

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.

Jack Hobbs is President of the Royal NZ Institute of Horticulture (RNZIH) and Manager of the Auckland Regional Botanic Gardens (ARBG).

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

¹ Larnach Castle, P O Box 1350, Dunedin; Sophie@larnachcastle.co.nz.

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



Aerial view of Larnach Castle, the surrounding grounds and garden, and Otago Peninsula and Harbour beyond. This professional photo is effectively used for publicity and promotion.

photographer is a worthwhile investment. Our professional shot was one of the best things we have done – it has ended up on many brochure covers, magazines, websites, calendars etc.

Number four: the press kit

At Larnach Castle we love the media. They are your best form of advertising, so do not stint on your hospitality – it is an investment, not a cost. Make sure you have all your information available in a press kit. This should contain an outline of key dates, your stories, hard facts, including your prices, opening hours, and of course, a CD of your images. Media are always looking for stories, so if something interesting happens at your place phone them, or put out a press release.

Number five: compile databases

This may be a slog; best left for rainy afternoons, but can become one of your most valuable resources. I have a collection of databases with contact details from which I can email, mail, fax, or contact people personally with Castle news. These include travel wholesalers both national and international, visitor centres, hotels and motels, travel agents, friends, media, “friends of Larnach Castle” and staff. Collect business cards and store the information. Create the databases and use them.

Number six: marketing material

This is where you can spend some serious money, but being of

Scottish descent we always try to be sensible. After all, it is a cost to your business.

The first thing you need is a brochure about your garden, with some of your photos and those words you worked so hard at crafting. You will then need to distribute these brochures to people on your databases – often paying for their services. You will also need agent information – with clear pricing, key selling points and suggested itineraries recommending ways they can fit your garden into their tours. You need to contact these agents and I recommend you do it in person.

A photo album is my favourite tool for agent presentations, but you may prefer a PowerPoint presentation using a computer. I tend to avoid PowerPoint’s because I prefer my presentations to have a more personal touch.

One of the banes of my life is people selling advertising, especially on a Monday morning. Do not let those salespeople sell you advertising that you really do not need – choose your advertising to best fit your customers and their profiles. DVDs and videos can be a good investment, once you have managed to get enough money together and your product is mature enough. We sell them to visitors.

Have a professional looking business card made up and I recommend using the reverse

side of the card as well. I hate wasted space, and I am sure that gardeners also like to see full use of resources, so put your key selling points here too.

Posters, postcards, books, calendars, printed material are all useful tools and you can sell them as well.

Our website (www.larnachcastle.co.nz) is well visited and contains plenty of information which can motivate people to visit and cut down on time spent answering queries. The more information you provide on your website the better.

Number seven: you are the marketer

You or your representatives are the face of the product. It is the relationships you build along with a wonderful garden that will bring you business. You need to look the part, to portray the professional image that you wish to project. My mother Margaret and I have a maxim – dress to the status of the highest person in the room and look successful! Everyone else then looks underdressed. We get lots of compliments on our uniforms and make lovely walking billboards!

Number eight: surveys and statistics

You have heard the saying, “lies, damn lies and statistics”. Well, yours need not be that way! We survey. We ask where people are coming from, what do they

think about us, how did they hear about us, and do they have any suggestions or complaints? Think of it as free consultations from experts – your customers! We keep refining and changing our surveys as our information needs change.

Number nine: networking

Sometimes people tend to underrate this, but it is often the people you meet and build relationships with that become your best advocates and may send opportunities in your direction. There are also great opportunities to learn from your peers. At Larnach Castle we belong to quite a few organizations and attend

several conferences throughout the year as well as meeting people at trade shows, hosting travel agent familiarisation sessions and so forth. Remember to hand out your business card and collect as many as possible for your mailing lists and databases. Another great benefit from networking is joint marketing which can help make your dollar go further.

Number ten: create a marketing plan

Write it down! A basic marketing plan needs to have where you are now, where you want to go and how you are going to get there.

So that is my top ten basics that I feel you need for marketing your garden. If you are interested in more than just these ten, I recommend that you read one of my favourite books, *Marketing for Success*³. Marketing is a huge topic and there are many ways of approaching it, but I do think, with a few tools, planning and cooperation, that the open gardens of New Zealand have a great future in attracting visitors.

Sophie Barker is Business Development Manager at Larnach Castle in Dunedin. Her mother, Margaret Barker, is the garden creator at Larnach Castle and has owned Larnach Castle since 1967.

³ *Marketing for success: a practical, down-to-earth approach to marketing your small business in New Zealand on a limited budget* by Glen Senior and Ian McBride (Enterprise Publications Ltd., Christchurch).

My Home My Castle: building the garden at Larnach Castle

*Margaret Barker*¹

It was February 1967. Barry, my husband, and I were on an adventure holiday of the South Island, sleeping in the back of our panel van. We had been told of the legendary castle high on the Otago Peninsula. We drove down a dark drive and there it lay, dreaming of past days of grandeur, resplendent amongst trees and a ruined garden. After we had explored the empty and dilapidated interior of the Victorian mansion, the property was offered to us for sale. Circumstances required a rapid decision. We decided to buy, wound up our affairs in Wellington and moved south. The castle became our vocation and a home for our family. Sophie and Norcombe were born within the next two years.

Larnach Castle was built during the 1870s and 1880s on the tide of wealth from the Otago goldrush by William Larnach, banker, politician, land owner, speculator and merchant baron. Skilled

craftsman and precious building materials were brought by sailing ships from around the world to the remote Otago Peninsula to create the magnificent edifice of Larnach's dreams.

Larnach and his family lived in the Castle, somewhat intermittently, for twenty five years, until Larnach took his own life in Parliament buildings in 1898.

Larnach's family sold the Castle in 1906 to the Government who used it as a mental hospital then sold it on. Except for a brief heyday in the 1930s, the Castle was largely neglected, twice being totally abandoned. It slipped into disrepair and became engulfed by secondary growth and self sown trees. At the time of our purchase, the building was locally disregarded and in danger of falling into ruin. We saw the Castle as a potential national treasure and set about to restore the historic property with the intention of making it our home and sharing it with paying visitors.

I had grown up in large gardens and wanted my children to have that same wonderful experience. I had a passion to create a garden, and the land surrounding Larnach Castle was to be my canvas.



Fig. 1a The rock garden at Larnach Castle as it is today, restored by Margaret Barker.

¹ Larnach Castle, P O Box 1350, Dunedin; MargaretB@larnachcastle.co.nz