

Horticulture Innovation Australia

Final Report

Training Growers In Direct Consumer Engagement - Scoping Report

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Executive Summary

Growers within Australia, and around the world, are beginning to either directly experience or witness, the benefit of building individual brands and harnessing the power of marketing, especially with its current reduced cost of entry due to the rising prominence of social media: Facebook, Instagram, You Tube.

In response to vegetable growers' request to gain/increase their knowledge of marketing and enhance their skills, Hort. Innovation commissioned Workshop Australia ("Workshop") to conduct a scoping project to design a bespoke 'Direct Consumer Engagement Program' to address marketing knowledge gaps, enabling them to improve the viability and sustainability of their businesses. This project aims to deliver a detailed program proposal for a series of training opportunities to enhance skill sets, which could be widely distributed, and in particular to address social media.

Project Objectives:

- To provide an overview of how marketing, branding and consumer engagement work in principle
- To provide a thorough and extensive outline of the marketing channels, platforms and opportunities available to growers, taking into account different business sizes, complexities, resources and capabilities, sales/distribution model variation;
- To provide easy-to-use, up-to-the-minute guides, particularly on social and digital media marketing, that can be accessed via a number of different formats, in a self-directed learning capacity;
- To incentivise and facilitate growers who wish to start their own consumer brand journey – determining who their ideal customer is, understanding how to motivate them and build their own story that will attract that customer and keep them into the future -, or evolve their current brand further, for long-term success.

Project Activities:

1: Initial Briefings & Brainstorms

2: Research Phase

A small but varied selection of 'off the shelf' marketing training programs and course curricula were reviewed, specifically for content and language, with a focus on social media. Whilst the larger programs could not be reviewed fully - often sold via individual topic modules only – we were able to get a sense of their delivery and engagement potential, e.g. how visual was it? how relevant? level of jargon etc. For a summary of observations, see Appendix 3 'Program Review Findings'.

3: Program Framework Development

In consultation with Hort Innovation and other key stakeholders, a clear and comprehensive framework for the marketing training program was developed, encompassing key objectives and considerations, along with a detailed rationale for each.

4: Supplier Liaison & Detailed Cost Estimate of Deliverables

Liaison and briefings with a variety of suppliers and industry specialists allowed the preparation of a detailed budget for deliverables, including a potential range of investment level options dependent on available budget.

5: Delivery of Report

The findings and recommendations from this scoping project have been delivered herewith.

Key Outputs (Appendices):

1. 'Direct Consumer Engagement Grower Marketing Program Framework & Rationale'
2. 'Direct Consumer Engagement Grower Marketing Program Investment Level Options'.

Key Outcomes:

Following this period of investigation and review, the following conclusions were drawn:

- All growers are likely to possess a level of marketing knowledge (ranging from a little to a lot); the training program needs to appeal across this spectrum;
- Building grower appreciation and knowledge of marketing is equally as important as demonstrating its practical applications, as it is this that underpins how one application may be successful over another;
- For a program to be effective, and of quality, it needs to have logic, relevance, ease of navigation, inspiring content, and just as importantly, deliver that content in an engaging and entertaining manner to maintain attention and 'talkability', i.e. share amongst peers and teams;
- The program should be available in a range of formats (printable PDFs, audio and video files) to maximise grower participation;
- Marketing could create new roles and responsibilities oriented towards leading edge marketing practices within a grower's business and thus have a broad impact on the business and local community.

Recommendations:

For future R&D:

It is recommended that a series of grower interviews (as detailed in the 'Direct Consumer Engagement Grower Marketing Framework & Rationale') be undertaken prior to finalizing and producing the content of the training program. Capturing grower input upfront encourages ownership and is likely to improve uptake and participation in the training program through referral and industry forums.

NB: There is a clear opportunity to work/ link with VegPro, however, making this connection was not within scope for this project. The project required scoping of a program of activity that addressed grower needs for marketing training.

Keywords

Grower marketing program; direct consumer engagement; marketing; training; education; Workshop Australia; brands; branding; advertising; social media

Introduction

This scoping study considers the possibility of a 'Direct Consumer Engagement Grower Training Program' to take vegetable growers on an educational and instructional journey enabling them to better engage their consumers, whether that is wholesalers, retailers or the grocery buyer. One that will be directly informed and designed by grower's feedback, in a 'choose your own adventure' style, that can be joined at any stage – from the very beginning, at the end, or at any point along the way, depending on their existing level of marketing knowledge and activity, plus the size or life stage of their business.

The objectives of the marketing training program are:

- To provide an overview of how marketing, branding and consumer engagement work in principle;
- To detail all the opportunities available to growers (taking into account different business sizes, complexities, resources and capabilities as well as grower sales/distribution model variation);
- To provide a thorough and extensive outline of the marketing channels and platforms available in the present time;
- To provide an easy to use, up-to-the-minute guide on social and digital media marketing from a remote base; and
- To provide incentive and know-how on starting their own consumer brand journey, or evolving a current brand further for long-term success.

This project provides an outline of a *proposed* program framework that meets the above objectives, in a cost efficient and timely manner, in collaboration with Hort. Innovation key stakeholders. The project allows growers to understand what would be involved in creating a training program specifically for growers to undertake marketing activities within their own businesses.

Implementing a training program would enable growers to drive their *individual* businesses forward from a consumer demand perspective and future talent attraction and retention. Accessing a program like this would allow growers to understand the background to a phenomenon they are directly experiencing or witnessing - the undeniable benefit of building individual brands and the power of marketing – which has been particularly prevalent with the increased use of social media.

According to latest ABS figures (June 2016), there are 2,171,544 actively trading businesses within Australia. The struggle to achieve individual recognition (and therefore a fair share of a shopper's disposable income) is significant, and businesses have to find new and innovative ways in which to stand out and market themselves, to secure their future.

Many growers don't have the knowledge or tools to utilise marketing to grow and sustain their businesses effectively. Growers themselves also recognise the need to share their individual stories and build direct consumer relationships.

Overall Objective:

To provide growers with an educational and instructional marketing program - shaped by grower input with the ability to be joined at any stage, depending on their existing marketing knowledge, activity, size or business life stage - enabling them to better engage their consumers and build sustainable businesses.

Grower Sentiment:

Competition has increased amongst growers, giving rise to concern over increasing imports and the continued dominance of retailers demands, selling to consumers who are under pressure with even less disposable income.

This translates to a desire to up-skill to survive and thrive – it's no longer enough to just grow vegetables, growers need to focus on optimising their individual businesses, looking for fresh ways to promote themselves and increase their profile against competitors.

Consumer Sentiment:

Recent years have seen a noticeable shift in Australian consumers purchasing behaviour – including the growth of farmers' markets and farm gate buying. Interest in provenance ("where has my food come from, and from whom?"), 'food miles' and a reduction in food wastage has led to 'shop local' and 'shop small' movements gaining momentum and recently, the launch of Australia's first ever rescued-food supermarket.

Food scares (e.g. imported frozen berries) can affect consumer confidence in retailers. These behavioural changes indicate that consumers may be more accepting of and actively seeking the reassurance of reliable brands, as long as they are still at an affordable price. The time for growers therefore to capitalise on this and adapt to change, is now.

Significance for Industry and Growers:

Australian horticulture needs to be in the driving seat of adopting modern marketing practices that boost both domestic and export sales, to guarantee the industry's future by attracting the next generation of farmers and thus, redirect some of the power back into the hands of growers themselves.

Equally important is for growers to not only see funds invested in productivity and efficiencies from a growing perspective, but in driving their individual businesses forward. One way to do this is via individual grower marketing campaigns, with growers actively attracting new customers and retaining them via loyalty to their individual brand, in order to future proof their business.

Methodology

A 5-step process has been used to scope the 'Direct Consumer Engagement Grower Training Program' development. Outlined below is the full detail behind each step:

1. Initial Briefings and Brainstorms

After an initial briefing session, areas of focus were agreed on to include:

- *Building grower appreciation and knowledge of the power and benefits of marketing;*
- *Demonstrating how marketing can be used to turn their business into a sustainable brand.*

Following the initial briefing, a number of rigorous sessions and exercises were undertaken, including:

1a - Brainstorms:

- With key Workshop staff members including CEO, Senior Strategy Planner, Senior Business Directors and Business Executive.

1b - Desk Research:

- To review all available briefing and reference materials;
- Including previous Workshop Australia brand-building presentations and examples;
- Including relevant industry material.

1c - Strategy & Mapping Sessions:

- To identify likely or perceived knowledge gaps, based on experience;
- To draft core program requirements (as a whiteboard exercise);
- To map the program's information architecture (as a whiteboard exercise).

1d - Consultation, with External Industry Specialists

- To ensure the program is sense-checked, comprehensive and sound;
- To obtain further insights and (where appropriate) indicative investment levels

including:

- Small to medium business owners (FBA (Family Business Association) Forum Group);
- Those with human resources experience;
- Trainers (Tripod Brand Planning Workshops);
- Media (Sandbox & Paykel Media);
- Social media specialists (Social Media Knowledge (SMK));
- Production suppliers and/or subcontractors (Shotbox Films & Brightworks).

1e - Consultation, with Hort Innovation Stakeholders:

- To gain perspective and a better understanding of grower requirements;
- To sense-check the program's outline;
- To incorporate Hort Innovation feedback and input into all elements of the program.

2. Research Phase

An initial research phase was undertaken to source and examine a number of 'off the shelf' marketing programs – in this context, defined as a pre-existing marketing program that any person can undertake regardless of their industry, their business type and/or size.

Programs were selected with a particular focus on those tailored towards small businesses with specific social media and digital media content, given its relevance to individual growers' likely marketing budget limitations and today's media climate; i.e. most business being driven towards the digital space to connect, engage and communicate with customers as the most cost effective and powerful way to reach them.

Each program delivery was reviewed for:

- *Language* *Terminology, consistency, tonality*
- *Content* *Is it applicable to small business, new starters and new media?*
- *Relevance* *To our grower audience*
- *Quality* *Best practice examples*
- *Engagement* *Presentation in an approachable, simple, inspiring, interactive manner.*

Various program formats that have been reviewed include:

- *Online courses or webinars*
- *One-on-One training specialists*
- *Training workshops (small groups)*
- *Seminars*
- *e-Newsletters*

3. Program Framework Development

Key learnings from Steps 1 and 2 indicated the following:

- *All growers are likely to possess a certain level of marketing knowledge (ranging from a little, to a lot)*
- *All marketing programs that were deemed to be of quality, display logic flow, ease of navigation, achievable milestones and relevant, inspirational content.*

With these in mind, a program framework for the 'Direct Consumer Engagement Grower Training Program' has been developed, encompassing all key Hort Innovation objectives and grower considerations.

Purpose of Program Framework:

- To design a tailored program specifically for Hort Innovation levy-paying members;
- To organise all information and content;
- To provide structure and logic flow;
- To ensure clarity of concept and content;
- To assist with future content development;
- To plan future production requirements, in order to create downloadable content such as digital, audio or video files;
- To identify entry and exit points for grower participation, depending on levels of pre-existing marketing knowledge and/or business life stage;
- Ultimately, creating a one-page blueprint of the entire program.

With the above framework, anyone within Hort Innovation (including growers) can quickly and easily view the program's purpose, structure and content, from end-to-end.

Grower Marketing Knowledge / Activity 'It' Scale:

The following scale was agreed, against which to plot grower marketing knowledge:



5 Program Phases:

Content for the marketing training program was then organised into 5 distinct phases:

1. Information

Sharing of basic marketing principles and the difference between a business and a brand;

2. Inspiration

Encouraging growers to start their own 'business to brand' journey;

3. Education

Providing growers with specific brand building and marketing 'how-to guides';

4. Implementation

Providing step-by-step guides on initiating and executing marketing activity;

5. Optimisation

Educating on ways to review all marketing activity and refine where appropriate.

Thereby guiding the program development to ensure every level of grower marketing knowledge is met with a specifically designed, highly relevant phase of education/training.

Individual Program Modules:

Each of the above 5 program phases have been broken down into a number of individual modules, designed to act as training chapters or subjects that growers can complete at their own pace.

The title and proposed content outline of 17 program modules in total has been scoped out, which provides the general content plan (but not the content itself), with approximately 60 sub-chapters listed within these modules.

Program Modules – Preparation of Detail and Rationales:

The content plan for each program module has been fleshed out in detail to clearly outline:

- *Overview and Objectives* *What's the purpose behind each module?*
- *Key Benefits* *What do we expect to achieve as a result?*
- *Methodology* *How do we intend developing & producing this module?*
- *Output* *What is the end result for Hort Innovation and/or growers?*

Case Studies – Sourcing and Citing:

Further desk research was conducted to source and cite case studies, from both in and out of category. These have been used only when relevant to demonstrate the importance of a specific program module, or sub-chapter's content, or to provide Hort Innovation (and ultimately the growers) with further confidence.

4. Supplier Liaison / Detailed Cost Estimate of Deliverables

The following were consulted:

- Key internal staff members (including CEO, Senior Business Directors, Strategy Planning and Copywriters) to discuss anticipated content development requirements;
- External resources and suppliers (primarily production companies) to discuss anticipated production requirements.

As a result, a detailed budget has been prepared to assist with understanding the investment levels in a program of this nature, where 4 options are outlined for review:

- **Options 1 - 3:** Part program development and implementation (in line with reduced scope).
- **Option 4:** Full program development and implementation.

5. Report Delivery

The detailed scoping report was prepared, in consultation with Hort Innovation.

Outputs

1. Direct Consumer Engagement Grower Marketing Program Framework

A one-page overview of the entire program's framework, including the 'Grower Marketing Knowledge Scale', the 5 phases, the 17 program modules and c.60 sub-chapters.

2. Direct Consumer Engagement Grower Marketing Program Framework – Rationale

A detailed extension of the above framework, providing overview & objectives, key benefits, proposed methodology and proposed output for the entire program (across all 5 phases and all 17 program modules).

3. Detailed Budget for Deliverables

A detailed cost estimate, outlining the anticipated service provider head hours and anticipated external production costs to develop, implement and execute the 'Direct Consumer Engagement Grower Marketing Program'.

4. Investment Level Options

A further iteration of the above detailed cost outline, this time outlining the various investment level options to develop, implement and execute the 'Direct Consumer Engagement Grower Marketing Program', depending on available budgets.

Outcomes

Project specific:

1. Investigations led to a broader and more all-encompassing framework production.

The 'Direct Consumer Engagement Grower Marketing Program Framework' became a much broader offering than originally anticipated due to the need to have relevance and encompass the full spectrum of audience knowledge, which should encourage increased uptake and longevity through ongoing participation.

2. Utilization of a training program is optimized by deep understanding.

Many teaching methods, regardless of type or industry, are guided by the principles of what, why, and how. Once a grower understands the 'what' (i.e. what is marketing?), is convinced by the 'why' (i.e. why do I need marketing?), they are then more likely to engage with the 'how' (i.e. how do I use marketing effectively) and as a result, engage with the program long-term. Building grower appreciation and knowledge of marketing therefore is equally as important as demonstrating its practical application and this has led to the proposal for a more in-depth program and thus investment in the larger scale of program.

3. Off-the-shelf programs failed to meet relevance goals against our target audience and their needs.

Following the review of existing 'off the shelf' marketing programs, it became apparent that those of any real quality or substance were comparative in terms of logic, relevance, ease of navigation and inspirational content. Those that particularly stood out were programs grounded in a clear understanding of audience and audience needs. This further demonstrates the need for the development of a grower-specific marketing training program, where we can talk directly to the varying types of consumer they are trying to attract, engage and retain.

4. It is essential that program content be available in a range of formats (printable PDFs, audio and video files).

At the outset, it was agreed that a more visual representation of knowledge would be more engaging and beneficial for our audience. However, it became apparent through conversations and initial research, that we need to make the 'Direct Consumer Engagement Grower Marketing Program' as accessible as possible, to as many growers as possible, in order to maximise participation. At a very basic level, this means taking into account their physical resources (technology and equipment - for example, printers) and their time (tendency to multi-task - for example, listening to audio files whilst on a tractor) and encouraging them to participate in the program on their own terms...wherever, whenever and however they can.

5. A solid recruitment and incentive program is a key consideration to ensure uptake of this training, however was not part of this scoping proposal.

It has become clear that with such a big investment in the marketing training of growers, an equally thorough program of recruitment must be considered and scoped out to ensure its uptake and trial.

Next steps:***By project completion (May 2017)***

Hort Innovation will be able to use this scoping study for growers to consider commissioning the development of a comprehensive education/training program, with the view to implement within FY2017/2018, depending on which investment level option is preferred.

Future investment

Within one year, a second phase of this project could produce a comprehensive, multi-format resource that any Australian vegetable levy-paying grower could access, free of charge, to increase their marketing skill base with a view to improving the long term sustainability of their business (and livelihood). Delivery would consider the findings of VG16014, the digital asset review and strategy in terms of grower access, channels of distribution etc.

It is anticipated that this would lead to more engaged growers within the community and potentially increased sales strength, proactivity and business innovation within the domestic vegetable market.

Program participants would have a well-informed, solid understanding and a better appreciation of the power of marketing; the difference between a business and a brand.

We expect that program graduates would have the motivation to implement change in their businesses and access to the necessary information, tools and resources required to do so, no matter what their business life stage (size) or marketing knowledge.

Recommendations

As part of this project, a detailed cost estimate has been provided in liaison with a range of suppliers, including options for investment (please see Appendix 2) for further development of the proposed program.

This diligence has not only provided a comprehensive budget (in line with industry standards and competitive cost structures), but also identified four clear investment options for Hort Innovation's consideration:

Option 1:

PART PROGRAM (IMPLEMENTATION PHASE ONLY)

This option focuses purely on the implementation phase, without any of the preceding 'brand-building' content or inspiration that we understand to be critical to better facilitate engagement, participation and therefore transform a grower's business into a viable, sustainable brand.

Whilst it is still a highly practical phase, the content would require some level of pre-existing marketing knowledge and as such, may not be suitable for the majority of growers.

Option 2:

PART PROGRAM (IMPLEMENTATION & OPTIMISATION PHASES ONLY)

As per above, however it also includes the optimisation phase, so that growers can start to implement and monitor their own brand 'health checks' and have faith that their marketing efforts and activities are as effective as possible, or alter accordingly.

Option 3:

PART PROGRAM (INSPIRATION, EDUCATION & IMPLEMENTATION PHASES ONLY)

This option covers a wider spectrum of grower marketing knowledge, starting at the very beginning of the brand-building process without assumption of any pre-existing knowledge or experience. For those growers who do already possess marketing knowledge or experience, this option is designed to further their education, enhance their skill base and reignite inspiration.

Option 4: RECOMMENDATION

FULL PROGRAM (ALL FIVE PHASES)

Following this scoping phase project, it is recommended that Hort Innovation invest in the full 'Direct Consumer Engagement Grower Marketing Program', as outlined in the detailed framework and rationale. This program has been developed following the extensive and rigorous process outlined in the methodology and although the program has been designed as a modular format, it is our belief and firm recommendation that all phases should be made available to all growers.

In doing so, Hort Innovation will cover the full spectrum of marketing knowledge and experience amongst growers and provide the inspiration, information, skills and tools required to transform grower businesses into sustainable brands.

Intellectual Property/Commercialisation

No commercial IP generated.

Appendices

- 1. Direct Consumer Engagement Grower Marketing Program Framework & Rationale**
- 2. Detailed Cost Estimate of Deliverables & Investment Level Options**
- 3. Program Review Findings**