

## **Bridging the Generation Gap<sup>©</sup>**

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“Bridging the Generation Gap” is an International Plant Propagators Society (IPPS) specific lecture discussing ways to increase and retain membership and attendance at annual meetings. Inspired from the questions asked in the “Membership Proposal” for 2014/2015 by the International Board, the strategies presented are aimed to reach a new generation while maintaining the long standing integrity of IPPS.

### **REINVENTING THE PROPAGATOR**

Mechanization has changed the face of plant production. With the integration of efficient technology nurseries can operate with fewer employees. These advancements have enabled plants to be produced very consistently with a high level of quality. However, this shift has impacted the employment of many nurseries and the membership of professional association’s worldwide.

Box store trends have also contributed to a major shift in the green industry. Through the mass market economic structure the green industry has fallen prey to a dangerous trend of devaluing our products and accommodating unnecessary warranties. The expectations and responsibility of the end consumer have changed dramatically in the last decade. Plant warranties eliminate the consequence of not learning how to grow plants. The mass market has also created a bottle neck with regard to available plant material. By limiting the selection of plants down to a few genera we have devalued the diversity that makes horticulture such a broad and interesting opportunity.

The time has come for a renaissance of the professional plant propagator! Like the modern day Brew Master, this is a career that the public is genuinely fascinated by. Everyone in IPPS has important and interesting information to share with the world. The propagator is the heart and soul of a nursery and that is something to celebrate!

### **STRATEGIES TO REACH A NEW GENERATION**

IPPS is a professional organization and the most efficient way to secure new members is through the existing network of nurseries active in the region. Member nurseries can approach new hires as an investment for International Plant Propagators Society. Promote an annual IPPS membership and attendance at the yearly meeting as a benefit of employment. Just like vacation and sick days, membership in a professional organization is a bonus of employment and is a great strategy for attracting quality young talent. A professional work environment will attract young professionals.

Utilizing and staying current on social media trends is an effective and inexpensive way to reach new members. Connecting with people from across the world is easy, sharing photos and information is instant and social media is free and used on the individuals terms. There are many different platforms of social media that are popular, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn.

One powerful tool of social media is the Hashtag. According to Wikipedia, it is (noun) “a word or an un-spaced phrase prefixed with the hash or pound character (#) to form a label. It is a type of metadata tag.” In short, it is a way of organizing content based off a specific title, such as #IPPS2014. Hashtags are used on all forms of social media, though they do not cross reference.

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<sup>1</sup> Editor’s Note: Brie Arthur is a member of the IPPS Southern Region, North America (IPPS-SRNA) and serves as “Social Media Chair,” helping to promote the group to a wider audience. Additionally she is providing support to the International Board of IPPS with regard to Marketing and Development. FB: Brienne Gluvna Arthur, IG: BrieThePlantLady, TW: BriePlantLady, LI: Brienne Gluvna Arthur.

Facebook (FB) is a powerful resource to easily connect with the user. It is also a critical component to driving browser searches. There are several ways to utilize Facebook for IPPS purposes. First, the IPPS Southern Region PAGE: this is critical for posting links that connect to the website and to rank consistently on search engines. The goal of the FB Page is to keep content current by posting 2-3 times per week. Short, relevant messages that direct visitors to the website for membership and meeting information are the most effective use for a page. This is not a forum for photo shares or discussion, as the posts from non-administrators cannot be made public.

The current IPPS-SRNA Facebook page has 450 “likes” and is reaching up to 200 users per post. The circulation of the group page posts is restricted as means of charging the user. These posts can reach a much broader audience if IPPS members share the group posts through their individual pages. These shared posts allow the message to be circulated without financial input.

The IPPS International Group was created on Facebook as a means of connecting members globally in an easy to use, real time format. GROUPS provide a forum for ongoing discussions and photo share. Users can easily utilize the group from a mobile device, thus enabling real time interaction. Meeting photographs can be shared and organized into albums for everyone to enjoy. Technical discussions can be tracked and networking information collected.

The IPPS identity should extend beyond this meeting. Often we are all gathered at the same trade shows and symposium. We can easily plan seasonal events through the IPPS Group. These satellite meetings can provide the opportunity for young members to network and work towards a common IPPS driven goal, such as a campaign to increase membership. Young members often have the time and energy to engage because their professional responsibilities are less.

### **INCREASING ATTENDANCE AT ANNUAL MEETINGS**

Some of the obvious solutions for increasing meeting attendance are already being well executed thanks to the efforts of Helene Dodge. Having an up to date website with clear, concise information is paramount. Posting meeting information in a timely manner will allow planners to schedule their year early and young members the opportunity to begin saving if the meeting is not subsidized by their employer. Active links that can easily be shared on social media will help direct traffic to the website and make the user experience easy and hassle free.

Promote one special aspect of the meeting in advance to create excitement and anticipation. Share the fun memories through social media and the website to further engage members and beyond. Schedule tours at a diverse selection of horticultural facilities including public gardens, food producers, annual and perennial growers and college campuses.

### **WHY IPPS MATTERS**

At the very core of the IPPS value to “Seek and Share Knowledge” is the desire to gather as a society to generate a sense of community, inspiration and fellowship. In researching the value of professional memberships I began asking friends and mentors for their opinions. To the experienced IPPS members: How they are you engaging with a new generation? The young professionals were asked: Why do you value IPPS? The participants each have a unique point of view, and are full of great insights!

Matt and Tim Nichols: “We value IPPS as a group because of the face to face interaction with experts who have real life experience. It has a great blend of information and camaraderie for the industry. IPPS provides a resource of practical and useful information that becomes essential for anyone who wants to advance their horticultural knowledge.”

Maarten van der Giessen: “I reach the next generation by grabbing them by the sleeve, just as my mentor, Brice Briggs did to me. The younger folks are interested in the

industry and are hungry for information. When you're talking plants there is no generation gap! The excitement is universal."

Judson Le Compte: "The mix of industry, academia, beginners, students, and professional producers makes IPPS my favorite meeting. The openness to share is so welcoming. The dynamic at IPPS is so different from any other meeting I have attended. No other group has been as inviting to students as IPPS."

Bobby Green: "IPPS is so much more than propagation protocols and the HOW of plant reproduction. It is the WHY of propagation. From new plant introductions to high and low tech clonal techniques, there is something here for every aspiring plants person. We often decry the lack of volume of young folks entering the industry, but as is often the case, one person with enough passion can change the world."

Ryan Guillou: "We always talk about how gardens are ever changing and not static. It is important to view our professional community in the same way. IPPS provides the opportunity to stay current, discuss ideas, and most importantly prevent reinventing the wheel. Why make the same mistakes as someone else?"

David Creech : "Passion for plants is difficult to teach. Entertain, educate, enlighten. Lucky are those who wake up every day eager to get to the garden. Increase attendance by reducing registrations costs for students and new professionals. Also, encourage word of mouth to endorse IPPS membership. We could invite professors to speak if they bring students to the meeting."

Ben Gregory: "IPPS is a brilliant resource to meet people, learn and travel: the three most important things for a young professional. This is a perfect time to join and become an active member. Everyone is so inviting and shares so many different ideas that are relevant."

Kay Phelps: "Every college in the USA with a horticulture department could encourage students to attend at least one professional meeting in their graduating year. They will see and learn that there is so much to this business. This would be a great opportunity to extend their knowledge."

### **ADDING VALUE TO MEMBERSHIP**

Membership is more than attending the annual meetings. Create a "Networking" section on website where members can be highlighted. Add a calendar of green industry events to better connect members through-out the year. Include historical information on the website to emphasize the IPPS motto through the generations. Cross promote IPPS at industry events to further recognize the identity and importance of the association.

### **SENDING MEMBERS OFF WITH PURPOSE**

Now more than ever, sending members off with purpose is paramount. Collectively we need a mission to accomplish and the young members can be a great resource. We need to set a goal, such as of increasing membership and attendance at annual meetings by 25% or fundraising for scholarships to support the next generation of professionals.

My final point is to challenge each one of you to find one new member for 2015. We can double attendance if each person in the society brings just one new colleague next year. The knowledge, experience and gratitude of the International Plant Propagators Society is worth preserving and sharing. Now it is up to all of us to ensure this group will remain for generations to come.

