

USE OF PLANTS AS A COMMUNICATIONS VEHICLE

by Ernest Dichter

Motivational research is quite different from the kind of research you have just been hearing about. In our research we are dealing with the human psyche; particularly, why people do things, why they don't do things and how we can get them to do things we, for one reason or another, would like them to do.

In a recent survey for the nursery industry we looked at ways nursery businessmen could improve their working relationship with their customer . . . how they could help him be more satisfied with the services offered to him. Many interesting, thought-provoking ideas are found in this summary entitled *New Opportunities for the Nursery Industry*.

Today I would like to discuss future research that the industry might look into to help it identify areas where its product could be more fully utilized and serve a real purpose.

In a recent poll people were asked to choose among 26 things they considered important to their happiness. Ninety-five percent wanted green grass and trees, plants and flowers. With this as background we begin to explore areas where plants may solve some of our problems.

1. Can plants help in the establishment of identity?

People today, more than ever, are interested in finding themselves, in expressing themselves. To what extent do plants serve this purpose? How can we demonstrate, through our advertising programs, that plants will help the individual do this?

2. Can plants help bridge the generation gap?

Plants might solve some of the barriers existent between the young and old. Both groups have a real fondness for plants. Perhaps planting projects which bring the two groups together may help break down barriers. Older people interested in "staying young" might be able to identify with bright, fast-growing, flowering plants. Can we keep such a group returning to our stores by emphasizing that certain plants have

such characteristics to offer them if properly cultivated?

3. Can plants break down emotional barriers?

Dr. Dichter suggests that Americans are hungry for heroes and want to express their emotion. At the same time they are embarrassed by their emotions. Possibly plants as gifts can be utilized to act as a symbolic gesture. Dr. Dichter suggests that, just as a secretary wants to be recognized for her good work through flowers, maybe through advertising secretaries would be encouraged to reciprocate by buying a plant for their bosses when he deserves some special recognition.

4. Can plants increase productivity?

Dr. Dichter related that in some of his recent studies he found that productivity of coal miners, steel workers, and many other types of employees, depends, to a large extent, on better communications between management and rank-and-file. What they wanted was an expression of appreciation on the part of management. Dr. Dichter suggests that an increase in pay is not always the answer . . . improvement of the workers' surroundings is an alternative. Can plants play a part here? Even in the case of the mine workers plants may be a partial answer for increased communication, and may also act as a work incentive. Underground greenhouses may be a possibility.

5. Plants and the psychological personality...

Many people have favorite plants and flowers. Can this be further researched so that the personality of individuals and plants can be matched? A marketing approach might be developed where people arriving at a garden center for the first time would be recommended to purchase plants matching their personalities. Personality description and corresponding plant lists would be available for him to choose from.

6. Large institutions and plants...

Banks, governmental agencies, insurance companies, large multi-national companies: all are beginning to have a similar communications problem. They need to establish contact with their clientele; they need to relate to them. Many now are beginning to realize that plants may help them towards this goal. Some now have a bowl of apples ready for visitors, others a small plant they feel has real significance. Many banks are beginning to realize large spaces with marble walls and floors may be a barrier to easy communications. Plants can soften and beautify such areas.

7. Plants as a tool for inter-personal communications...

Salesmen, parents and children, teachers and pupils, married couples, almost every one of us has many occasions when we would like to establish a better contact with each other or related group. Plants and flowers can serve this purpose . . . all we need do is have people think of plants first when they are attempting to find a means of establishing or reestablishing communications.

8. Urban planning and greenery...

Our studies on how to motivate people to move to the inner city have shown that one of the most desired features of a rehabilitated inner city

is trees, shrubs, grass. How can urban planners, builders and architects be convinced of this fact and be induced to include such greenery in their planning? Dr. Dichter reports that many European cities have specially allocated green areas around the city to encourage gardening by citizens living in those areas. Should such gardens be encouraged in our cities?

9. International communication...

What needs to be done to encourage foreign visitors to take home plants as souvenirs of their visit to the U.S.? What are typical American plants that can serve this purpose? Dr. Dichter suggests plant stores at airports to facilitate sale of plants to such visitors.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Dr. Dichter said the nursery industry must keep aware of the changing trends and lifestyles of the American society, and in doing so will be better able to promote its product as one which creates happiness among mankind. After all, Dr. Dichter suggests, this is one of the main reasons for our love and interest in plants.

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ABSTRACTS

Costonis, A.C. and H.F. Davis. 1976. **Fungitoxic properties of an antibiotic against Dutch elm disease.** *Eur. J. For. Path.* 6(1):1-11.

A formulation containing solubilized Nystatin called Ceratocide, is fungitoxic to *Ceratocystis ulmi* (Buis.) Moreau as shown in laboratory studies. In controlled inoculations studies in eight-year-old elm saplings, Ceratocide was shown to have prophylactic utility in Dutch elm disease control when injected 2, 4 or 10 days before a challenge inoculation with *C. ulmi*. Therapeutic control was not obtained with a single injection of Ceratocide. Most infected trees succumbed to Dutch elm disease either during the same year of treatment or a year later.

Smith, E.M. and K.W. Reisch. 1975. **Landscape trees for Ohio.** Coop. Ext. Service Bull. 597, Ohio State University, Columbus.

This publication is intended primarily as an introduction and general guide for those who have an interest in trees for landscape or ornamental purposes. There are hundreds of species and cultivars of trees that can be grown in Ohio; however, the 350 included here are among the most important for landscape purposes. More detailed information concerning the trees mentioned and those omitted is available in numerous text books, many of which are available in local libraries.