

cluster, possibly centred upon NZGT listings. The cluster could be marketed to both the domestic and international markets, and as a result of having a collective value (say NZ\$200) to visit any 10 gardens from a list of 150, the value would attract international agent interest. Another field could be the formation of a group of Qualmark star rated accommodation providers that

have accommodation within gardens of Regional or National Significance.

I also believe that some current New Zealand shows and festivals are of international standing and are ready to be further marketed offshore. Well known examples include the Ellerslie Flower Show in Auckland and the Taranaki Rhododendron and Garden Festival, and there are many other

less known events deserving of international recognition.

The future looks bright for the garden tourism industry, and there are great benefits to be had by pulling together at all levels, from the grass-roots private garden, to the botanic gardens and parks, through to event organisers, inbound tour operators, and tourism and horticultural organisations.

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Ron joined Qualmark in 2002 at a time when the organization was in the process of introducing the endorsement system for non-accommodation operators and upgrading the accommodation criteria.

Qualmark now has around 1500 licence holders and the endorsement program spans sectors as diverse as skydiving to gardens. Tourism New Zealand and the Automobile Association of New Zealand jointly own Qualmark.

Ron's broad business experiences include agriculture, horticulture, retail, property management, human resource management and tourism.

Turning your garden treasure into gold

Jack Hobbs¹ and Aleysha Pangari

Introduction

For many years our main focus at the Auckland Botanic Gardens has been on making physical improvements to the gardens. The main driver for these improvements has been feedback from fellow plant and garden 'enthusiasts', who are seldom short of opinions which remain highly valued and useful. The importance of improving the quality of the services we offer our visitors has also been paramount.

In more recent times we have realised that we have needed to take a much broader and more disciplined approach to growing our business. It is vital to have a great garden and services, but it all amounts to nothing if it does not provide what our customers want, or if insufficient people know about it and realise what it potentially offers to them.

Progressively we have realised that our potential visitor base is in fact much broader than the garden

enthusiasts we have previously targeted and been influenced by. We also realised how little we knew about our customers, and what potential our business had in terms of increasing both the numbers and diversity of our visitors.

The solution was to commission professional market research so that we could better understand our existing and potential visitors, including what would motivate them to visit, their wants/needs and other information that could be used for informed decision making on future growth. The results of this research have completely shifted our perception of who our current and potential visitors might be and it has clarified what we might do to optimise the chances that they will choose us as their preferred destination.

As alluded to earlier, we found that keen gardeners in fact make up a small proportion of our visitors, with only one third of our visitors

indicating that it is our plants and gardens that they most like about the Botanic Gardens. Only around 13% of our local population use the Botanic Gardens for ideas and information on gardening. Areas of greatest enjoyment include walking, relaxing, feeding the ducks and activities for the kids. Market research is full of surprises, and one soon learns to never assume what motivates visitors.

An example of effective product development based on market research has been the success of our new Children's Garden. This development was largely a response to feedback indicating Botanic Gardens (and gardens generally) are not viewed as appealing destinations for families. Since opening this new attraction in March 2005 the numbers of families visiting the gardens has risen significantly, contributing to a doubling of total visitation during the autumn months compared to

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the previous few years. Admittedly the opening of a new Visitor Centre also contributed to this increase, but early signs regarding family visitation in particular remain promising.

At the New Zealand Gardens Trust (NZGT) seminar held at Pukeiti in 2004, I spoke mainly about our market research, and what we had learnt about our customers². More recently, at the NZGT seminar held at Larnach Castle in 2005, I focussed on the marketing plan we have subsequently developed as a solution to the issues raised in our market research findings. This is the focus covered in this article.

I now firmly believe that a key to growing any business is through the effective development and implementation of a marketing plan.

The following contains some terminology and definitions that may sound straight from a marketing handbook, but which nevertheless helps clarify the purpose of marketing.

A 'marketing' organisation is defined as one that finds out what it is the customer wants and needs and then develops the product or service to meet those wants/needs. The 'selling' organisation develops the product or service first and then tries to sell it on to the customer.

Marketing is not just about advertising or promotion (these are tactics marketers use to raise awareness and are important) but more importantly about developing products and services that meet customer needs and desires. It is about ensuring that your product and services deliver what your visitors want, and that potential visitors are given every opportunity to choose your garden as their preferred destination. Internal capabilities must of course be taken into account when establishing what it is you will offer.

Furthermore, your product is not just 'the garden', but everything relating to it such as accessibility, clear signage and directions, ease

of parking, friendliness/helpfulness of the staff and so forth – it is the whole experience including the garden.

It is interesting to note the increased attention paid to hard landscaping and garden art as significant drivers of visitor interest.

Planning

Developing an effective marketing plan can be daunting when resources are limited. Following is a basic strategy that requires modest expenditure:

1. Secondary research – this is the utilisation of market research conducted by others, including gardens (private and public), Tourism New Zealand, Sport and Recreation New Zealand (SPARC), local tourism operators, boutique hotels, and Statistics New Zealand. In addition, the internet is becoming a more reliable source for carrying out secondary research quickly and efficiently.

2. Secondary research is useful in detecting external trends that could impact on your business – both within and outside the industry. It will not necessarily provide you with an exact profile of potential visitors, but can highlight opportunities and indicate to whom they might be most attractive. For example, from secondary research the Botanic Gardens learned about gardening trends in New Zealand and a general profile of people actively participating in gardening. This information was considered together with the fact that people have increasingly less leisure time and their living situations are also changing (e.g., smaller properties etc). It provided a general profile of people living within the local area, the Auckland region and New Zealand as a whole, and also visitors to the region and country (e.g., tourism potential).

Actively obtaining feedback, or recording unsolicited feedback (including verbal) from your visitors will be most beneficial in improving your offer (product and services) and how to reach people. Although this feedback

will be from existing customers, it may highlight potential strategies for attracting new markets/people. Ideas include having a visitor book or similar where people can write comments, although much of the time the comments will be positive. However simply speaking with people and asking them what they think of your garden, what motivated them to visit in the first place, how they heard about you, whether or not their expectations were met (or not met), or exceeded is going to be extremely useful. Encourage constructive feedback – even reward it! (Good case studies include one instance where a manufacturer rewarded negative constructive feedback – it helped him develop a product superior to his competitors and lead the market in his industry).

3. Primary market research – this is the ideal as it provides information specific to your business that can help it grow. However, the expense of conducting such research, using the skills of experienced professionals, often means that it is only larger businesses that conduct this type of research.

In saying that, it can be undertaken at relatively small cost and, given the information is well utilised, the financial benefits can outweigh the initial upfront cost. However, you must be very clear about what information you need and why and be able to articulate that in a written brief. Given a good brief, the researcher would recommend the best methodology and work with you in further clarifying exactly the information you require. Research can be undertaken in a number of ways, both qualitative – involving focus groups and face-to-face interviews (usually the most expensive form of research), and quantitative (often involving telephone interviews).

The Gardens recently undertook quantitative research (200 telephone interviews) plus desk research (analysis of existing research already undertaken by ARC Parks) to establish the key

² Article by Jack Hobbs entitled: What is important to your garden visitor. *New Zealand Garden Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 2, December 2004, p. 7–9.

customer segments within the local area for the Gardens. This provided information on existing and potential customers, including demographic (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, household situation) and psycho-graphic (e.g., motivators, lifestyle, wants/needs) profiles that will enable the Gardens to further tailor its product and services. We also established the best way in which to reach these segments, for example, where they were most likely to get their information from.

If resources are inadequate a simple onsite questionnaire may be sufficient to obtain your information needs, with a small incentive offered if people complete that information. Remember to trial the questionnaire first on family and friends to ensure that the questions asked provide you with the information you need.

4. Marketing (or business) plan – this articulates your key goals and how these will be achieved. It will include an action plan, costings and timeline. Remember it is not necessary to do everything at once. A major benefit of such a plan is the focus it puts on what you are trying to achieve.

- Set your key goals/objectives and where possible make them measurable, for example, increased revenue by dollar.
- Develop strategies to achieve these goals/objectives – using knowledge gained through formal/informal research and taking into account your internal capabilities including financial.

5. Promotion – this includes advertising and other actions aimed to convey to your target market the product and services you offer (e.g., posters displayed at local businesses, flyers, local newspaper advertising). Remember there are a number of free advertising options, including for the Auckland area the *What's On* supplement in the *Weekend Herald*, and *Citymix* magazine. It can be most cost effective to target locals in terms of increased numbers, although the average spend of tourists is likely to be higher.

6. Establish links with other complementary websites – this is where it's good to know a little about the profile of your existing and potential customers – their interests, motivations etc. It could be for instance that a link is established with an organisation or group that you may not have otherwise considered.

7. Events – small events can create some urgency for visitors who have previously delayed their visit, for example, jazz in the garden, Lotus festival.

8. Networking – this may in fact be the first action, as it may include pooling of resources to fund marketing strategies from the outset. The key is to view other gardens and tourist focussed business as potential partners rather than competitors.

Garden visitors may be more inclined to visit a group of destinations rather than just one, particularly if these are complementary, for example destinations that offer a range of facilities and products such as café, garden styles etc.

Basic outline of a marketing plan

1. Executive summary – high level, concise (2 page maximum), self-explanatory, includes for example your key goals/objectives as set out in the marketing plan and strategies for a stated time period for achieving those goals/objectives. This section will highlight core challenges to overcome and opportunities from which to leverage.

2. Situation Analysis – this includes an analysis of your existing product / service offer in relation to any insights gained through research and trends within and outside of the industry, and compared with what is offered by your competitors. This section might include:

- Product/Service offering – this is a list and description of the product(s) or services the garden offers (think about what it is they actually offer of value to customers and potential customers). It is always a good idea to think in terms of customer needs and customer benefits, as these define the product offering

(e.g., garden), rather than taking an internal focus. For example, a flower shop is selling a lot more than flowers, it is the message the flowers transmit, and the convenience of transmitting those messages.

- SWOT analysis – identify your Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (best done with staff or partner/s, as opposed to doing it alone). Strengths and weaknesses are usually internal, while opportunities and threats are external factors. This section could be an appendix to the marketing plan.
- Competition – identify and describe major competitors in terms of the factors that most influence potential visitor numbers and/or revenue.
- Market analysis – everything known about target customers (even if it's just a good guess from knowing the industry and observation of current visitors, plus informal feedback received), what current and potential customers need, trends within the industry, potential for growth etc.

3. Marketing Strategy – this is the exciting part where you strategise the growth of your business, using the information from your analysis. It might include:

- Marketing and financial objectives.
- Target market/s – articulated to include geographic, demographic and psycho-graphic profiles if possible.
- Strategies for achieving the objectives.
- Action plan detailing actions, responsibilities, timeline, budget.
- Keys to success – how to recognise you have been successful in your marketing efforts – for example, increased revenue as well as visitor numbers, high level of satisfaction etc.
- Contingency plans.
- Budget analysis – forecast income and expenditure etc.

A major reason for having a marketing plan is to ensure that

you approach the future in a considered way that allows you to take best advantage of your opportunities.

It need not be onerous and there are many ways in which to approach a marketing plan – the above is just a guide. Remember that it is written at a point in time and needs to be reviewed on a regular basis, say annually, taking into account changing trends, people's lifestyles and other factors.

In future you may well reflect on it as the best time and money you spent.

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Jack has been a presenter of television gardening programmes from 1991 until 2003, including 8 years as a presenter on Maggie's Garden Show.

For almost 20 years he ran an extensive plant breeding programme at ARBG which has produced many popular native plant hybrids including the popular 'Wiri' series of *Hebe* and *Leptospermum* which are now grown commercially in many parts of the world.

Jack has been involved as writer and/or photographer on several gardening books. Since 1989 he has been a regular contributor of articles and photography to the *New Zealand Gardener*.

Aleysha Pangari has devoted her career to marketing. Currently she is employed by the Auckland Regional Council in a marketing role, having previously filled a similar position with Auckland City Council.

For the past two years most of her time has been dedicated to developing a marketing plan for Auckland Botanic Gardens.

Ten tips for quality marketing of your garden visiting business

Sophie Barker¹

This article provides a brief introduction on quality marketing. I am applying the old adage "talk about what you know" so will use Larnach Castle as a case study.

The history of the Larnach Castle garden is already well known², and so I am going to concentrate on our marketing strategy. The castle building itself is well-established as a famous and successful attraction. However, a few years ago we decided to market a "new product" – the Larnach Castle garden. This is actually more challenging and specialized from a marketing viewpoint than the castle!

From the experience gained, here are my top ten tips for successfully marketing your business and your garden.

Number one: be market ready

You have to get your product market ready, that is, in tip top condition. As I am a marketer and not a gardener, it is the gardening experts themselves that know best how to achieve market readiness.

Number two: key selling points

Ask yourself the question all potential visitors are asking themselves: "why should I visit this garden?" A travel agent will ask you the same question, often requesting you to compare yourself with the "competitor" down the road. You need to be ready to provide your "key selling points" – the aspects that make your garden unique or saleable.

Here are a few of ours:

- Set in the grounds of New Zealand's only castle
- Food and facilities
- New Zealand native plant trail
- Interesting collections and gardens such as a South Seas Garden
- Accommodation on site
- Owner/creator available for guided tour
- A "must visit" as it combines interesting and rare plants with great design skill and floral features most of the year round.

Try to sum up the key selling points of your garden in one tidy sentence. Then work on crafting 50, 100, and 200 words on your garden ready for instant use, and to send to anyone who expresses interest.

Number three: key photos

Have a photo that sums up the essence of your words. The old cliché about a picture being worth a thousand words rings very true. Ideally, a picture should say a number of things. Our key picture says: beautiful setting, historic building, people, views, mature trees, formal garden out front. We have a whole set of different garden pictures that we use to provide different messages to different markets. In this electronic age the photos should be in digital format, in a small file for emailing as well as a large file for publishing. And have them on a disk with a supply in your top drawer to hand out whenever the opportunity arises. I cannot emphasize enough that the photos should be of the best quality, so paying a competent professional

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² See Margaret Barker's article, also in this issue.