

Ziswiler Othmar

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IGCA E-News

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Welcome from our IGCA President

Hi All!



Hope you are well after this difficult period we have all experienced. We all had to go through new measures, rules and situations and after these long difficult months, Spring brought us, in Europe, a very good season.

Consumers discovered the positive influence of plants and gardening on their lives.

The pandemic has created a new generation of gardening enthusiasts who have found growing is good for the soul!

So, I wish everyone a nice summer... and a great spring for our colleagues down under.

I'm really looking forward to finally see you all again in The Netherlands for the 2022 IGCA Congress!

ciao

Martina

Update from Australia

by Leigh Siebler



Hello everyone,

Positivity is strong in Australia despite Victoria just coming out of lockdown five. Sydney in particular, and parts of NSW are having Covid challenges.

Most other states are cautious but ok.

Vaccine rollout is challenging and slow with everyone blaming everyone else for the problem. Politicians are copping flack all the time, but I don't fancy their job.

The good news for GCA is the appointment of a new person to help me. Over the years, GCA has been mainly me with help from consultants. We did have excellent assistance from Monique Wilson on Social Media for some years then she opened her own Plant Shop and ran out of time for GCA. Thank you for your time Monique.

Jane Cleary is our new Social Media and Graphics Guru. Our new logo combining Garden Releaf and GCA is shown here and we love it.



Jane and I are reviewing everything that GCA has done over the years with the sole aim of adding more value for members. Jane has added excellent graphics to our Enews and promotional flyers.

As parts of Australia have been locked down, we have run a series (5) of workshops on Social Media via Zoom. They have been well attended and we now have a Zoom Signage Workshop on August 11. More will follow.

Garden Releaf has been our very successful program but is still up for review and some major changes. We are also looking carefully at our recent Member Survey.

We run a mini benchmarking program each month in Australia, mini compared with the UK. You need to remember that some states incurred lockdowns and some did not so these are averages.

Average results across Australia for financial year June 2020 to July 2021 are:

- # Sales month June minus 30%
- # Sales YTD, (12 months) plus 22%
- # Average sale June plus 3%
- # Average sale YTD plus 8.7%
- # Customer numbers June minus 31%

Customer numbers YTD plus 13.5%

There are other numbers too but these are important ones.

Karl Stensson, Sheridan Nurseries, Canada was in Australia and suggested we monitor this set of figures too. Sales per employee per month average was \$17,628. You need to add in all sales employees and round casuals up to a 38 hour week. Interesting? Thank you Karl.



Succulents & Cacti, hot sellers at Alowyn Gardens

We are looking forward to being able to travel overseas again and pass on our best wishes to everyone around the world.

Warm regards, Leigh Siebler

News from Canada

By Robin Godfrey

Like all countries the past 18 months have not been the norm. Retail sales here in Canada have had unique experiences specific to their Provinces due to provincial COVID regulations. Overall, everyone is looking to forecast their 2022 numbers by reflecting on the past 18 months



Many realize that the upwards turn in sales, highest ever in history will have to be chalked up to a one-off year which may never happen again.

The one consistent change across the country was:

- Increase of new gardeners, the Gen Z and Millennials are understanding and enjoying the benefits of being outside and discovering the world of plants.
- Tropical plants are clearing shelves and, in some cases, don't even have a chance to get off the trucks before people are wanting to put their names on them.
- Obtaining supplies has been a bit of a struggle, as there has been a shortage in everyday materials such as seeding trays, tomato cages, fertilizers, and chemicals.
- Staff have been great, and many stores stated that employees are staying on.
- Average sale per customer has increased, even as business flattens in mid 2021.
- Everyone is using this exceptional increase in sales to reinvest in their organizations by adding buildings, new shading systems, POS systems, and staff bonuses.

Now the hurdle is to accurately forecast for 2022. Many feel a 15-20% increase on a normal year would be a good range. Garden Centres Canada is having a Speakers Series in October with the intent to look forward in our economy and assist our members in their forecasting. We have engaged speakers Dr. Charlie Hall, Katie Dubow and our own local Dr. Amy Bowen who will be speaking about their research in better understanding the factors consumers consider

and value when purchasing nursery plants. If you are interested, please contact Anne, anne@canadanursery.com for more information or keep an eye on our CNLA Enews.

It's a great time to be in our industry, not only has it been a profitable wave it has been rewarding knowing that people are understanding the importance of plants, for their own physical and mental benefits. Children are discovering the gratifying achievement of growing their own food. We all know gardening is much more than just a hobby, it's an education and a trend we all hope continues!

Robin Godfrey - Chairperson: Garden Centres Canada

News from France

by Etienne Bodin

General Assembly of the French garden centers and pet shops Federation, June 24th



After several months of Covid-19 crisis, the French Federation presented its actions during this particular period. This half day with our members was a good opportunity to look back at our management of the health crisis but also the activities of our working groups.



Thanks to intensive lobbying by our Federation, Garden centers were allowed to open during the first two lockdowns (Spring and Christmas), but also the third and last (to this date) of April 2021. As a result, the retail sector concluded the year with a growth of 1.1% and 2021 is looking very promising so far. Overall, our Federation now accounts for a total of 1,600 garden centers and pet shops, with 52 member companies.

In 2020, we changed our name to be more compatible with our sector's evolution, as well as our members and our collective projects such as the Label on animal well-being (50 pet shops certified so far). Our Federation also continued to assist its members and develop its services: two working groups were created on communication and sustainable development, and we hired a new employee who will be in charge of monitoring regulations related to selling plants and animals.

You can watch our year in review with this stop motion video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MitZJgD8N0E&t=2s>

Update from Czech Republic

by Michal Ferencik

Garden industry was luckily not by all the restriction which went through last more than year. We are facing more customers coming to our Garden centres. Czech customers are still investing to their homes and gardens, and that is visible on our growing average shopping trolley.



There is a grow in indoor plants – especially younger generations start to buy more.

With the preparation of autumn and X-mas season we are facing the fast grow of prices, which is the same all over the World I guess. Together with the growth of price of the foreign products we see growing demand for the local (in my meaning local is European) manufactured products, but there are sometimes missing capacities to produce enough. This we see as a great opportunity bringing new local product to our Garden centres despite the fact that these small producers rarely have any pricing policy or disturbing way in the meaning of wholesale cooperation.

With best regards

Michal Ferenčík – Garden centre Ferenčík, Czech garden centre association

News from Germany

The garden centers will have to change their purchasing because other large customers such as grocery chains and hardware stores order very early and limit the remaining market.

The corona restrictions are gradually falling away. Currently, a mask no longer

has to be worn in the outdoor area. The garden cafés have been able to open again for 4 weeks, outside and inside.

In Germany, vaccinated people are granted more and more additional freedoms. For example, the cinemas have been open again since Monday.

The Ostmann garden center opened its new garden center in Oldenburg - just in time for Easter! Find pictures attached!



The weather could be better – lots of rain this summer 😊!

Update from Ireland

by Fergal Doyle

Overall 2021 retail performance in Ireland has been a tale of two halves. Essential retail such as grocery, pet, fuel, convenience and alcohol performed extremely well for the first 6 months of the year as people were asked to remain at home.

Non-essential retail remained closed from January 1st until the middle of May with online sales being allowed, which kept many businesses alive. Since reopening in the middle of May, non-essential retail has seen a significant rise from pent of demand with June sales increasing +30% on 2019 levels. Overall footfall levels in regional towns and urban shopping centres is at 70% - 80% of 2019 levels but with conversion rates higher as people are shopping with intent. City centre locations are still only trading at 50% footfall levels as the lack of office workers and tourists dragging the numbers lower.

Garden Centres many of them sell essential items such as pet food, fuel and takeaway coffee and food which allowed many of them to trade on during the lockdown. Other smaller garden centres were forced to remain closed. Since reopening, Garden Centres have performed well as people continue to invest in their home & garden. The availability of stock continues to be a significant challenge. The availability of skilled staff is also proving difficult. Online sales which proved strong during the lockdown, has decreased in the months of May, June & July as the wider economy has reopened, but they still remain strong and well above last year.

Feedback from The Netherlands

We hope you are all doing well during this strange times.

In The Netherlands we are quite busy preparing the IGCA congress of 2022. We truly do believe we have a great programm, visiting de most beautiful gardencenters, other (garden) business- and retail companies and of course some highlights of our country.

We are looking forward to meeting everybody again. If you are curious about the coming congress in 2022, take a sneak peak at www.igca2022.nl.

Registration will open soon!

Despite of the pandemic the gardencenters in The Netherlands are doing well. Not that good as 2020 of course, but...

After dealing with a lockdown in Q1 and a cold and wet Spring, people keep finding their ways to the gardencenters again. Garden owners become more and more aware of how important greening is. In the changing of the climate green can add so much. Our goal is to encourage this more and more and show how garden owners can be of value in greening cities with their own garden. We have to make sure that the consumer knows where to find us as gardencenters. Gardencenters can claim the role as a place of knowledge and inspiration for greening and climate.

During the IGCA congress 2022 we will inspire you on this important topic and role for gardencenters and we will 'Celebrate Green Innovation'.

Hello from South Africa

by Gerdie Olivier



Our economy has been suffering from the effects of COVID with job losses and a growing unemployment rate. Many households have been feeling the pinch with the cost of food and other basics that have increased gradually over the past few months.

This was one of the major factors in the recent unrests and widespread looting in one our regions. Agriculture has suffered huge losses though damage to properties, burning of crops and theft. In the next few months these factors will contribute to our already struggling economy, hampering much needed growth. South Africa's road to economical recovery is set to a long and difficult

one.

From April – July, which marks our Winter season, sales slow down considerably and garden centres use this time to do routine maintenance and renovations.

Over the past two weeks, we have experienced a few really cold snaps, with temperatures dropping below zero in many areas that never get that cold. So, what happens? Gardeners hibernate a while longer... our Spring season usually kicks off in the beginning of August and we hope that the weather will play along to encourage gardeners to get busy in their gardens again.

Through our Life is a Garden marketing initiative, we have constantly exposed consumers to gardening to ensure this remains a popular pastime and grow in popularity. The main focus area of this campaign is social media and we are active on Facebook (with over 68 000 followers), Pinterest, Instagram and other channels. One of the biggest success stories is our Seasonal Gardening Facebook group that has built an online gardening community with more than 22 000 members all sharing ideas, inspiration and advice with one another. Articles are also published in traditional print media to reach consumers.

On 4 June we co-hosted our Industry Convention with the SA Green Industries Council and the SA Landscaping Institute.



Brand Pretorius

This event was in the format of a Facebook live event that was also streamed on YouTube and featured renowned business speaker, Brand Pretorius (CEO of one of the biggest



SANA President, Paul Vonk

motor vehicle franchises in SA),
business meetings and our awards
function.

We have also been offering online training workshops to our members to enable them to train staff or upskill themselves in various topics. These workshops have proven to be very popular amongst members – especially in region where training is not regularly offered.

Our association is still operating remotely with staff working from home and all meetings and events are done virtually.

We wish you all well – stay safe!
Gerdie

Update from Switzerland

by Othmar Zisweiler



Despite cool temperatures, heavy rain and hail in some areas, Swiss garden centers can look back on a good first half of 2021. Due to home office duty, people have spent more time at home, which has promoted the need for a beautiful garden and full vegetable beds.

This is also noticed by landscapers, who can hardly defend themselves from orders.

Exciting are the current developments in the field of plant protection. Although the Swiss population has rejected the ban on chemical pesticides, the demand for alternatives has increased significantly. In particular, sales of plant

strengthening agents increased. On the occasion of a study day, Erwin Meier, Gartencenter Meier AG, compared the situation with the Swiss health care system. Only a fraction of the costs is spent on disease prevention, although it would be much cheaper to take preventive measures. However, this requires a change in behavior on the part of the individual (or garden owner). It is well known that such changes require a lot of persuasion. Especially since it is difficult to recognize which measure leads to a healthy plant. This is in contrast to chemical means, where the success is directly visible, e.g. in the form of dead insects. Therefore, is a lot of convincing to be done in our industry.

News from UK

by Iain Wylie



We find ourselves in strange times, the government have just announced the biggest easing of restrictions in England since they were first introduced in March 2020, yet Covid is still with us.

The UK has carried out a successful vaccination programme enabling this to come about but there is huge uncertainty as to what the 'new normal' will be like or indeed how great the danger from Covid that still remains.

Currently infections are on the rise but the severity in terms of hospital admissions and deaths seems significantly less. All centres in the UK are currently open and trading exceptionally well. All centres were closed initially during the first lockdown in March 2020 but due to a hard-fought campaign by the GCA along with other industry bodies were the first retail outlets to be allowed to open again, last May. Centres in England have been allowed to remain open ever since but those in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have faced intermittent periods of closure, of varying length, in the intervening period.

The UK will not be unique in having a buoyant market, demand for gardening goods and plants is high. During the lockdowns it is estimated 3 million people turned to gardening for the first time ever. One challenge for the future is to retain these customers and add them to our customer base permanently. The demand has put a strain on the supply chain. Manufacturers working within Covid guidelines were struggling to reach anything like normal capacity, let alone meet the increased demand. Shortages of raw materials have not helped the situation either. At one point growing media/compost was extremely difficult to get hold of. Global issues with shipping have caused shortages of imported goods, especially from the Far East. Nowhere has this been more noticeable than with garden furniture, with many centres reporting sales achieving their total annual 2021 budgets by April and unable to obtain more stock for many months ahead. The cost of importing, with limited containers available and vastly inflated freight costs, all adds to the pressure.

For the time being, restaurants and cafes are operating under stricter guidelines, limiting the numbers than can be catered for and also increasing the operating costs by the insistence on table service, for example. This is set to change once restrictions are lifted in the next few weeks.

With both consumers and government, the environment and sustainability are getting increased attention. There is a real push for a greener economy, reducing carbon emissions and recycling. UK horticulture is affected by this, primarily for the extraction and use of peat in growing media as well as the more general issues such as plastics. Although not final, it looks inevitable we will have to phase out the use of peat completely by 2025 for retail customers and by 2030 for growers. To achieve this and still meet the growing demand, we must have sufficient availability of alternative substrates and at an acceptable price, which is also not an easy task. Watch this space, there will, no doubt be plenty more to come on this and we would be interested in how, or indeed if, other countries across the world are tackling the issue.

From an association perspective we are carrying out inspections again this year, having cancelled them completely for the first time ever, in 2020. Our normal inspection season is March – June but because of ongoing lockdowns at the time we did have to delay the start until late April. The majority have been completed and they should all be finished by the end of July, after which we will host our first ‘in person’ area meetings for the first time in two years, to announce the area winners. The GCA Executive Committee (Board) met in person in June for the first time since November 2019 and it was great to see everyone again, albeit with some social distancing measures in place and the hope is our next scheduled meeting will be ‘in person’ too. While we have all got used to Zoom, Teams and the like it really was so much better being together. We have also decided that we should go ahead with our annual conference in January 2022, again having cancelled this event in 2021. We are in the process of looking for a suitable venue and hope to be sharing some good news with members shortly once the details are finalised.

Last but not least, we hope that colleagues around the world remain safe and well and that you too are on the road to getting back to some normality. We are definitely looking forward to being able to see you at the next IGCA Congress.

Iain Wylie
UK Garden Centre Association

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