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NurseryInsight

Partners in progress



by MARIA ZAMPINI

'Lending your support to the grassroots effort could prove to be the cheapest and best business partnership you'll ever make.'

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As I pen this edition of Nursery Insight, Memorial Day is only two weeks away. In my mind, this holiday has always been a focal point in time. It means spring is over and you can finally take a breath. It's time to regroup, refocus, take a gulp of fresh air, pull up your bootstraps and move forward to try to secure summer and fall sales. It also ushers in another trade show season.

To me, the summer shows have a little different feel than the winter ones; it's definitely warmer, but the shows seem to be somewhat laid back. Perhaps this due to the events being a little more spread out; they don't fall right before "do or die" spring shipping, and they occur when the weather is definitely more conducive to travel.

I spent some time this week planning for the likes of OFA, PANTS, Summer Green, IGC, Far West, the GWA Symposium and more. And while filling out the OFA New Varieties Display contract and event registration, what do my wandering eyes see but a savings for me! Big savings—hot dang!

You see, once again the American Nursery & Landscape Association (ANLA) has partnered with OFA—an Association of Horticulture Professionals (OFA) so that even if you aren't an OFA member, as an ANLA member, you can take advantage of member rates for the OFA Short Course in Columbus July 10 to 13. If you've never been, you're missing something. As Nicholas Staddon, New Plants Team director at Monrovia, would say, "It's a smoker!"

I think it is a truly top-notch trade show and educational event. As the brochure states, "... OFA and ANLA leaders have a perfect opportunity to seek greater success for the entire nursery, greenhouse, garden center, and landscape communities." What a winning combination for all involved: ANLA gets a first class venue for its meetings and educational product for its membership—at member prices; OFA gets exposed to an additional target market with the likelihood of drawing in more attendees. And lucky me! I'm one of the

beneficiaries of their forward-thinking partnership.

I think that in today's world, partnerships are becoming an even more important business tool. Partnerships can allow you to keep your individuality but, at the same time, combine forces to reach levels you never could have achieved alone. Granted, the thought of sharing—in particular with someone you've perceived as a competitor—can go against one's basic nature. Then again, one must give to receive.

As with anything, there is a risk. But remember the old saying: "Don't be afraid to go out on a limb ... that's where the fruit is." The bigger gamble would be to keep doing what you're doing and not try something new or different.

This also brings to mind a business theory my dad has preached to me for many years, which is the two-horse concept of teamwork. Here's how it goes: Let's say one horse alone can pull 700 pounds, and another horse can pull 800 pounds. How many pounds can they pull together? The answer might surprise you. As part of the two-horse team, each horse pulls his own weight

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plus the weight of their interaction—so in this scenario, the team pulls about 3,000 pounds!

I make it a point to try to attend the ANLA's Legislative Leadership Conference in DC and the Ohio Nursery & Landscape Association's Advocacy Day at the statehouse in Columbus. Each of these events is held biannually. They are first and foremost an opportunity to meet with elected officials and show grassroots support on issues that are important to our industry and our businesses. Additionally, there are politicians, decision-makers and experts who educate attendees on the political process and current hot topics. And—of course!—these events provide still another occasion to network with colleagues and make new contacts.

In politics it is a fact that there is strength in numbers. It's an arena in which the industry could benefit from greater association partnering. The last couple of times I visited DC, here were ANLA delegates walking in the door to a senator's or representative's office while PLANET delegates were walking out. For the most part, we were essentially singing the same tune.

One of the first things you're reminded of you before your visits to Capitol Hill is to be mindful of the politicians' time. So what do we do? We make them sit through the same spiel back to back. While I like to think they heard our comments or concerns, I also sensed them wondering why we didn't come together. Not a good impression, and it's definitely not maximizing our potential.

I think people shy away from politics for a variety of reasons. If I had my way I wouldn't be involved, either, but I understand that if I'm not, I'm leaving my fate totally in the hands of the politicians. It's a scary thought. I don't care what party the politicians represent, before they say yea or nay on something that can profoundly affect my business or personal life, I want to at least get in my two cents' worth.

I look at it this way: If I have to sleep with the wolves, then let me at least be able to pick whether the sheets are silk or cotton.

I encourage you to seek out your local, state or national association to see how easily they can help make your voice heard. Lending your support to the grassroots effort could prove to be the cheapest and best business partnership you'll ever make.

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