

## Launching New Plants—A Liner Producer's Job?

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### WHY IS A LINER PRODUCER INTERESTED IN LAUNCHING NEW PLANTS?

It is part of a propagator's job to consider the launch of new plants. The liner producer is at the beginning of the nursery line and should offer the best range of varieties to really fit the needs of the plant market. And there is a demand for new plants.

A liner producer has many customers all over his own country and he also exports very often and sells large quantities, he is normally a good contact for the breeder of new plants.

Searching, selecting, and launching new plants is really a liner producer's job but it is not an easy one for him. He has no finished plants to show; he does not sell to a garden centre or to a landscape company but to a grower. So he is quite far from the final customer. When you want to sell a new plant you have to convince your customer, the customer of his customer, and the final consumer.

You can only do it if:

- 1) You are very selective on the new plants you want to launch.
- 2) You are very efficient at promoting to your direct customer.
- 3) You assist your customers with their promotions and cooperate with growers and distributors.

### KEY FACTORS IN A SUCCESSFUL LAUNCH

**Long Trial Period.** A serious experimental stage is important:

1) To precisely observe the plant and compare it with similar cultivars to be sure that it brings something new to the market.

2) To know exactly which kind of market the plant is really suitable for and what all the different possibilities are of using it.

3) We need to know: how to propagate it; how to grow it; how to sell it successfully; how hardy it is; whether it can stand full sun or shade; whether it can tolerate wet or dry soil; whether it will tolerate coastal conditions; how vigorously it grows; the size of the adult plant; whether it can be grown easily in containers; disease susceptibility; and so on.

It is also very useful to test the ornamental attraction of the new plants with groups of consumers, landscapers, and garden centre buyers.

**Production in Quantity.** Frequently we are too cautious and do not put enough plants into production. To really succeed in launching new plants we need big numbers; it is the only way to have an effect on the market.

It is evidently a risk which we are not always ready to take. But a good promotion campaign costs money and you can't pay for it with small quantities. Sharing the risk is also a good solution. Launching a new plant with four or five nurseries is a good way to produce large numbers and minimise the risk.

**Quality and Intensity of Promotion.** The customers of my own nursery are nursery growers so we have put most of our promotional efforts into the catalogue.

It is a 90-page catalogue and is illustrated with 170 colour photographs. We have both French and English versions. It is an investment of £50,000—conception, realisation, and despatch included. It is sent, of course, to our customers and prospective customers but also to the customers of our customers, such as garden centres, landscape businesses, landscape architects and local authorities.

Two basic elements of promotion are very important when starting: the name of the plant and the quality of the photographs.

**Plant Name.** The name must be suggestive, attractive and easy to remember. It is an element we never pay enough attention to. Sometimes there are English or French names which sound good in every country but generally it is preferable to give a name according to the country targeted for the plant promotion.

Unfortunately, too many nurserymen fall into the bad habit of renaming a plant to get round the laws on Plant Breeder's Rights or trademarks. For example they will name the *Potentilla fruticosa* Red Ace™ as "Red Joker" or *Choisya ternata* Sundance™ as "Moonlipper". It is, of course illegal if the plant is protected by breeder's rights, but it is legal if the plant is only trademarked. It may be legal but it is certainly not fair or honest, and brings confusion to the names and damages the promotion work done previously. I do think the entire trade should condemn such ways of working.

**Photographs.** The quality of photographs used in promotion is, in my opinion, a second basic condition for successful promotion. We need them for the catalogue to start successful promotions. You need them for your catalogue if that is your main selling tool; you need them on your exhibition stand; you need them for posters and colour labels for garden centres; and you need them for publicity in magazines. You always need them.

## PLANT BREEDERS RIGHTS

Some are very much in favour, some are completely against Plant Breeder's Rights. Many have no opinion on the matter.

It is true that protecting plants is very expensive and to be really efficient the protection must be applied in all the countries where you want to sell the plants which makes it still more expensive. And the control of infringements costs a lot of money.

But it is still the best way to pay the breeder and to perpetuate research on new plants. In the long term it means more money for the breeder. When you have spent a lot of money for Breeder's Rights in five or six countries, on top of promotion expenses, you are obliged to develop the varieties to the maximum, and sub-licence them as much as possible. Again, you need large quantities to really benefit from all that you have done.

A good new plant which has been previously tested and which, because of its interest can be produced on a large scale, should be protected by breeders rights.

Sub-licencing is the best way to increase to the maximum the propagation of a new plant. Yes, to be the only one to launch a new plant is a great competitive advantage and it is very good publicity for your company. But to really make money in the long term with a new plant the best way is:

- To protect it with breeder's rights on an international scale;
- To sub-licence as much as possible;
- To manage a very good promotional campaign;
- To efficiently control all the infringements.