

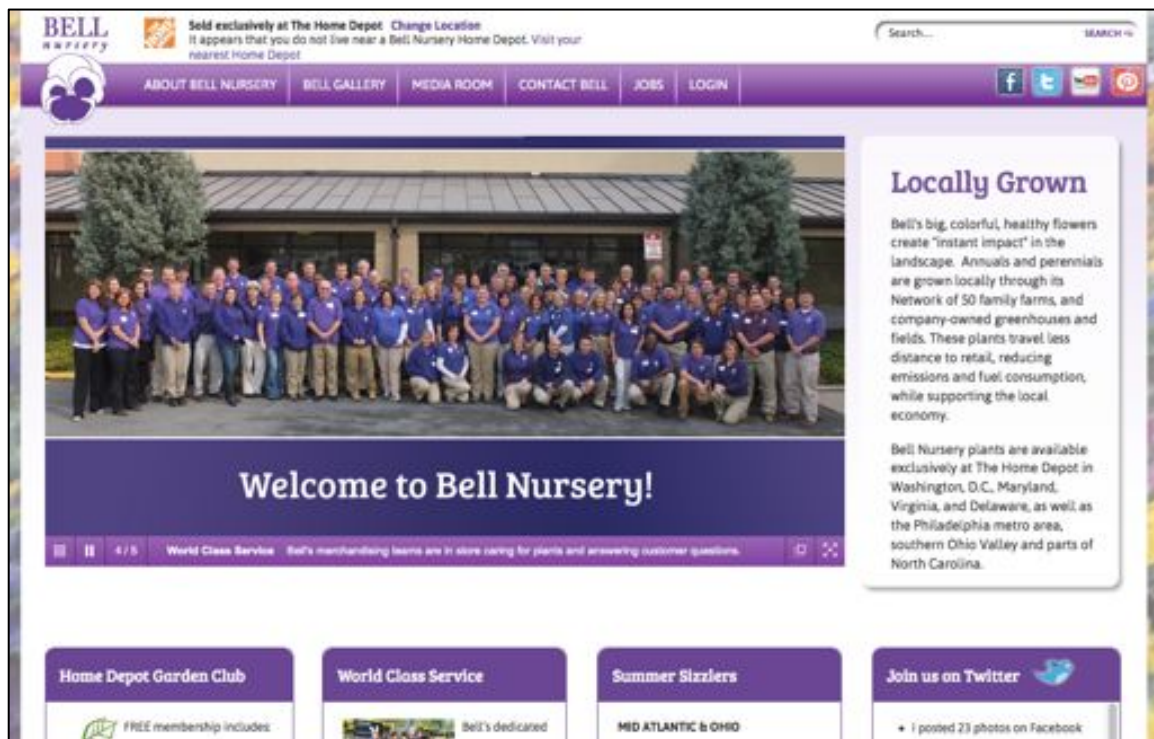
A SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDE FOR FLORAL RETAILERS AND WHOLESALERS

Case Study: Bell Nursery

Company History

Bob and Shirley Mangum founded Bell Nursery in 1978 to grow plants for the family's various horticultural businesses – Mangum Florist, Interior Plant Distributors and Creative Plantings. In 1994 they sold the nursery to their son, Gary, and son-in-law, Mike McCarthy. The new partners immediately shifted focus to growing great flowering annuals and looking for new customers.

In early 1995, Mangum met with a merchant from The Home Depot who recognized the quality of the flowers he saw and offered Bell an opportunity to stock 100 New Guinea hanging baskets at one store in Catonsville, Md. The baskets sold out in a day. That summer, Bell stocked a small percentage of the annuals at that same store.



Over the next few years Bell earned additional shelf space at an increasing number of Home Depot garden centers. Today, the company provides colorful

annuals, and all live goods - including trees, shrubs, perennials, tropicals and specialty items - and has expanded to serve nearly two hundred stores from Raleigh to Philadelphia, and west to the Ohio Valley. Bell grows more than 100 million annuals, 5 million perennials and 1 million poinsettias each year.

As Bell's partnership with The Home Depot grew, the company needed to expand greenhouse and range operations. In the late 1990s they added additional greenhouses in Sudlersville, Md., but when sales required additional growing space, Mangum and McCarthy turned to a network model first used by Purdue Chicken. In the first year of the program, they signed on 11 family farmers to their Growers Network. These families invested in building greenhouses, often mortgaging their property, and committed to growing plants for Bell. While Mangum and McCarthy originally envisioned just 20-25 acres Network growing space, they now have 40 farmers growing 75 acres of plants and flowers, bringing Bell's total growing space to 220 acres.

“We want Bell quality to be THE quality standard for the entire industry.”

Mangum also quickly realized that plants properly presented and maintained in the stores had a better rate of sell through at the register. In addition to staging and caring for plants, Bell's industry-leading retail merchandising team provides care information and other customer assistance, increasing likelihood of customer success when they get their plants home.

In addition to creating the Growers Network and merchandising program, Bell strives for disciplined shipping. Bell's commitment to shipping plants and flowers only at prime stage takes patience on the part of the growers and customers. Plants are kept in the greenhouse or field until they reach predetermined growth specifications, resulting in the best quality product at retail, a notable edge over many competitors.

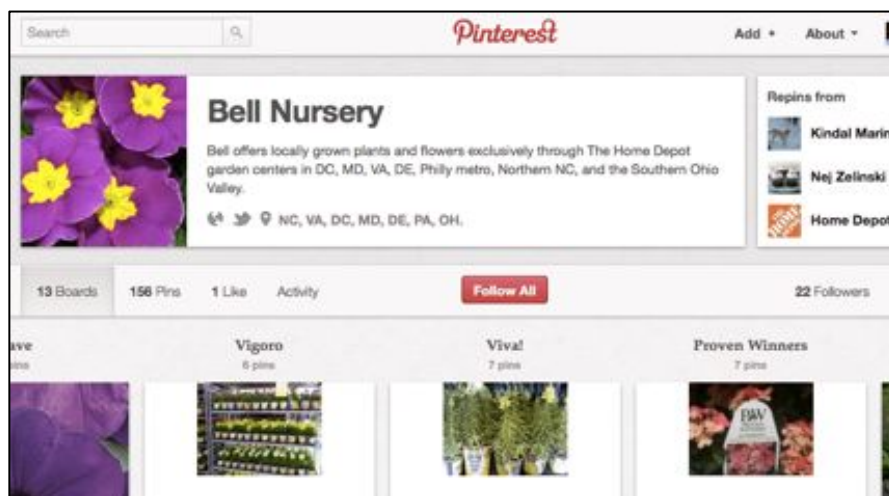
In 2011, Bell expanded its business operations, increasing full time and year-round staff by about 15%. The company also moved its corporate headquarters from Burtonsville, Md., to a distribution warehouse in Elkridge, Md., increasing loading docks from 3 to 20, vastly improving its ability to receive and distribute great product. The Burtonsville facility continues to serve as the hub of Bell's growing operations.

Social Media Strategy

Obviously, Bell Nursery has an interesting story to tell in regards to their company history. Kindel Marin, Bell's marketing director is quick to emphasize that they want the Bell story to resonate with consumers. There are some pretty passionate folks who work and grow for Bell and that passion comes out in how they grow and how they sell. “Bell Quality” is known all along the Eastern

seaboard and can best be summarized by the phrase “see no dirt.” In other words, when a customer picks up a Bell plant, they are hard pressed to see any dirt underneath the vast foliage and flowers of the plant itself. That’s the core marketing message that Bell wants to disseminate through their social media marketing efforts (Bell sets a quality standard that is THE standard for the industry).

At the heart of the social media framework for Bell Nursery is the newly revamped website. It serves as the centralized point of contact for consumers to find more detailed information once they have that first interaction whether it is through the Bell Facebook page, the Pinterest page, Twitter feeds, Google+, or YouTube. The website provides a lot of eye candy for the plant lover, as well as a section called Idea House that is designed to provide some creative spark to their customers who may be unsure of what or how to engage in gardening and landscaping. With their partners (The Home Depot, Pavestone, and Scotts Miracle Gro), they show all aspects of outdoor home and garden care, from laying a path to building a retaining wall, and from prepping soil for planting to long-term fertilizer and weed maintenance.



Another key strategy of the SM toolkit for Bell is to drive customers to the Home Depot Garden Club where they can obtain exclusive savings and special offers, delivered to their inbox, monthly lawn and garden ideas customized for their location, ideas and instructions for unique outdoor projects, and a personalized outdoor journal and photo album. By driving the customers to the HD Garden Club, they are developing the synergies of partnering with HD and becoming a more indispensable vendor at the same time.

Another key aspect of Bell’s messaging to the end consumer is relating the benefits of plants in enhancing the quality of their lives. Through links to videos, academic publications, and sites such as America in Bloom, consumers are educated on how important it is to engage in gardening and landscaping not only

in their home landscapes but in their communities as well. SM communications help to reinforce the message repeatedly.

