

Basic Marketing Concepts for Forest and Conservation Nurseries

B. J. Hill¹

Hill, B.J. 1995. Basic Marketing Concepts for Forest and Conservation Nurseries. In: Landis, T.D.; Cregg, B., tech. coords. National Proceedings, Forest and Conservation Nursery Associations. Gen. Tech. Rep. PNW-GTR-365. Portland, OR: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station: 23-26. Available at: <http://www.fcnanet.org/proceedings/1995/hill.pdf>

Abstract-Basic marketing concepts can be useful for forest and conservation nurseries especially as they transition into self-sustaining financial situations. These basic marketing concepts include marketing orientation, marketing plan development, market research, target marketing, SWOT analysis, marketing mix, promotional mix, and advertising mix. These concepts are explained and applied to forest and conservation nurseries.

Basic marketing principles can be applied to nearly any for-profit or not-for-profit enterprise to increase customer satisfaction and to enhance business, or organizational, success. Sometimes, a simple outline of those basic marketing concepts is all that is needed to remind us to turn needed attention towards the customer or client. This paper seeks to provide an outline of basic marketing principles.

More than anything else, **marketing is an attitude and orientation towards your customers.** A hundred years ago, industrialized companies produced goods, like Model T's, that were purchased without a lot of hoopla. A scarcity of goods in which people bought whatever was available characterized an industrial orientation. In the past, nurseries with a fixed customer base may have been able to produce any type of seedlings the nursery desired. Fifty years ago, companies utilized dynamic salesmen to unload products, like the Edsel, regardless of their value. This approach characterizes a sales orientation. Today, businesses adjust their product, price, or pattern of distribution to meet the needs of their customers. Businesses that characteristically put their customers first follow a **marketing orientation.**

Adjusting a nursery's product, price, or distribution to better meet customer needs and wants is the foundation of marketing. Likewise, finding customers whose needs and wants match the products and services offered by our nurseries is an important part of marketing, but not the only part. For example, a nursery that offers a new species of seedling at the request of customers, or sets the price of seed production based on species after customer complaints, or decides to deliver over a broader range of territory is involved in marketing just as much as the nursery that spends money for newspaper or magazine advertising.

Traditionally, a **marketing mix** includes these four P's of product, price, place (distribution), and promotion. Those involved in service industries have realized that the additional P's of people, packaging, programming, and partnership are also important to customer satisfaction.

Deciding what you want to do to meet a customer's needs and wants for the coming months or year is called a **marketing plan.** The various stages of a marketing plan are the building blocks to marketing success. Knowing what to do comes from information you gather from your customers. Gathering and considering that information is **market research.**

Understanding just who your current customers are and who your potential customers may be is identifying **target markets**. Meeting the needs and wants of different customer groups is **target marketing**.

A marketing plan is based on a formal "**vision**" of your nursery. The plan also utilizes an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, called **SWOT analysis**. Then, **broad goals and strategies** of adjustment to the marketing mix, or eight Ps, are developed. Next, an **action plan** is prepared that details how the goals will be met by describing the who, what, when and how much. The plan spells out the target market, the marketing activity, who is responsible, the time frame for the activity, and the money to be spent for each action. After **implementation, an evaluation** of each activity suggests whether the actions ought to continue, be adjusted, or be discontinued. Marketing planning is a continuous cycle of analyzing, strategizing, planning, implementing, evaluating, and analyzing again. Again, the steps of the marketing plan are:

1. Creating a guiding vision of your nursery.

For some nurseries a guiding vision is mandated by legislative, executive, or bureaucratic action. Still, nursery managers and employees have entered the field with an individual commitment to some ideal of forestry management. To gain support, build morale, and provide direction, a compelling statement of mission and ideals should be prepared. The vision materializes as questions about the reasons, objectives, themes, strategies, and profits of the nursery are answered. Then, the vision statement can be written to crystallize the process in positive affirmations that will provide direction and build confidence.

2. Analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

A careful examination of the external environments that a nursery finds itself in, as well as customer-based market research, leads to a better understanding of how the nursery can meet its guiding vision. The environment, or situation, a nursery finds itself in includes: the general economy, available technologies, societal shifts, political and legal changes and regulations, available resources, and competition. A close look at these environments, and the nursery's strengths and weaknesses within these environments can give a good idea of opportunities and challenges.

Market research adds information about customers and their levels of satisfaction. Market research can be as simple as visiting with customers in the field or on the phone or as complex as a carefully designed mail survey. Market research should help to identify who the target markets are, and how their needs and wants change.

3. Developing objectives and strategies.

Objectives are clear and measurable statements of business intentions for a specific period of time. They can be focused on particular strategies and the effects of those strategies on growth and profitability. Major strategies should focus on each of the components of the marketing mix (the 8 Ps) that will be utilized to meet objectives and realize the guiding vision for the nursery. A description of each component within the marketing mix that might be utilized as a marketing strategy are detailed below.

Product. For forest and conservation nurseries the common products are seeds and seedlings. Other services, such as seed processing, may also be a part of the product mix. Adjusting the product mix is the first strategy that should be considered in any marketing plan.

Price. This includes not only the actual price for each seedling, seed, or service, but also the minimum order taken, discounts for bulk purchases, and unique pricing strategies for the variety of services or species that might be made available. Customer perception of value is an ongoing issue in marketing efforts.

Distribution (Place). The distribution channels used to deliver the products and services provided by nurseries may also be adjusted to better meet customer wants and needs. Sales to wholesalers, retailers, cooperatives, or directly to customers, freight by air, truck, or delivery, and use of sales representatives are all decisions that relate to distribution and are a part of the marketing mix.

Promotion. The promotional mix can include **advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, merchandising, public relations, and publicity.**

Advertising efforts are common and require careful consideration. No amount of advertising can alter a poor reputation. Only product and service changes can completely overcome a negative image. It is so easy to spend large amounts of money on advertising that any advertising expenditures should be approached with special caution. Some possible advertising media include newspaper, magazine, radio, television, outdoor (billboards), and direct mail. Cooperative advertising between nurseries is certainly an option utilized by other industries and enterprises with limited marketing budgets. Though advertising is a tempting place to spend marketing efforts, other promotion strategies are likely to yield substantial rewards. Souvenir T-shirts and mugs with logo or slogan are examples of **merchandising**. Point-of-purchase displays, point-of-purchase demonstrations, premiums, contests, sweepstakes, games, and coupons are examples of **sales promotions**. Though these would not be commonly used by nurseries, they shouldn't be dismissed out of hand either.

Personal selling with direct contacts is certainly appropriate for bulk customers and partner agencies.

Grand opening events, new conferences, announcements or feature stories in papers or magazines, and media interviews can all play a role in nursery marketing as **publicity and public relations** promotions.

People. The employees of any enterprise or organization are an often overlooked marketing resource. Service industries are especially dependent on the ability of employees to serve and satisfy customers. **Internal marketing** are those efforts that help employees feel good about their work and the mission of their institution.

Packaging and Programming. These marketing strategies involve packaging and putting together various products and services in a format that meets customer needs and developing

special events or activities that appeal to customers. Imagination and unique perspectives are the most important talents needed to utilize these strategies.

Partnerships. Forest and conservation nurseries have long held partnerships with various National Forests. Those nurseries may not have looked upon those as important marketing strategies, but they certainly are.

The formation of similar partnerships will continue to be an important source for increasing nursery clientele.

4. Preparing a detailed action plan.

An action plan describes the scheduling, resource needs and individual responsibility for each marketing strategy. The best action plans provide the greatest specific detail.

5. Implementing your plan.

Certainly the most important part of any marketing plan is its implementation. Without someone to carry out the marketing strategies, planning is a process of futility.

6. Evaluating your actions and strategies.

No marketing plan will ever be all it can be until each marketing strategy is critically examined for its effectiveness. Periodic evaluations then lead to changes and adjustments in future strategy implementation.

Marketing can be rigorous and formal or simple and casual. If an orientation towards customers is in place, anything a nursery might do to better meet the wants and needs of customers or to find those customer's who desire their products and services is marketing. A marketing plan can be a sketch of these efforts or a detailed report, but the most important activity is asking, "What can I do to adjust my product, price, place, promotion, people, packaging, programming, or partnerships to better meet customer wants and needs?"

¹ *Tourism Program University of Nebraska at Kearney West Center, C208 Kearney, NE 68849.*
