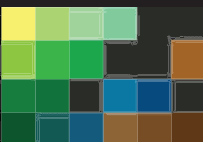




**Start
here.**

OPENHORT
A PLACE TO SHARE
GREEN INDUSTRY MARKETING.



Presenting three alternative
ideas that could change
the green industry.

www.openhort.com

What can **you** do?

More than you think.

Industry promotion doesn't have to be an all-or-nothing proposition. Whether you are for or against a National Promotion campaign like Got Milk? there is something you can do to improve our industry: **improve your company.**

For too long we have gone around in circular arguments, never advancing the debate or our understanding of the true issue: our industry's image to the world. One says, "Hey! We should have a national campaign! That would be cool!"

Start

Another says, "How you gonna pay for that?" And the idea fades in the light of objections...only to resurface in a decade or two when someone once again says, "Hey! It would be great if we had a national campaign like Got Milk!"

OpenHort thinks it's time we thought about these issues in a different way. In the Fall 2011, we posted to the OpenHort blog an eight-part series examining the topic. This booklet is a summary and extension of this discussion. Enjoy!

Come together



What if self interest helped others?

We want to break down the barriers between the Collectivists (those who want to pool our money to promote the entire industry) and the Separatists (those who don't). Both can coexist, and both can work together. We believe it's possible for our separate, individual companies to remain autonomously focused on our own businesses, but still promote and improve the entire industry. How is this possible?

Mutually beneficial relationships are most often motivated by self-interest for both parties. It happens all the time. It's pretty much the definition of the American experiment. It's at the heart of any healthy community. Altruism is a virtue, but it isn't the key to progress.

Separatists are too paranoid about the money.

Collectivists need to give up scheming how to get other people's money.

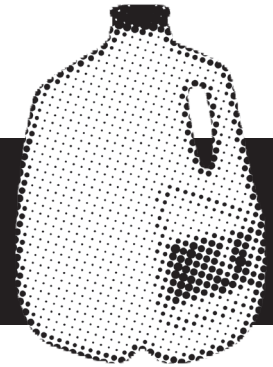
Consider one of the most surprising developments of the past two decades: the rise of vibrant open-source communities. Epitomized by Linux, Wikipedia, Android and the Firefox browser, "open-source" products are made not by a top-down traditional command-control organization but by individuals with concurrent yet different agendas and differing approaches to production. The result is an outpouring of creativity and accelerated innovation.

Sharing-based innovation already happens inside our industry. Perhaps it's easiest to see at industry gatherings like the Clinic. Sharing ideas, even those we may think are trade secrets, sparks new ideas and ends up paying back more than we could have imagined.

Sincere Collectivists long for us, as an industry, to move forward--to do something to improve. Sincere Separatists may care more for their own business than they do for someone else's, but that doesn't mean they don't care about anyone other than themselves. We believe we can find ways to collaborate, participate, share and improve.

And the place to start is at home, on your nursery. We have three suggestions to share. But 1st...

**The wrong paradigm
won't get us where we want to go.**



forget milk

We think it's time to forget about milk because it's just not helpful and it leads us down a dead-end. It really takes little creativity to say, "Hey, we should have a Got Milk campaign for our industry." It's a testament to the effectiveness of the "Got Milk?" ads that surely every single industry since 1990 has wished they had such a campaign. We imagine there have been countless dreams of "Got socks?" and "Got bubble bath?" and "Got carpet?" just as every father daydreams when their son goes out for basketball that he could be the next Michael Jordan. Sure, it's fine to aspire to greatness, but it's naive to bank on it.

And plants aren't anything like milk, not in frequency of consumption, ease of use, homogeneity, or really in just about any way at all. Our industry doesn't face the same challenges as milk did, nor do we have remotely similar supply chain dynamics.

There are many reasons we should stop dreaming of Milk, but perhaps the most important is because our fantasies can blind us to seeing genuine opportunities.

Imagine the fantasy came true.

Suppose for a moment that we have \$500 million and we spend it to promote the industry. Our ad campaign is everywhere, and it's so good it's the first ad to win an Oscar. People wear our slogan on t-shirts. Lady Gaga and George Clooney are begging to be spokespeople.

Massive crowds flock to our garden centers, and the plants are flying off the shelves faster than we can unload the trucks. Landscape contractors have their phone lines jammed every time an ad runs on TV.

If money were no object, if we had all the money in the world, would we see people falling in love with plants?





Kill confusion

Or be killed by it. Could it be “confusion” is already killing us? The reason we won't see a massive surge in garden interest from any (even the best funded and flawlessly executed) marketing campaign is also a fundamental reason we're suffering: we confuse people.

We aren't saying “plants confuse people,” even though that may be true. That's not our point. **We** confuse people, intimidate people, misunderstand people, alienate people and we don't seem to care... even though they are our potential customers. People want plants. They get it. Plants are good. Plants are beautiful. Plants are worthwhile. People want plants, but can they see past our shelves and our trucks to see that we can help them solve their need for plants?

Many homeowners and potential gardeners do not have the first idea how to get started. Our industry has made success very complicated for the average person with an average interest in plants. We have given the American consumer two options: call a landscape contractor and they will come to your house with a truck full of Mexicans or go to a garden center and blindly pick out plants as best you can. Trucks or shelves. Take your pick.

I can empathize. I feel this way when it comes to interior decorating. My wife and I want a nice home, but we don't have a clue how to make it all “put together.” Our options seem to be: go shopping and hate the experience because we don't know what we're doing or call a interior decorator. There are so many reasons I don't want to do either one. Shopping stinks. And there's no way I want to have a guy named “Franck” come take over my house. Is the green industry offering the world the same dichotomy? We think we offer the service--the solution--people are looking for, and maybe you think you have plenty of customers because of your “service,” but how many of them found what they were looking for because they

somehow were able to see past the trucks and shelves you put in their way...and how many can't?

The third option is beginning to take root already. They are called "garden coaches." Similar to the phenomenon of "personal trainers" for fitness, these individuals are offering just what we believe people really want. We envision a future with many more people actively selling plants for a living. We see an opportunity to form an army of individuals advancing the same cause: getting people excited about plants. We think the "garden coach" is going to be huge.

It is time for the industry to legitimize and encourage the emerging role of "garden coaches" by creating a national certification program. Such a program could bring many hundreds of new professionals

into our industry. Think our industry is diverse and fragmented? Is that a bad thing? Let's play to our strength and seek to increase the diversity.

By offering a national certification program, it will encourage this sector to grow tremendously by legitimizing it, professionalizing it, defining it and ensuring that it grows in ways that benefit the industry. Once this national certification is in place, common or "generic," easily customizable sales, marketing and support materials could be developed and deployed via this network.

This is how we should promote our industry. Through an army of individuals that just happen to share the same goal. We were made to be grass-root.

If you'll forgive a Christian gospel analogy...instead of relying on converts to somehow show up at church and listen to one single preacher, let's equip the congregation to go out and make disciples.

Summary: What's the point in telling people to "get plants" if they have little capacity to accommodate them in their lives and we aren't showing them in a clear way how they can achieve success with plants? Let's focus less on trucks and shelves and more on personal connection. "Coaches" kill confusion with confidence and clarity.

The "garden coach" is a great way to advance the industry.

How to kill confusion.

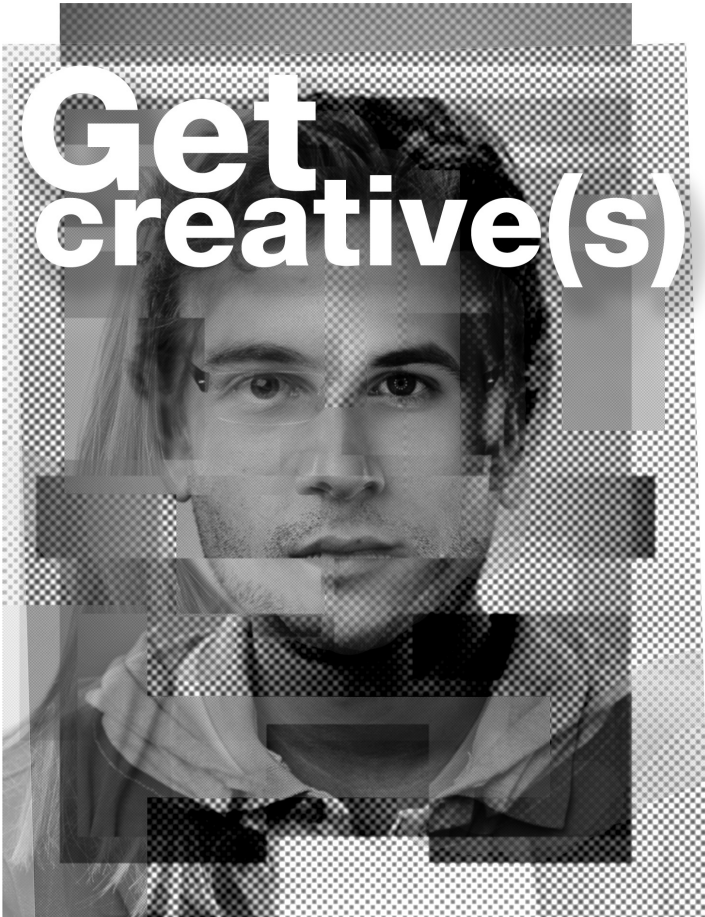


1 Make gardening easier. Sounds impossible, right? Maybe not. New genetics, new science & technology, as well as better design could take the work out of "yard work." Two other tactics worth mentioning: lower their expectations (disposable plants?) and (we're really into this idea right now) RECIPES. Think about it. We'll post our thoughts on the amazing invention of the recipe at the blog in February (can't resist a short version: cooking is what it is because of a universal structure for repeatable results that anyone can understand. We don't have that; we should strive for a way to simplify and structure landscapes into a "recipe").

2 Make people better. Too many people out there are idiots. And lazy too! They don't want to sweat. They don't want to get dirty. Our future depends on them? I suppose we could start with educating them, but who wants to be preached to? Edutainment is the name of the game, and with new media exploding, we'll have more opportunity to engage and aid homeowners: from POS to living room to backyard...our voices can reach anywhere. But as for lazy...eh. No comment there.

3 Be their guide. If you really can't make a task any easier--if it's really hard and that's part of the value--then the strategy is to be a sherpa. For example, climbing Mt. Everest is hard. That's why people hire guides. This makes sense to them. Kill confusion by helping them. Be their guide.

Get creative(s)



The future belongs to the creative class, and its ranks are swelling quickly. The tools and distribution platforms to create and publish creative content have been democratized so greatly in the past 5 years that only the invention of the printing press can compare with the societal impact we will witness. Today, for less than the cost of a used car, a student can obtain the means of making a feature film that can rival Hollywood.

With blogs, social media, desktop publishing, apps, mobile computing and video broadcasting platforms, the traditional media gatekeepers have lost their power. This is a huge trend, and it comes at just the right time for us.

OpenHort believes our industry has a tremendous opportunity before us. We can exploit this change. We can lead it. We can rehabilitate our image and reinvent ourselves faster than we can imagine. We can change the perceived value of plants. And we can do it for a lot less money than it costs to have “superbowl ads.”

OpenHort encourages every green industry firm to hire a creative. Every grower, garden center and landscaper should make it a priority—right now—to hire a talented multimedia creative producer. Do not look to your current staff to “fill in” like you always have done. And do not out-source the creative process to an expensive, established marketing firm. Hire your own creative.

If you hire someone, let us know. We'd like to see their work and share it on OpenHort

It doesn't have to be a full-time position, though that would be ideal. And it doesn't have to cost a heart-stopping amount. There are many thousands of design and film students, amateurs and semi-professionals willing to work for as little as \$10 per hour. True, many are only worth \$10 per hour, but now, while the upheaval is still occurring, there are many talented creatives that are undervalued.

We want to see a massive infusion of new creative ideas into our industry, and we want OpenHort to be a connector, facilitator and inspiration to these creatives in the green industry. We believe that if as little as 20 firms made the commitment to hire a creative, and to task those creatives with promoting the basic fundamental value of plants...the innovation would be staggering. We would go a long way forward to understanding what we as an industry should focus on to “sell more plants.”

How to find your creative.

auburn craigslist > jobs > art/media/design jobs

SAMPLE EXAMPLE.

Posting Title: - **Specific Location:**

Reply to:

show hide anonymize (your email will show as: job-xxxxxxx@craigslist.org) [?]

Posting Description: Only one job description per posting please. Please see our FAQ for job posters [?]

We grow plants! (Or...We are a local garden center!) We've been in business for 35 years, and we need a new, fresh creative image. We want to "wow" the world. Our plants are beautiful, and we are looking for a design superstar to do them justice. Ideal candidate is great at photography, graphic design, proficient in all the Adobe programs, HTML, and likes dogs. We're a small company; part-time but could be full if you're a great fit. This is a real job. Check out our website here: www.openhort.com Pay is \$10/hour.

**DON'T BE BORING.
BUT BE YOURSELF, TOO.**

Here's how to find your creative: post a job on craigslist under either “art/media/design” or “tv/film/video/radio” or “web/HTML/info design” or “writing/editing,” depending on what you want done. We'd stay clear of “marketing/advertising/PR” cause it's not as genuinely creative as the others. Make your ad kind of bold by asking for a “superstar” or a “genius” and also put a low salary...we suggest \$10/hour. The ads are free so be real, not corporate or stiff. Most creatives would love to work with our visually rich products. Be prepared for a lot of responses, and many won't want a “job” but to freelance.



Tell stories

The way forward is not through clever slogans or slick brands. To focus on these is to get distracted. Slogans and brands are fine and good, so long as they connect emotionally with the people we want to buy more plants. The way to be relevant, the way to engage an audience, the way to move people and inspire them...is nothing new. We must tell stories. We should make it a priority to become world-class storytellers.

Whether it be through recruiting and equipping garden coaches or through finding and hiring creatives, we must make sure that they realize their #1 goal and primary skill should be in telling stories.

OpenHort has a modest proposal to begin a project that will point us forward in how we should tell stories. We propose to make two documentary-style videos that tell the personal story of a gardener (end consumer) in an emotional and relatable way. The idea is a simple one: have real gardeners explain why they love plants. Not just for the results, but for the whole process. The experience. The lifestyle.

Once the format, tone and style of these videos are established and refined, we can make plans to produce and distribute them in a concerted way. Imagine if in a few years' time we had 1,000 such videos made. It is possible. Even if the only viewers of these videos were their friends and family, which would happen naturally without paying for network airtime, the number of people impacted with a positive message for gardening would perhaps be close to 1 million. How much would this cost? We don't know. Perhaps as little as \$200k.

This is what we imagine: A garden center asks some of its customers to give testimonials to why they love plants. Depending on the garden center's unique priority, they could choose the demographic that would most benefit them (GenY or BabyBoomer? Female? Middle-class suburbanite? Urban hipster? Tropical, xeriscape, vegetable?) The "creative" connected with the garden center makes the videos, producing two versions: one that specifically promotes the garden center and another that is generic and able to be used by the entire industry. What could be unleashed if we give voice to those most passionate about our products?

How can we encourage and nurture those with an average or immature interest in plants to pursue this interest further...and in a safe and credible way? We need to make it seem normal to have people talk about plants.

To move forward, OpenHort is asking for help. It is our goal to have 100 individuals contribute \$20 to have these two pilot videos produced. It's not that it will cost us \$2,000; we don't know what it will cost. And we don't care about the money. OpenHort isn't about money. We would gladly pay for this ourselves, but this is a test. We don't want to waste our time. If we can't convince 100 people to give up 20 bucks freely, without a guarantee that it will ever end up helping their business directly...then the whole concept of "collective marketing" and industry-wide participation in the common goal of selling more plants is...well, never gonna work.

This is a test...

If you're tired of hearing people say, "We should have a campaign like GotMilk," but never doing anything to make it happen, if you wish there were something we could do, here's your baby step. We're willing to work on this very hard, but we're not willing to work alone.

Summary

In summary, as an alternative to a impossible-to-achieve “got milk?” ad campaign, we propose you improve your business AND promote the industry by taking the following three steps:

1 Kill confusion. Explore how you can truly offer a “garden coach” service. Wholesalers, identify “garden coach” customers and think of some way to encourage their development... say a field day or educational summit at your nursery. Let's play to our strengths and lay the groundwork for a massive influx of “garden coaches” by creating a national certification program. This would increase diversity and distribute the power and control, but in a way that could allow for common marketing messages.

2 Get creative(s). Place an ad on craigslist and then hire the creative of your choice. Put them to work for your company AND for the industry as a whole. Growers: task the creative with making dual-purpose creations...whatever it is, make it so that your customers can use it to promote their own company. If you need help picking the creative or need inspiration or direction on putting them to work...have them connect with OpenHort, where we're always happy to share.

3 Tell stories. First, get serious about telling your own story to the world. Then, if you'd like to help with our vision, donate \$20 to OpenHort to produce 2 pilot “Why I Garden” videos.

To support us, send me an email: art@openhort.com

Design notes:

We are excited to share our ideas at the Clinic.

We began with the blog postings from OpenHort, and (since it's an election year) decided to make a "voting booth" for the question of a national marketing promotion order. We created two fictitious "parties" for the opposing sides of the issue, and chose bird mascots that would illustrate their philosophical differences. (Geese fly in a formation to the betterment of all. Eagles appear to be noble loners.)

The video, "Decision 2012" was at first going to be two individuals from the industry having a [friendly] debate (live and in-person, not pre-recorded). In the end, we decided to argue both sides. No real person was used as a model and we do not intend to offend (okay, maybe just a little).

The "3 Steps Forward" posters were designed as photo collages. The intention was to have them be a visual metaphor: separate, distinct photos are combined to make a different image altogether. The images work together, but do not lose their individual integrity. This is similar to our vision of individual firms working together for a larger goal.

This booklet was designed to be a sort of "zine" style. Since it is photo-copied, it seemed appropriate.

Thanks for reading.

questions, comments and complaints can be sent to
art@openhort.com



3 steps forward

An alternative to a national promotion campaign...we envision a grass-roots initiative to massively increase the numbers of “plant evangelists” or “garden coaches,” kick-start innovation and coolness by finding creatives adept at new media and, above all, telling the story of plants in a credible, emotional way to the world.