

GREEN GROWTH: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF METRO AND NON-METRO  
GARDEN CENTERS USE OF NEW-MEDIA MARKETING

by

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## **Abstract**

Garden centers are facing increasing market pressure from big-box retail stores that offer similar products at more competitive prices but lack a quality produce and exceptional service. In order to differentiate themselves from big-box stores, garden centers must build relationships with their customers which can increase marketing reach. Marketing ability and reach is limiting the expansion of Kansas garden centers which spend the majority of their advertising dollars on traditional media. However, social media can be an effective method for not only understanding consumers but also developing profitable relationships with customers. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of stakeholders of metro and non-metro garden centers as they use new media to market their business. Findings indicate garden center stakeholders prefer to use traditional media channels to market to their customers, lack a clear strategy and objectives related to new-media marketing, and are not effectively implementing relationship marketing principles.

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## **Dedication**

To Alyssa,

For personifying the Psalm 31 woman. Thank you for giving up your dream of being a stay-at-home mom so we could make a better life for our family. We're almost there.

To Carter and Emery,

For giving me smiles and belly laughs and for motivating me to become a man who is worthy of being called your dad.

## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

The green industry adds over \$200 billion to the United States Economy (AgCensus, 2012), and according to a survey of 3,044 nurseries across the nation, the industry employs over 450,000 workers which accounts for nearly eight billion dollars in paid wages (Hodges, Hall, & Palma, 2011). Plant material accounts for the largest portion of revenue for garden centers followed by secondary products such as chemicals, fertilizers, seeds, and equipment as identified by a regional survey of 175 respondents in the Southern United States (Garber & Bondari, 1998). Although most garden centers are open year-round, the retail garden center industry is seasonal and competes with many outside influences that can negatively affect sales, such as: bad weather, competition from large corporations, and an economy that is in regression (Garber & Bondari, 1998).

The rise of mass merchants selling garden and nursery products have adversely impacted the economic health of over 5,000 retail locations situated in non-metro locations and put the economic future of such establishments at risk (Stone, 1997). It is estimated that mass merchants have siphoned nearly half the revenue from smaller, local garden centers within ten years of their introduction into a community (Hodges et al., 2011). Although mass merchants, as indicated by survey responses of over 1,500 North Carolina residents, can offer prices that local garden centers cannot match, consumers are willing to pay higher prices for the increased selection, higher quality plants, and expert knowledge offered by small garden centers (Safley & Wholgenant, 1995). However, in more recent studies conducted by Palma, Hall, & Collart (2011), which used electronic surveys in the state of Texas, customers indicated price as the

greatest complaint against smaller garden centers which gives further credence to the need for garden centers to have quality plants and value-added offerings. Some garden centers have sought to differentiate themselves from big-box retailers by implementing a value-added, social atmosphere with coffee shops or recreational activities within the centers in order to increase customer intrigue, motivation, and to improve the shopping experience (Hodges et al., 2011). Even though big-box retailers are becoming ever-more influential in the green industry, consumers still prefer purchasing plant material from garden centers and nurseries over mass merchants (Palma et al., 2011).

One factor limiting the expansion of garden centers and nurseries within the Great Plains region, which includes Kansas, is marketing. Garden centers spend the majority of their advertising dollars on the Yellow Pages and print media (Behe, Dennis, Hall, Hodges, & Brumfield, 2008). Research conducted on 70 Tennessee garden centers also identified a key marketing channel was word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing (Ekanem, Singh, Tegegne, & Muhammad, 2000). Despite these attempts to reach customers, different populations and market segments require different marketing efforts, and mass media advertising is expensive and lacks the impact that WOM has. Marketing campaigns via new media are free or low-cost, and if used correctly, could lead to further promotion. Furthermore, businesses not utilizing new media as part of their marketing plan could be losing ground to competitors and putting the business at a disadvantage (Meyers, Irlbeck, Graybill-Leonard, & Doerfert, 2011).

Mangold and Faulds (2009) classify social media as a vast network of online communities such as: blogs, discussion boards, websites, and social networking sites. Often classified under the

umbrella term “Web 2.0,” social networks have the potential to impact the way companies conduct marketing, provided traditional business principles like quality of product and service are maintained. Bolotaeva and Cata (2011) conducted a synthesis of available literature regarding social-media marketing and determined properly utilizing social networking tools can have a positive impact on sales, powerfully establish a company’s brand, increase salience of the business, position the company positively within the community, and reduce advertising costs. Of the social networks available for companies to invest advertising resources in, the Pew Research Center identified Facebook is the dominant leader with nearly 71% of all people on the Internet having an account (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). Providing a great marketplace for discussion, Facebook has become a powerful tool for business-to-consumer (B2C) communication and in facilitating consumer-to-consumer (C2C) communication (Yu, Chen, & Kwok, 2011).

Once considered a predominantly young media, Facebook is beginning to mature in its demographics, with over 60% of adults online between the ages of 50-64 having an active Facebook account and 79% of adults between the ages of 30-49 having an active Facebook account. The results of a regional survey with over 1,800 social media users indicates rural America is also transitioning into the digital age; as of 2012, 71% of rural adults online use Facebook (Duggan & Smith, 2013). Furthermore, according to an online survey with over 2,500 respondents conducted by Behe et al. (2013), “consumers have readily adopted personal computers and Internet technology as a way of seeking information and/or making purchases online” (p. 209). Additionally, a well-established and easily-accessed web presence demonstrates a positive impact on the quantity of purchases (Behe et al., 2013).

Constantinides and Fountain (2008) suggested the incorporation of social media as a marketing tool has made it possible for a business to communicate directly to an individual consumer. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) allows businesses to communicate to many consumers, who in turn, can communicate with thousands of users with a single click. Establishing a direct line of back-and-forth communication with a highly-engaged and identified target population allows consumers to feel feedback is valued and recognized, thereby increasing the probability of customers engaging in WOM marketing via the digital sphere and physical circles. This approach to enhancing the user experience by meeting informational needs, known as customer advocacy, is an integral component of a successful online marketing campaign (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008).

A case study involving the social media accounts of 20 top restaurant chains identified the long-term effects of social media marketing are unknown (Yu et al., 2011) because new-media marketing is supported by many other digital and marketing channels (Fagerstrom & Ghina, 2010). Despite this limitation, it is still a behaviorally-influential tool that allows consumers to share opinions, experiences, and attitudes with others while increasing awareness of a company and product (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Businesses can improve relationships and customer loyalty while gathering sufficient information on the need for new products (Constantinides, Romero, & Gomez Boria, 2008).

Constantinides et al. (2008) suggested as a result of a synthesis of literature that consumers in today's digital environment are remarkably different than offline consumers of yesterday, as they



are knowledgeable about market choices. Because of this increase in knowledge, creating close-knit, personal connections via active listening through social-media channels to consumer demands, experiences, and needs is of the highest priority. By empowering the consumer, businesses can, in real time, communicate with a company in an open forum (Constantindes & Fountain, 2008). Realizing consumers will take to the open forum, specifically social media, to comment and share their experiences, companies should consider actively using social media to understand potential needs of customers (Constantinides et al., 2008).

In research regarding urban and rural social media use, Gilbert, Karahalios, and Sandvig (2008) determined rural and urban users differ in how they use social media. Rural users have fewer “friends” when compared to their urban counterparts. Rural social media users are primarily females who tend to be more cautious than both males and urban users with their privacy settings. When compared to urban users, rural users are less trusting of new sources of information and require different strategies to reach them (Gilbert et al., 2008).

### **Statement of Problem**

When a mass merchant retailer establishes itself within a community, surrounding rural garden centers notice a decrease of revenue (Stone, 1997). In addition to a loss in revenue from the local garden center, rural customers visiting mass merchants out of town will also spend revenue at restaurants and other establishments which further deplete rural America of much needed revenue (Stone, 1997). Even though the majority of rural America participates in Facebook and other social networks (Duggan & Brenner, 2013), the majority of rural garden centers are still marketing through traditional and expensive paper outlets (Behe et al., 2008) as shown through a survey of over 2,500 garden centers across the nation. Additionally, the traditional marketing is

being sent to a consumer who is increasingly visiting online sources to gather product information and shop (Behe et al., 2013).

While there are volumes of literature published regarding social media use in organizations and businesses, currently no literature exists in regards to how garden centers, specifically metro or non-metro garden centers, are implementing social media in their marketing and relationship management efforts. Results from this study could give understanding into the struggles, experiences, and successes of rural garden centers trying to implement social media into garden center marketing strategies.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of stakeholders of mid-western metro and non-metro garden centers as they use social media to market their business. Semi-structured in-depth interviews explored the following research questions.

- **RQ1:** What are garden center stakeholders' perceptions and attitudes towards new media as it relates to the marketing of their business?
- **RQ2:** What barriers do stakeholders encounter when using new media to market their business?
- **RQ3:** What new media strategies are being implemented in the marketing of metro and non-metro garden centers?
- **RQ4:** What are stakeholder perceptions regarding customer interaction with new-media content?

### **Assumptions**

The prevailing assumption during this study was the supposition stakeholders had a desire and capability to use social media in their marketing efforts and valued such a platform for

advertising and communicating with customers. Additional assumptions regarding the availability of required technology (computers, broadband Internet, smart phones, and cameras) could apply to the participants' experiences. Lastly, the researcher assumed the participating garden centers had effective fundamentals of customer service and good rapport within the community that could be further strengthened through implementing social media marketing and relationship management strategies.

### **Limitations**

Although in-depth interviews can yield incredibly rich and meaningful data in exploring the experiences of participants, caution should be used in generalizing the findings beyond the specific units of analysis under the specific situations in which they were observed (Flick, 2009).

An additional limitation regards the sampling measures used in this study. Recommendations from a Cooperative Extension specialist were used to identify subjects for inclusion. Such purposive sampling measures included the strength and economic health of the garden center, quality of products, exceptional service, willingness to be involved in the study, and presence of a Facebook page. All participants' experiences using social media to market their operations occurred within an already established and successful business. An additional limitation is the sample size of customers included in this study. Lastly, all businesses are unique and therefore must conduct an internal evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses (Behe & Barton, 2010).

Only two customers responded to the call for participants which is below the minimum number of participants required for a qualitative study (Creswell, 2007). This damages generalizability and transferability efforts specifically for garden center customers. However, the total number of

all stakeholders (customers, owners, and employees) for this study was eight. This sample size is more than sufficient for a qualitative study (Creswell, 2007).

### **Definition of Key Terms**

- ***A/B Split Testing*** – A/B split testing is a technique used to compare two variables that could affect the engagement or interaction of new-media content. One version is sent with variable A and one is sent with variable B. When each version is published, analytics are tracked to determine which variable has the most impact (Belosic, 2014).
- ***CMC*** – Computer mediated communication. Computer-mediated communication “spans the use from interpersonal to mass communication” (Baldwin, Perry, & Moffitt, 2004, p. 246). People use CMC to communicate with each other online via email, text, or social media websites. Therefore, in this study CMC will be used to identify any non-verbal interaction taking place between two or more people using a computer or smartphone.
- ***Engagement*** - Engagement on social media is generally viewed as “a visitor taking some action beyond viewing or reading, for example, commenting, registering, downloading, retweeting, and so on” (Paine, 2011, p. 60).
- ***Garden Center*** – Definitions of garden centers and nurseries are varied and interchangeable. For this study, a garden center will refer to a store-front location that grows and sells predominantly plant products in a majority retail setting.
- ***Metro*** – The U.S. Department of Agricultural Economic Research Service (ERS) defines a metro county as one that includes populations of over 50,000 residents with outlying counties economically-tied to the core commerce of the metro county (Cromartie & Parker, 2013).

- ***New-Media Marketing:*** For the purposes of this research, new-media marketing will encompass any marketing efforts conducted via online channels which will include e-newsletters.
- **Nonmetro** – Cromartie and Parker’s (2013) definition of non-metro counties will be used for this study. A non-metro county is one that has: 1) a presence of open countryside; 2) rural towns with fewer than 2,500 people; 3) and urban areas with a population of more than 2,500 people but fewer than 49,999 people.
- ***Social Media*** - The term social media refers to blogs, social networking sites, and a myriad of other online channels (Mangold & Faulds, 2009), which allow businesses to target specific adult populations (Fagerstrom & Ghina, 2010). Mangold and Faulds (2009) state this is interchangeable with the term Web 2.0.
- ***Social-Media Marketing*** – Marketing that occurs via any form of social media with the explicit intent to: promote a product or event, distribute coupons or information, or connect (physically, cognitively, or emotionally) with potential or existing customers. Social media marketing occurs via Web 2.0.
- ***Stakeholder*** – Clarkson (1995) defines stakeholder as anyone with ownership or interest in a business or organization. Therefore, in this study “stakeholder” will refer to employees, owners, or customers of the garden centers.

## **Summary**

Small business owners are under continuous threat of being undercut by mass merchandisers (Stone, 1997) thereby placing greater emphasis on the need to exceed customer expectations for quality, selection, service, and expertise (Safley & Wholgenant, 1995). Currently, retailers rely on WOM, Yellow Pages, and print media to market their products (Ekanem et al., 2000), even

though Web 2.0 exceeds traditional-marketing methods in terms of reach, depth of customer relationship, and cost (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). More-and-more plant and garden center consumers are beginning to search for products online (Behe et al., 2013).

## **Chapter 2 - Literature Review**

The goal of this study was to explore the experiences of stakeholders of metro and non-metro garden centers as stakeholders use social media to promote their operations. The aim of this study was to identify stakeholder's experiences, both positive and negative, in utilizing new media to market their products as well as to identify possible roadblocks such organizations may face in doing so. The literature reviewed in this chapter includes an overview of the green industry; definitions of metro and nonmetro and the tension between mass merchants and non-metro retailers; consumer preferences in regards to selection criteria of garden centers and plant products; and social media marketing. A theoretical framework is introduced into this study consisting of relationship marketing, and social information processing theory.

### **Industry Overview**

There are 49,839 businesses in the U.S. that are defined as a greenhouse, nursery, or floriculture enterprise (AgCensus, 2012). The average U.S. farm is 434 acres, while greenhouse and nursery operations average a meager 87 acres, but such operations bring in \$262,719 per year compared to the \$187,097 of the average American farm operation. The green industry is slightly more technologically advanced with 68% of operations having access to the Internet compared with 57% of traditional farms (AgCensus, 2012). Demographically, the green industry is similar in age, ethnicity, employment practices, and employment status when compared to farm operations. The industry also appears to be changing, with drastic decreases in the production of vegetable seeds, cut flowers, and foliage plants being offset by increases in nursery stock and flower seeds. Nursery operations are predominantly located along coastal corridors (AgCensus, 2012).

Affording to Brumfield's (2003) report, the garden center industry was once the fastest growing sector in domestic agriculture at a rate of nearly 10% a year. However, as of 2011 the market has reached a decline due to an unstable housing marketing and weak economic conditions (Hodges et al., 2011). Additionally, a demand for garden center products is seasonal and corresponds with spring and fall planting seasons. Many growers offset this market variability by introducing seasonal offerings like Easter Lilies and Poinsettias to attract customers during slower seasons (Hodges et al., 2011). Nursery crops are generally associated with plant products that cost more per unit than conventional agricultural enterprises outside of the nursery and horticultural industry. Such high value nursery crops usually include: "broadleaf evergreens, coniferous evergreens, deciduous shade trees, deciduous flowering trees, deciduous shrubs, and other ornamentals, fruits and nut plants, Christmas trees... transplants for commercial truck crop production, and propagation material" (Brumfield, 2003, para. 1).

A longitudinal comparison of multi-decade U.S. census data from 1978 to 1997 indicates urban sprawl has considerable effects upon the production agriculture landscape (Thomas & Howell, 2003), positively influencing operations that can intensively grow products on smaller plots of land located near large population centers. As such, garden centers residing within metropolitan areas received the highest overall sales when compared to rural or urban sectors (Thomas & Howell, 2003). Regionally, the highest total sales were in the Pacific U.S. (Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington) and the Southeast, which includes: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and South Carolina. The Great Plains region, which includes Kansas, was the least represented in total number of operations (Hodges et al., 2011).



Ward (1997) identifies three factors that affect demand of horticultural goods: external factors, internal factors, and seasonal factors. External influences include the economy, inflation, weather, and the labor market. Internal factors are business decisions, growing practices, and marketing decisions. Lastly, the seasonal nature of garden centers affects income levels. Hinson and Navajas (2004) state nursery growers are unique within the world of agricultural production. However, there exists no federal subsidies to offset risks due to market or environmental issues (Brumfield, 2003). Furthermore, owners are limited by capital resources, equipment, and the longevity of skilled labor (Brumfield, 2003).

### **The Mass Merchant Dilemma**

Taylor (1996) states the present economic status of towns was founded by small businesses that laid the fabric for the economic landscape of rural America; however, the United States began shifting with the advent of retail giants like J.C. Penny, Montgomery Ward, Sears, and eventually the new breed of mass merchants like Wal-Mart, Target, and Home Depot. These mass merchants offered a vast selection of competing merchandise at prices that were nearly impossible for rural entrepreneurs to beat (Taylor, 1996). The introduction of mass merchandisers like Wal-Mart can be an insurmountable, economic obstacle to small business retailers grossing less than \$1 million in annual sales (Peterson & McGee, 2000). Stone (1997) identified small businesses, especially ones offering similar product categories to big-box stores, risk significant economic impacts once the mass merchant is established within the community. This effect is further enhanced when a mass merchant is established near communities with fewer than 5,000 residents. Further exacerbating the negative economic impact, rural residents leave their communities to shop at the mass merchant and take their collective buying power with them, resulting in a negative flow of cash from one community to another. However, small

businesses can adapt and implement several strategies to compete with an impersonal mass merchandiser, such as: offering upscale merchandise, increasing customer relationships, emphasizing customer service, and implementing creative advertising (Stone, 1997).

### **Mass Merchants and the Rural Garden Center**

Stores in place prior to the construction of the mass merchant are at a high risk for failure, and that these pre-existing businesses would be replaced by newer ones not in direct competition with Wal-Mart (Stone, 1997). Newer research conducted by Sobel and Dean (2008) contrasts that of Stone (1997) and suggests an arrival of a Wal-Mart in small towns could benefit the rural economy. However, while the overall positive economic impact of a big-box store arriving in rural America may be positive, it comes at a price. Sobel and Dean (2008) state companies with similar product offerings to the big-box stores are at risk of closing down and being replaced by newer and more-differentiated businesses. This turnover of established businesses could be especially problematic for the average nursery, which is 23 years old (Behe et al., 2008). The additions of mass merchants into the green industry have created a highly-competitive market for independent garden centers and nurseries (Behe & Barton, 2000; Brand & Leonard, 2001). Hodges et al. (2011) further recognize garden centers are not immune from the impact of mass merchants, stating:

While big box stores and mass merchants have captured over half of the amount Americans spend a year on lawn and garden plants, the independent garden centers aren't surrendering. They do not have the volume to compete effectively on price, so they attempt to compete with better selection and more value-added services, which are especially attractive to new gardeners (p. 4).

Despite value-added services offered by traditional garden centers, mass merchandisers are still negatively impacting the sales of small garden centers (Hudson, Behe, Ponder, & Barrick, 1997).

Currently, retail garden centers and mass merchants purchase somewhat similar amounts of products with retail centers purchasing \$2.3 billion and \$2.1 billion respectively (AgCensus, 2007). Although there is current research regarding buyer preferences influencing the consumer's selection of garden centers over mass merchants, there is currently a void of research identifying how garden centers can market these strengths to the consumer.

### **Defining metro and non-metro communities**

There are multiple methods of defining rural and urban communities that yield vastly different results (Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008). Such delineations between rural and urban have been made through defining municipal and jurisdictional lines, population density, and economic influence; however, the term is still loosely used in research to apply to the specific needs of the researcher (Isserman, 2005). The most commonly-used determinant is based upon economic principles tied to the presence of an urban area with more than 50,000 people (Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008

Yet such definitions can be misleading, and Isserman (2005) identified the inaccuracies of current data suggesting “there are [by using current definitions] more than a million farmers in metropolitan America...and the Grand Canyon is in metropolitan America” (p. 470). Such issues are caused by the gentle transition between urban and rural communities within the same county. However, “ERS researchers and others who analyze conditions in ‘rural’ America most often study conditions in nonmetropolitan (non-metro) areas, defined on the basis of counties” (Cromartie & Parker, 2013, para. 1). Cromartie and Parker's (2013) characteristics of non-metro counties include the presence of open countryside, rural towns with fewer than 2,500 people, and urban areas ranging from 2,500 to 49,999 people.

## **Factors influencing garden center selection**

Customer reasons for selecting a particular garden center vary (Hodges et al., 2011). Although reasons may vary, Safley & Wholgenant (1995) identified customers are looking for a retail outlet in close proximity to their home that offers a wide selection of high quality plants and knowledgeable staff that are able to answer their questions. A survey administered to nearly 800 single-family residences identified primary importance is placed upon the quality of plant material offered by the garden center with quality of customer service being second (Brand & Leonard, 2001). Consumers have higher expectations of plant quality and service at garden centers when compared to mass merchants because they believe garden center employees are experts within their field (Safley & Wohlgenant, 1995). Having a knowledgeable staff to assist the customer with plant care is a considerable advantage for the garden center because consumers struggle with maintaining the health of their purchases (Hodges et al., 2011). Brand and Leonard (2001) identify three main avenues customers reach out for technical help with their garden or plant purchases: independent garden centers, magazines, and friends. Lastly, in addition to plant quality, selection, and service, customers appreciate garden centers that have clearly visible plant labels with identifying information and suggestions for care (Brand & Leonard, 2011).

## **Consumers want to purchase locally-grown plants**

Concerning individual purchases of plant material, consumers place varying importance on product attributes (Behe et al., 2010). The type of plant is the most important attribute considered by customers followed by locally-grown varieties and environmentally-friendly principles (Behe et al., 2013). Furthermore, customers are willing to pay a premium for locally grown plants that are planted in compostable containers and grown in energy efficient facilities (Khachatryan et

al., 2014). A case study conducted by Getter and Behe (2013) determined buying local is an increasing trend with consumers in regards to their food and plant purchases, because consumers want their purchases to support local businesses and farmers. Conversely, consumers greatly discounted the utility of internationally-grown products (Behe et al., 2013). Even though consumers are concerned about buying local plants that are environmentally friendly, consumers are less interested in organic trends in horticulture because they are not purchasing the product to eat (Yue et al., 2011).

### **Eco-friendly plants and containers**

Consumers have access to a broad range of information regarding environmental issues related to the green industry; as such, consumers are asking the green industry to mature and become socially responsible in production practices, and in response, customers are willing to pay a premium for such products (Behe et al., 2013). Consumer demand for environmentally-conscious business practices is increasing (Behe et al., 2010). Environmentally-conscious customers tend to gravitate specifically towards woody or herbaceous plants more than annuals (Behe et al., 2013; Getter & Behe, 2013). Additionally, woody and herbaceous plant buyers visit stores to make purchases at twice the rate of standard consumers and have higher recycling behaviors and an increased interest in plant containers that are recyclable or biodegradable (Behe et al., 2010).

Consumers place a higher demand on a sustainable container than a sustainably-produced plant (Yue et al., 2011; Khachatryan et al., 2014). Although customers are willing to pay a premium for recyclable pots (Khachatryan et al., 2014), they prefer containers that are biodegradable and compostable (Yue et al., 2011). Within the biodegradable pot selection, consumers preferred specific attributes of rice hull pots and containers made out of wheat that resembled plastic-like

characteristics than containers made out of straw, which have a different appearance (Behe et al., 2010). Although consumers value these products more, caution should be used in placing a premium price on environmentally friendly containers because willingness-to-pay varies based on eco-friendly habits of the customer (Khachatryan et al., 2014).

### **Customer Service**

The green industry is becoming increasingly competitive, which is placing greater emphasis on a store to differentiate itself by price, selection, and level of customer service (Hodges et al., 2011). Furthermore, as the quest for retail differentiation continues during increased industry competition, it will be the quality of service that truly separates a business from other establishments (Hudson et al., 1997). Consumers carry high expectations for plant survival and vitality and face disappointment when their products underperform (Getter & Behe, 2013).

Customers have the same expectation regarding quality of service for both mass merchants and traditional garden centers (Behe & Barton, 2000), but there are gaps between this expectation and what the organizations are able to provide (Hudson et al., 1997). However, traditional garden centers are recognized by consumers as having a higher level of customer service and less of a differentiation between the service the customer expected and the service they received (Behe & Barton, 2000; Hudson et al., 1997). The level of customer service is correlated with the level of “customer delight”, which is identified as a feeling of considerable joy and contentment towards the quality of service and product received. When consumers are delighted with their shopping experience they are more probably to make repeat purchases (Mason, Starman, Lineberger, & Behe, 2008). Hodges et al. (2011) identified more than 80% of all retail garden center plant sales were to returning customers, thus indicating a high level of customer satisfaction. When

compared to national numbers, the Great Plains region is slightly lower with a repeat customer percent of 65.6% (Behe et al., 2008).

### **Organically Grown**

The organic industry grossed over three billion dollars in total sales with a profit margin slightly higher than those of traditional farms (AgCensus, 2007). Additionally, the largest segments of the organic industry are in livestock and vegetables, with floral and bedding plants consisting of just 5.7% of total sales (AgCensus, 2007). Although most consumers do not place an emphasis on organically grown plants for non-food consumption, parents with children under the age of twelve and routine organic food purchasers place a higher interest on organically grown plants, especially vegetable or herbs (Yue et al., 2011)

### **The Garden Center Consumer**

Behe et al. (2013) segment the garden center customer into multiple categories: flowering shrub buyers, plant fanatics, vegetable buyers, a group labeled as “perennial passionates”, the great indoors, annual gardeners, flowering abundance, foodies, herbivores, and non buyers. Flowering shrub buyers are predominantly Caucasian and located in the Southeast. These consumers place low importance on plant type compared to product origin and locality, have a proclivity towards compostable containers, and energy saving practices. Plant fanatics are repeat customers who consist of younger, metropolitan adults who emphasize biodegradable or recyclable containers, locality, and energy-saving production methods. Vegetable and “perennial passionates” are customers who exclusively purchased vegetables or perennial plants. This market segment desires compostable containers. The great indoors category has a higher percentage of African-Americans, are located in the Pacific West, and place importance on energy-saving production practices and less emphasis on container type. Annual gardeners are the largest segment by

number. This audience purchases annuals over perennials and prefer compostable containers. The flowering abundance segment purchases shrubs and trees and desire energy-saving production practices and plantable containers. Foodies purchase vegetables or citrus trees and are younger than the average customer, predominantly male, and more heterogeneous in race. Herbivores showed a proclivity towards vegetable and herb production and show greater utility in recyclable containers and low-energy production practices. These customers are less concentrated in the corn-belt or Appalachian regions. Lastly, non plant buyers are members of a population that do not make plant purchases. These consumers often come from lower income household, but they still value production practices (Behe et al., 2013).

Constantinides et al. (2008) demonstrated consumers are vastly different in today's online environment than the unconnected consumers of previous years because they are more knowledgeable and involved. The gardener has adopted and integrated computers and the Internet into their daily lives, and they use such tools to research purchasing decisions at an increasing rate; additionally, they are utilizing the Internet to make online purchases (Behe et al., 2013). Of the consumers that use the Internet to conduct product research, the majority are women who reside in lower-income households in rural areas (Behe et al., 2013). While rural users are more likely to conduct research of gardening products online, they are less likely than urban inhabitants to go online for product reviews (Behe et al., 2013). Additionally, more and more users are utilizing smartphones to search for online information, especially while they are in the retail store (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). Twenty-eight percent of consumers searched for gardening information at least once in a year (Behe et al., 2008). Educational and age demographics also influence buying behaviors, with individuals over the age of 40 having



decreased frequencies of purchases (Palma et al., 2011). Additionally, older age groups (40-55) with college degrees and those with higher incomes also purchased less frequently, while individuals with medium income levels had increased buying behaviors (Palma et al., 2011). Although research has been conducted by Duggan and Smith (2013) and Behe et al. (2008) regarding consumer's use of online and mobile technology to locate and research product information, there is currently a lack of research regarding consumers' use of social media in the buying process.

### **Consumer Experiences**

Ornamental plants offer a unique niche market within the agricultural industry with special challenges for the marketing efforts of garden center owners, since, unlike food purchases, the relative number of consumer purchases are low because ornamental plants are used for decoration and not consumption (Palma et al., 2011). Therefore, keeping the customer involved and motivated to buy ornamental plants is pivotal to garden centers (Hodges et al., 2011).

Unfruitful gardening experiences by homeowners in past purchases cause them to be wary of new purchases, and a survey of Phoenix, Arizona garden center customers showed their lack of knowledge often hinders future purchasing potential, serving as a barrier to garden center profit (Niemiera, Innis-Smith, & Leda, 1993). These experiences lead to decreased satisfaction of consumers, which in turn impacts repeat buying decisions. An online survey of over 650 garden center consumers across the nation indicate garden center owners should place more emphasis on educating and delighting their customer base (Hicks et al., 2005). As part of the marketing process, Behe and Barton (2000) suggest garden center staff should seek the opinions of their customers to ascertain the level of service (and delight) they are providing. Since ornamental purchases are largely voluntary and incredibly seasonal, it is important to understand the factors

that affect and influence purchasing behaviors (Palma et al., 2011). Additionally, offering guarantees to customers in order to decrease apprehension could positively contribute to customer satisfaction (Dennis et al., 2004). There is a current gap in research regarding how social media is being used by garden centers in order to satisfy the service needs of customers.

### **Garden Center Marketing**

Although garden centers value WOM, they use print media like Yellow Pages, newspapers, and brochures as their most common advertising outlets (Ekanem et al., 2000); with an emphasis placed on print media (Behe et al., 2008). The retail garden center industry allocated just 4.6% of total sales to advertising, choosing to concentrate their efforts on catalogs, tradeshow, and the Internet (Hodges et al., 2011). In the Great Plains region, which includes Kansas, newsletters and the Yellow Pages are considered the most important marketing channels (Behe et al., 2008). Advertising channels have varied levels of effectiveness based upon the demographics of the neighborhood surrounding the garden center. Survey responses from 120 garden centers across the nation indicate mass media has an inversely proportional relationship between population and return on investment while rural communities might have more success with newspapers and store-posted bulletins (Kelly, 1990). However, in today's digital age, it is important that businesses create an interactive website that can be accessed across multiple platforms in order to facilitate consumer demands (Behe et al., 2013). Despite this transition towards an online customer base, in-person sales are still the backbone of the horticulture industry (Behe et al., 2008). Because these seasonal sales can be very short, it is important that growers understand which varieties, species, and plant features are most popular with the consumer (Palma et al., 2011). Research has been conducted on preferred marketing channels for garden centers (Behe et al., 2008; Ekanem et al., 2000; Hodges et al., 2011). Research is lacking in regards to internet

marketing, specifically social media marketing. Furthermore, current research has not explored stakeholder's experiences, preferences, and beliefs regarding marketing in today's highly-connected marketplace.

### **Recommendations for Improvement**

There are several ways for the garden center industry to improve marketing strategies and improve profitability; Behe et al. (2013) recommend the industry segment consumers by plant purchasing behaviors and environmentally responsible attitudes. Growers should promote locally-grown plants in environmentally-friendly and biodegradable containers (Yue et. al., 2011). Even though labor could be a limiting factor, Hudson et al. (1997) suggested garden centers modify working hours to compete with mass merchants and improve the quality of marketing materials. Lastly, garden centers and nurseries should make sure websites are of high quality and available on computers, phones, and tablets (Behe et al., 2013).

### **Social Media and Web 2.0**

Original websites, called Web 1.0, treated consumers only as receivers of information and not as active participants in the conversation, whereas Web 2.0 assumes a collaborative position of mutual engagement and creation between the consumer and business (Thackeray, Neiger, Hanson, & McKenzie, 2008, p. 338). Although there is still disagreement about what the term Web 2.0 means (O'Reilly, 2007), social media is considered a vast, online network that "encompasses a wide range of online, WOM forums including blogs, company sponsored discussion boards and chat rooms, ...email, consumer product or service ratings website and forums, internet discussion boards and forums, moblogs ...and social networking sites (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p. 358). This collection of networks is often referred to as "Web 2.0," because "they pick up from the previous generation of technologies invented during the last wave of

Internet innovation” (Rigby, 2008, p. 6). Rigby (2008) further described Web 2.0 as “a set of popular Internet technologies...[and] a group of people who believe that we are entering a new era” (p. 6).

Social media is prevalent in today’s society, with 73% of all Internet-using adults utilizing one or more social networking sites (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). The public is also becoming more diverse in their social media palette, with 42% of adults online utilizing multiple platforms of social media (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). The public uses social networking sites in a variety of ways, and Kietzmann, Silverstre, McCarthy, and Pitt (2012) suggested (in a conceptual model) seven functions of social media that help understand user needs. First, social media serves a function of identity where users reveal their identity to a larger audience. Secondly, users use the function of presence to indicate to each other if they are online and available for immediate communication. Next, users interact with one another by sharing content. Conversations also form between two people. Inbound messages from one user to another can actually increase social capital between two users. Facebook and other social networking sites also allow for communities or “groups” to emerge, fostering communication between people with common interests or needs. In doing so, social media users integrate the sixth function of social media – relationships. Lastly, users integrate the function of reputation to evaluate the character of other users, organizations, or corporations (Kietzmann et al., 2012). The decision as to which social media to integrate into a business’ plans should be directly related to the objectives of the firm (Castronovo & Huang, 2012). The success of these media is contingent on considerable resources being allocated to their proper use and evaluation (Miller & Llamas, 2010, p. 4).

Although research on social media usage within businesses has been extensive, the green industry appears to have a void of related research.

## **Facebook**

Facebook “is a computer-mediated social networking system that has become one of the most popular means of communication in North American” (Ross, 2009, p. 579). Although there are a multitude of social-networking sites, Duggan and Smith (2013) recognize that “despite recent growth by services such as Pinterest and Instagram, Facebook remains the dominant social networking platform...[with] some 71% of online adults [being] Facebook users compared to Twitter (16%), Pinterest (15%), and Instagram (13%), which is a slight increase from 67% of online adults who used Facebook as of late 2012” (p. 1). Women are the majority users of Facebook with 76% of women online using the site compared to 66% of men, and black and Hispanic users outnumbering white. The majority of adults online between the ages of 18-64 have an active Facebook account, with 18-29 year olds being the most concentrated (84%) users of the site. Thirty to forty-nine year olds also have a highly active rate on Facebook with 79% of online users having an account. Users with some college education are the most popular users as well as members who make less than \$30,000 annually. Additionally, more than half (63%) of Facebook users log in to the networking site daily. Rise in income is negatively correlated to Facebook use, and urban users are slightly more active than rural (Duggan & Smith, 2013, table 1).

## **Twitter**

Twitter has reached 241 million users with the majority existing outside of the United States (Twitter, 2014). Twitter is a “micro-blogging” website. Micro-blogging is a form of communication that allows users to express themselves in a minimal amount of text (usually

under 200 characters) through multiple platforms, such as: email, Twitter, mobile phones, or instant messages and allows faster distribution of information when compared to standard blogging (Java, Song, Finn, & Tseng, 2007). In Twitter “posts are limited to 140 characters. Twitter is beneficial for engaging with customers and propagating the conversation about one’s brand, products, and/or services” (Castronovo & Huang, 2012, p. 124). As a result of a data analysis conducted by Java et al. (1997) that studied Twitter conversations by longitude, latitude, and time, people use micro-blogging websites primarily for daily conversation and sharing information.

Twitter claims it “helps you create and share ideas and information instantly, without barriers (Twitter, 2014). Rural audiences are underrepresented on Twitter with only 6% of online users utilizing the micro-blogging website (Mislove, Lehmann, Ahn, Onnela, & Rosenquist, 2011). Nation-wide, 18% of online adults use Twitter with the most popular segment being young adults and African-Americans (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). Slightly less than half of Twitter users (46%) log in daily with men and women being relatively even in their use of Twitter (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). Users fall into three categories of use: “daily chatter, conversations, and sharing information and reporting news” (Java et al., 2007, p. 2).

## **Instagram**

Instagram is a mobile application that allows users to take photographs, edit them, and instantly upload and share them to the web (Instagram, 2014). Since its creation in 2010, 15 million users have created an account on Instagram (Hochman & Schwartz, 2012), with

Seventeen percent of online adults using Instagram, up from 13% in late 2012. Two groups in particular have experienced a notable increase in Instagram usage in the last year. Instagram adoption by Internet users ages 18-29 has increased from 28% in late 2012 to 37%

in 2013, and adoption by African American Internet users has increased from 23% to 34% over the same time period. Instagram was acquired by Facebook in April 2013 (Duggan & Smith, 2013, p. 4)

As with Twitter, rural users are also underrepresented on Instagram (Duggan & Brenner, 2013).

### **Pinterest**

“Pinterest is a tool for collecting and organizing the things that inspire you” (Pinterest, 2015, para. 1), and agriculturists are actively utilizing Pinterest in the marketing mix (Topp, Stebner, Barkman & Baker, 2014). According to Duggan and Smith (2013), Pinterest is rapidly growing with 21% of online users having an active account. While only 8% of online males use Pinterest, 33% of online women are Pinterest users (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). The site is most popular among people in upper income brackets residing in suburban America; however, rural users have begun to adopt the website with 17% of rural Internet users having an account (Duggan & Brenner, 2013).

### **LinkedIn**

Founded in 2003, LinkedIn is “the world’s largest professional network with 250 million members in over 200 countries...who seek to connect the world’s professionals to make them more productive and successful” (LinkedIn, 2014, para. 1). LinkedIn is most popular with users who have a college degree, are between the ages of 30-64, and in the urban or suburban demographics (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). LinkedIn users are “segmented into three groups: current or recent students, young professionals, and older professionals” (Papacharissi, 2009, p. 3). LinkedIn is different than Facebook or other social networking sites in that its primary focus is on professionally related information, inviting users to post resumes, work experiences, and abandons any form of personal information regarding hobbies or interests (Papacharissi, 2009).

## **Blogs**

Originally defined as Weblogs, blog sites are websites that are updated at the user's discretion with the most recent posts appearing at the top of the blog (Rigby, 2008). This method of ordering posts in reverse chronological order is a key function to the usability and popularity of blog sites (O'Reilly, 2007). Although there is no clear definition for what constitutes a blog (Rigby, 2008), they are often used as a diary for expression, a political messaging machine, a marketing tool for businesses and corporations, or a way for concerned citizens to participate in the media and communities (Mathison, 2009). Blogs can also be used to educate readers about products or events and act as a public relations platform (Rigby, 2008). Additionally, such blogs are characterized by software that is user-friendly and contain hypertext (Rigby, 2008). The use of hypertext gives special power to blogs because in doing so, they have a large influence over search engine ranking results (O'Reilly, 2007). An additional distinguishing feature of a blog is a subscription feed which allows millions of readers to subscribe to a specific blog, making it a form of "live web" (O'Reilly, 2007). Over 57 million Americans read blogs, of which most are under the age of 30 (Rigby, 2008).

According to a synthesis of literature conducted by Castronovo & Huang (2012), blogs allow companies to create a platform that beckons users to enter into meaningful relationships with a company, "thereby increasing customer loyalty and the number of third-party advocates for the firm" (p. 123). Business blogs can also be used to generate attention and involvement by offering incentives to the customer, sharing customer stories, and directly communicating with consumers and their concerns and interests (Castronovo & Huang, 2012).



## **E-newsletters**

Castronovo and Huang (2012) state email can be an invaluable tool in customer relationship management, offering firms straightforward and cost effective ways to acquire customers and strengthen customer relations (Heinonen & Strandvik, 2003). Marketers can also use email to reach out to customers, build a stronger brand identity, and increase customer loyalty.

Effectiveness of email campaigns can be measured in terms of its delivery and open rates, link clicks, and brand website traffic (Castronovo & Huang, 2012). Newsletters that are sent via email are called “e-newsletters, [and] work by providing information that is relevant to a targeted audience” (Baggot, 2011, p. 166). Baggot’s (2011) case study concluded subscribers to a business’ e-newsletter enter a social transaction where they offer their email address in exchange for valuable or interesting content. In doing so, a firm is viewed as generous and trustworthy, resulting in increased loyalty. Although a large body of work has been compiled on email marketing, there is a current gap in the literature regarding e-newsletters.

## **Social-Media Marketing**

Businesses may be apprehensive in utilizing Facebook out of a fear of time and allocated labor expenses. However, the actual costs to utilizing Facebook to market an organization are minimal (O’Neil & Scheiffer, 2014). Ultimately, social media allows companies to create a profile and maintain an online presence that is closely related to their physical brand (Castronovo & Huang, 2012).

The role of social media in a company’s overall communications program can have significant business results if implemented correctly; furthermore, it can be used to accomplish three goals: building awareness, increasing sales, or building loyalty (Castronovo & Huang, 2012; Paine,

2011). Constantinides et al. (2008) identify social media, or Web 2.0, as “the pinnacle to all other marketing aspects” (p. 13), because it is the height of the marketing pyramid of small businesses. Organizations should make sure they are already offering excellent product quality, service, and have an exceptional website already in place before they begin integrating social marketing strategies. If any elements of this marketing mix are lacking, social media can work to the detriment of an organization by super-charging the negative publicity created by unsatisfied and empowered customers (Constantinides et al., 2008).

Web 2.0 allows companies to communicate directly with a target audience while at the same time allowing customers to communicate with other customers. For this reason, social media is considered a hybrid-marketing tool (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). By utilizing this hybrid-marketing tool, businesses gather essential information about its consumers that allows the business to truly differentiate and market its products while at the same time reducing advertising expenditures (Bolataeva & Cata, 2011).

Therein lies the true benefit to social media, companies can now adapt their messages across multiple platforms to target specific consumers while at the same time encouraging them to engage in conversations with the company and others all while reducing advertising costs (Hanna et al., 2011). Consumers and businesses approach social media differently, with consumers utilizing the platform for relationships and entertainment and businesses utilizing Facebook to collect valuable information about its target audience, making social media “not just a marketing phenomenon, but a marketing era” (Boone & Kurtz, 2013, p. 100).

Social media have profound benefits when consumers are encouraged to create and share content with the businesses they visit and with other consumers (Hanna et al., 2011). Such benefits can be “especially advantageous for smaller to medium-sized firms in the consumer products and services industry, which oftentimes lack the resources necessary for employing traditional forms of advertising” (Castronovo & Huang, 2012, p. 117). According to the case study conducted by Hanna et al. (2011), social media has allowed businesses to run successful advertising campaigns outside of traditionally expensive mass media. In addition to being cost effective, Mangold & Faulds (2009) identify two specific benefits to social media marketing: 1) social media allows companies to communicate with their consumers and 2) consumers to communicate with other consumers. The key distinction between utilizing Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 in marketing is while Web 1.0 is concerned with publication, Web 2.0 excels in participation (Warschauer & Grimers, 2007). There has been extensive research conducted on small business marketing via social media; however, there is a lack of research focusing on the green industry’s use of social media marketing.

### **Consumer Relationship Management**

Today’s business communications world is vastly different than in previous generations, and companies are now placing greater importance on connecting with customers and developing a continuous relationship rather than merely looking at marketing as a public relations tool that begins with the business creating a message and ends at the consumer receiving it (Marken, 2008). By building close relationships, “social media has provided customers with their own voice, not as passive respondents as in their previous relationships with brands, but as active members of brand communities who have confidence to come into the brand’s space” (Miller & Lammas, 2010, p. 3). However, in order to develop such close customer ties and understand how

to build a relationship, marketers must understand the preferences and behaviors of their consumers (Blanchard, 2011). To do so, marketers must actively seek out customers in the medium of their choice by visiting online communities to gain a broader understanding of customer needs (Constantinides et al., 2008). By gaining an understanding of customer needs by researching their desires and needs via online communities, a business now has “the information [it] needs to effectively understand, segment, and target...customers in such a way that allows them to more efficiently allocate resources to creating customer value, devising customer-centric strategies, increasing customer loyalty, and increasing firm profitability” (Castronovo & Huang, 2012, p. 119). Marketers:

Must also keep in mind the importance of listening throughout all phases of the campaign. Since the basis for social media is conversation, smart marketers use social media to listen to what is being said about their own company and its products, competitors, consumer likes and dislikes, consumer wish lists or problems they would like solved, even the overall hopes and fears of the general public (Boone & Kurtz, 2013, p. 111).

In today’s socially-networked economy, consumers pose a unique challenge to businesses because they have more control, access to information, and market influence than ever before (Constantinides et al., 2008). Businesses can use this new economic environment to their advantage by fostering close relationships that mirror peer-to-peer communication for the sole purpose of turning casual shoppers into loyal customers (Castronovo & Huang, 2012). With this purpose in mind, businesses are wise to implement blogs, social networks, or other forums that allow consumers to contribute, thereby bridging the gap between the company and consumer (Constantinides et al., 2008).

The foundation of social-media marketing is in enabling companies to talk to their customers, customers to talk to one another, and customers to talk to companies (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). This not only engages consumers when they are able to give feedback to a company (Mangold & Faulds, 2009), but the act of directly involving the consumer by eliciting feedback empowers the customer (O'Reilly, 2007). The empowered consumer becomes even more profitable, because when a consumer feels valued by a company, they are more likely to talk about the company, its products, and how the company makes them feel, thereby initiating valued WOM marketing on the digital sphere (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Innovative businesses that manage customer relations understand that by doing so, customer loyalty is increased at the same time reducing the advertising budget of companies, because they already know the specific needs and desires of their target market. Furthermore, listening to the customer helps forewarn the customer of any potential issues with products (Constantinides et al., 2008). Business professionals are indicating the best tool for promoting such communication and customer involvement between businesses and consumers is Facebook (Yu et al., 2011).

Social media marketing is relatively simple, it allows companies to talk to their customers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009), and in doing so, social media marketing removes any intermediary source and creates a direct line of communication between businesses and consumers (Constantinides et al., 2008). Mangold and Faulds (2009) indicate social media has made it possible for consumers to talk to thousands of other consumers. Users communicate with online peers and strangers through sharing the experiences and knowledge of products and businesses, thereby making each individual user incredibly powerful and persuasive in the marketing mix (Constantindes et al., 2008). Consumers influence other consumers online just as they could via

WOM, and prefer to do so in networks or community groups where they have similar interests and desires (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

### **Developing a Social Media Strategy**

Companies that use social media marketing successfully outperform companies that focus on traditional media platforms (Paine, 2011). However, before a company can begin to see the fruits of its online labor, it must first clearly identify a narrative strategy regarding what it desires to share and contribute to the marketplace (Hanna et al., 2011). Regarding social media, there are two common marketing strategies which include enhancing public image through key concepts and advertising campaigns and contests (Yu et al., 2011). A company will conduct these strategies over three forms of social media: owned, paid, and earned (Hanna et al., 2011).

Thackeray et al., (2008) advises businesses desiring to launch a new-media promotional strategy to ask several questions before they begin. First, a business must evaluate whether a specific social-media channel will serve the needs of its target population. Secondly, an organization must analyze customer habits and know the costs reach those customers and their needs. Lastly, businesses should evaluate the social media proposal to see how difficult it will be to implement and if the campaign can be measured (Thackeray et al., 2008) Lastly, businesses that use social media must identify how they can engage consumers to the maximum potential in cost-effective ways that put the business in control of the conversation (Miller & Llamas, 2010).

### **The Importance of Measurable Objectives**

Blanchard (2011) postulates “tying a social media program to measurable business objectives is crucial” (p. 194), because objectives give purpose and momentum to a campaign and make stakeholders accountable for the results of the program. Blanchard (2011) states this allows a

manager or owner the ability to see what is effective and what is not effective. However, before marketing a specific campaign, business owners must address several considerations, including: being willing to invest both financially and in human resources into the program; review the available options to see which strategies are best aligned with the business; willingness to view social media as a passive, not active, tool that allows businesses to listen to the needs of the customer; and be active in creating interaction between community groups and individual consumers (Constantinides et al., 2008). Social media marketing objectives should focus on three vital business characteristics, sales, reputation, and relationship with customers (Young, 2014).

### **Making Posts Interesting**

Fagerstrom and Ghinea (2010) claim “consumers must have some incentive to spend time and energy to share their thoughts, opinions, and experiences” (p. 70) on a company’s website or social media accounts. Businesses offer incentives through providing multiple networking platforms, using blogs or other social media to engage customers, traditional-based promotional tools, support causes important to the target market, create informational posts or videos, offer talking points, and be creative or outrageous (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). In an attempt to create a shared experience with consumers, businesses must realize that all messages are not created equal; photographs and videos that are directly shared on social media are more enticing to users than a link because the customer must expend extra effort to click on the hypertext and open the message in another browser (Yu et al., 2011).

### **Measuring the Message**

Blanchard (2011) states that without “an adequate measurement practice in place, success, progress, and even failure, cannot be properly measured in either the short run or the long run” (p. 194). Furthermore, without measurement a firm has no way to determine if resources are

adequately and responsibly being allocated to social media marketing (Young, 2011). However, long-term impacts of a social media marketing program are not always immediately measurable (Yu et al., 2011), because social marketing is a multi-channel platform with many variances and influences (Fagerstrom & Ghina, 2010). Due to this ambiguity, measurement tools have been slowly advancing (Duncan, 2010). Currently, more than 75% of organizations are measuring the analytics of their social media efforts (Boone & Kurtz, 2013). “Social media marketing programs must be measured in terms of its ability to generate positive buzz about a firm and its products and services . . . translating into . . . increased awareness, increased sales, or increased loyalty (Castronovo & Huang, 2012, p. 124). Measurement efforts should also evaluate brand popularity among a company’s target audience and evaluate any change in perceived influence (Boone & Kurtz, 2013). Goals should be structured in such a way as to specifically measure the outcomes (Castronovo & Huang, 2012). Fortunately, content creators can use web analytics, or instruments used to track web traffic patterns, to view in-depth analysis of their campaigns (Duncan, 2010). Duncan (2010) further describes the abilities of web analytics as resources that: segment traffic sources, compare social media marketing to other campaign types, track unique visitors, and determine which marketing channels are most effective.

### **Measuring Engagement**

Engagement on social media is generally viewed as “a visitor taking some action beyond viewing or reading, for example, commenting, registering, downloading, retweeting, and so on (Paine, 2011, p. 60).” Furthermore, the level of engagement seen on social media indicates the consumers’ level of interest in the online presence of the organization. Therefore, Engagement is important because it is the first step in building a relationship between your customers and your brand (Paine, 2011, p. 60). Furthermore, tracking and measuring engagement levels can help



identify if businesses are listening to their customers because, “engagement is a way to determine whether you are having a dialog, or you are just yelling ever more loudly” (Paine, 2011, p. 79).

### **Excellence in Public Relations**

Grunig (1992) categorizes four models of communication that businesses and public relations practitioners rely upon: public information, press agency, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical communication. “Research shows that the two-way symmetrical model is the most ethical approach to public relations and that ethical public relations also is the model most effective in meeting organizational needs” (Grunig, 1992, p 308). Two-way symmetrical communication is a form of public relations that uses thorough communication between the business and all stakeholders to mitigate conflict between stakeholders. Businesses do this by understanding the needs and wants of stakeholders to “improve understanding and build relationships with publics” (Grunig, 1992, p. 39). Additionally, small-scale operations are more likely to use two-way communication practices (Grunig, 1992). In the digital sphere, two-way symmetrical communications can help organizations because listening to consumers via social media allows a company to improve its products and more effectively target potential customers (Paine, 2011).

### **Relationship Management Theory**

The theoretical principles of relationship management theory served as a platform for this study. Communication has always been pivotal to the study of public relations; however, scholars struggle at pinpointing an exact, all-encompassing definition for public relations, what it should entail, and what it should do (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). Building upon Grunig’s (1992) work, Ledingham and Bruning (2000) recommend organizations approach public relations as a

two-way symmetrical approach, “an approach that emphasizes building and maintaining relationships that benefit not only the organization but also public [stakeholders]” (p. 65). In 2003, Ledingham further developed a framework for public relations that incorporated four key relational perspectives: 1) recognizing the pivotal role that relationships play in public relationships; 2) viewing public relations as management of relationships; 3) identifying various types of public relationships with organizations and its influential characteristics; and 4) the construction of models for organization-public relationships that leave room for relationships, their processes, and the positive and negative consequences of those relationships.

The goal of public relations is “to facilitate positive communication between an organization and its publics” (Wilson, 1994, p. 136). However, public relations should be viewed not as a one-way process in which an organization disseminates information to its customers, but as a two-tiered process where a company first focuses on building relationships with its customers and once those relationships are established, disseminate information and communication practices that seek to positively foster those relationships (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). Wilson (1994) concludes relationships are the result of earned behavior, namely consumers’ perceptions of transparency, mutual benefits, and confidence towards a specified entity. Further giving clarity to the changing landscape of public relations, Wilson (1994) determined:

The emphasis in public relations is on relationship building. The era of press agency, and publicity is past and attempts to integrate public relations part and parcel with marketing are falling on hostile ears. It is focused on developing relationships with all the publics in a corporation’s community: government, industry, suppliers, employees, special interests, and local and national communities. . . Corporate credibility in these relationships is based less on successful business performance and more on demonstrated commitment to and support of community. (p. 138).

In order to look at the relationship management between an organization and a stakeholder, it is important to operationalize stakeholder in regards to the theory. A stakeholder is “any person or group that has an interest, right, claim, or ownership in an organization (Clarkson, 1995).

Stakeholders and organizations share a symbiotic relationship grounded in “economic, political, or social concerns” (Coombs, 2000, p. 97). Organizations that focus on building relationships with identified stakeholders not only foster beneficial dialogue between the two parties but also create a meaningful relationship in the minds of the consumer (Bridges & Nelson, 2000).

Thomlison (2000) defines a relationship as “a set of expectations two parties have for each other’s behavior based on their interaction patterns (p. 179). Furthermore, relationships are symbiotic with interpersonal communication between an organization and its stakeholders (Coombs, 2000).

Public relations and the role of relationships are integral to relationship management, which “is the notion of public relations as the management of relationships between an organization and its key publics [stakeholders]” (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000, p. 56). Further clarifying the role of relationship management in his later work, Ledingham (2003) postulates that organizations facilitate relationship management when businesses balance the priorities of itself with the public. This notion of relationship management is consistent with Grunig’s theory of two-way symmetrical communication (Ledingham, 2003). However, organizations cannot stop at merely identifying a relationship (Thomlison, 2000), because an organization is judged by its history of exceeding or falling short of stakeholder expectations (Coombs, 2000). It is with this importance in mind that “marketers need to develop new techniques to establish and build trusting relationships between companies and their customers” (Boone & Kurtz, 2013, p. 18).

## **Relationship Marketing**

Relationship marketing encompasses multiple stakeholders and:

Refers to the development, growth, and maintenance of long term, cost-effective exchange relationships with individual customers, suppliers, employees, and other partners for mutual benefit. It broadens the scope of external marketing relationships to include suppliers, customers, and referral sources. In relationship marketing, the term customer takes on new meaning (Boone & Kurtz, 2013, p. 18).

Relationship marketing presents a prevalent and consistent positive message to all possible stakeholders (Baldwin et al., 2004). Although relationship marketing can be tedious with issues found throughout the entire process (Bridges & Nelson, 2000), the outcome often results in symbiotic relationships between stakeholders (Levenshus, 2010; Ledingham, 2003). As a result of such mutually-beneficial relationships, businesses streamline the process of gathering vital demographic information and purchasing habits about their target audience, thus making relationship marketing an imperative activity for any business (Boone & Kurtz, 2013). In addition to gaining valuable market research, it is important for businesses to not only “attract new customers . . . [but] maintain a relationship with them so they become loyal repeat customers (Boone & Kurtz, 2013, p. 18). However, it is not sufficient to only communicate with customers, organizations must constantly build relationships established in transparency, confidence, and dedication. In doing so, companies will create a currency and brand that is far more effective than products or price structures. It is important for companies to establish the aforementioned traits within their target audience, but they must implement these practices behaviorally and empirically within their organization or risk alienating their customer base (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). If a behavioral commitment to transparency with the goal of relationship marketing is practiced by an organization, it will help ease any customer concerns in

the case of a crisis or conflict within the organization (Bridges & Nelson, 2000). What differentiates relationship marketing from other strategies is that “the audience, the images they hold, and their perceptions are actually more important in the communication process than the organization (Baldwin et al., 2004, p. 364). Ultimately, the greatest benefit of relationship marketing is loyalty (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000).

Relationship management can be practiced across many platforms through traditional media (Bridges & Nelson, 2000), especially through new media technologies such as blogs (Levensush, 2010) and Facebook (O’Neil & Scheiffer, 2014), which makes social networking sites paramount for the forming and maintaining of customer relationships (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009). Regardless of medium, marketers must be customer centered (Boone & Kurtz, 2013) and build “loyal, mutually beneficial relationships with both new and existing customers” (Boone & Kurtz, 2013, p. 346). Toth (2009) proposes the goal of relationship marketing should be creating and fostering beneficial consumer relationships. Lastly, Ledingham (2003) identifies the unit of analysis for public relations should always be the relationships between the customer and the organization and the fulfillment of customer expectations as the nature of the relationship changes over time.

### **Measuring Relationships in Social Media**

Developing relationships and creating brand advocates should be the primary objective of social media marketing (Young, 2011). Furthermore:

The rise of social media makes the cultivation of relationships with stakeholders more important than ever. In order to encourage those relationships, businesses need to shift from broadcasting to customers to listening to the stakeholders, acting as their champion, advising internal decision-makers, and building engagement with the brand (Pain, 2011, p. 73).

In order to determine the quality of relationships being created with consumers, businesses must establish effective strategies for measuring six key components of consumer relationships (Young, 2011). Relationships via businesses and consumers have an element of control which is the mutually-agreed upon ability to influence each other. Secondly, relationships must have an element of trust which consists of integrity, competence, and dependability. For a relationship to exist between a business and consumers, there must be an additional element of satisfaction and the extent to where both parties believe the relationship is worth maintaining. In the exchange level of consumer relationships, parties become mutually beneficial partners. The exchange relationship level is characterized by “one party [giving] benefits to other only because the other has provided benefits in the past or is expected to do so in the future” (Paine, 2011, p. 57). The last level of relationships is the communal phase. In this phase of relationships, consumers and businesses enter into a symbiotic relationship and offer up benefits and rewards because each party is naturally concerned about the wellbeing of the other. This is the pinnacle phase of relationship marketing and measurement tools must be enacted in order to obtain this level of relationship with consumers (Paine, 2011).

In order to measure the success of any relationship marketing campaign, a business must measure not only the revenue brought in as part of the marketing efforts but also the level and quality of the relationships created or maintained. This level of measurement can only be measured through surveys or interviews (Paine, 2011). Ultimately, success isn't just the number of impressions or even likes, comments, or shares. Volume is not relevant in social media. The only relevant currency in social media marketing campaigns is the level of relationship, which is an essential component to success (Paine, 2011).

Paine (2011) further states there are several intensities to customer engagement online that can indicate where a company stands in regards to the level of customer relationships. The first stage of engagement includes lurking. At this level of engagement, the relationship between firm and customer is purely exchange. The second level of relationship engagement is casual engagement. At this level customers often subscribe to a blog or suggest a Facebook page to a friend. However, relationships at this state quickly stagnate and as a result, the casual level of relationship is where most relationships die. The growth of repeat visitors over time is one measurement that can indicate if relationships are growing (Paine, 2011).

The active level of engagement is demonstrated by customers networking with other peers via the Facebook page or blog and participating by liking, commenting, or sharing. The relationship at this level becomes communal because the business and consumers are both concerned about the well-being of one another. This level of relationship is vital because it is at the active stage where consumers will pay more for products and recommend such products to their social sphere of influence. The much-coveted WOM marketing begins at the active level of engagement. Measurement of this stage includes the increased level of engagement over time (Paine, 2011). Some companies will enter the committed level of relationship with consumers (Paine, 2011). At this level of engagement, consumers will register for rewards or other material which results in both parties developing mutual and positive feelings towards the other. The common reason consumers enter this stage of relationships with companies is because their positive expectations from previous interactions has been continually reinforced. Measurement for this stage of

relationship includes the increase of registrations for rewards cards, e-newsletter signups, or other related incentives (Paine, 2011).

Paine (2011) states the last level of engagement and relationship is customer loyalty. The loyalty phase is characterized by a mutual care for the health and well-being of the other. Consumers will also participate in WOM marketing by expressing their commitment to these businesses. This level of engagement and relationship is the most difficult to measure and requires a survey (Paine, 2011).

### **Social Information Processing Theory**

Computer mediated communication (CMC) began with the creation of the original Internet which linked two or more computers together for the purpose of file sharing and data redundancy. Relationship marketing occurs via CMC (Walther, 1996). Eventually consumers began adopting computers to communicate with each other. Original studies demonstrated that CMC was inferior in the interpersonal relationships this new medium fostered. However, the original studies were flawed in design, because they forced users to communicate within a confined time frame (Walther, 1996).

Walther (1996) criticizes past studies that identified CMC results in impersonal relationships based on the lack of nonverbal cues over online communication when compared to face-to-face (F2F) communication. However, the main difference between in-person and online communication is “not the amount of social information exchanged, but the rate of social information exchange” (Walther, 1996, p. 10). Herein lies a critical component of social information processing theory, the difference between CMC and F2F communication is not a



lack of information, but in the difference of processing and deciphering. If ample opportunity and time is provided, CMC can cause deep interpersonal, sometimes hyper-personal relationships, to form that can be equal in intensity to those created by F2F (Walther, 1996; Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008).

Social information processing theory (SIPT) is a post-positivist and process theory (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008) that assumes CMC users are motivated to create relationships through information transferred through text, and it is through the interpretation of such textual artifacts that knowledge of the individual is formed (Walther, 1996). The communicator adapts and modifies their conversation through such interpretation, but due to the lack of non-verbal cues, the process is delayed when compared to the speed and efficiency of F2F conversation which makes multiple exchanges required (Walther, 1996; Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). CMC users' adaptation, and often overcompensation, to the lack of interpreted nonverbal cues is a key component of SIPT (Walther & Addario, 2001). Additionally, since cues are filtered out, users often select which characteristics of their identity should be hyper-intensified and which negative aspects should be mitigated (Walther, 1996). CMC users spend considerable time and cognitive effort creating messages that highlight positive attributes and under-emphasize negative ones which can result in intimacy with other users provided adequate time and exposure is allowed (Walther, 2007).

### **Summary**

Although small retail garden centers are at risk for losing sales to growing mass merchants, their quality of product, selection, and exceptional service combined with technical expertise make them the preferred vendors for consumers looking to purchase plant material. Additionally,

consumers willingly pay a premium in price for the quality, selection, and experience offered by garden centers.

Garden centers have small allocations for advertising. When they do spend revenue for campaigns, they rely primarily on print media sources that have shown to be ineffective. When garden centers create advertising messages, they would benefit from highlighting plants that are locally grown in pots that are either plantable or compostable. Even though the organic industry is increasing in popularity, organically grown plants offer little advantage to most consumers.

Social media marketing efforts can expand upon the most important aspect of a garden center's strengths – consumer relationships. Once specific marketing objectives are identified, companies can use social media to engage in relationship management strategies with consumers via frequent posts and customer engagement, garden centers are able to actively listen to the concerns of their consumers and respond accordingly through their preferred social media outlet.

Although computer-mediated communication (CMC) was once considered an impersonal media, social information processing theory (SIPT) demonstrates that, if given sufficient time, deep interpersonal relationships can be formed through CMC provided consumers desire to seek out a relationship and spend cognitive effort in doing so. Customer service is integral to consumers selecting garden centers over mass merchants (Hudson, 1997; Brand & Leonard, 2001).

Additionally, customers are searching online for product information (Behe et al., 2008).

However, there is a lack of research using CMC, specifically social media, to develop relationships with customers and relationship marketing strategies.

After reviewing the available literature, several gaps were identified. Although garden centers have many qualities that consumers prefer over mass merchants, there is a void of literature identifying how garden centers use new media to market these strengths to the consumer. Consumers are increasingly reaching to their smartphone to research product attributes and garden centers (Duggan & Smith, 2013; Behe et al., 2008). However, there is a lack of research on the role of Web 2.0 in the consumer's buying process. In terms of CMC, there is little research on how garden centers are utilizing the strengths of social media to develop strong relationships with customers and how customers are responding to and valuing this form of communication. Lastly, research has not yet explored stakeholder experiences and attitudes towards social media marketing.

## Chapter 3 - Methodology

Current research suggests garden centers are facing increased competition and are utilizing marketing channels that are less than ideal to reach today's modern, online consumer (Behe et al., 2013). Social media marketing, if integrated properly, can create deeper customer relationships that produce loyal customers (Paine, 2011). The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of stakeholders of Great Plains metro and non-metro garden centers as employees and owners use social media to market the garden center. Additionally, the research sought to explore perceived successes and perceived challenges of stakeholders to identify areas of educational need related to new and social media within the industry. The data was collected via in-depth interviews from participants at metro and non-metro garden centers in Kansas.

The following research questions guided this study.

- **RQ1:** What are garden center stakeholders' perceptions and attitudes towards new media as it relates to the marketing of their business?
- **RQ2:** What barriers do stakeholders encounter when using new media to market their business?
- **RQ3:** What new media strategies are being implemented in the marketing of metro and non-metro garden centers?
- **RQ4:** What are stakeholder perceptions regarding customer interaction with new-media content?

### Design of the Study

This qualitative study incorporated in-depth, semi-structured interviews to gather a broad depth of information and understanding of participants' experiences related to social-media marketing and garden centers. Qualitative and quantitative methodologies have innate limitations each unique to the respective fields (Flick, 2009), and "the choice between quantitative and qualitative

research methods should be determined by the research question, not by the preference of the researcher” (Marshall, 1996, p. 522). Qualitative researchers study phenomenon and people in their natural state in order to come to a greater understanding of participants’ experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). As such, qualitative research is the avenue of choice when the researcher desires to gain an in-depth, complete, and complex understanding when the unit of analysis cannot be separated from the situational context (Creswell, 2007). The researcher approached this study from a qualitative standpoint because qualitative studies best answer questions of motive, like why and how (Marshall, 1996). Never separated from the researcher’s subjectivities and starting with assumptions and epistemology, qualitative research results in data that is a conjoined creation of the participant and researcher relationship, and is a “complex description and interpretation of the problem” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). Concerning validity, the qualitative study generates deeper information because it allows the researcher the ability to understand situations outside of the researcher’s paradigm (Williams & Heikes, 1993). Since the goal of this study was to explore the experiences and opinions outside of the researcher’s own paradigm in order to generate in-depth understanding of such experiences, qualitative methods were deemed appropriate.

For the purpose of this qualitative study, eight in-depth interviews were conducted to gain a broader understanding of the participants’ experiences and viewpoints. In a comparative study researchers “will not observe the case as a whole and in its complexity, but rather a multiplicity of cases” (Flick, 2009, p. 135). In this way, researchers explore and compare the experiences and responses in regards to a specific topic. Such studies offer an intricate and detailed study comparison of similar groups that are best investigated through interviews (Flick, 2009).

Ultimately, semi-structured interviews rely upon the “knowledge, skills, vision, and integrity of the researcher doing the analysis” (Rabionet, 2011, p. 565). In this study, the researcher will draw upon multiple data sources in order to overcome limitations.

The primary method of data collection was in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Appendix A) with participants. In-depth interviews, by nature, allow the researcher a framework or structure to conduct the interview with the freedom to deviate from task to explore relevant issues to the participant (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003). In semi-structured interviews, “research questions focus on the impact of concrete events or the subjective handling of the conditions of one’s own activities” (Flick, 2009, p. 155). Entirely unstructured interviews pose a risk to researchers by missing possible topics of relevant interest, whereas a semi-structured interview allows the respondent to elaborate and the researcher to adapt while still following a pre-determined structure (Rabionet, 2011). Furthermore, qualitative interviews are an effective method for gaining an increased understanding regarding a participant’s experiences (deMarrais, 2004). The questions were designed to be open-ended with a margin for more specific follow-up probes.

### **Question Design**

Open ended questions and follow-up probes were designed to elicit responses on the participants’ experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and phenomena that sought to establish grounds for answering the research questions guiding this study. Probing questions should be asked often during the initial parts of the interview to demonstrate to the participant the depth of information desired by the researcher (Krueger, 1998). Questions were initially broad in scope and narrow in specificity, because a researcher “should ask unstructured questions first and introduce increased structuring only later during the interview to prevent the interviewer’s frame of reference being

imposed on the interviewee's viewpoints" (Flick, 2009, p. 151). Questions occurring later in the interview process contained more specificity in regards to isolated events or occurrences (Flick, 2009). Additionally, Krueger (1998) states positive questions should be asked prior to negative questions. Structure and arrangement of questions within the interview followed Flick's (2009) recommendations of evaluating interview question designs which includes: determining theoretical relevance, what is the link to the research questions, what is the substantial dimension of the question, ease of answering, and question positioning and distribution (Box 13.5).

Several additional considerations are offered by Creswell (2007). The researcher should use a protocol form with approximately five questions that are open ended which should result in an interview between 60-90 minutes in length. However, since the interview questions related to social media, a topic participants may or may not have had much knowledge or interest of, additional questions and prompts were added in order to generate sufficient data. Overarching research questions should be narrowed into sub questions with questions of greatest ease placed at the start of the interview. Creswell (2007) further mentions questions should initially be pilot tested for validity. Interviews should be conducted in a quiet place, lending itself to interviewing, that is not a hindrance to the participant (Creswell, 2007). As such, interviews of garden center owners and employees were conducted in private meeting rooms that promised to be free of interruption. Customer interviews were conducted in private meeting rooms at local libraries.

Krueger (1998) offers five categories of questions: opening, introductory, transition, key, and ending that helped guide the formation of the interview structure. Opening questions are usually an introductory question that comforts the individual and are often based upon facts or requires

little self-disclosure. The general topic for the interview is then introduced to provide a chance for participant reflection and response which could generate new topics not originally thought of by the researcher. Transition questions link the conversation to the central questions of the interview, or key questions, that are integral to the study. Lastly, ending questions ask the respondent to summarize or offer additional responses not covered within the research (Krueger, 1998).

Based upon the recommendations of Creswell (2007), Flick (2009), and Krueger (1998) the interviews were guided on the following principles: lasting 60-90 minutes in length; consisted of open-ended questions; used general questions that were positive and non-confrontational at the start of the interview which increased in specificity as the interview progressed; and followed the opening, introductory, transition, key, and ending principles. The interview guide (Appendix A) was evaluated by a panel of experts for validity (Flick, 2009).

### **Sampling Procedures**

Qualitative research gravitates towards purposive sampling techniques where selection of participants is based upon a pre-existing set of criterion (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Marshall (1996) mentioned while quantitative methods make generalizations based upon a representative sampling, this method of subject selection does not align with qualitative work based on theoretical and practical reasons. Qualitative studies tend to use a smaller sample that decreases the generalizability. Secondly, for a truly representative sample, it is necessary to eliminate any potential bias in the participant, which is not feasible when looking at in-depth situational data at the heart of qualitative research. Qualitative research attempts to understand paradigms and epistemological viewpoints of the participants, which are not evenly distributed throughout the



population (Marshall, 1996). Ultimately, understanding and exploration, not generalizability, are the goals of qualitative research (Flick, 2009).

Eight in-depth interviews were conducted with participants from two metro garden centers and two non-metro garden centers. The eight participants were twice the minimum number needed for a qualitative study as identified by Creswell (2007). The participants at each garden center included the owner and the employee most responsible for social media content. Two additional customers, one from a metro garden center and one from a non-metro garden center, were also included. A purposively-selected list of garden centers was generated by a state Extension specialist with expert knowledge of existing Kansas garden centers. When asked for the criterion that informed the selection, the specialist responded:

I selected the urban garden centers because I knew they were large, active and had websites and Facebook pages. These garden centers are the ones named when I asked Extension agents about good garden centers in the area. I also felt that they were progressive and interested in continual improvement of their businesses. The rural garden centers were selected for their specialties (bedding plants vs. woody plants), presence...and absence of active Facebook participation... We [Extension organization] have a good relationship with the folks at [rural garden center], and I know they will work well with us on any project that might benefit their business. I think they will be open to suggestions and can be a good case study for working with constraints in rural businesses: few people, maybe not the right personality for social media, time (personal communication, Dr. Cheryl Boyer, March 18, 2014).

Of the 261 garden centers within the state of Kansas, the selection included ten metro and 13 non-metro businesses for a total of 23 garden centers. Based on the body of work analyzed for the review of literature, the garden centers selected followed the need for existing successful business practices needing to be in place prior to launching a social media campaign. However, the generated list merely indicated a presence of strong business practices and the existence of

some form of social media and thereby neglected to ascertain whether the garden centers were successfully utilizing social media. Failure to identify this component of the selection process could lead to inaccurate comparisons and damage transferability. Since qualitative studies focus on validity and generating a large amount of data from a few participants, the original list of 23 garden centers was scaled down to two metro garden centers and two non-metro garden centers. To generate a sample that could be used for possible comparative purposes, one metro garden center was selected that had a high engagement rate on Facebook and one non-metro garden center was selected that had poor engagement rates. One high engagement non-metro garden center and one low engagement non-metro garden center were also selected.

Effectiveness of social media campaigns can be difficult to define or measure (Smitha, 2013). Facebook engagement rate was used to identify high performing and low performing garden centers. Engagement is “a metric that marketers use to measure brands’ effectiveness at engaging their audiences” (Smitha, 2013, para 1). Engagement rate can also be used to compare the effectiveness of one brand on Facebook to another (Smitha, 2013). There are two current metrics for evaluating engagement. Metric one consists of the following formula:  $\text{engagement rate} = (\text{clicks} + \text{likes} + \text{comments} + \text{shares}) / \text{people who saw your post (Post Reach)}$ . This metric is useful for measuring how useful a business’ content is to its fan base. However, this metric is not as useful in regards to a comparative measure to other businesses. In order to accurately measure the engagement rate, or effectiveness, of one Facebook page to another, the following formula (metric 2) must be used:  $\text{engagement} = (\text{likes} + \text{comments} + \text{shares}) / \text{total fans}$ . The second metric allows a comparison to be completed without accessing proprietary Facebook Insight data (Smitha, 2013).

Posts over the previous 60 days were evaluated for engagement. The engagement rates were averaged over the previous sixty days and metro and non-metro garden centers were ranked from highest to lowest in regards to engagement. Utilizing metric two to rank effectiveness in engaging fans on Facebook resulted in a sample of garden centers that have successful business operations as identified by a Kansas Extension specialist with one metro and one non-metro garden center excelling in Facebook and one metro and one non-metro garden center poorly performing on Facebook. The researcher called the owner of each garden center to ask for participation in the study.

Once the garden centers were identified and the interviews were conducted, customers were then selected for the interview. Participating garden centers were asked to make a Facebook post asking for two volunteers for the study (Appendix B). By making a Facebook post on the business' page, the grant team was able to select customers that had an existing online presence with the business and therefore could give testimony to how the garden center interacted with, developed relationships with, and provided valuable content to customers. Participating customers were compensated for their time with a \$25 gift card to the garden center paid for by the research team. Three of the four garden center employees posted the invite on the garden center Facebook account. One metro and one non-metro participant responded.

### **Philosophical Assumptions and Subjectivities**

As Crotty (1998) proclaims, “different ways of viewing the world shape different ways of researching the world” (p. 66). Additionally, researchers must include their subjectivities within the framework of research and acknowledge such subjectivities both internally and to the public

in order to understand the influence such assumptions have on the creation, evaluation, and analyzing of research (Creswell, 2007). An ontological lens grounded in a post-positivist paradigm guided the study. The ontological assumption uses the data collected from participants to show different ideas and is concerned with “the nature of reality and its characteristics” (Creswell, 2007, p. 16). The researcher occasionally entered into a methodological assumption of practice in that prior knowledge, a priori assumptions, and continuous change based upon evidence found in the field guided the research.

The researcher used a post-positivist, interpretivist viewpoint to conduct and analyze the research and reach an understanding of the experiences of the participants. Post-positivism, while grounded in logical cause-and-effect attributes, views experiences as central to the individual and not wholly universal. Additionally, researchers use varying levels of data analysis, including computer-aided computation (Creswell, 2007). Within the post-positivist paradigm, the researcher was influenced by an interpretivist philosophy that experiences are isolated to the individual participant and construction of experiences are unique to the individual stakeholder within the individual garden center. Crotty’s (1998) and Creswell’s (2007) work on interpretivism and ontology guided this study because each metro and non-metro garden center employee or owner had a specific reality constructed of individual customers, demographics, and proprietary attributes that informed and influenced responses unique to the individual within the garden center and specific to the garden center. Therefore, each participant response was analyzed from the frame of exclusivity based upon the sum of the individual’s experiences.

Although the researcher was an outside observer not personally or professionally tied to the businesses under study, it must be noted the researcher was a former horticulture instructor with some experience within the garden center industry in a different region. Conscious efforts were taken to objectively evaluate the situations and data encountered within the study. However, the researcher remains sympathetic to employees and garden centers which could affect the interpretation of information to be skewed towards the positive. Additionally, the researcher operates a small businesses primarily through social media and therefore may subconsciously place an increased importance on social media in regards to small business marketing. Furthermore, the researcher acted as a teaching assistant to a new-media marketing class at Kansas State University, and therefore entered interviews with some bias towards the benefits and relevancy of social media in agriculturally-related firms.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Interviews were conducted between November, 2014 and January, 2015 because participants identified that time frame was the most convenient for them. Consenting participants were given a consent form (Appendix C) to sign prior to the interview starting and formally prompted on the purpose of the study and extent of confidentiality. All interviews were recorded with two recorders. Participants were immediately debriefed by the researcher at the end of the interview. Audio recordings were backed up for redundancy and all identifying information was removed to ensure confidentiality. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher and a professor's assistant and were entered into NVivo10 (QSR International, Burlington, MA) for coding and analysis to determine common linkages and themes that could give further insight into experiences and aid in the formation of theory.

Computer programs like NVivo have several advantages that include allowing researchers to increase the speed of analysis, increase the quality of research, and increase transparency as textual links are created. Additionally, researchers can further define complex linkages between index words that may be problematic without the use of a computer (Flick, 2009). Glaser's (1965) constant comparative method assisted the researcher in categorizing participant responses into relevant major themes. The constant-comparative method allows the researcher to identify themes that occur in a theoretical fashion and to develop in a natural way from the participants' responses. In this way, the researcher becomes the research instrument by using his or her direct experience with the interviews to identify appropriate commonalities between responses (Flick, 2009).

### **Credibility, Validity, and Transferability**

Credibility, reliability, and transferability are essential components and concerns of a qualitative study, and the onus is on the researcher to demonstrate the findings result from data and not subjectivities (Shenton, 2003). Shenton (2003) also indicates compromising internal validity is a critical error in qualitative research. In order to mitigate any errors that could decrease credibility, all data was collected and analyzed verbatim with audio recordings and transcribed by outside sources. Although a grounded theory was used as an approach to analysis, the use of NVivo can help mitigate human error in analyzing the data, thereby increasing the transparency of the data analysis process. Additionally, after concluding the interview sessions, all participants were debriefed by a researcher to maximize accuracy of the written data was synonymous with participant perception. The research team conducted face validity analysis of the interview questions to increase validity of the results. External validity in qualitative research is in the eye

of the beholder, and it is up to the reader to determine if the information can be generalized to his or her own socially constructed experiences (Crotty, 1998).

### **Summary**

A qualitative process comprised of in-depth interviews was used in this study. Eight interviews were conducted with half of the participants representing metro garden centers and half of the participants representing non-metro garden centers. In-depth interviews were recorded via audio recorders and transcribed by the lead researcher and a professor's assistant. All data was coded and analyzed via NVivo10 based upon Glaser's (1965) constant comparative approach to identify common themes. The study was approved by Kansas State University's Institutional Review Boards (Appendix D).

## Chapter 4 - Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of stakeholders of mid-western metro and non-metro garden centers as they experience new-media marketing. The following four research questions guided this study:

- **RQ1:** What are garden center stakeholders' perceptions and attitudes towards new media as it relates to the marketing of their business?
- **RQ2:** What barriers do stakeholders encounter when using new media to market their business?
- **RQ3:** What new media strategies are being implemented in the marketing of metro and non-metro garden centers?
- **RQ4:** What are stakeholder perceptions regarding customer interaction with new-media content?

The results presented in this chapter are from in-depth interviews with stakeholders (employees, owners, and customers) and are presented in the order of the four research questions. Findings in this study are the result of stakeholder responses during eight 60-90 minute in-depth, semi-structured interviews which were analyzed via Glaser's (1965) constant comparative method and organized into themes through NVivo 10. Table one includes a brief description of the garden centers and a numerical identifier. Table two includes participant pseudonyms and characteristics



Table 1 Garden Center Characteristics

Store	Description	New Media	Traditional Media	Facebook Stats
A	<b>Classification: Non-metro</b> Garden center A is located in non-metro Northwest Kansas. There are two other garden center locations in Nebraska. In addition to offering retail plant material to customers, the garden center also offers landscape design and construction services and does approximately 20% of its sales online through eBay or Amazon. The center is owned by one individual.	B,E,F,G,H, P,T	Radio Billboards Newspaper Direct mail	916 likes .07% engagement rate
B	<b>Classification: Metro</b> Garden center B is located near Topeka, Kansas, and was established in the 1950's. It has gone through several ownership changes. The primary revenue source for the garden center is in retail sales of plant material and gardening supplies such as fertilizer and weed killer.	E, F	Radio Newspaper Direct mail	818 likes 1.3% engagement rate
C	<b>Classification: Metro</b> Garden center C is located in Wichita, Kansas, and is in its fourth generation of ownership. The primary focus of this garden center is in retail sales split across two locations in Wichita. In addition to retail plant supplies, the garden center also runs a gift store and a microbrewery store.	B, E, F, I, P, T	Radio Television Newspaper Direct mail	5,440 likes .14% engagement rate
D	<b>Classification: Non-metro</b> Garden center D is located in a small town in western Kansas and is currently in its first generation. The store focuses on retail plant supplies and a year-round gift shop is also a significant aspect of the business.	F	Radio Television Newspaper Direct Mail	844 likes 1.09% engagement rate

\* Note: B=blog, E=e-newsletter, F=Facebook, G=Google Plus, H=Houzz, I=Instagram, P=Pinterest, & T=Twitter ; engagement rate was calculated on October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014

Table 2 Participant Description

Name	Participant Description	Store
Annie	Annie is an employee at garden center A. She graduated from Kansas State University with a degree in landscape design and took a class in marketing. She is the sole landscape designer for the garden center and is also the marketing manager. She uses Facebook and Pinterest for her personal social media.	A
Andy	Andy is the owner of garden center A. He spent the majority of his career farming. However, when faced with the difficulty of finding a way for the farm to support his children and his retirement, he decided to build a garden center. He does not use social media in his personal life.	A
Brad	Brad is the general manager of garden center B, and he oversees all of the marketing. Brad does not use social media for personal use.	B
Chris	Chris is the fourth-generation manager of garden center C and received a master's degree in business administration. His current role is president of the garden center. He oversees the operations and marketing of the garden center. Chris uses Facebook in his personal life.	C
Carl	Carl is the third-generation manager and is the current CEO. He identified his primary responsibilities are helping with the daily operations, preparing new media content, and taking pictures for marketing purposes. He operates two blogs for the garden center and has a personal blog.	C
Cassie	Cassie is a customer and identifies herself as a marketing and sales representative. She started gardening to relieve the stress associated with her day job. She heard about the garden center through a television advertisement in the 1990's. Her primary interests are in low-water gardening and yucca plants. Cassie uses Facebook in her personal life.	C
Diana	Diana is the owner of garden center D and works alongside her husband. Her primary responsibilities are with customer service and education. She is also the sole manager of the Facebook page and is in charge of television and radio advertisements. Diana uses Facebook in her personal life.	D
Donna	Donna is a customer at garden center D. She and her husband own a house in the same town as the garden center and their primary area of interest is in re-establishing their lawn. They were referred to the garden center by friends after a poor experience with a competing garden center. She uses Facebook and Pinterest in her personal life.	D

## **RQ1: Stakeholder perceptions and attitudes towards new-media marketing**

In order to understand how stakeholders perceive new-media marketing as it relates to the marketing of their business, participants were asked questions pertaining to how new media impacts profits, marketing reach, and customer interaction with the garden center. Participants' interview responses yielded the following themes: 1) Stakeholders prefer familiar and traditional marketing strategies; 2) Although stakeholders use social media and see some positives to implementing it, they are skeptical of its ability to positively impact sales.

### ***Stakeholders prefer to focus on traditional marketing strategies***

When asked to describe how the garden centers market to the public, all participants identified a preference towards traditional marketing that includes: television, radio, newspaper, direct mail, and in-store print material.

#### ***Newspaper and Print***

All the garden centers identified a newspaper and print marketing presence. Diana, along with her husband, own garden center D. When asked to describe her marketing strategy, Diana mentioned, "garden centers are used to being in the regular media [which includes] newspapers. We're used to all of that." In terms of advertising for a specific event or sale that will take place at the store, Diana discussed how she prefers traditional channels of marketing because, "newspaper is timely...If I advertise in the newspaper I can get them in here; they will bring the coupon in. No one brings their iPhone in and says this is what I want."

While serving as the landscape designer and marketing manager for the business, Annie states the emphasis of the advertising budget is primarily in print media, specifically "newspaper

advertisements throughout the growing season.” Andy, Annie’s boss, expanded upon the preference for more traditional ways of marketing and said, “we do some newspaper advertisements”, which he mentioned are limited to block ads. Andy has tried stuffing newspapers with direct mail flyers, but mentioned, “I don’t think they worked very well for us. We’re dropping that”. Andy continued and said, “in addition to newspapers, we do a little bit with billboards. I’d like to do more with billboards because I think that’s the good old-fashioned way to do things.”

Chris and Brad also mentioned the influence and role of print advertising. Chris is the CEO of garden center C and mentioned, “we spend the bulk of our budget on [traditional marketing].” Although Brad did not mention marketing in the newspaper, he did mention, “We do a catalog we print and distribute.”

### ***Television and Radio are still popular and desired advertising channels***

Radio advertising was mentioned by stakeholders at every garden center. Although the form of such advertising varied, all participants identified a radio presence that either included traditional advertisements or a presence on dedicated segments throughout the week. For participants who used a radio show, the format consisted of discussing gardening issues on air with the general public. Brad mentioned, “we do a lot of radio advertising... We can run radio advertisements, and I can quantify how much I’ve spent on it because I have the bills to show for it.” In addition to paid advertising on local radio stations, Brad also has a radio program that airs every Sunday. Describing the format of the show, Brad said, “it’s a call-in format. [The topic is] whatever I want to talk about plus whatever calls I want to take and their questions...it’s an hour-long program.” Diana also identified radio was a significant part of her advertising budget, saying, “the bulk of our [advertising] cost is in radio.”

Carl and Chris both represent the same garden center with Carl serving as the CEO and Chris operating as the president. Although Carl said they “didn’t spend any money on television or radio [advertising], Chris mentioned how the store purchased equipment to create more personalized advertisements to send to the radio stations. In describing his approach to radio advertising, Chris added:

We’ve traditionally had our radio advertisements. We’ve been mostly using the radio guy’s voice, but we bought a microphone and we’re going to start doing our radio advertisements in-house. [Carl] and I did them for a while, but it just got to be too much for us to drive across town to record one or two spots where finding someone on staff that sounds like what our customer is, that 40-year old... Hopefully we can get the sound of what our actual customer is instead of a radio person.”

Chris mentioned the garden center has a long tradition of radio advertising and said, “[We’ve been on the radio for] 20, maybe 25 years on a different station. [It was on] Saturday morning, kind of traditional garden talk show; [We] stopped that in 2013.” However, the garden center has recommitted to having a radio presence. Chris discussed his interest in returning to radio, and mentioned:

This new show kind of came about. It was basically a new opportunity that wasn’t going to cost us any additional money so they were basically giving us the hour time plus threw in some other spots on their other stations. It was kind of hard to say no to it... We [now] do a one-hour, Monday evening drive time garden talk show... [The show] is a one-hour chat with somebody about what’s going on.

Although Andy uses radio advertising for his garden center, he mentions that television, although a desirable marketing medium, “is just too expensive.” However, Chris mentioned his garden

center saves money on television advertising by participating in a gardening-themed television show that airs every week. He mentioned:

We also do a three minute television segment on Saturday and Sunday mornings on the ABC affiliate... This week we talked about instant shape artificial trees that you don't have to fluff; they come out of a box and they're ready to go. People come in and they're like... I heard Carl and Chris talking about these instant shape trees, where are they?

### ***Strategic planning on traditional media***

Participants at every garden center included comments regarding planning traditional media in advance. When asked about a general strategy that is used for the marketing, Carl replied, “[Chris] develops an editorial calendar for 52 weeks which would have all of the promotions on it on traditional media.” Speaking of this editorial and advertising calendar, Chris added:

[It has] got the number, date, the Monday through Sunday, how we would run our dates, and then at the top of all these we have what we want to promote and seminars. It's really kind of like our Bible. It's got what our spot radio's gonna run, if we're going to run a newspaper that week, if direct mail needs to go out.

Also alluding to long-term planning of traditional media marketing Carl mentioned, “we'll sit down and come up with topics for the entire quarter.” Brad also takes a long-term approach when scheduling traditional advertising content. He said, “[Marketing] has to be planned out ahead of time. He discussed an upcoming meeting where he will:

Plan out my marketing for next year. The majority of the marketing will get planned out for next year. [It will include] when I'm going to run ads, when we're going to do this, when we're going to do that. Some of the details may have to be worked out closer to that time that it's going to happen but I can do that ahead of time pretty effectively.

**Although stakeholders use social media and see some positives to implementing it, they are skeptical of its ability to positively impact sales.**

*Social media platforms used*

All participants had some form of presence on one or more social media platforms with the most popular being Facebook. Other networks that are being used, although to varying degree of activity, are Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, and Google Plus, and Houzz. Although Houzz does not have an “about” section to describe its purpose, one participant identified the website helps match customers looking for housing and landscape design work to industry professionals.

All garden centers had a Facebook page because the sampling procedures used in this study drew upon garden centers with an active Facebook page. However, participants varied in the degree to which they used Facebook. Chris described the decision to use Facebook for marketing and said:

It was seven or eight years ago that [we started using] Facebook. We played with it a little bit, and now it's integrated. It's so easy to tie everything together across the social medias. You post something on Twitter and it goes to Facebook and vice versa. Your Facebook posts get pushed to Twitter.

Brad and his garden center has had an account “for three or four years”, while Diana has used the platform for several years. Although a few garden centers have a Twitter account, the micro blogging site is not an area of focus and posting to the social media is usually automated by partnering the account with Facebook or Hootsuite (a social media management tool). Annie mentioned this automated process:

I started working with Hootsuite, doing our Twitter page that I don't keep up. I don't personally understand Twitter or have my own account. It's gibberish. On Hootsuite I can just click “post to Twitter” and it posts to Twitter for me and I don't have to deal with that.

Diana has an account on Twitter, but stated, “I don’t want to use Twitter yet. I just need to have a few more minutes to figure it out.” Even though Chris has a Twitter account linked to the garden center Facebook page, he is skeptical of the platform. He responded, “Twitter is just for magazines, universities, or others that are saying hey use this. It seems to be skewed heavy on that or even other garden owners.”

Even though Chris and Carl are skeptical of the ability for Twitter to be a relevant marketing platform for the garden center, they did mention recent success with Twitter when partnering with other outside businesses to market a single event. Regarding an event partnership with the garden center and local breweries, Andy recalled:

I was amazed at all the retweets the other local breweries were retweeting. It wasn’t banter back and forth, but there was a lot of tweeting going on about our chili fest... We gave away 1,000 sample glasses. We started with little shot glasses with our logo on it and those were gone in 15 minutes. We got little plastic drink cups. We gave away a little over 1,000 of those cups total in the short period of time. It was as busy at this store as I’ve ever seen it. I’m not saying it was the tweeting going on, but it was kind of the perfect storm with the weather, with the event, and with the chili. We didn’t really advertise it in any way outside of social media... We were amazed at how well it worked.

Outside of Facebook and Twitter, participation in other social media was identified as minimal.

Although Annie has created a Google Plus and Pinterest account she said, “I haven’t seen much interaction from [our] Google Plus page... we never got any likes or comments, so we never got any interaction from it.” Annie mentioned the minimal use of Pinterest in advertising and said, “we’ll occasionally do something on Pinterest.” Although Chris also has an active Pinterest page for the garden center, he says “we’ve used Pinterest, but that’s probably the least active...it’s



used so infrequently. I don't know if we have a lot of followers. We just don't do a good job on Pinterest." Chris also responded that they garden center will use Instagram "sometimes."

### *E-newsletters*

Participants at three of the four garden centers identified the preferred method for Web 2.0 marketing was through a weekly or bi-monthly e-newsletter. Annie mentioned, "we send out a newsletter every week to all of our local customers. I like to do the newsletter Friday evening so I can put the new blog on the newsletter." In terms of the process that is used for the newsletter, Andy stated [Annie] writes it up; she's always asking for ideas to write about and canvases everybody." Customers at Andy's garden center are asked for their email address at the point of sale station where he tells his customers:

If you give me your email address we will tell you when the blackberries are ripe, when the peaches are ready to pick, we will send you good plant information on how to be successful, and then we will tell you when you're ready to pull weeds. If you throw in a little humor, they know they are going to get a little advertising along with it. We're willing to accept that it just makes it more palatable.

Describing his newsletter, Brad mentioned, "the e-newsletter is something we've been doing for several years. That gets [the most] attention. We do that every two weeks year round." When asked to describe the process of creating an e-newsletter Brad continued, "I write a lot of it. My other managers occasionally write a piece...I'll write an opening piece that's just kind of, chit chat. Get people a feel for the business and for myself." Although Brad identifies the e-newsletter is essential for marketing, he is unsure if it helps bring in new customers and says, "I'm not sure if it helps the quantity [of customers] because the people that get the newsletter are already existing customers."

Chris talked about the weekly newsletter and said, “it goes out weekly and [Carl] writes those articles...He’s a good story teller. It’s not just a here-we-are company yelling buy our stuff. He’ll write a story that’s interesting and maybe try to tie a product in with it. It’s about a 350 word read.” In terms of who makes the decisions to write the content, Chris mentioned, “[Carl] has free reign over what he writes about. He tries to match his topic to our product focus for that week.” The newsletter has a subscription of approximately 15,000 people and is delivered through Constant Contact which is an e-newsletter program.

***Participants started Facebook because they did not want to be left out of a potential marketing channel***

Stakeholders at three of the four garden centers identified a fear of being left out of a potential marketing channel caused them sign-up for Facebook and begin using it to market their garden centers. Annie indicated a previous employee created the garden center Facebook page before she got there and could not identify a reason why it was being used. However, Brad mentioned, “I think we began [Facebook] just to make sure we were involved with what was happening and participating in what was current.” When asked about the overall reason for adopting Facebook, Brad further stated, “because people are using it.”

Meanwhile, Diana recalled feeling pressured into Facebook from her soil and potting mix dealer during a conference call, saying “he’d been after me. [He said] we need to do this. They set us up with somebody in New York that was managing their Facebook page. He told me all the time you need to do this.” Talking about the social pressure, Diana continued and said, “It is the wave I just can’t ignore. I have to participate. I can either be left totally behind or I can get in there and figure out what is working for us,”

Stakeholders at three of the four garden centers identified wanting to use social media as a way to increase profits at the garden center by directly communicating to potential customers.

Discussing how Facebook fits into the advertising strategy, Brad stated:

Twenty or thirty years ago, everybody ran a newspaper ad in their local newspaper. If you had a business and wanted to advertise, it was easy...In today's world, it doesn't work that way. People do this and some people do that. Some people read this and some people read that. It's just so fragmented. There's just a lot of different avenues you have to use. [Facebook] is just one of those avenues you've got to use. I think it's just one more way to reach people.

Echoing Brad's viewpoint, Chris explained his views on why the garden center adopted social media, saying, "I think [social media] is just a different way to communicate with customers."

Diana, who uses a mixture of traditional advertising and social media stated, "social media is no different than television or radio, magazines, or newspapers...You need the right person at the right time seeing the right product...social media is about direct advertising. It's about as direct as you can get." Carl mentioned social media, when used as a marketing channel, can increase "name recognition...Social media keeps us in the forefront."

### ***Facebook is WOM marketing***

Participants from three of the four garden centers identified Facebook can help the store with brand recognition by allowing consumers an additional opportunity to recommend products or services to their in-person or online friends. As such, stakeholders viewed Facebook as a digital extension of WOM marketing. Discussing why his garden center uses Facebook, Andy mentioned:

I think it's important that we are [on Facebook], but I think it's more important that other people talk about us on social media...I don't see [Facebook] as a place where we can get

out there and do what it can do. It can do a lot for us if a non customer [talks about] us...When I see Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest...they are social medias that are peers talking to peers. Those people are coming to us to ask what we want. They are getting their peer advice from a non-professional because that non-professional means it will work for me or it won't work for me. You have to take good enough care of customers here that when they go home they talk positively about you on Facebook. That influence is going to help your business for more than what we can help our business on Facebook.

When prompted to give a specific example of how social media helped facilitate WOM in relation to his garden center, Andy mentioned a job his store received in another state:

It was some friends we did a job about an hour away up towards Lincoln where the competition would have been stiff. We did a hard-scape landscape job. They took pictures of it and sent it out on Facebook and their friends further away...saw their place and looked at it and called us up. We went there and did a \$40,000 job for them.

Diana also spoke of the ability of Facebook to generate WOM marketing and offered the following unprompted response, "there's no difference between WOM, us talking, and social media...It's the same thing. You're just missing the verbal and non-verbal cues." When prompted, Chris also identified social media could be viewed through the lens of WOM marketing and said, "I think [social media] could be [WOM marketing]. We could do a better job of building that piece. I think if we were to do that, it would bring some value".

Andy believes non-metro areas could also benefit from WOM marketing facilitated by social media. He operates a garden center in a non-metro town that is more than an hour away from a metro city. Andy expanded on the need for non-metro garden centers to implement social media to take advantage of WOM:

We're too rural. We don't have enough people who could possibly drive two hours here... I think enough people will come here from enough distance. When they go home they're going to tell their friends about it on social media. They'll buy from you online because they won't drive that distance...It's extremely important to [rural garden centers]. I feel it should be more important to us than people in the middle of the city because we don't have enough demographics. The population isn't here to support how we want to live...To support that business we have to attract people from a greater distance. Social media is one way to attract people from the urban area.

### ***Financial impacts are lacking***

All participants identified skepticism in regards to the ability of social media to generate a positive financial impact for the garden center. While some participants acknowledged social media might have some intangible benefits, they could not identify how social media was actively increasing revenue at the store. When asked how her social media presence affects the profits of the garden center, Diana replied:

To be able to tell you it has made me one single dime, I can't. I don't have any way to track it...[Facebook] has just not been the big boom that I need for me to go spend money on it...Social media sometimes is not a help. It doesn't get me stuff sold because the customer is still outside my store...I'm spending a lot of time on [Facebook], and I cannot justify the amount of time being spent on it for the sales [that are being generated].

Further alluding to this uncertainty, Diana continued, "I've been doing Facebook for four years now, and I can count on both hands how many times people have come in and said I saw it on your Facebook page". Other participants had similar viewpoints. When asked how social media impacts the garden center, Annie replied, "there's not often direct sales from [social media]. If there are, they are really hard to track. But it's just generating awareness. [The financial impact] is not much and it is not direct."

Brad had similar viewpoints regarding the inability for social media to generate a return on investment or involvement. Regarding social media being profitable to his business, Brad mentioned if you post on "Facebook and you don't sell anymore this week than you did the week prior, then obviously it didn't strike a chord with anybody." When prompted to identify how social media has affected the garden center, Brad replied, "I don't think what we have done has impacted sales...Sometimes I post something on Facebook and you see some likes or whatever

which, is nice but it doesn't necessarily mean they're in here buying anything." Andy's skepticism also mirrored the doubt of Brad, saying, "I don't see [Facebook] to be near what it is cracked up to be."

Looking at more of a long-term approach to social media, Carl states, "it's not something you can put a pencil to and get a hard fast figure. I've spent this much time and effort on social media and here are my results." Chris mentioned, "we have a Facebook presence. I think we were probably more active a few years ago than we are now." When asked about the impact social media has on the garden center, Chris stated "we would be fine without it." When further prompted about how social media impacts sales, he added "very little...[Social media] is not hugely successful. I'm not cancelling my Facebook page, but it's not like we're banking our future on what's going on there."

## **RQ2: What barriers do participants encounter when using new media to market their business?**

In order to explore the barriers that hinder participants from successfully utilizing social media in their garden centers, participants were asked questions related to the challenges they face and what materials would help them improve the social media marketing of their business.

Participant responses yielded the following themes: 1) Stakeholders lack time and training; 2) Stakeholders desire high-touch channels of education from experienced professionals.

### ***Stakeholders lack time and training to effectively use social media.***

All participants identified the primary barrier to utilizing social media marketing was a lack of time. Specifically, stakeholders mentioned other job priorities related to the daily operations of the garden center and the large amount of time educating customers are the areas that consume

the most amount of time. In addition to the lack of time participants felt they have to effectively implement social media marketing, they also identified some knowledge barriers that hinder their use or enthusiasm for using social media marketing.

***Employees are too busy with other job responsibilities***

Stakeholders at three out of the four garden centers identified they were too busy to utilizing new-media marketing. The one garden center that did not identify as being too busy had three managers, one of which had a master's degree in business and another had a degree in communications who helps with the garden center while living in another state. Annie has a dual role in the garden center which encompasses working as the sole landscape designer as well as the marketing manager. However, this dual role often creates conflicting duties and priorities.

When asked about her role in the garden center, Annie stated:

I'm in charge of all the marketing and the advertisements. Other than that, my main role is a landscape designer, which works more with the landscape contractor side of the business. It's all under one head, but it's two very separate branches. We all have other jobs, so marketing just isn't...it's more my job than anybody else's, but it's not my only job nor is it my most important job.

Speaking of times where her duties overlapped, Annie said, "when you're two months behind on your design work, you just kind of do whatever you need to do...Sometimes I just type a post up in Facebook and send it out and call it good because I'm busy and have other things to do."

Annie's time conflict between marketing and the daily activities required in a garden center were shared by Brad, who said:

Marketing in general is challenging. As you know, none of us got into the business because of a marketing background...marketing is just something that comes with everything else that gets done. When you're busy, you're day-to-day. [Marketing] ends up not being a top priority...when you've got people in front of you that are needing help.

Even though Brad identified his role as general manager of the garden center is to oversee and supervise all advertising, he stated, “[my other responsibilities] are 110% everything [but marketing]. When asked to further elaborate on this time conflict, Brad added, “You have ten hours in the day, and you’re already booked for ten or twelve of them. What are you going to give up?” When asked how much time he believed social media marketing would take, he responded, “lots of time...and we just don’t have a lot of time with it.” When prompted to give a quantitative assessment on the time required to effectively market with social media, Brad identified “probably five to ten minutes every day.”

Also concerned about the time required to effectively manage a Facebook presence, Diana responded, “I need to know how long this is going to take. How much time does it really take? What kind of commitment does it truly take?” She began to compare social media management to her self-declared successful direct mail campaigns and stated:

You have to have two hours a week minimum to devote to direct mail to make it work, otherwise you’re just playing at it. Social media takes more time that I don’t have. I send a post card and the response is you have to come into the store. I don’t have to do anything else. I sent out 200 pieces of direct mail. It was just a little buy a gift and get a gift card for Christmas campaign...I had one company order ten \$75 gift cards. I didn’t have to do anything [except] write out the gift certificates and write out the order. Social media takes more time as a small business owner. The biggest problem is you have to be so many people as a small business owner; you have to know all of it. Social media is still new...If I can’t devote two hours a week I’m just wasting my time.

When asked what aspect of new-media marketing takes up the most time, she promptly responded, “responding to the customer.” She continued to describe a specific interaction with the customer prior to the interview involving a floral order for a wedding. She said, “I have 75 emails [from a customer]. I could have taken care of it in two phone calls. The 75 emails means



75 minutes to read the email and respond. It's eating time. That's the biggest problem." The lack of time was also a concern to Andy who said, "I don't think we're short on ideas, we're short on time. I think we're short on time carrying out our ideas. Time is a limiting factor. Devoting that time to come up with content."

***Considerable time is spent educating customers***

Participants at three out of the four garden centers felt they were hindered by the amount of time spent educating potential and existing customers. Brad mentioned helping customers with questions through the phone or via email "sometimes makes up 10% of the day, or 20% sometimes." Although he could not recall an exact number, when asked to elaborate he mentioned, "if I kept track it would probably scare me." Brad mentioned he is the primary employee answering questions via email and phone and such questions consist of items ranging from, "what the price is of something to if this item is in stock...I mean it's everything."

Diana identified there is a large knowledge gap in the consumer and said, "you have people coming who know nothing and then you have people coming in that can spout of Hemerocallis whatever...so you have this big information gap. It's real difficult trying to get everyone educated and on the same page." When asked about how much time educating the consumer takes she stated, "every other phone call I get is about water...You spend all this time, the education part of it. I spent half my day educating my customers...The education aspect of it is extremely difficult when it comes to garden centers."

When asked how that customer education occurs, she mentioned a combination of phone calls, emails, and even text messages to her phone. Diana continued, "people will send me pictures of

their tree because it's easy. I've got my cell phone. They'll send a picture of it to my flip phone. I mail it to myself because I can't look at it on my phone." She concluded, "[Customers] are taking my time and my resources." Andy offered a similar experience to those of Brad and Diana. "[Educating the consumer] is what I do all day long. It's my job, my biggest role. It's full time. I do more of that than anything else."

### ***Lacking information in an ever-changing medium***

All participants identified a feeling of being lost in an ever-changing world of social media and felt they did not have the necessary tools or training to keep up. Annie mentioned her confusion with Facebook advertising and posts not being seen by every follower:

They're pushing more and more in a direction where you're going to have to pay for people to see your post...It seemed like it costs a lot of money and we were confused and weren't understanding how it was being used or why we were getting charged...it didn't seem to correlate. It was confusing.

Diana also identified feeling confused when it comes to Facebook updates. She mentioned, "[Getting up to speed] is the biggest problem I have with social media. I still have a slide phone. When it comes to paid marketing, is that where I want to go?" Although she uses a consultant, Diana said, "I don't have anyone to explain." Andy also identified the need for constant help to navigate the moving target of social media marketing, saying "You will always need help."

While some participants identified needing help or clarification with advertising-related information, Chris mentioned a need for resources in regards to analytics and measuring campaigns, saying, "I don't understand how [analytics and Insights] work."

### ***Stakeholders desire high-touch channels of education from experienced professionals***

All stakeholders mentioned a desire for hands-on, high-touch channels of education. While Diana preferred a checklist of tasks to work on and complete, Brad identified he would be

willing to learn more about social media if he was convinced there would be a strong reward at the end of his efforts. However, all participants had some response to how they would want to learn about social media and new-media marketing.

### ***Consultants and educators***

When asked to describe her preferred method of learning about social media marketing, Annie stated she prefers learning “mostly from my own experience and from others.” When asked to elaborate she stated:

There’s all sorts of webinars that get sent to our email that once and a while I’ll look at. The garden center today publication doesn’t necessarily focus on social media, but marketing as a whole. That’s a really good site...[but] in a perfect world [I’d prefer to learn from] trial and error and with a coach.

Annie also identified feeling overwhelmed, intimidated, and confused by the vast majority of social media marketing information available on the Web. Although she wants to learn about social media marketing for her job she said, “the volume of conflicting ideas that are out there...sometimes is just overwhelming. I don’t even know where to start. I just feel information overload when I start thinking I’m going to make a strategy for Facebook.” Annie mentioned the desire to have some form of coach help her navigate the vast amount of information available on the web. Describing what the ideal coaching situation would look like, Annie added:

Maybe a weekly phone call...First [call] would probably be a long one to discuss the overall plan and then like the weekly communication on, what have you done this week, what are you working on, and should maybe try this or that. Just someone to kind of [give you] feedback and keep accountability with.

Diana also mentioned a preference for learning from a coach and said she will reach out to a social media coach. Speaking of her interaction with her social media consultant, Diana recalled, “I stepped out and took the opportunity to talk to [a consultant]. Someone said I needed to talk to her. So we spent a day having meetings and swapped contact information.”

Although Diana preferred a consultant, Andy is skeptical of the value consultants offer in regards to social media and marketing advice. He said he has, “used a lot of consultants... We’ve had different people come in. We’ve spent lots of money listening to these people. We haven’t learned enough that we felt it was worth while.” He mentions, “I learn better by listening to lectures.” When asked to elaborate on what type of lectures he would prefer, Andy mentioned a preference for extension-based workshops and land-grant institutions. He said, “I go to four land-grant institutions. I know everything they are doing.” He further offered an unprompted statement regarding his perceived value of Extension services:

If it wasn't for Extension services I don't know how we could do it. Honestly that's a very true and correct statement; I mean that in all sincerity. I'm not trying to flatter anybody; they are all our success. So when I go and I listen to what they are saying about trends and things that are happening I really pay attention to that and they are telling us.

Carl also preferred to learn from experts through hands-on workshops at local universities or expositions. When asked to describe his ideal workshop, Carl explained it would be a workshop where participants would:

Take your laptop to the class and sit down. Actually go through the steps and build a website or whatever you're doing. Being able to take your MacBook and sit down and develop that social medium would be beneficial. And hands on where they would answer

those questions... The [goal would be] a finished blog or website or website at the end of the course. Be able to respond to the people that commented and be able to manage that.

### ***Battle-tested veterans and trade show expositions***

One common characteristic participants desired in regards to learning about social media was to seek out advice from people who, as Chris mentioned, are “fighting the same fight” within the garden center industry. Participants desired to either learn online, through workshops, or garden center and nursery expositions provided the lecturer has a strong retail background.

Brad mentioned a desire to learn “from other garden centers. When I see stuff I like I try to emulate it.” Although unsure of where he would want to learn about new media techniques for his garden center, Brad identified he preferred to learn from events at trade shows or industry meetings, saying “I attend meetings and things like that, trade meetings, and hear what other garden centers do.” When prompted to identify what types of meetings, Brad responded:

There’s nursery meetings or garden center groups meetings we belong to. There could be some actual discussion or meetings or presentations that are being put together. It’s not like I’m seeking out meetings that are going to talk about Facebook, but if there’s a presentation on using social media, I might sit in on it. Or, if there’s a discussion using social media in your advertising, I might get involved in it.

However, Brad still identified that trusted friends or other industry professionals are his most desired reference for learning about new information and would be the most persuasive in terms of new-media marketing, saying:

I suppose if I heard something at a conference, colleagues that are doing something similar, you know in a situation similar to ours, I would probably connect with that more than anything. So if I know people that I’m familiar with and they’re telling me what is working well, then I’d be more inclined to look into and figure out what I needed to do to get similar results.

Andy also mentioned a desire to have colleagues or teachers within the garden center industry, saying: “I’d prefer them to bring in people that have been successful in the business. [People who] are willing to share with us how they were successful versus listening to someone who is trying to sell their services.” Chris echoed this sentiment, saying he preferred people “from the industry and people we know that also have garden centers in different markets than our current market.” When asked to clarify why he prefers people within the industry, Chris responded:

I guess there’s that sense of trust...it’s people that are fighting the same fight that we are. That we’re able to learn from what they’re doing... I don’t hold a whole lot of credence for those that call themselves a social media expert just because it’s...you can’t quantify it. I could go out and say that I’m a social media expert, read a couple books and probably sound like I know what I’m talking about. The people that have actually been there and done that I think to me have more credibility.

Chris was then asked to identify where he would seek out such experts, and he responded, “probably like a lot of things, I would start with Google and go from there.” Aside from Google, he also mentioned a private Facebook group that consists of other garden center owners and employees as a primary source of information. Speaking of the Facebook group, Chris mentioned:

It’s a Facebook group called IGC that’s mostly for owners and upper level employees; that’s kind of where some of [our] ideas will come from. I think there’s 500 or 600 members from across the country. I think three are from here. It’s not that many different stores... We get a lot of ideas from that because they’re things that are tried and true in many other markets. You can post your questions and it’s kind of an informal conversation on different topics.

Furthermore, Chris identified a preference for the IGC Facebook group due to the national-level representation and how suggestions wouldn’t be adopted by his competition. The possibility of a

general list of recommendations included in a for-pay service was not appealing to Chris because the “fear would be that if it’s too [common] that all the other garden centers are also doing it and how do we stand out at that point?”

### **RQ3: What new media strategies are being implemented in the marketing of metro and non-metro garden centers?**

To explore the social-media marketing strategies being implemented by stakeholders at metro and non-metro garden centers, participants were asked questions pertaining to the thought process, planning, and scheduling of their marketing content. Additionally, stakeholders were asked questions regarding the level of relationship the garden center maintains with customers and to what degree new-media marketing is responsible for that relationship. Participant responses yielded the following themes: 1) New-media marketing focuses on building relationships and providing educational content. 2) Strategic planning is limited to e-newsletter.

#### ***New-media marketing focuses on building relationships and providing educational content***

##### ***Stakeholders want to build relationships***

Participants from every garden center identified some desire to use new media to foster meaningful relationships with their customers that would translate into increased profit potential. Brad spoke of how he tries to leverage a personal tone through the e-newsletter that is sent out through the email account of the garden center. “I think it’s more effective when content is not just a bunch of bullet points or descriptions...When it’s kind of connected with somebody on a personal level...people connect more with [people] than they do a bunch of features.” Brad further added, “talk to me about what’s going on in my own garden and now I care.”

Carl also expressed a desire to step away from traditional advertising and tell human interest stories in an attempt to build a relationship. Carl explained how he approaches his e-newsletter by saying, “I’ll write the article and tie in some human interest story that has to do with gardening and try to tell a story. Hopefully people will find it interesting.” Further alluding to the need to focus on the customer in order to develop a relationship with them, Carl said:

[Telling personal stories] sets us apart from the competition or at least the big box stores...Personal stories tells the customer we are still involved in the day-to-day operations of the business and we’ve been around a long time. People like hearing those human interest stories.

### ***Relationships build loyalty and trust***

All participants offered some indication they believe relationships build loyal customers. In regards to how new media can help develop relationships with her customer base, Annie mentioned, “there’s loyalty that you can build.” Discussing what that loyalty looks like, Annie mentioned new media helps people stay customers with the garden center because it allows them to, “recognize us to be a full-service garden center...with the know how and degrees to answer their questions. They feel like we’re here and we’re available to help”.

Brad also had similar viewpoints of customer loyalty being developed through the e-newsletter. He hopes his attempt at relationship management through the e-newsletter produces customer loyalty and said:

Hopefully our e-newsletters [are] one more reason to keep [customers] coming back. Maybe a gentle reminder about something or reinforcing why they like working for us or why they chose to shop with us. That’s the direction we’re hoping to go with it.



Brad was asked an additional prompt regarding how the e-newsletter seeks to identify a relationship with his customers. He replied, “it’s through everything we do. [The relationship] is not just one thing, it’s everything.” Andy had similar sentiments to using new media for more than just advertising and instructed his manager to keep in mind that, “nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care. You’ve got to reach the person in a way that they know you truly care about their success.”

***Don’t sell. Build a relationship.***

All participants identified a strong emphasis in using new media not as a sales tool but as a relationship and community development platform. Most participants agreed trying to directly sell to the consumer through new media was not a beneficial practice and should, in most cases, be avoided. Speaking of trying to advertise on Facebook, Brad mentioned:

It seems like most of the Facebook stuff I see people doing is personal. A business trying to sell stuff in that venue is kind of in the way. That’s not what their Facebook account is for...I don’t know that I’m going to see it being used a lot more [for business].

Diana focuses her strategies on building a community relationship and said, “social media is about community. That’s my experience so far.” She was instructed by a consultant to step away from selling and said, “build the relationship...use Facebook as a community. It’s working for us.” Diana mentioned that personal posts “do better than when I try to sell something. That was the advice Fertiloam and our consultant gave me. Don’t try to sell something.” Diana recalled times where she did try to directly sell through Facebook and said, “every time I try to sell something I get slapped down. Stay away from direct selling...Encourage people to come in.”

Carl also views his marketing efforts as a relationship management tool and said, “it’s trying to build a connection and build a relationship... You can do that one-on-one with a person or through social media.” Chris also had similar viewpoints. He said, “I don’t like to use social media as a way to say here’s our sale. Come buy flats and plants for \$12.97 or whatever...if it’s something I would consider an advertisement, I wouldn’t expect much engagement with customers.” Chris continued to mention his desire to build a relationship using new media and said that a key change in his business strategy has been “going from just a listing of here’s a business trying to sell you stuff to having a more personal relationship.”

***E-newsletters are the medium for relationships***

Participants at three of the four garden centers preferred e-newsletters for building relationships with customers and not Facebook or other social media platforms. The one garden center employee that did not mention an e-newsletter did not have one. Although Brad uses both Facebook and an e-newsletter, he could not give a response when asked to compare the level of relationship between the two. He was offered a further prompt in regards to if he feels the same level of relationship with his customers as he does through Facebook, he replied, “No.” Just like Brad, Chris mentioned relationships are more effectively built through the e-newsletter than through social media platforms like Facebook. He mentioned, “I don’t know that we’ve got any sort of connection on Facebook. We’ve got a few likes or fans on Facebook that are really strong advocates...They like every post. We just don’t see that big of an audience.” Carl mentioned that if he were to recommend a platform to market to the consumer, that he would focus on e-newsletters that tell a story. He stated, “You need to be doing an e-news and just tell stories.”

### *Market to the consumer through educational and valuable content*

All stakeholders identified the value of content is the most important aspect of any post and all content should provide value to the customer. Andy mentioned the necessity of valuable content that resonates with the consumer and said, “content has to be above reproach... That’s just king. There’s no substitute for [good content].” When asked to elaborate, Andy stated, “It has to be about good, sound information on how to grow plants, how to take care of plants, how to prevent disease, and how to treat disease.” He continued by saying, “people won’t give you their email if they think you’re just going to send advertising to them. But if you’re going to send them information that will be helpful to be successful, they are willing to give it to you.” When asked how this philosophy guides his marketing strategy, Andy said “the content of everything we’re putting out there, it can’t have anything to do with selling. “Annie alluded to the concept that good content has the end result of educating the consumer. “Ultimate success,” she says, “would be for customers to be informed about what we have and what to do with their landscape. To be informed about any environmental conditions.” When asked about how this view of success influences her posting strategies, Annie replied “we post educational content.”

However, the attempt to educate the consumer is because participants hoped it will produce a profitable relationship. Speaking of the goal of educational content, Brad said:

We don’t [educate the consumer] for the sake of education. Educational content might drive sales. The only reason we’re doing [social media marketing] is to make money. Not trying to sound greedy, but we’re not Extension. We’re not here for the sake of educating the world. We’ve gotta make money or we go broke. It’s promotional.

When asked about how such educational content seeks to drive sales, Brad explained an educational article he included in a recent e-newsletter. He said, “in this last newsletter there’s a

comment about timing of fungicides or sprays for peach leaf growth control. So it's educational. The only thing we're putting it in there is because we sell peach leaf fungicide control."

Chris mentioned he uses a modified version of an e-newsletter called a "dirt alert" that is used to send out timely messages and emergencies that often involve the weather or some form of needed pest control measures. For example, he tries to, "provide information to customers. If we've got an unexpected frost coming...or bag worms are starting to hatch...trying to relay that information to people." While Diana does not use an e-newsletter at her garden center, she posts informational articles on the Facebook page for the garden center which include, "a few hints [on insect control] and other things you should be doing with gardening."

### ***Stakeholders use pictures to intrigue the customer***

All participants mentioned a preference for posting pictures rather than plain text. Specifically, they prefer to share photos of plant material that serves as an example of current inventory available to the consumer. Speaking of the types of content she posts on the Facebook page, Annie mentioned she posts pictures that, "are pretty, especially in the Spring when we have a lot of annuals...[We'll post] some pictures of annuals, label what it is, and call that good." She added:

As far as the landscaping side of the business, we put photos of jobs we've done...Another scenario is...I'll take the camera. Part of the social media marketing is taking a good picture and having a good library of pictures to use. So I'll take the camera into the greenhouse and into the gardens and take pictures, bring it in, and pick two of my favorites to post on social media.

When asked to describe the type of content that is usually posted on the Facebook page of the garden center, Chris mentioned:

Mostly flowers. People like to see pictures of flowers. [We'll post] mostly close ups of that kind of stuff. It may be busy and somebody may snap a picture of the parking lot full... We've taken pictures of people shopping at 10 o'clock at night [during a promotional event] and say, come on out, you've still got a couple hours left to join us.

Chris' garden center will post images of current events as well. Recalling a time when Carl was picking up Christmas trees for the garden center, Chris said, "[Carl] made a trip to New Mexico to pick up new Christmas trees. He was posting pictures of his trip, loading trees, the trailer loaded, and coming back." Carl mentioned he is the primary person in charge of posting pictures for the garden center and said, "I enjoy photography. I'm the one that posts more pictures and bring out a little creativity. As far as promoting our business on social media, I'd say [pictures] are a pretty big part of it." When prompted to give a few examples of images he would post to the Facebook page Carl replied, "when we get mother's day tropic plants in, hibiscus, those types of things. I take pictures and post those." He continued, "I'll try to get a full color picture of a full greenhouse with bright pansies to wow the customers... Most of what I post on Facebook will be a picture."

### ***Strategic planning limited to the e-newsletter***

#### ***E-newsletter strategic planning***

All participants who used an e-newsletter believed it was an integral part of their marketing strategy. When asked to describe the process of determining what is included in the e-newsletter, Brad stated:

We have a weekly staff meeting. [The newsletter] is one of the agenda items... We talk about it as a group and try to come up with an outline of a good newsletter for the time of the year that will come out and hit on things that are obviously timely that people are going to care about and will do something for business.

In terms of planning the publication of the e-newsletter, Brad mentioned he works with a consultant who helped him determine the best days of the week to publish the letter and evaluate relevant statistics. He replied, “Thursday open rates tend to be a successful... We do the bulk of our business on the weekends. So if it’s something that’s timely... or [we are] doing a promotion or sale, having it come right before the weekend is helpful.”

Chris and Carl also strategically plan the e-newsletter. Chris spoke of a consistent release strategy and stated, “E-news goes out on Wednesday. [We’re] trying to stay fresh in the customer’s mind about the upcoming weekend. I think if we go earlier than that, they get forgotten about by the weekend.” In determining how topics are selected for the publication Chris stated, “[Carl] tries to match his topic to our product focus for that week.”

Meanwhile, Annie mentioned she uses more strategy in regards to her e-newsletter than her Facebook posts, saying, “I do have a lot more strategy that goes into my newsletters than into my Facebook Posts.” Annie also mentioned the use of AB split testing to determine the effectiveness of different calls to action as well as publication dates for her e-newsletter. She described the process of determining the ideal time to publish her e-newsletters:

I’ve done AB splits with timing, which is why I email it out Friday evening instead of during the day. People tend to open it more and look at it more when they’re at home Saturday morning checking their email, that kind of thing. Whereas during the week they’re a little bit more busy... I’ve tried one where I actually had to physically split the list in half, and then one half got sent one newsletter template and one got sent a different one. It was all the same, the only difference was that I had little buttons that said, ‘order local gift certificate now’ and another was like, “click for more information, click to learn more.’ So one was like ‘I want to learn more, I’m not so sure,’ and another was like, ‘no, do it now.’ I was surprised, I thought I would get more clicks from the ‘learn more,’ but I actually got more clicks from the ‘sign up now’.

### ***Social media posting is reactionary and lacks strategic planning***

All stakeholders identified a lack of strategic planning and viewed social media as reactionary in nature with little-to-no strategic planning needed. Brad mentioned the amount of strategic planning placed on social media and said, “it would seem like it needs to be more spontaneous.” He added, “I don’t see making a schedule [for social media] and saying next year in May, the third week on Thursday, we’re going to post a picture of this. Maybe you could. But it seems like it needs to be spontaneous.” In regards to scheduling he mentioned, “it’s done on everyone’s discretion. Somebody sees something cool or we just get a cool photo opportunity, take a picture and post it.”

Although Annie identified she spent considerable time evaluating the analytics of her e-newsletter she mentioned, “having a [social media] plan would be an improvement...my ability to do something on a schedule isn’t very good.” When prompted to discuss the process she uses to determine social media posts, she said:

There isn’t a process. I’m checking up on Facebook to see if there’s any new comments, questions, messages, or anything like that. Then I...notice I haven’t posted anything in two or three days so I will then think really hard about something to post...Sometimes I just need content to post on there and call it good.

In regards to scheduling social media content, Annie added, “most of the [postings] are on the go, ever moving, not necessarily strategized.” Chris also identified the garden center social media presence lacked a specific strategy when compared to his 52 week editorial calendar for traditional media. He mentioned the desire for, “a more targeted focus or strategy on what we’re doing with Facebook and a more consistent budget for it.” Further reflecting on the garden centers posts, Chris said, “maybe...Evaluating posts instead of just putting something out here

and having one or two people like that and say it worked... We could do better... We really don't have a well-defined strategy." Andy also mentioned a lack of strategy in regards to scheduling social media posts and said, "there's no strategic planning meeting where we sit down and say you'll send out tweets on this."

When asked what her strategy was for determining what to post on Facebook Diana mentioned, "there is no strategy." When a follow-up question was asked if there was a decision-making process that goes into her posts she responded, "there isn't one." When asked about an editorial calendar she replied, "What's that?"

***Garden centers are not learning from their customers online***

All participants identified communication with customers and fostering a relationship through Facebook or the e-newsletter is vital to differentiating their business. However, participants could not identify specific examples regarding what they have learned about their customers. When asked what she has learned about her customers through social media, Annie replied, "I've never really sat down and thought about what I learn about my customers online."

Both Brad and Chris had similar responses. When asked what he has learned about his customers from Web 2.0, Brad replied "nothing". Chris also had difficulty in describing what he has learned about his customers through their attempts at marketing to the customer and said, "I don't have anything specific." Andy also responded, "I'm not sure how to answer that."

Participants at three of the four garden centers identified an attempt to learn about the customer online but such efforts were limited to demographic information offered by basic analytic



functions of Facebook. Discussing what she has learned about her customers online, Diana stated:

Eighty-five percent of them are [from Garden City]. The others are my family. The one in Australia is the one who used to be here. The one in Norway. I can tell where they come from. The age of people responding. They are 56 year old females.”

Chris also focused on the demographic data of Facebook users and said, “I was surprised at the age of the demographics. [It] was older than what I expected. I think that’s what happened with Facebook also, it’s not the 25-40 year old demographic.” Although Annie had originally mentioned she had learned very little from her customers online, when probed to offer more information her response also indicated her understanding of the customer stopped at demographic data. She said it, “seems like most of them are mid-40s, older, upper 30s, moms and grandmas.”

#### **RQ4: What are stakeholder perceptions regarding customer interaction with new-media content?**

In order to assess this research question, garden center employees and owners were asked about customer interaction via new media. Additionally, two garden center customers were asked about their experiences with the garden centers on new media. These responses were combined and the following themes emerged: 1) Customers interact with garden centers by sharing their experiences and engaging with content; 2) Customers desire meaningful, relevant, and educational content; 3) Customers gather information from a variety of sources and reward expertise with loyalty.

***Customers interact by sharing their experience and engaging with content***

All participants indicated the presence of customers sharing posts on the Facebook wall of the garden center or engage (like, comment, or share) the content that originated from the garden center.

***Customers share positive experiences with the garden center and friends.***

Both customers mentioned at least a marginal history of praising the garden center for great customer service by creating a post on the wall of the garden center. Donna, a twenty-something year-old wife, aspiring gardener, and customer at Diana's garden center mentioned sharing a post on the Facebook page of the garden center. She said, "I shared a post before when I first liked them... When we were in the middle of doing our lawn and they had been very helpful." Cassie, a retired woman who says she has an extensive marketing background, also alluded to feeling the desire to praise the garden center for great customer service. She recalled one particularly hot day visiting garden center C and said, "I got exceptional customer service one day. It was just freaking brutal hot picking out something. These kids were so patient with me. I wrote on [the Facebook page] an atta-boy."

Participants at half of the garden centers mentioned customers will often post on the Facebook page when they have experienced either a positive or a negative experience. Annie mentioned, "we'll get feedback from customers when we did a good job of answering questions... Sometimes they'll make a comment about their experience [with the garden center]." Additionally, Diana alluded to how customers will leave positive feedback when they are either happy with the quality of a purchased product or with the level of customer support they received. She said, "people will comment on the fact that they liked the tree they

planted...They'll comment about the great service. So, I'm getting feedback from the customer on what my level of service is." Annie also identified customers will post praise when products perform well, saying, "I remember one of our customers posted pictures of her limelight hydrangeas that were doing super amazing and looked awesome."

### ***Customers are selective in the posts they choose to engage with***

#### ***Sharing***

Both customers identified reasons for why some Facebook posts will generate more shares, likes, and comments when compared to others. They identified specific intentions regarding how they engage with posts. Speaking of her sharing tendencies, Donna stated

The only reason I shared [the post] to someone's page was they were doing what we were doing. [I said] Check this out, it may help you too. I want to say it was about the product we buy and they commented that it was on sale this week. I shared and said don't forget to buy it this week. I believe they bought it. We've recommended this product to three or four people and have liked it.

Cassie also discussed wanting to share a post that contained a discount or sale item. She mentioned she would share a post, "if it's something that is a pretty good deal I'll share that." However, she will also share additional information and said, "for example, if the page had something on there about drought resistant flowers, I'd share that with people because it's just good information to have."

#### ***Commenting and liking***

Both customers also identified several reasons for commenting on posts. Mentioning a contest with the garden center, Donna said, "my husband commented [on a post]. They were doing a give-away or something like that. He commented on it and said I should do it." Cassie mentions

commenting on Facebook posts helps her feel like she is part of the community and only does so “when I have something worthy to say.”

Employees and garden center owners identified specific content that customers usually engage with. In regards to specific posts, they mention pictures generate the most engagement. Annie mentioned, “a lot of times with the pictures, when they’re really pretty pictures or interesting, they’ll like it.” Brad echoed this statement and said, “if we post a picture, someone will post a comment like what is that, can it be grown here, or do we have it in stock?” Chris mentioned when he posts a picture of plant material or products on the Facebook page people will comment with statements like, “oh I need that. Or, they will tag their friends and say check this out.” In regards to the specific types of content that generates the most engagement, Chris mentioned, “if it’s unique or novel they’re more likely to comment.”

Annie identified patterns in how customers respond to Facebook posts. She described the interaction by saying, “if it’s educational type of thing I’ll get likes and no comments. If it’s an update a lot of times that just likes. If there’s photos of something really pretty then I’ll get more likes and more engagement with it.” She continued to mention her own personal experience as a Facebook user, and said:

I myself...I see a pretty picture and I’m like, Oh that’s cool or something like that. If it’s just [educational] text like bagworms are out and check your pine trees, my only response is that I’m going to go out and check my pine trees. I’m not going to like that post because it’s just information.

Diana identified she receives comments when she adds a picture of her employees. She observed followers will say, “what a great smile or what great people we are”. Although Carl earlier identified that he has a preference for posting pictures, he mentioned, “I get more comments on the social interest stories.”

***Customers desire meaningful, educational content and expect occasional advertisements.***

***Educational content***

Participants at all of the garden centers and both customers mentioned a desire for educational content. Andy mentioned a perceived strength of the new media of the garden center is that he “can help you be successful because we know this plant will work.” Annie also mentioned a positive viewpoint of the educational content posted on new media and mentioned, “I think people enjoy the educational part of it.” Additionally, Brad views new media, mainly the e-newsletter, as a way to disseminate educational content and views it as, “a great opportunity for us to educate people online. We can help them make a good decision and they can call us. [They’ll know] we are real people that can help them.”

The customers also identified a desire for meaningful content that is either educational or relational in nature. Speaking of the e-newsletter, Cassie stated, “[Carl] gives value and reason for things that he’s doing. Rather than just here’s the new plants...come in and buy them. He tells you where to grow them, how to grow them, and what they’re good for.” When asked what type of content she prefers to see on Facebook, Cassie mentioned an accountant page she follows. She added:

My accountant has done a tremendous job on social media putting out helpful hints. For example, he put out tax information and a post about social security. Today. He had a post about if you're going to do your taxes the things you need to look for.

Although Donna describes her use of Facebook as, "mostly like the Yellow Pages," she did mention she would value educational content and she would, "Spend more time looking at it. It would be a positive impact for sure." In regards to social media, Donna desired, "more information on the resources available" and identified a preference for videos. When prompted to give an example of how she would prefer to learn, Donna mentioned:

[I want] videos. Something simple like how to plant seeds. For people like us who have no clue it would be nice. Also to see what is available to purchase at your store that is available. I'd watch the videos, especially if they advertised on Facebook and sent me to YouTube.

Cassie also mentioned videos would be a desirable way to get educational content from the garden center. Speaking of how such videos would look, she described, "I could see them doing a topic-by-topic video. [It must be] straight forward, informational, and get to the point. My tolerance for video is about 90 seconds. It better tell me something valuable." However, Andy was the only garden center owner or employee that had tried to create educational content via YouTube. He describes creating an online garden-care store where intent on educating people about lawn care in order to sell lawn-care products through an online store and shipped to the customers home. He said, "we did YouTube and all types of videos. Showed them how to do it so they could plant themselves. I don't know what we did wrong but it didn't work."

Cassie continued to describe the type of information she would like and said, “more types of information on plants and flowers. You might have a flower of the week and information on Petunias. There are Double Wave Petunias and Wave Petunias...just that kind of stuff.” She continued to say she wanted more answers on cultural practices related to horticulture and that her “questions are based upon when to buy, when to plant, and what amount of sun and watering to give them.”

However, Cassie stated she doesn't “want to see a bunch of B.S. It's too much if it's not valuable information and just filling space.” Donna also mentioned the desire for content that has a purpose and isn't posted out of a reactionary nature with no strategy behind it. She mentioned:

I think posting a couple times a day would be great if it is relevant information. Don't post just to post. Make it relevant and don't overload us, especially if it's new information each time. If you don't have new information, don't post it. Just because you haven't posted for a few days, then [make a post]. That's annoying.

When asked how often a garden center should post, she stated, “I don't want to see a lot of posts a day.” Donna was then prompted to discuss how she perceives the posting intervals of the garden center she follows. She replied, “I see a post only once every couple of months, if that,” even though Diana mentions she posts every day. Donna continued to discuss the type of content she would appreciate:

Keep it relevant. Don't post your hours just because you need to post something. Let us know what is coming in a couple weeks. Even the information, hey, you have plant x,y, and z coming in soon...I think if they had [educational resources] that it would decrease the amount of time they spend answering questions to the customer. The real buyer, if you will, is going to be that informed person and want to know...[I want to see] more information on the resources available. We know they are a retail store. They sell grass

seeds and shrubs. We know they sell it. I think it would be nice if they would post just, tidbits, things they have learned. Even if it's not pertaining to me. I don't really feel like growing Kale, but if they've had luck growing Kale, stuff like that. Things they've learned that customers go through to find them.

### *Selling is acceptable*

As mentioned earlier, all of the employees and owners were hesitant to directly post advertisements or sale information on their Facebook page. Brad identified that, "[selling] is not what Facebook is for," and Diana stated, "don't say I've got roses. Stay away from that." In addition, Chris mentioned Facebook users "don't like being blatantly advertised to...make sure your postings don't seem like we're advertising." However, the two customers interviewed desired some level of advertising.

Cassie spoke of advertising on Facebook and said, "it's perfectly ok for [garden centers] to advertise the time is running out on our half price daisy sales and leave it at that. There's a difference between delivering information and having a 4x6 [mailer]." Recalling an advertisement that persuaded her to a purchase, Cassie explained the store posted "this week we are...introducing the Diamond Red Crape Myrtle in these colors and it's good for western exposure. He said the price and then this particular week introducing it at half price of something."

Donna also mentioned the desire to see some limited forms of advertising and said, "a little would be good. A lot of it I might skip over, but it would be nice to see it...just don't blow up my news feed." She discussed an experience that stands out in relation to the garden center, and said:



One of my department managers is big into growing things and he's found lots of stuff [at the garden center]. He's like, oh this is 50% off. I've never seen those ads like that. He just walks in and finds it. It would be nice to see stuff like that. More information about what's going on.

***Customers are actively searching for information and reward it with loyalty***

Customers mentioned they used a variety of sources to search out gardening information, including: Google, Pinterest, and contacting the individual garden center owners.

***Helpful sales staff produce customer loyalty***

All the employees or owners mentioned having pride in the quality of service given to the customer and the ability to answer their questions. They also identified helping answer questions takes up considerable amount of time and resources. However, the two customers interviewed identified that good customer service and the ability to answer their questions generated deep feelings of customer loyalty.

Speaking of her experience at the garden center, Cassie stated, "I haven't talked to one person who couldn't answer all of my questions. When you go to Wal-Mart, they can't even spell flower. That's just the way it is...Social media got me in the door, but the people [and their service] kept me there." Cassie also explained how the supportive and informed staff also influences her to pay slightly more for her plant material. She added, "if you're going to pay more to support a local merchant...Having that person explain how to care for it, what to look for, is huge."

Donna also identified that the knowledgeable staff were the reason she only visits Diana's garden center, saying:

[We visit] because of Diana. Every time we've gone in there she's been able to answer our questions or send us in the right direction. The most recent time we have an area of

our yard that won't even grow grass. It's just dead. She pulled up a satellite photo and pointed out we are right behind the mall and hotels. There's a hill. She pointed out where the drainage was down the hill through the hill into our yard. She said I'm sure somebody did a sterilization to build. Just stuff like that brings us in. If we have questions, we know she can answer them.

### ***Seeking and searching for information***

Although customers do want to visit the garden center for specific questions, the two customer participants indicated they will use online tools such as Pinterest, Google, and email. Describing how she would find information related to gardening, Cassie stated, "I'll email Carl." And even though Donna mentioned she believes she gets better help when she visits the garden center to ask questions, she prefers the Internet. She described how she is trying to find information about how to grow herbs for the spring:

[I use] the Internet. Who knows if it is right. Herbs have been my big obsession lately. I've been scouring the Internet finding everything I can. I found what I wanted to do and what would work. I found [a resource put out] by K-State Extension office on gardening. It's a manual they put out for Kansas with all the hardiness zones and what can grow where. That's become a Bible in my house. I read it all the time. I'll definitely use the Internet first and then we end up at Diana's.

She further added:

I start with Pinterest. It used to be Google, and now it's just Pinterest. Pinterest is organized in a way that makes sense in my head. It's obviously, not everything is true. It sends you to a lot of good blogs. It's easier to find blogs and stuff like that. I like that more than the official stuff. I like the official K-State gardening manual, but the rest of the website I wasn't impressed with.

## **Chapter summary**

The qualitative data obtained from eight in-depth interviews of metro and non-metro garden center stakeholders were analyzed via Glaser's (1965) constant comparative method to give insight to the four research questions that guided this study. The findings indicated garden center

employees and owners favor traditional media such as radio, television, and newspaper for the majority of their marketing needs and spend considerable time strategically planning content for these mass communication channels (RQ1).

Stakeholders are utilizing a variety of new-media marketing tools and adopted Facebook to add another marketing channel and increase the volume of customers being exposed to their marketing messages. However, employees and owners are skeptical of the ability of social media to generate a positive ROI. However, they do agree it can lead to WOM marketing. Participants at three of the four garden centers believe their e-newsletter is positively affecting the garden center.

Garden center employees and owners face multiple barriers to being effective at new-media marketing which includes a lack of training, time spent educating customers, and other responsibilities related to the garden center (RQ2). In regards to strategies (RQ3), garden center stakeholders identified the primary strategy used in new-media marketing was relationship marketing primarily through the e-newsletter. A second common method used in new-media marketing was creating meaningful or personalized content that educates, informs, or interests the consumer. The goal of customer education was to drive sales. In regards to social media strategic planning, garden center employees and owners identified they did not have a strategic plan in place and posts were more reactionary and unplanned. Garden center employees were also not actively measuring the engagement rates of their content nor were they learning from their customers.

Garden center customers praised the garden centers for providing great customer service by posting on the Facebook page of the store. In addition, customers are actively seeking out information online related to gardening and will share relevant and useful content within their social sphere of influence. Furthermore, customers expect to see some level of relevant advertisements from the garden center provided they are useful and do not occur frequently (RQ4).

## **Chapter 5 - Conclusions**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of stakeholders of Mid-Western metro and non-metro garden centers as stakeholders use new media to market their business. To assist the reader, the final chapter of this thesis will restate the problem and include an outline of the methodology used to conduct this study. This chapter will then summarize the findings from Chapter 4 and discuss the implications these findings have for theory and practitioners. Lastly, the chapter will conclude with recommendations for future research.

While there are volumes of literature published regarding social media use in organizations and businesses, currently no literature exists in regards to how garden centers, specifically employees or owners of non-metro or metro garden centers, are implementing social media in their marketing and relationship management efforts. Results from this study could give understanding into the struggles, experiences, and successes of non-metro garden centers trying to implement social media into garden center marketing strategies. Four research questions guided this study and included: 1) What are garden center stakeholders' perceptions and attitudes towards new-media marketing as it relates to the marketing of their business; 2) What barriers do stakeholders encounter when using new media to market their business; 3) What new media strategies are being implemented in the marketing of metro and non-metro garden centers; 4) What are stakeholder perceptions regarding customer interaction with new media content?

To explore these research questions, a qualitative approach was deemed necessary which used 60-90 minute, in-depth interviews with eight stakeholders of non-metro and metro garden centers. A list containing 23 garden centers, ten metro and 13 non-metro, was obtained from a

state Extension specialist. Garden centers on the list were selected because of their strong business practices, retail size, and the presence of a Facebook page. These garden centers also had a strong relationship with state Extension and were perceived to have a high possibility of being cooperative with the research team.

To be included in the study, garden centers needed to post once a month on Facebook over the past six months. Six garden centers were eliminated due to a lack of posting to Facebook. The previous sixty days worth of posts were then evaluated to determine engagement based upon the definition offered in Chapter three. Garden centers were then ranked by their level of engagement and one high engaging and one low engaging non-metro and metro garden center were selected.

Interviews were scheduled between November and January because these were times participants designated as the most convenient. Participants were debriefed immediately after the interview to check for validity. After the interview, the garden centers were asked to create a post on the Facebook page asking for customers who would be willing to participate in an interview in exchange for a \$25 gift certificate. The lead researcher contacted all participants who responded to the Facebook posts and scheduled interviews at local libraries. Interviews were transcribed by the lead researcher and a professor's assistant and analyzed via Glaser's (1965) constant comparative method with the aid of NVivo 10.

## Conclusions

### *Stakeholder perceptions towards new-media marketing.*

Participants used a variety of new-media marketing techniques including e-newsletters, Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, and Instagram. However, stakeholders had a greater trust in traditional methods of advertising like newspaper, print, television, and radio and focused the majority of their marketing budget towards these more traditional marketing avenues.

Some garden centers used television as a marketing channel, but the primary method of mass communication for both metro and non-metro garden centers was radio. Stakeholders focused predominantly on radio advertising in one of two ways, paid advertising or dedicated call-in shows. Garden centers that reported using paid radio spots mentioned the desire to create personalized commercials that stand out from other radio announcements. However, the most popular form of radio advertising was through participating in a weekly dedicated radio segment where community members called in to discuss their gardening concerns or ask questions.

Traditional media not only received the majority of marketing dollars, it also received a significant amount of strategic planning. Stakeholders believed traditional marketing must be planned, routine, and scheduled a quarter or year in advance. Participants also identified a belief that traditional media was more quantifiable in terms of calculating ROI.

Although stakeholders placed an emphasis on traditional marketing techniques, they identified positive experiences with some forms of new media and adopted social media platforms like Facebook because they viewed them as another marketing channel that could positively impact

sales. The preferred channel of new-media marketing was through a weekly or bi-monthly e-newsletter published by the garden center and distributed to an email list of current customers. In regards to social media marketing, participants described varying levels of satisfaction towards Facebook, but agreed the platform could be used to facilitate positive WOM marketing and generate additional sales. However, some stakeholders believed Facebook was a social media that is more important for allowing customers to talk to other customers about the garden center instead of the garden center posting content about itself.

Participants are skeptical of the ability for Facebook and other social media networks to generate a positive ROI. The owners and employees interviewed indicated a hesitancy to continue marketing on Facebook or investing further into the platform because they had difficulty quantifying their marketing activities to an increase in sales. Additionally, participants expressed concern the time and money spent on Facebook marketing, either through posts or paid advertisements do not bring clients into the store. Participants indicated a concern that potential customers are engaging with Facebook posts outside of the store and thus not generating sales. Despite stakeholders saying Facebook has not had a direct or measurable financial impact on the garden center, they were not planning on deactivating their pages.

### ***Barriers to new media***

The most common barrier hindering stakeholders from effectively participating in new-media marketing strategies was a lack of time. Employees or owners identified the daily duties and routines took up a considerable amount of time that cannibalized resources allocated for new-media marketing. Furthermore, educating customers was identified as the most time-consuming aspect of their jobs and often hindered advertising. This interaction occurs primarily through



email or phone calls, but the garden center stakeholders preferred the interaction to be in person because they perceived face-to-face communication was not only more efficient, but they would then have the customer in the store front with the potential to make a purchase and contribute to a positive return on involvement. Stakeholders believed social media marketing, despite not having the ROI desired, was more time consuming than other methods of mass communication.

Only one participant had a slight level of formal training in new-media marketing techniques. As such, participants identified a lack of information created uncertainty, confusion, or hesitancy towards fully investing in new-media marketing technologies beyond the e-newsletter.

Participants also felt social media moved forward at a pace they could not keep up with and they did not have sufficient tools to stay current.

In regards to how employees or garden centers desired to learn about new-media marketing techniques, they preferred a wide variety of information sources. However, stakeholders preferred material from experienced industry professionals delivered through high-touch communication channels. Possible educational channels included webinars, one-on-one consulting, university workshops, and at expositions or garden shows. Although stakeholders were not actively seeking help in regards to new-media marketing, they were not opposed to learning and would most likely attend workshops presented by professionals at expositions or garden center trade shows. Garden center employees or owners were skeptical of consultants because they either had previous negative experiences with consultants and did not see the value in them, or they were skeptical of the marketing advice of experts who were not proven professionals within the industry. The primary desire was for any educational opportunity to

achieve a specific goal or objective such as the creation of a website or marketing plan at the end of the event.

### ***New media strategies***

Stakeholders identified the common strategies they use in new-media marketing as: providing educational content, utilizing pictures, and relationship marketing. Relationship marketing was the preferred strategy for reaching the consumer because participants felt it produces a feeling of loyalty and trust. The employees and owners believed relationship marketing practices are a powerful revenue source for them and help the locally-owned garden centers to be differentiated from the large, impersonal box stores. E-newsletters were perceived to be superior tools to develop meaningful relationships with customers when compared to Facebook or other social media platforms.

Stakeholders emphasized creating valuable and educational content that will be of use to their target audience and not on creating overt advertisements. Content focused on information about flowers or gardening tips and was planned so it coincided with product and sales goals. New-media marketing for the garden center also focused on providing visual content that was perceived to be more valuable and interesting to the consumer. Specifically, photos are posted of plant material that is in bloom or current events happening at the garden center.

Stakeholders spent the majority of their strategic planning on the garden center e-newsletter compared to any other form of new media. Most employees or owners indicated an editorial calendar was used for the publication that included a strict publishing schedule and content identified by multiple members of the staff. Additionally, garden centers focused on

measurement and analytics which helped drive vital characteristics of the e-newsletter like publication dates or calls-to-action.

A marginal strategy was mentioned by stakeholders in regards to social-media advertising. As such, social media was seen more as reactionary in nature with postings being more spontaneous and was viewed as not possible to plan in advance. Garden centers also demonstrated minimal analytic efforts when compared to those of traditional media or the e-newsletter. When analytics were used, the data focused on customer demographics and were not used to learn about consumer traits, preferences, or target audiences.

### ***Perceptions regarding customer interaction with new media content***

Customers identified several tendencies regarding how they interact with the garden center Facebook pages including writing a post on the page, sharing content with friends, or liking or commenting on a post. Customers will write a post on the wall of the garden center Facebook page to share a positive experience with the store. Participating customers also identified they will share a post if they believe the information is useful to those within their social network and comment if they feel they can have something to contribute to the conversation.

Customers identified they are constantly seeking out information about gardening either online through Google or social-media platforms or will directly email the garden center employees. In terms of content customers desire to see from the garden centers on new media, customers identified they only want to see posts when they are relevant, meet a gardening need, and get to the point. The preferred method of receiving educational information was through a succinct video.

Employees and owners were hesitant to use social media as a platform for directly selling products. However, customers expressed a desire to see some advertising if there was a relevant special going on in the store. Although the customers expected to see some advertisements, they did not want to be inundated by a stream of ads on their social media feed.

## **Discussion**

### ***Stakeholder perceptions towards new-media marketing***

Participants identified a preference and confidence for traditional, mass communication marketing channels that included radio, newspaper, television, and print media. This proclivity towards older methods of advertising is in agreement with the previous findings of Behe et al. (2008), Hodges et al. (2010), and Stone (1997). Although stakeholders have adapted their newsletters to a more modern e-newsletter format, much of the marketing emphasis has not changed in twenty years. Garden center stakeholders have created a web-presence and social media presence, but it does not seem to be a focus or significant consideration of the advertising environment. Therefore, the preference toward older forms of mass communication could demonstrate garden-center stakeholders are not adapting to the digital world or planning for the demographic shift when the millennial generation becomes the primary target audience.

The most popular social media source used in new-media marketing was Facebook, which caters to an older demographic that is already involved in garden center purchases. Ignoring other social media platforms could further indicate garden centers are not adapting the marketing message or channels to meet the next generation of upcoming home buyers. This could potentially cause issues when competing for market share with online retailers and big-box stores

that also sell plant material. Additionally, the lack of social media presence and focusing on content that is easily accessible across all devices is in contrast to the recommendations of Behe et al. (2013) who concluded garden centers should focus on creating content that can be easily accessible and used across multiple devices including mobile phones and tablets and operate online sales. Garden-center stakeholders did not have a clear strategy towards integrating marketing efforts that considered smart phones or tablets.

Garden center employees and owners were also concerned about the lack of ROI in regards to the time spent marketing on social media. However, stakeholders were measuring the success of their social media campaigns by looking at the amount of direct and immediate increase in sales after content was posted online. Since they do not see immediate or direct financial impacts, stakeholders indicated they don't believe social media can impact sales. This contrasts the recommendations of Paine (2011) who states companies that are the most active on social media are more profitable than their contemporaries who are not utilizing new-media marketing strategies. Additionally, the focus on sales could be leading stakeholders to be evaluating the incorrect unit of analysis. Although social media can have a impact on sales, the greatest impact is in regards to relationships and brand awareness (Castronovo & Huang, 2012). Garden centers were not focusing, or measuring, the quality of relationships or the satisfaction of customers online which is contrary to the advice and findings of Ledingham (2003). Since the relationship and awareness benefits can lead to profits that are not directly measurable (Yu et al., 2011), garden centers most likely are measuring the wrong forms of profit or revenue streams and becoming frustrated with the marketing efforts via new media.

Given stakeholder statements indicating a lack of education regarding new media or strategic planning, it is reasonable to conclude garden center employees are not fully invested in social-media marketing. One indication of this lack of desire to fully invest in new-media methods is that garden centers did not have a full-time employee dedicated to marketing or social-media marketing. The employees who had responsibilities related to social media had, at best, a split role that involved other garden center duties that quickly overshadowed the marketing responsibilities of the employee. Since “success on social media is contingent on considerable resources being allocated to the proper use and evaluation” (Millers & Llamas, 2010, p. 4), it is possible to conclude stakeholders are seeing little ROI on new media because they have not fully committed the resources that are vital to success. The lack of insight into the social media campaign contrasts that of Constantinides et al. (2008) who stated that prior to a firm utilizing social media, they must identify if they have the desire, finances, and resources to adequately use new media.

Garden centers also seem to be approaching new-media marketing from the same lens as mass communications and advertising. Stakeholders identified they were taking a “broad net” approach to new-media marketing where they send a message out to potential receivers and hope that results in a purchase at the store front. However, this approach to treating new media like mass communications is in violation of Warshauer and Grimes’ (2007) findings which state social media should be used for fostering individualized communication and interaction. By viewing new-media marketing as a platform to reach more people, participants could be approaching social media from an inaccurate perspective and thereby using the wrong tool for the job. By treating social media as just another marketing channel, they are acting in violation

of Paine's (2011) recommendations and research that recommends communicating to a smaller, more interested, and highly engaged audience is far more important than the number of eyes that see a message. As such, participants are expecting results from a medium that does not excel in how they are looking to use it.

Employees and owners indicated they are utilizing social media to talk to their customers, not empower them. This social media paradigm counters the viewpoints of Mangold and Faulds (2009) who state Facebook excels at empowering customers which can lead to positive online WOM marketing (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Employees and owners identified customers rarely mention they saw a post on Facebook. However, customers mentioned they shared the garden center posts on their friends' and contacts' pages. It could be logical to consider customers view shared posts as a recommendation from a trusted friend and not a post from the garden center. Garden centers stakeholders were not actively measuring any aspect of WOM marketing, and they were not tracking where customers heard about the store, sales, or promotional activities. Therefore, employees and owners may be inaccurately measuring the effectiveness of their Facebook advertising by only measuring the customers' voluntary statements mentioning they heard about a promotion through the Facebook page.

In terms of a new-media marketing channel, participants of metro and non-metro garden centers heavily favored an e-newsletter because they believed they could guarantee customers were seeing the message since it could be delivered directly to their email inbox. However, participants identified they were not routinely measuring click through rates or open rates. When open rates were measured, they were rarely used to identify patterns or trends. The proclivity

towards email newsletters could indicate stakeholders maintain a mentality of approaching marketing through the digital sphere just like they approach mass communication marketing which would align with the findings of Behe et al. (2008). Employees and owners could be more comfortable with e-newsletters because, in the digital sphere, they are the closest channel possible to traditional media and paper mailing newsletters that were practiced by many of the garden centers before adopting an e-newsletter.

However, participants of both metro and non-metro garden centers expressed they felt their newsletter created a relationship and sense of loyalty among their customer base. Mainly, they stated the publication builds a relationship and loyalty because they share personal stories with their audience which helps the audience feel connected and aligns with the work of Castronovo and Huang (2012) and Yu et al (2011) which concluded e-newsletters have a relational component by increasing customer loyalty. Neither metro nor non-metro garden centers are utilizing any concrete way to measure loyalty. Stakeholders also mentioned some form of strategy in regards to how they ask for customer email addresses. The exchange of email address for information could, in and of itself, produce loyalty (Baggot, 2011). However, such loyalty would be produced by in-person relationships and may not contribute to successful online relationship-management marketing.

### ***Barriers to marketing***

Employees or owners of both metro and non-metro garden centers identified they were too busy for new-media marketing and their primary areas of concern were the day-to-day responsibilities of the garden center and customer interaction. All stakeholders indicated the garden center responsibilities and chores cannibalized the time allocated for social-media marketing. However,



participants were able to spend considerable time working on other advertising campaigns like radio, television, e-newsletter, or print campaigns. The lack of time spent on developing a social media presence stands in opposition to the recommendations of Constantinides et al. (2008) who stated social media requires time and dedication to be successful and strategic planning cannot be an afterthought. The absence of time seems to be more of an indication of the low emphasis or belief in new-media marketing because stakeholders are spending time on activities or efforts they believe to be important.

Non-metro and metro garden center employees or owners also stated the majority of their time is spent educating customers through email, phone calls, or in person. Customer service is the focus of garden centers and is a key part of their marketing strategy. Customers interviewed also affirmed the level of service they received and the business' ability to answer their questions was a paramount reason for purchasing from the store on a persistent basis. The positive effect customer service has on the customers aligns with the work of Behe and Barton (2000) and Hudson et al. (1997) which concluded consumers prefer small-scale garden centers because of the level of service provided. However, employees indicated the high level of service is also preventing them from effectively marketing the store and takes a considerable portion of their time. Although they believe it is paramount to their business, they are also overrun with customer requests that come in through the internet or telephone. Customer service is closely tied to customer delight, and delighted customers show an increased proclivity to make repeat purchases (Mason et al., 2008). Although providing customer service is a strong point of the garden centers, they are not encouraging customers to post their experiences nor are they interacting with the customers that do.

Garden centers identified a lack of training in regards to marketing in general, especially new-media marketing. Additionally, they identified funds were not available to hire a full-time marketer or even an employee with a 50/50 role split between garden center responsibilities and marketing. This finding aligns with Brumfield (2003) in that garden centers lack primary capital resources, of which could be used to hire additional staff or increase marketing reach. The lack of resources to hire skilled marketers leads to garden centers hiring experts in the plant field who are not equipped to effectively market the skills and inventory that makes the garden center unique. Since employees don't have the training for new-media marketing and owners lack the resources to hire someone who does, their social-media marketing lacks a strategy. Therefore, employees at both metro and non-metro garden centers not only lack the tools to develop an effective and profitable marketing strategy on new media, but they also lack the ability to accurately measure their current strategy.

Both metro and non-metro garden centers are skeptical of new-media marketing. Although they are not actively seeking new information, they are not opposed to learning about new-media marketing. If they are going to learn about social media, they expressed a desire for high-touch channels of education to help bridge the information gap on new-media marketing. In regards to the high-touch channel or educator, participants were skeptical of any outside help and only wanted someone who had experience within the same industry. They also identified they were skeptical of social-media marketing consultants or experts. This could also be a result of their skepticism of social-media marketing in general.

Although some participants have experience hiring consultants, they admitted they either did not receive an adequate ROI or they admitted to not fully using them. Consultants hired by the garden center were either graphic designers, marketing consultants, or individuals who offered basic analytical support and not long-term strategic planning for campaigns or in-depth knowledge management. The participants indicated that none of the consultants mentioned were actually new-media marketing experts who specialized in e-newsletters or other new media. Instead, consultants were often graphic designers or individuals who ran small, traditionally-focused advertising companies. The lack of a true social-media marketing expert being used for consulting could be one reason why garden centers lacked trust in social media marketers and felt they did not receive an adequate ROI on their investment.

### ***New-media marketing strategies***

#### ***Present strategies***

In regards to participants' use of social media to market the garden center, Facebook was the primary social media channel regardless of the business residing in metro or non-metro populations. Facebook was the primary social media platform used by the garden centers which also correlates with the preferred social media platforms of adults as identified by Mislove et al. (2011). Though some garden centers used other platforms, they were not actively using them at the time of the interview.

Stakeholders, especially those in non-metro areas, believed Twitter was not relevant or useful. This belief could exist because Twitter is underrepresented in the non-metro audience (Mislove et al., 2011). Only one garden center was on Instagram and they were located in a metropolitan

area. None of the non-metro garden centers were using Instagram, which is also underrepresented in non-metro audiences (Mislove, et al., 2011).

Only one participant, an employee at a non-metro garden center, identified having an active blog. All garden centers were focused on trying to build relationships with their customers but most thought the only way to do this was through an e-newsletter. However, blogs are valuable relationship management tools and can be used for educating people about products (Rigby, 2008). Having a platform that helps educate customers about their products could not only increase relationship and loyalty, but it could also create an educational resource that decreases the amount of time spent educating customers.

The primary strategy both metro and non-metro garden centers used in new-media marketing was relationship marketing. Stakeholders believed they were involved in relationship marketing and stated the primary focus of their marketing efforts was to build relationships. They also believed relationship marketing helps produce loyalty and separate the family-owned businesses from big-box stores that are coming into their town and threatening the store. This belief that relationship marketing could differentiate the garden center from massive businesses aligns with the work of Stone (1997) who stated businesses can adapt and implement strategies to compete such as increasing customer relationships.

The principal method for delivering relationship-marketing information was through an e-newsletter. Participants believed e-newsletters created meaningful customer relationships and loyalty which aligns with the work of Young (2014) which states, “customer relationship

management marketing programs that incorporate email marketing or other media partners have been known to reinforce the relationship with a brand” (p. 55). Loyalty is one byproduct of effective relationship marketing, and these efforts align with the findings of Ledingham and Bruning (2000). Yet garden centers in this study are not tracking this perceived loyalty and therefore cannot measure it. Employees mentioned customers talk about their newsletter in person, but they are not tracking those in-person mentions either. As such, they are not allowing the customer to give vital feedback or stay involved. Keeping customers involved and motivated is pivotal to garden centers (Hodges et al., 2010) and is key to relationship marketing.

Another strategy implemented by both metro and non-metro garden centers in new-media marketing efforts was to disseminate educational content for the customer to use. Garden center owners and employees mentioned providing educational content to consumers through the e-newsletter or through the social media. Customers desired educational or relevant content, and creating such content could increase engagement or interest in the posts. This aligns with Paine (2011) who said customers have many marketing channels to choose from and they will reject messages depending on if they find it useful, interesting, or relevant.

Negative gardening experiences make people wary to purchase new products and lack of knowledge can hinder future purchasing potential (Niemiera et al., 1993), Therefore, providing educational content to help new gardeners avoid these negative experiences could possibly have more of a long-term impact on sales and increase repeat customers. Also, since customers identified they shared information with their social circle they thought may be beneficial to them, this could further be a benefit to stakeholders at garden centers.

Most educational content stakeholders are producing is aimed at driving sales. Stakeholders identified content is usually written with the specific intent to sell a product in the store instead of being created to fill the needs of the consumer. Although nothing is inherently wrong with this approach, this could be why participants aren't seeing a developed relationship online and customers are remaining in the casual relationship engagement stage. Also, the content the garden centers are producing could be seen as self-seeking. Stakeholders are not identifying and delivering the educational content consumers want to see which could also be the reason for a low engagement level on Facebook. This could be further evidence that the garden centers are actually participating in a one-way communication style and not a two-way symmetrical communication style that is used when seeking to develop a relationship.

Stakeholders at metro and non-metro garden centers are providing pictures and believe they are generating more interaction which aligns with Safley and Wholgenant (1995) and Yue et al. (2011). They will also share specific types of plants which can be purchased at the garden store. This could prove to be an effective marketing strategy because the type of plant is the most important attribute for wanting to purchase locally-grown plants (Behe et al., 2013).

### *Absent strategies*

Blanchard (2011) stated tying social-media programs to measurable business objectives is crucial. However, metro and non-metro garden centers are not utilizing business objectives to guide the implementation of new-media marketing techniques. The only goal-oriented statement offered by garden centers in regards to social media use was to make more money. Paine (2011) stated business or communication goals related to new-media marketing should focus on

increasing sales, increasing engagement, and/or improving the relationship of stakeholders. Garden center employees seemed to only focus on one aspect of this, which was increasing sales. However, the sales which Paine mention are long-term and result from increased WOM marketing and increased brand loyalty from meaningful relationships. Therefore, even though garden centers had one key aspect of the business objectives, stakeholders were wrongly focusing on immediate and direct sales even though they had no way to track this at the point of sale station.

Owners and employees also identified they are not strategically utilizing a measurement program based around analytics to determine if their efforts are being effective. Instead, stakeholders are casually looking at the comments, likes and shares on a post. However, participants did not indicate looking at characteristics of high-achieving or low-performing posts. This could be problematic, because without an adequate measurement or analytic strategy in place, success, progress, and failure on new media cannot be measured (Blanchard, 2011). Without measurement and analytics, marketers do not have the means to identify if resources, budget, and time are being allocated wisely (Paine, 2011). Furthermore, the lack of in-depth analytics could be preventing stakeholders from adjusting the content of their messages to adapt to customer needs and create meaningful content that resonates with consumers.

Additionally, in order to understand success in new-media marketing, the revenue and the relationship with consumers must be continuously measured (Paine, 2011). However, employees lacked the ability to perform in-depth analytics in regards to Facebook or other new media. This is evident because participants did not measure engagement rates beyond just number of

comments or likes nor did they identify what types of posts work best or days or times to post. Although they understood pictures received the most engagement, they weren't actively measuring the trends of photos. This lack of analytics could be hindering the potential for successful new-media marketing campaigns because engagement is a key indicator of interest in brand and online activities (Paine, 2011). In social-media, measurement isn't a measure of impressions or how many people have been exposed to a message like in Mass Media. Volume is not part of the equation. The focus of measurement is on building relationships, which is the key to success and the most difficult item to measure (Paine, 2011).

Metro and non-metro garden center employees indicated they are not creating measurement programs or methods to learn about the needs, desires, and interests of their customers. This lack of customer research goes against the recommendations of Boone and Kurtz (2013) that state businesses should view Facebook as a data collection instrument that gives them valuable tools for target marketing. Additionally, stakeholders that are not learning about customers will never know what they find to be relevant (Paine, 2011). Since a key aspect of new media is learning about customers in order to further differentiate products and services and develop deeper relationships (Bolataeva & Cata, 2011), garden centers are missing a key opportunity to engage. Instead of a data collection device, stakeholders viewed social media as a modern printing press. The lack of engagement measurement and data mining is possibly hurting garden center sales (Castronovo & Huang, 2012) and loyalty.

Metro and non-metro garden center stakeholders identified a key reason they try to develop relationships with consumers via new-media channels is to compete against the big-box stores



and drive loyalty. However, without learning about customer desires through effective measurement strategies, employees and owners could be putting themselves at risk by spending time creating ineffective relationship-marketing techniques that may not truly guard them against the competition of massive retailers or the new generations of online stores. Stakeholders indicated missing an opportunity to measure the level of service they are receiving. Although some Facebook fans shared their positive experiences on Facebook, garden center employees and owners are missing the mark on what Behe and Barton (2000) suggest in regards to learning about the level of customer service given.

Employees and owners of metro and non-metro garden centers were aware they lacked a strategy in regards to social-media marketing, and their posts were reactionary and included pictures of plants in bloom as they saw them. As such, participants indicated there was no long-term vision or effort to link social media to existing marketing campaigns on traditional media. This inability to draft a social media strategy contrasts the work and recommendations of Hanna et al. (2011), Paine (2011), and Young (2014) which recommends a company must clearly identify a strategy regarding what it desires to share and contribute to the customer before it can be profitable.

Stakeholders identified they did not see social media to be profitable. However, they should not expect results from their efforts until they develop a clear strategy for making it profitable.

Stakeholders stated they started Facebook because they felt they needed to be on it. They did not do a formal or informal market analysis to determine where their customers were and if the social media would reach their target market. This contrasts Thackeray et al. (2008) who

concluded before a launching campaign stakeholders should always ask which channel will serve the needs of the target population.

Employees and owners believed social media should be spontaneous and not driven by a specific, planned strategy. One possible explanation for this viewpoint is that social media is not tangible like other forms being used by the garden center. In traditional advertising, advertisements are planned because everyone is competing for a small time slot that is organized by the radio station, newspaper team, or television station. Unlike traditional media, social media can be posted at any time with minimal financial cost or resources. Since the resources required to post to new media is minimal and no direct competition exists, it could be possible that participants do not feel a need to strategically plan something that is so readily available to them and free. However, garden center employees or owners may not be realizing that, although they are not competing for an advanced time slot for a radio or back page advertisement through the newspaper, they are competing with a highly-selective audience that can tune out social media messages because, as Paine (2011) states, there are many channels available to them.

Although stakeholders are metro and non-metro garden centers stated they are utilizing relationship marketing principles, they are not dedicated to learning about the customer and are stagnating the development of more profitable relationships. Since relationship management needs to have an active consideration for the customer, garden center efforts contrast the work of Blanchard (2011) which stated in order to develop close customer ties and understand how to build a relationship, marketers must understand the preferences and behaviors of consumers.

The practice of relationship marketing identified by the employees of the garden centers focused on telling personal stories from the garden center's point of view and hoping they resonate. Garden centers did not mention actively listening to target markets at any stage of the process. However, listening to the customer through social media can help improve product offerings and customer experience (Paine, 2011). This provides further support for the idea that employees are lacking the strategy required to move the customer along the engagement continuum. As such, it appears garden centers, through online marketing, are stuck on the casual intensity of engagement which is where most relationships end (Paine, 2011).

Although customers signing up for e-newsletters would indicate they are in the committed phase of relationship engagement, those email signups are predominantly happening in Face-to-Face (F2F) contact in the store which also could identify relationship management is occurring in the store but not online. F2F relationship is also easier to develop and happens more quickly when compared to online relationships. There wasn't a strategy for funneling online customers to an email sign up. There were links to a newsletter, but those metrics were not tracked or evaluated with the exception of one garden center. This could indicate that, although garden center stakeholders value relationship management marketing, they are focusing primarily on in-person methods of doing so while neglecting Web 2.0 which is often seen as a digital extension of the physical storefront.

The responses by stakeholders in this study pointed toward a business-customer relationship that is stuck in the casual level of engagement relationship. In this stage, customers remain in the "observe and lurk" state of decision making (Paine, 2011) which could give some explanation to

why garden centers are not seeing the engagement they desire. However, most garden center employees and owners believed social media could function at the active level of engagement where Facebook can become WOM marketing. The lack of symbiotic relationships perceived on new media could act as a hindrance to the garden centers and be one possible explanation for why stakeholders do not believe they are seeing a ROI for their social-media marketing.

Although stakeholders are trying, they are not fully implementing relationship marketing programs. Furthermore, employees and owners perceived their marketing efforts to be effective relationship-marketing programs and the relationship was a key area of emphasis for everything they did. However, garden centers indicated they were focusing only on communicating with customers via e-newsletter to build loyalty. However, their online presence was not centered around building relationships.

Metro and non-metro garden center employees indicated they desired a loyal relationship that is only possible with two-way symmetrical communication. However, garden center employees and owners identified the conversation with customers on new media is more one-dimensional in nature. Stakeholders adopted a top-down marketing strategy where all communication came from the organization and neither allowed the customer to speak or did not fully listen when they did. The two-way symmetrical model could be used to deepen these relationships and to understand the needs and wants of stakeholders to improve understanding and build relationships with public (Grunig, 1992).

Stakeholders focused on story telling and push marketing instead of utilizing their marketing efforts to dive deeper into a symbiotic relationship and gather key information regarding purchasing habits and characteristics of customers that are vital for businesses which aligns with Boone and Kurtz (2013). The garden center employees offered no indication of utilizing social media to become a benefit to the customer, yet their aim was to develop a loyal customer base. In doing so, the relationships were not built on a foundation of exchange. This contrasts the recommendations of Boone & Kurtz (2013) which states:

the development, growth, and maintenance of long-term, cost-effective exchange relationships with individual customers, suppliers, employees, and other partners for mutual benefit. It broadens the scope of external marketing relationships to include...customers and referral sources. The term customer takes on new meaning (p. 18).

Additionally this lack of exchange relationship focused on one-way communication with customers. Therefore, employees and owners of metro and non-metro garden centers may not be constantly listening to the customer in order to constantly build a relationship which violates the recommendations of Ledingham and Bruning (2000). And since there was no mutual engagement or collaboration driving the relationship process or communication efforts, they were going against the recommendations of Thackeray et al. (2008). Participant responses indicated no clear differences between the strategies of metro and non-metro garden centers in regards to new-media marketing.

### ***Perceptions regarding customer interaction with new media content***

Garden center employees and customers of both non-metro and metro areas both stated Facebook fans interact with garden centers on Facebook. Specifically, this is accomplished by sharing positive experiences on the page when they are either delighted with the level of

customer service they receive or with the performance of the products they purchase. Customers sharing positive experiences online could further validate the opinions of the employees in this study regarding the belief that social media is not necessarily a medium for the garden center to talk about themselves but to allow other customers to talk about the garden center to their social sphere of influence.

Customers also share posts when content is relevant to others in their social network. This desire to share relevant content adds to the findings of Kietzmann et al. (2012) who stated users interact with one another by sharing content. However, garden centers are not strategically planning content nor are employees and owners actively seeking out consumer preferences. Therefore, despite Facebook users' desires to share content with other users, the lack of relevant content that is meeting consumers' needs could be why garden centers are not seeing the engagement they originally anticipated. In regards to the type of educational content consumers are looking for from garden centers, they preferred relevant and brief videos. This aligns with the findings of Yu et al. (2011) which stated video is more enticing for new media users.

Furthermore, not only did garden center employees and owners indicate they were not strategically planning content, they also lacked any form of strategy for how to interact with customers online. This lack of knowledge or desire regarding how to engage with customers online could stagnate customer relationships. Additionally garden center employees and owners could be missing a vital opportunity to understand their customer because they lack a pre-defined strategy to engage with the customer online. By developing a platform to engage and understand

the consumer, garden center employees and owners could learn from their customers and begin to develop meaningful content that will resonate with the customer.

Customers desire meaningful and relevant content and are actively searching for more information. If consumers find information through personalized contacts at the garden center, they will reward that source with long-term customer loyalty. Customers identified the first place they search for educational content on gardening is the internet, specifically Google and Pinterest. While previous generations turned to the YellowBooks to look for stores, modern-day consumers are searching for information online through various search engines and social media like Pinterest (Constantinides et al., 2008). This online tendency could be problematic for garden centers who are late adopters or laggards in regards to social media marketing. This aligns with the findings of Behe et al. (2013) which indicates consumers are starting to make purchasing decisions online, and that non-metro customers are more likely to search for information online. Even though more and more garden center consumers are going online to find information, garden centers did not mention advertising on Google, using ad words, or adapting the social media pages to increase searchability. This could be a potential issue for the garden centers in the future as larger commercial operations begin to implement strategies for online sales and shipping and increasing searchability through SEO practices.

Although Facebook users approach Facebook from a relational standpoint (Boone & Kurtz, 2013), customers identified they wanted to see some relevant advertisements in limited quantity. However, garden centers believed customers did not want to see any form of advertisement and identified a decreased engagement when they did try to sell. This could be because they are not

actively listening to what consumers are wanting or identifying the online times they are using.

In terms of creating advertisements, garden center employees and owners were not using the paid advertising features or promoted posts on Facebook which can be directly targeted to users within the garden center target market. Stakeholders will spend money on radio advertising and newspaper advertising where engagement is difficult to measure and traditionally more expensive. This indicates garden center stakeholders have a lack of involvement, desire, or trust in the ability of social media to impact the sales of the garden center and again speaks to the lack of strategic planning.

Stakeholders at metro and non-metro garden centers seem to be spending time and resources on new media because they identified it fills a need based upon a false perception of what the media can do. They indicated a lack of trust in social media which could hinder their desire to invest in it to the point where it can actually be profitable in the long term. Since new media requires considerable time investments and some allocated resources, it is no surprise that garden centers believe social media is unfruitful. However, continuing to use a marketing channel in a matter, and an objective, that it is not designed for will only further frustrate stakeholders, use more time, and hinder them from allocating those resources in other areas like customer service or other forms of marketing. Lastly, there seemed to be no clear differences between the perceptions of metro and non-metro garden center employees or owners in regards to how they perceive customer interaction via new-media channels.



## **Recommendations**

This research provides multiple recommendations for the practice and theory of new-media marketing, especially in regards to the strategy, measurement, and relationship management involved in utilizing new-media marketing strategies for garden centers.

### ***Theoretical implications***

Excellence in public communications and relationship management theory guided this qualitative, exploratory study. Grunig (1992), through his excellence in communication theory, identified a two-way symmetrical model of communication as the most effective means of communication between stakeholders. Additionally, the two-way model of communication recommends businesses and organizations spend equal resources listening to stakeholders as talking to stakeholders. In order to properly communicate to customers, the theory postulates the organization must listen to the desires, needs, and wants of its customers. Social media is an effective avenue for conducting such research and communicating to customers (Young, 2014; Paine, 2011). The findings of this study demonstrate engagement rates and interest on social media diminishes when businesses are not actively listening to the needs of customers. This study offers additional support for two-way communication online and indicates this population is not engaged in two-way symmetrical communication.

Relationship management theory was the second theory that guided this study. The theory was developed by Ledingham and Bruning (2000) and further expanded upon Grunig's (1992) two-way symmetrical communication model by identifying businesses and organizations should move beyond two-way symmetrical communication. Instead, businesses and organizations should focus on building meaningful relationships with public stakeholders. The emphasis of this

theory is on building relationships with all relevant stakeholders and “is based less on successful business performance and more on demonstrated commitment to and support of community” (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000, p. 138).

Furthermore, relationships created through relationship management practices are symbiotic between all relevant stakeholders (Coombs, 2000). As such, marketers must balance their own priorities with the priorities of all relevant stakeholders (Ledingham, 2003). Therefore, this study adds to the recommendations of Boone and Kurtz (2013) who said, “marketers need to develop new techniques to establish and build trusting relationships between companies and their customers” (p. 18). This study adds to the body of literature by concluding a disregard for relationship management strategies can stagnate the development of profitable relationships with online consumers.

The effect social information processing theory has on relationship management was also considered within this study. Customers were not engaging with the content of the garden center which hindered the ability to form deep connections with the garden center. Additionally, customers identified that in-person contact existed with the members of the garden center and could circumvent any possible effect in regards to the ability of social media to create, in and of itself, relationships between stakeholders. Walther (1996) identified that in a cues-filtered-out environment, communicators tend to hyper intensify positive traits. Employees and owners focused extensively on personal stories that helped identify who they are and give personality and meaning to the papers.

This study offers additional questions regarding the role of social information processing theory and how it influences the communication between the online presence of a business and customers. Garden centers often interact with customers in-person and through Web 2.0. Therefore, this study creates questions regarding the relevancy social information processing theory has in communication when personal communication, to any degree, has been established. Since garden centers should move towards a more-intensive online presence to sell and market horticultural products (Behe et al., 2008), social information processing theory could become increasingly-more relevant and vital to garden centers.

### ***Recommendations for practitioners***

#### ***Garden centers***

Several recommendations are offered to garden center employees and owners based on these findings. Since more and more customers are looking at garden centers online for their purchases (Behe et al., 2008), garden center stakeholders should consider utilizing principles of relationship management and offering customers an exchange relationship in order to move them along the engagement continuum. The exchange relationship is a key aspect of relationship marketing and this allows the garden center to learn from the customer. By listening to and learning from the customer, employees and owners will be able to better understand customer desires and needs. Understanding customer desires will allow garden center employees and owners to improve the quality of educational content being shared via new media.

The more valuable a business' content is on social media, the more helpful and beneficial its online presence may seem. This may align the business' online presence closely with the helpful customer service that is experienced in the store front which could increase the level of exchange

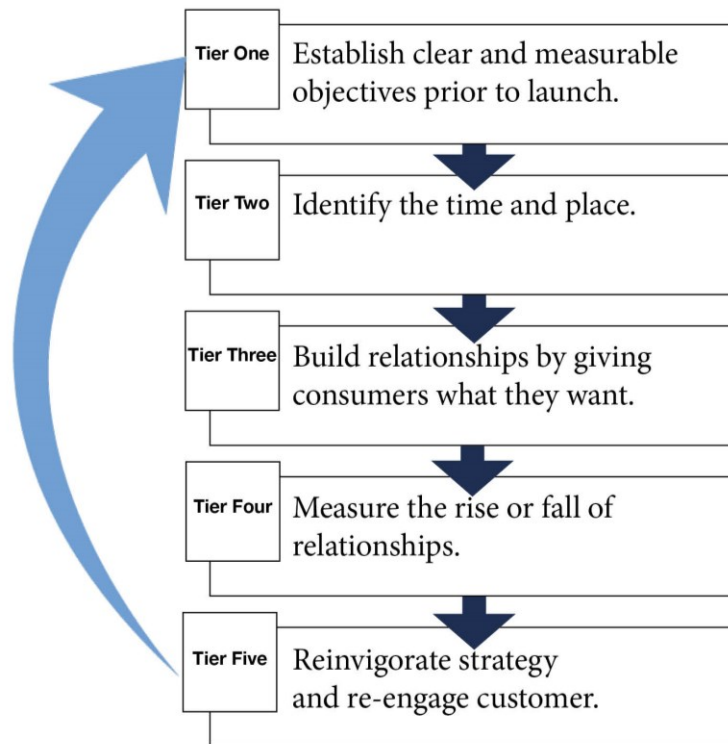
relationship and produce loyalty and engagement. Linking the helpful garden center that excels at customer service and delivering customer delight to a social media account could increase WOM marketing which has been shown to be profitable and, in turn, may help garden centers generate more revenue from social media.

### ***Social-media marketers***

In regards to a strategy for new-media marketing, it is recommended social-media marketers strategically plan posts or campaigns, in advance, the same way they do other forms of successful traditional advertising like radio, newspaper, and television. Additionally, it is recommended practitioners view strategic planning and measurement as bound to one another and unable to be separated, because they maintain a cyclical cause and effect relationship necessary for online marketers. This study also recommends measurement be considered a vital and integrated part of strategy, especially in regards to relationship marketing. Therefore, measurement should also be conducted in order to move the customer to the loyalty phase of customer engagement and to an advocacy level of relationships. This study recommends stakeholders who use new-media marketing routinely measure their campaigns, add metrics to measure success beyond sales, and measure the quality of relationships. Additionally, measurable objectives should be created prior to the launch of any campaign so practitioners can determine if the campaign was successful or not. The ability to define success of a social media campaign is paramount, and may help ease the concerns of more traditionally-minded employers who prefer to market through print, radio, or television.

Garden center stakeholders must evaluate their overall objectives related to the garden center business and define how social media can align with such objectives and business strategies.

Once the relationship between business strategies and and social media objectives have been identified, it is recommended the garden center begin to form online relationships with relevant stakeholders. In order to develop profitable social media campaigns that develop relationships and move casual engagers and lurkers / observers into loyal brand activists, this study recommends a five tier approach as identified in the following educational model.



**Figure 1 Five-tiered relationship marketing approach**

*The foundation of the five-tier model*

Social media can have a positive impact on a business. However, if sound business principles are not present, social media can act as a hindrance to companies (Bolateva & Cata, 2011). This educational model assumes a presence of solid business principles that include excellent products, great customer service, and an online presence.

### ***Tier one***

The objective of tier one is to establish clear and measurable objectives for each social media platform and set protocols for how the business should interact with customers via online channels. As such, tier one recommends stakeholders identify relevant objectives prior to launching a social media campaign or advertising efforts. This study recommends businesses that desire to use new-media marketing create objectives that focus on building brand awareness, forming relationships, and positively increasing sales through direct or indirect exposure to new-media messages. Additionally, stakeholders should thoughtfully consider the appropriate social media outlets for their target audience and establish objectives specific to each new media channel. Once these outlets have been identified, garden center stakeholders should identify how they will engage with customers through these channels in order to facilitate progression through the educational model. Garden center stakeholders and new media marketers should consider creating objectives and measurement programs that are appropriate for the social media deemed relevant to stakeholders.

### ***Tier two***

The objective of tier two is to identify the most opportune time to get a message to the consumer. Since employees or owners identified they felt their messages were not being seen by customers on the digital sphere, this phase will help identify maximum reach so content can begin the relationship forming process. Tier two focuses on identifying the demographics and user characteristics on all relevant new media channels because learning from customers is the first stage in developing consumer relationships (Paine, 2011). In this tier, stakeholders must evaluate key demographic information including but not limited to age, gender, location, and ethnicity. Additionally, stakeholders should identify patterns of user behavior that includes

online habits such as peak times of day and times on each social media platform. Electronic newsletters do not offer the level of insights that social media platforms do, so it is recommended garden centers conduct A/B split testing of their newsletter list to determine days and times that yield the peak open rates. Once the garden center employees have sufficiently listened to user demographics and characteristics, it is recommended as part of this tier that they begin posting content during peak times to increase the message reach.

### ***Tier three***

The objective of tier three is to develop the relationship by identifying what the consumer wants and desires through actively monitoring the engagement levels of produced content and identifying relevant themes. The engagement tier requires adaptation and testing. New media marketers who are utilizing e-newsletters should conduct split A/B testing in regards to subject lines and titles. Additionally, it is recommended marketers keep accurate records of the topics of each newsletter and draw correlations and associations between the type of content and click-through or purchases. Regarding social media, stakeholders should identify patterns in engagement that includes likes, comments, and shares to determine what content is resonating the most with consumers. As part of this tier, it is recommended garden center stakeholders constantly evaluate themes and correlations between shared content and high engagement trends. In doing so, the garden center will be using social media to listen to the consumer in regards to their wants and needs and thus approach social media marketing from a two-way symmetrical communication standpoint.

Furthermore, garden center employees responsible for new-media marketing should actively seek out ways to engage with the customer that are congruent with the standards of practice

defined in tier one. As such, employees who manage social media can help foster a culture and atmosphere of dialogue between the garden center and the customer. By increasing dialogue, the garden center page can further be used to understand the needs and desires of the customer and further provide relevant and meaningful content.

#### ***Tier four***

The objective of tier four is to measure what the customers identify to be the quality and level of relationship with the garden center in addition to the rise or fall of these relationships. However, relationship measurement is complex and is accomplished through surveys or customer interviews (Paine, 2011; Young, 2014). Therefore, this study recommends practitioners conduct surveys of their customers to identify: 1) the social media used and the frequency of that use; 2) the content customers desire, especially educational content which would indicate to the consumer that the business desires an exchange relationship; 3) the level of relationship felt.

#### ***Tier five***

Since relationship management online relies on measurement (Young, 2011), the objective of the final tier is to use the data generated from the previous tiers to adjust content accordingly and reengage the target audience with modified and improved objectives and strategies. This is a continuous process which is never fully completed. As relationships improve the necessity for delivering even more valuable content improves. If, at any point, the process ceases to improve, relationships will ultimately stagnate, erode, and begin damaging the effectiveness of new-media marketing campaigns.

However, in order to effectively market with new media, this study recommends stakeholders allocate sufficient time and resources. The garden center stakeholders in this study identified



they cannot afford to hire social media managers and are also over-committed and lack the time to effectively market. According to the insights of Behe et al. (2008), garden centers cannot afford to fall behind in social media influence, especially as an aging demographic transition out of the economic sphere of influence. Garden center stakeholders also mentioned social media marketing would need between one to two hours a week to be effective. However, many garden center employees within this study mentioned, at their current use, they find social media to be time consuming and ineffective. If garden centers were more strategic with use of social media and planned ahead, employees could spend less time on it on a daily basis and increase the amount of ROI.

### *Agricultural communicators*

Agricultural communication professionals should understand businesses and potential clients may be skeptical of new-media marketing and may prefer traditional marketing approaches like television, radio, and newspaper. Therefore, practitioners must properly educate relevant stakeholders regarding the strength and weaknesses of social-media marketing as it pertains to the business. Practitioners should be cautioned against viewing social media marketing as a “get rich” scheme with the philosophy of “if you post it, they will buy.” Instead, this study recommends a slow, methodical use of social media that is focused on collecting relevant data in order to actively build meaningful relationships that facilitate WOM marketing and customer loyalty. It is recommended communicators not view a sale as the ultimate determinant of success of social-media marketing but the presence of loyal, brand advocate relationships. Additionally, professionals must also educate businesses owners on this concept and strategy.

Agricultural communications professionals should understand limited resources may exist for the proper implementation of new-media marketing and any such position may, at best, be split among other responsibilities within the organization. Therefore, this study suggests organizations allocate time during leadership meetings to address new-media marketing strategies and how it can be integrated into the daily operations of the business or organization. It is also recommended that, through shared leadership meetings, daily or weekly tasks related to new-media marketing be assigned to relevant stakeholders to make sure social-media is not an afterthought but instead what Mangold and Faulds (2009) identify as a hybrid marketing element.

### ***Teachers and instructors***

Many of the garden center employees or owners identified they understood how to view Facebook Insight data to track likes, comments, and engagement. Furthermore, stakeholders identified this data gave them insight into a cursory, at best, level of consumer preference which influenced the posting of pictures on Facebook pages. However, stakeholders were not looking at trends or correlations to gain an in-depth understanding of consumer behavior in order to generate engaging content that increased customer relationships. Stakeholders also lacked the ability to create objectives, formulate a strategy, and create measurement systems that gauge the success of social media marketing. There was also a lack of understanding in regards to how social media success should be defined. Therefore, this study offers several recommendations for teachers and faculty who teach agricultural communication courses that contain a new-media component.

First and foremost, faculty should focus on fostering an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of social-media marketing for agricultural businesses or organizations. In doing so, faculty will ensure students transitioning into the industry will have sufficient knowledge to create social-media campaigns with the proper objectives. Secondly, faculty should focus on communicating how to create specific social-media objectives for a business or organization. Objectives should focus on the three measurable characteristics of social media as offered by Paine (2011) and include profit, reputation, and relationship. Along with these objectives, students should be instructed how to identify key performance indicators that help determine if an individual objective via social media has been achieved. Next, faculty should instill an understanding of social media strategy as it relates to fulfilling social media objectives. As part of a specific strategy, students should be instructed to identify key demographics of target markets to identify relevant social media channels.

More emphasis should be placed upon the necessity of accurate and in-depth measurement approaches for social media that extend beyond the basic metrics of likes, comments, and shares. Furthermore, students must be well-versed in analyzing trends and correlations that give insight into behavior and preferences. Students must be equipped with the knowledge and understanding that measurement is not an afterthought of social-media marketing but an integrated, essential, and all-encompassing strategy that guides all objectives, strategies, and tactics, and is never finished. Since a key component of social media marketing is generating relationships which can only be measured through surveys (Paine, 2011), students also should gain experience in developing consumer surveys that give insight into such relationships. Students should be guided beyond merely understanding how to measure demographic data and basic engagement

measurements of new-media sites and instead focus on relevant key performance indicators that could identify if a ROI or return on investment has been reached.

### ***Freelancers and consultants***

Freelancers and consultants should understand potential clients may be skeptical of the benefits consultants of social-media marketers offer. Also, participants within this study indicated experience within the industry was more important than social media knowledge or a perceived “expert status.” This study recommends freelancers and social-media consultants spend considerable time researching and investigating the industry before a potential client is approached.

### ***Recommendations for research***

This study recommends future research should focus on consumers’ perceptions and preferences in regards to new media. Since educational and relevant content is paramount to consumers, this study recommends research be conducted to identify what content non-metro garden center customers desire. This study also recommends research be conducted that identifies what aspects of relationship marketing are resonating with the consumer. Additionally, future research should be conducted on how the level of relationship consumers, especially in non-metro areas, affects buying behavior. In addition to measuring the relationship of consumers who follow local businesses on social media, future research should also identify which new media platforms are yielding the greatest ROI in regards to increased sales, increased reputation, and increased relationships.

It would be of additional value to empirically test the five-tiered relationship management educational model (Figure 1) to determine if this is an effective method to approaching

relationship marketing strategies beyond the garden centers in this study. Since garden center employees and owners lack training in social media marketing, further research should be conducted in regards to their desired learning style. Preferred learning channels and preferences should be evaluated to identify what methods of delivery are desired and valued.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of stakeholders of Great Plains metro and non-metro garden centers as they use social media to market their business. Four research questions guided this study and included: 1) What are stakeholder perceptions and attitudes towards new-media marketing as it relates to their business; 2) What barriers to stakeholders encounter when using new media to market their business; 3) What new-media strategies are being implemented in the marketing of metro and non-metro garden centers; 4) What are stakeholder perceptions regarding customer interaction with new media content? In order to assess these questions, eight in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted which included one metro customer, one non-metro customer, three employees or owners of metro garden centers, and three employees or owners of non-metro garden centers.

Results of this study indicate garden center employees or owners value traditional marketing methods like television, radio, and print advertisements. In regards to new-media marketing, stakeholders preferred an e-newsletter to market to consumers. Although stakeholders used social media to varying degrees, they the lacked the correct perspective, dedication, strategic planning, and measurement required to see a positive ROI. Garden center stakeholders believed they were conducting successful relationship marketing methods by including personal stories on

new-media. However, the lack of engagement and measurement hinders stakeholder abilities to truly generate meaningful relationships as defined by Paine (2011).

The data generated from this study contributes to the body of literature regarding Grunig's (1992) two-way symmetrical communication as it relates to social media marketing. This study expands on relationship management theory by offering further insight into how social media can be used to develop relationships with consumers. Lastly, this research offers questions to the extent social information processing theory has when prior, F2F contact exists.

The study also offers several recommendations for practitioners, educators, and future researchers. A five-tiered relationship management educational model based on the findings was offered to practitioners to foster relationship marketing that includes specific and measurable objectives, testing, engagement, and modification. Faculty are encouraged to develop accurate viewpoints in regards to social media marketing with their students and to focus on in-depth measurement practices that move beyond descriptive analytics and into prescriptive knowledge.

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## Appendix A - Interview Guide

### Employee and owner interview guide

1. Can you tell me about your role with the garden center?
  - a. How does your role involve the use of social media?
2. Tell me about what social media platforms you use.
  - a. How about on behalf of the garden center?
3. How was the decision made to use social media for the garden center?
4. How does social media fit into the overall marketing strategy for the garden center?
5. How are decisions made related to what content is posted on social media and the website?
  - a. What type of content do you post?
6. Can you describe an experience that stands out to you on social media as it relates to the garden center?
  - a. What made the experience positive or negative?
  - b. How did that impact your use of social media?
  - c. What would you have done differently / same in the future?
  - d. Did this change how you use social media in relation to the business?
  - e. How about a positive/negative experience?
    - i. Repeat questions
7. What process do you use to determine content to post?
  - a. Examples if needed: editorial calendar, tech tools like Hootsuite, or a social media plan or strategy?
  - b. How did you decide what to post?
  - c. How did you know if a post or strategy was effective or ineffective?
  - d. Was there a specific type of post or theme that seemed to be successful?
    - i. How did you determine success?
8. Can you describe how you learn about social media techniques?
  - a. Is there a person you ask?
  - b. Is there a website?
  - c. How would you like to learn about social media techniques in an ideal world?
9. Tell me about challenges you encounter using social media?
  - a. How did you respond to those obstacles?
  - b. Would anything have helped you overcome those barriers?
10. What are the garden centers' strengths in regards to social media use?
  - a. Why do you feel those are strengths?
  - b. Where do you think it can be improved?
11. How do you think social media impacts your business?
  - a. Does it impact sales?
  - b. How about the impact on the customers?
    - i. Quantity of customers
    - ii. Involvement / mood

12. How do your customers respond to your social media posts?
  - a. How about interaction online? Was there a difference?
  - b. Does it vary based on type of content?
  - c. Does it vary based upon the season?
  
13. How would you describe interaction you have with customers online?
  - a. How did you interact with customers?
  - b. Can you describe the connection you felt with your social media customers?
  - c. What type of customers are your fans?
  
14. What have you learned about your customers from your interaction with them on social media?
  - a. What were customers saying online?
    - i. Did they have any feedback?
    - ii. Did they have any requests?
  - b. How do you think you could use this information to benefit your business?
15. What resources would benefit you in your social media marketing?
16. What advice would you have for other garden centers looking to use social media to market their business?
17. Do you look at your social media analytics?
  - a. Insights, twitter analytics, etc....?
  - b. If yes
    - i. How do you use them?
    - ii. Does this affect your strategy?
  - c. If no
    - i. What are the barriers you face using analytics?
18. Is there anything else you would like to add?\

Interview debrief



## Customer interview guide

1. How did you originally hear about the garden center?
2. How often do you shop at the garden center?
  - a. Is there a time of year you are most active in the store?
  - b. What type of products do you usually purchase from the garden center?
  - c. Why do you shop at this specific garden center?
  - d. Do you shop at any other garden centers?
3. How do you find information related to gardening or horticulture?
  - a. What questions do you usually have?
  - b. What resources would benefit you as a gardener?
  - c. What resources would benefit you as a customer?
  - d. In a perfect world, where would you find information on horticulture or gardening?
4. What social media platforms do you use?
  - a. What times of the day do you usually use social media?
  - b. What device do you use to access social media?
5. What comes to mind when you think about the garden center's Facebook page?
6. How would you describe the interaction you have with the garden center online?
  - a. How about through social media?
  - b. If website mentioned
    - i. Why do you visit their website?
  - c. How about Facebook?
    - i. How do you interact with the garden center?
7. Can you describe an experience that stands out to you on social media as it relates to the garden center?
  - a. What made the experience positive or negative?
  - b. How did that impact your view of the garden center as a customer?
    - i. How about the employees or owners?
  - c. How about a positive/negative experience?
    - i. Repeat questions
8. What are the garden centers' strengths in regards to social media use?
  - a. Could you give some examples?
  - b. Why do you feel those are strengths?
  - c. Where do you think it can be improved?
9. What would you like to see on the garden center's Facebook page?
  - a. What don't you want to see?
  - b. How often would you like to see the garden center in your news feed?
10. What do you gain by being a fan of the garden center's Facebook page?
11. Tell me about a time a social media post on the garden center influenced your decision to make a purchase?
12. What advice would you have for garden centers looking to use social media to market their business?
13. Is there anything else you would like to add?

## **Appendix B - Customer Invite**

A graduate student from Kansas State University is doing his thesis on garden centers and social media. He is looking for two of our customers that would be willing to participate in a 60-90 minute interview here in \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_ between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. You will be given a \$25 gift card to our store for your time and all responses will be confidential. Please email Scott Stebner at [scottstebner@ksu.edu](mailto:scottstebner@ksu.edu) if you would like to participate.

# Appendix C - Informed Consent

*Customer*

## KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

### INFORMED CONSENT TEMPLATE

PROJECT TITLE: Green Growth: An Exploratory Study of Rural and Urban Garden Centers use of Social Media Marketing

APPROVAL DATE OF PROJECT: \_\_\_\_\_ EXPIRATION DATE OF PROJECT: \_\_\_\_\_

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Lauri M. Baker (PhD), Scott Stebner (Graduate student), Cheryl Boyer (PhD), Hikaru Hanawa Peterson (PhD)

CONTACT AND PHONE FOR ANY PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS: Scott Stebner, 408-440-6281

IRB CHAIR CONTACT/PHONE INFORMATION: Rick Scheidt, (785) 532-3224

SPONSOR OF PROJECT: \_\_\_\_\_

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: The purpose of this project is to explore the social media marketing experiences of rural and urban garden center stakeholders.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED: In-depth Interviews and object-elicited interviews.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENTS, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO SUBJECT: \_\_\_\_\_

NA

LENGTH OF STUDY: 60-90 minutes

RISKS ANTICIPATED: NA

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED: Customer will receive a \$25 gift card to the garden center

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY: Your identity will be kept confidential. Your responses will be given a gender-neutral pseudonym to protect your confidentiality and any identifying characteristics will be removed. This data will be kept confidential from the garden center, employers, employees, and customers.

IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT AVAILABLE IF INJURY OCCURS: NA

PARENTAL APPROVAL FOR MINORS: NA

TERMS OF PARTICIPATION: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Last revised on May 20, 2004

## Appendix D - Institutional Review Board Approval Letter



TO: Lauri Baker  
Agricultural Communications  
307 Umberger

Proposal Number: 7183

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair   
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 05/19/2014

RE: Proposal Entitled, "Green Growth: An Exploratory Study of Rural and Urban Garden Centers use of Social Media Marketing"

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects / Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Kansas State University has reviewed the proposal identified above and has determined that it is EXEMPT from further IRB review. This exemption applies only to the proposal - as written - and currently on file with the IRB. Any change potentially affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation and may disqualify the proposal from exemption.

Based upon information provided to the IRB, this activity is exempt under the criteria set forth in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, **45 CFR §46.101, paragraph b, category: 2, subsection: ii.**

Certain research is exempt from the requirements of HHS/OHRP regulations. A determination that research is exempt does not imply that investigators have no ethical responsibilities to subjects in such research; it means only that the regulatory requirements related to IRB review, informed consent, and assurance of compliance do not apply to the research.

Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, the University Research Compliance Office, and if the subjects are KSU students, to the Director of the Student Health Center.

<b>FOR OFFICE USE ONLY:</b> IRB Protocol # _____ Application Received: _____
Routed: _____ Training Complete: _____

## Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB)

### Application for Approval Form

Last revised on January 2011

#### ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION:

- Title of Project:** (if applicable, use the exact title listed in the grant/contract application)  
Green Growth: An Exploratory Study of Rural and Urban Garden Centers use of Social Media Marketing
- Type of Application:**  
 New/Renewal       Revision (to a pending new application)  
 Modification (to an existing # \_\_\_\_\_ approved application)
- Principal Investigator:** (must be a KSU faculty member)
- |                        |   |                      |   |
|------------------------|---|----------------------|---|
| <b>Name:</b>           | <span style="background-color: #cccccc;">Lauri M. Baker</span>              | <b>Degree/Title:</b> | <span style="background-color: #cccccc;">Assistant Professor</span> |
| <b>Department:</b>     | <span style="background-color: #cccccc;">Agricultural Communications</span> | <b>Campus Phone:</b> | <span style="background-color: #cccccc;">785-532-1140</span>        |
| <b>Campus Address:</b> | <span style="background-color: #cccccc;">307 Umberger Hall</span>           | <b>Fax #:</b>        | <span style="background-color: #cccccc;">785-532-5633</span>        |
| <b>E-mail</b>          | <span style="background-color: #cccccc;">lmbaker@ksu.edu</span>             |                      |   |
- Contact Name/Email/Phone for Questions/Problems with Form:** Scott Stebner / scottstebner@k-state.edu / 408-440-6281
- Does this project involve any collaborators not part of the faculty/staff at KSU?** (projects with non-KSU collaborators may require additional coordination and approvals):  
 No  
 Yes
- Project Classification** (Is this project part of one of the following?):  
 Thesis  
 Dissertation  
 Faculty Research  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
**Note:** Class Projects should use the short form application for class projects.
- Please attach a copy of the Consent Form:**  
 Copy attached  
 Consent form not used
- Funding Source:**  Internal     External (identify source and attach a copy of the sponsor's grant application or contract as submitted to the funding agency)  
 Copy attached       Not applicable
- |  |   |
|--|---|
|  | <span style="background-color: #cccccc; padding: 2px;">Federal State Marketing Improvement Program Grant</span> |
|--|---|
- Based upon criteria found in 45 CFR 46 – and the overview of projects that may qualify for exemption explained at <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/policy/checklists/decisioncharts.html> , I believe that my project using human subjects should be determined by the IRB to be exempt from IRB review:**  
 No  
 Yes (If yes, please complete application including Section XII. C. 'Exempt Projects'; remember that only the IRB has the authority to determine that a project is exempt from IRB review)

If you have questions, please call the University Research Compliance Office (URCO) at 532-3224, or [comply@ksu.edu](mailto:comply@ksu.edu)

Last revised on January 2011

## Human Subjects Research Protocol Application Form

The KSU IRB is required by law to ensure that all research involving human subjects is adequately reviewed for specific information and is approved prior to inception of any proposed activity. Consequently, it is important that you answer all questions accurately. If you need help or have questions about how to complete this application, please call the Research Compliance Office at 532-3224, or e-mail us at [comply@ksu.edu](mailto:comply@ksu.edu).

Please provide the requested information in the shaded text boxes. The shaded text boxes are designed to accommodate responses within the body of the application. As you type your answers, the text boxes will expand as needed. After completion, print the form and send the original and one photocopy to the Institutional Review Board, Room 203, Fairchild Hall.

<b>Principal Investigator:</b>	<b>Lauri M. Baker</b>
<b>Project Title:</b>	<b>Green Growth: An Exploratory Study of Rural and Urban Garden Centers use of Social Media Marketing</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>4/30/14</b>

### MODIFICATION

Is this a modification of an approved protocol?  Yes  No If yes, please comply with the following:

If you are requesting a modification or a change to an IRB approved protocol, please provide a concise description of all of the changes that you are proposing in the following block. Additionally, please highlight or bold the proposed changes in the body of the protocol where appropriate, so that it is clearly discernable to the IRB reviewers what and where the proposed changes are. This will greatly help the committee and facilitate the review.

### NON-TECHNICAL SYNOPSIS (brief narrative description of proposal easily understood by nonscientists):

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of stakeholders in charge of marketing of a mid-western urban and rural garden center as they implement social media marketing strategies to promote a specified sales event. Six in-depth interviews lasting approximately 60-90 minutes will be conducted with three taking place at a rural Kansas garden center and the other three occurring at an urban garden center near Kansas City.

#### I. BACKGROUND (concise narrative review of the literature and basis for the study):

One factor limiting the expansion of garden centers and nurseries within the Great Plains region, which includes Kansas, is marketing. Garden centers spend the majority of their advertising dollars on the Yellow Pages and print media (Behe, Dennis, Hall, Hodges, & Brumfield, 2008). Research conducted on garden centers also identifies the most influential marketing channel was word-of-mouth (WOM) (Ekanem, Singh, Tegegne, & Muhammad, 2000). Yet despite these attempts to reach customers, different populations and market segments require different marketing efforts, and mass media advertising is expensive and lacks the impact that WOM has. Marketing campaigns via social media are free or low-cost, and if used correctly, could lead to further promotion. Furthermore, businesses not utilizing social media as part of their marketing plan could be losing ground to their competitors and putting themselves at a disadvantage (Meyers, Irlbeck, Graybill-Leonard, & Doerfert, 2011).

#### II. PROJECT/STUDY DESCRIPTION (please provide a concise narrative description of the proposed activity in terms that will allow the IRB or other interested parties to clearly understand what it is that you propose to do that involves human subjects. This description must be in enough detail so that IRB members can make an informed decision about proposal).

Garden centers will be purposively chosen by a state extension specialist based upon the specialist's recommendations. Once the two garden centers are identified, participants will be asked to volunteer for the study. They will be given a social-media marketing resources and asked to identify a sales event they want to market via social media. Within approximately two weeks of the conclusion of the sales event, the researcher will conduct confidential in-depth interviews lasting approximately 60-90 minutes in length. Following the study, the participants will be briefed to check for validity and

accuracy.

III. **OBJECTIVE** (briefly state the objective of the research – what you hope to learn from the study):

**To determine the experiences of rural and urban garden centers as they use social media to market their business.**

IV. **DESIGN AND PROCEDURES** (succinctly outline formal plan for study):

- A. Location of study:
- B. Variables to be studied: **Satisfaction, enjoyment, confidence, ease of use**
- C. Data collection methods: (surveys, instruments, etc – **Interviews and field observations / notes PLEASE ATTACH**)
- D. List any factors that might lead to a subject dropping out or withdrawing from a study. These might include, but are not limited to emotional or physical stress, pain, inconvenience, etc.: **Time to participate**
- E. List all biological samples taken: (if any) **NA**
- F. Debriefing procedures for participants: **Following the interviews, participants will be debriefed by another member of the research team to check for accuracy.**

V. **RESEARCH SUBJECTS:**

- A. Source: **Purposely selected from two garden centers**
- B. Number: **Three rural participants and six urban participants**
- C. Characteristics: (list any unique qualifiers desirable for research subject participation) **Stakeholder within the garden center (owner, manager, employee, or customer).**
- D. Recruitment procedures: (Explain how do you plan to recruit your subjects? Attach any fliers, posters, etc. used in recruitment. If you plan to use any inducements, ie. cash, gifts, prizes, etc., please list them here.) **The state extension specialist will identify a rural garden center and an urban garden center to be a part of this study. In-person invitations will be given to the participants. Although no financial incentives will be given to the participant, they will be given a list of resources to use for marketing their campaign via social media.**

VI. **RISK – PROTECTION – BENEFITS:** The answers for the three questions below are central to human subjects research. You must demonstrate a reasonable balance between anticipated risks to research participants, protection strategies, and anticipated benefits to participants or others.

- A. **Risks for Subjects:** (Identify any reasonably foreseeable physical, psychological, or social risks for participants. State that there are “no known risks” if appropriate.)  
**No known risks**
- B. **Minimizing Risk:** (Describe specific measures used to minimize or protect subjects from anticipated risks.)  
**No known risks**
- C. **Benefits:** (Describe any reasonably expected benefits for research participants, a class of participants, or to society as a whole.)  
**Participants may begin to more closely evaluate their social media use as it relates to the promotion of the business. Additionally, increased sales may occur by using social media techniques.**

In your opinion, does the research involve **more than minimal risk** to subjects? (“Minimal risk” means that “the risks of harm anticipated in the proposed research are not greater, considering probability and magnitude, than those ordinarily

encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.”)

Yes       No

**VII. CONFIDENTIALITY:** Confidentiality is the formal treatment of information that an individual has disclosed to you in a relationship of trust and with the expectation that it will not be divulged to others without permission in ways that are inconsistent with the understanding of the original disclosure. Consequently, it is your responsibility to protect information that you gather from human research subjects in a way that is consistent with your agreement with the volunteer and with their expectations. If possible, it is best if research subjects’ identity and linkage to information or data remains unknown.

Explain how you are going to protect confidentiality of research subjects and/or data or records. Include plans for maintaining records after completion.

**All participants will be given a gender-neutral pseudonym in publications to protect their identity. Additionally, all recordings will be kept confidential from other employees, employers, and the public. All identifying information will be removed from participant responses that could jeopardize confidentiality. After the interviews have been conducted, the files will be transcribed by an outside firm and kept in a locked cabinet in a locked office only accessible to other university employees. Additionally, the audio recordings will be stored on a separate drive. All data will be destroyed following the conclusion of the study.**

**VIII. INFORMED CONSENT:** Informed consent is a critical component of human subjects research – it is your responsibility to make sure that any potential subject knows exactly what the project that you are planning is about, and what his/her potential role is. (There may be projects where some forms of “deception” of the subject is necessary for the execution of the study, but it must be carefully justified to and approved by the IRB). A schematic for determining when a waiver or alteration of informed consent may be considered by the IRB is found at

<http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/policy/consentckls.html>

Even if your proposed activity does qualify for a waiver of informed consent, you must still provide potential participants with basic information that informs them of their rights as subjects, i.e. explanation that the project is research and the purpose of the research, length of study, study procedures, debriefing issues to include anticipated benefits, study and administrative contact information, confidentiality strategy, and the fact that participation is entirely voluntary and can be terminated at any time without penalty, etc. Even if your potential subjects are completely anonymous, you are obliged to provide them (and the IRB) with basic information about your project. See informed consent example on the URCO website. It is a federal requirement to maintain informed consent forms for 3 years after the study completion.

**Yes    No    Answer the following questions about the informed consent procedures.**

- A. Are you using a written informed consent form? If “yes,” include a copy with this application. If “no” see b.
- B. In accordance with guidance in 45 CFR 46, I am requesting a waiver or alteration of informed consent elements (See Section VII above). If “yes,” provide a basis and/or justification for your request.
- C. Are you using the online Consent Form Template provided by the URCO? If “no,” does your Informed Consent document has all the minimum required elements of informed consent found in the Consent Form Template? (Please explain)
- D. Are your research subjects anonymous? If they are anonymous, you will not have access to any information that will allow you to determine the identity of the research subjects in your study, or to link research data to a specific individual in any way. Anonymity is a powerful protection for potential research subjects. (An anonymous subject is one whose identity is unknown even to the researcher, or the data or information collected cannot be linked in any way to a specific person).



- E. Are subjects debriefed about the purposes, consequences, and benefits of the research? Debriefing refers to a mechanism for informing the research subjects of the results or conclusions, after the data is collected and analyzed, and the study is over. (If “no” explain why.) Attach copy of debriefing statement to be utilized. Subjects will be debriefed following the study by a member of the research team in order to make sure their statements were accurately reflected.

**\*It is a requirement that you maintain all signed copies of informed consent documents for at least 3 years following the completion of your study. These documents must be available for examination and review by federal compliance officials.**

**IX. PROJECT INFORMATION:** (If you answer yes to any of the questions below, you should explain them in one of the paragraphs above)

- | Yes                                 | No                                  | Does the project involve any of the following?   |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | a. Deception of subjects   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | b. Shock or other forms of punishment  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | c. Sexually explicit materials or questions about sexual orientation, sexual experience or sexual abuse            |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | d. Handling of money or other valuable commodities   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | e. Extraction or use of blood, other bodily fluids, or tissues   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | f. Questions about any kind of illegal or illicit activity   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | g. Purposeful creation of anxiety  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | h. Any procedure that might be viewed as invasion of privacy   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | i. Physical exercise or stress   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | j. Administration of substances (food, drugs, etc.) to subjects  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | k. Any procedure that might place subjects at risk   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | l. Any form of potential abuse; i.e., psychological, physical, sexual  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | m. Is there potential for the data from this project to be published in a journal, presented at a conference, etc? |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | n. Use of surveys or questionnaires for data collection  |
- IF YES, PLEASE ATTACH!!**

**X. SUBJECT INFORMATION:** (If you answer yes to any of the questions below, you should explain them in one of the paragraphs above)

- | Yes                      | No                                  | Does the research involve subjects from any of the following categories?   |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | a. Under 18 years of age (these subjects require parental or guardian consent)   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | b. Over 65 years of age  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | c. Physically or mentally disabled   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | d. Economically or educationally disadvantaged   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | e. Unable to provide their own legal informed consent  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | f. Pregnant females as target population   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | g. Victims   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | h. Subjects in institutions (e.g., prisons, nursing homes, halfway houses)   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | i. Are research subjects in this activity students recruited from university classes or volunteer pools? If so, do you have a reasonable alternative(s) to participation as a research subject in your project, i.e., another activity such as writing or reading that would serve to protect students from unfair pressure or coercion to participate in this project? If you answered this question “Yes,” explain any <u>alternatives options</u> for class credit for potential human subject volunteers in your study. (It is also important to remember that: Students must be free to choose <b>not</b> to participate in research that they have signed up for <b>at any time</b> without penalty. Communication of their decision can be conveyed in any manner, to |

include **simply not showing up** for the research.)

- j. Are research subjects **audio** taped? If yes, how do you plan to protect the recorded information and mitigate any additional risks?  
 Subject names will be removed after transcription. The audio recordings will be transcribed by an external firm and then kept in a locked room accessible only to employees. All participants will be given a gender-neutral psuedonym to protect their confidentiality. All recordings will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.
- k. Are research subjects' images being recorded (video taped, photographed)? If yes, how do you plan to protect the recorded information and mitigate any additional risks?

XI. **CONFLICT OF INTEREST:** Concerns have been growing that financial interests in research may threaten the safety and rights of human research subjects. Financial interests are not in them selves prohibited and may well be appropriate and legitimate. Not all financial interests cause Conflict of Interest (COI) or harm to human subjects. However, to the extent that financial interests may affect the welfare of human subjects in research, IRB's, institutions, and investigators must consider what actions regarding financial interests may be necessary to protect human subjects. Please answer the following questions:

- |                                     |                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Yes</b>                          | <b>No</b>                           |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | a. Do you or the institution have any proprietary interest in a potential product of this research, including patents, trademarks, copyrights, or licensing agreements?  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | b. Do you have an equity interest in the research sponsor (publicly held or a non-publicly held company)?  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | c. Do you receive significant payments of other sorts, eg., grants, equipment, retainers for consultation and/or honoraria from the sponsor of this research?  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | d. Do you receive payment per participant or incentive payments?   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>            | e. If you answered yes on any of the above questions, please provide adequate explanatory information so the IRB can assess any potential COI indicated above.<br>This project is a part of a grant from the Federal State Marketing Improvement Program. The grant application is attached. The assistantship for the M.S. student on the project is funded through this grant. |

**XII. PROJECT COLLABORATORS:**

A. **KSU Collaborators – list anyone affiliated with KSU who is collecting or analyzing data:** (list all collaborators on the project, including co-principal investigators, undergraduate and graduate students)

Name:	Department:	Campus Phone:	Campus Email:
Scott Stebner	Agricultural Communications	785-532-5804	scottstebner@k-state.edu
Lauri M. Baker	Agricultural Communications	785-532-1140	lmbaker@k-state.edu
Cheryl Boyer	Extension Specialist - Horticulture	785/532-3504	crboyer@ksu.edu
Hikaru Hanawa Peterson	Agricultural Economics	785.477.0726	hhp@ksu.edu

**B. Non-KSU Collaborators:** (List all collaborators on your human subjects research project not affiliated with KSU in the spaces below. KSU has negotiated an Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), the federal office responsible for oversight of research involving human subjects. When research involving human subjects includes collaborators who are not employees or agents of KSU the activities of those unaffiliated individuals may be covered under the KSU Assurance only in accordance with a formal, written agreement of commitment to relevant human subject protection policies and IRB oversight. The Unaffiliated Investigators Agreement can be found and downloaded at <http://www.k-state.edu/research/comply/irb/forms/Unaffiliated%20Investigator%20Agreement.doc>

**C.** The URCO must have a copy of the Unaffiliated Investigator Agreement on file for each non-KSU collaborator who is not covered by their own IRB and assurance with OHRP. Consequently, it is critical that you identify non-KSU collaborators, and initiate any coordination and/or approval process early, to minimize delays caused by administrative requirements.)

Name:	Organization:	Phone:	Institutional Email:

**Does your non-KSU collaborator’s organization have an Assurance with OHRP?** (for Federalwide Assurance and Multiple Project Assurance (MPA) listings of other institutions, please reference the OHRP website under Assurance Information at: <http://ohrp.cit.nih.gov/search>).

No  
 Yes If yes, Collaborator’s FWA or MPA # \_\_\_\_\_

**Is your non-KSU collaborator’s IRB reviewing this proposal?**

No  
 Yes If yes, IRB approval # \_\_\_\_\_

**C. Exempt Projects:** 45 CFR 46 identifies six categories of research involving human subjects that may be exempt from IRB review. The categories for exemption are listed here: <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/policy/checklists/decisioncharts.html>. If you believe that your project qualifies for exemption, please indicate which exemption category applies (1-6). Please remember that only the IRB can make the final determination whether a project is exempt from IRB review, or not.

**Exemption Category:** 45 CFR, 46.101(b)(2)

**XIII. CLINICAL TRIAL** Yes No  
 (If so, please give product.)

**Export Controls Training:**

-The Provost has mandated that all KSU faculty/staff with a full-time appointment participate in the Export Control Program.

-If you are not in our database as having completed the Export Control training, this proposal will not be approved until your participation is verified.

-To complete the Export Control training, follow the instructions below:

Click on:

<http://www.k-state.edu/research/comply/ecp/index.htm>

1. After signing into K-State Online, you will be taken to the Export Control Homepage
2. Read the directions and click on the video link to begin the program
3. Make sure you enter your name / email when prompted so that participation is verified

If you click on the link and are not taken to K-State Online, this means that you have already completed the Export Control training and have been removed from the roster. If this is the case, no further action is required.

-Can't recall if you have completed this training? Contact the URCO at 785-532-3224 or [comply@ksu.edu](mailto:comply@ksu.edu) and we will be happy to look it up for you.

**Post Approval Monitoring:** The URCO has a Post-Approval Monitoring (PAM) program to help assure that activities are performed in accordance with provisions or procedures approved by the IRB. Accordingly, the URCO staff will arrange a PAM visit as appropriate; to assess compliance with approved activities.

**If you have questions, please call the University Research Compliance Office (URCO) at 532-3224, or [comply@ksu.edu](mailto:comply@ksu.edu)**

**INVESTIGATOR ASSURANCE FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS**

(Print this page separately because it requires a signature by the PI.)

P.I. Name: **Lauri M. Baker**

Title of Project: **Green Growth: An Exploratory Study of Rural and Urban Garden Centers use of Social Media Marketing**

XIV. **ASSURANCES:** As the Principal Investigator on this protocol, I provide assurances for the following:

- A. **Research Involving Human Subjects:** This project will be performed in the manner described in this proposal, and in accordance with the Federalwide Assurance FWA00000865 approved for Kansas State University available at <http://ohrp.osophs.dhhs.gov/polasur.htm#FWA>, applicable laws, regulations, and guidelines. Any proposed deviation or modification from the procedures detailed herein must be submitted to the IRB, and be approved by the Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) prior to implementation.
- B. **Training:** I assure that all personnel working with human subjects described in this protocol are technically competent for the role described for them, and have completed the required IRB training modules found on the URCO website at: <http://www.k-state.edu/research/comply/irb/training/index.htm>. I understand that no proposals will receive final IRB approval until the URCO has documentation of completion of training by all appropriate personnel.
- C. **Extramural Funding:** If funded by an extramural source, I assure that this application accurately reflects all procedures involving human subjects as described in the grant/contract proposal to the funding agency. I also assure that I will notify the IRB/URCO, the KSU PreAward Services, and the funding/contract entity if there are modifications or changes made to the protocol after the initial submission to the funding agency.
- D. **Study Duration:** I understand that it is the responsibility of the Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) to perform continuing reviews of human subjects research as necessary. I also understand that as continuing reviews are conducted, it is my responsibility to provide timely and accurate review or update information when requested, to include notification of the IRB/URCO when my study is changed or completed.
- E. **Conflict of Interest:** I assure that I have accurately described (in this application) any potential Conflict of Interest that my collaborators, the University, or I may have in association with this proposed research activity.
- F. **Adverse Event Reporting:** I assure that I will promptly report to the IRB / URCO any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others that involve the protocol as approved. Unanticipated or Adverse Event Form is located on the URCO website at: <http://www.k-state.edu/research/comply/irb/forms/index.htm>. In the case of a serious event, the Unanticipated or Adverse Events Form may follow a phone call or email contact with the URCO.
- G. **Accuracy:** I assure that the information herein provided to the Committee for Human Subjects Research is to the best of my knowledge complete and accurate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal Investigator Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(date)

# Appendix E - Institutional Review Board Modification Form

<b>FOR OFFICE USE ONLY:</b> IRB Protocol # _____ Application Received: _____	
Routed: _____	Training Complete: _____

## Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB)

Application for Approval Form

Last revised on January 2011

### ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION:

- **Title of Project:** (if applicable, use the exact title listed in the grant/contract application)  
Green Growth: An Exploratory Study of Rural and Urban Garden Centers use of Social Media Marketing
- **Type of Application:**  
 New/Renewal       Revision (to a pending new application)  
 Modification (to an existing # 7183 approved application)
- **Principal Investigator:** (must be a KSU faculty member)  

<b>Name:</b>	<u>Lauri M. Baker</u>	<b>Degree/Title:</b>	<u>Assistant Professor</u>
<b>Department:</b>	<u>Agricultural Communications</u>	<b>Campus Phone:</b>	<u>785-532-1140</u>
<b>Campus Address:</b>	<u>307 Umberger Hall</u>	<b>Fax #:</b>	<u>785-532-5633</u>
<b>E-mail</b>	<u>lbaker@ksu.edu</u>		
- **Contact Name/Email/Phone for Questions/Problems with Form:** Scott Stebner / scottstebner@k-state.edu / 408-440-6281
- **Does this project involve any collaborators not part of the faculty/staff at KSU?** (projects with non-KSU collaborators may require additional coordination and approvals):  
 No  
 Yes
- **Project Classification** (Is this project part of one of the following?):  
 Thesis  
 Dissertation  
 Faculty Research  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Note: Class Projects should use the short form application for class projects.
- **Please attach a copy of the Consent Form:**  
 Copy attached  
 Consent form not used
- **Funding Source:**  Internal     External (identify source and attach a copy of the sponsor's grant application or contract as submitted to the funding agency)  
 Copy attached       Not applicable      Federal State Marketing Improvement Program Grant
- **Based upon criteria found in 45 CFR 46 – and the overview of projects that may qualify for exemption explained at <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/policy/checklists/decisioncharts.html>, I believe that my project using human subjects should be determined by the IRB to be exempt from IRB review:**  
 No  
 Yes (If yes, please complete application including Section XII. C. 'Exempt Projects'; remember that only the IRB has the authority to determine that a project is exempt from IRB review)

If you have questions, please call the University Research Compliance Office (URCO) at 532-3224, or [comply@ksu.edu](mailto:comply@ksu.edu)

Last revised on January 2011

## Human Subjects Research Protocol Application Form

The KSU IRB is required by law to ensure that all research involving human subjects is adequately reviewed for specific information and is approved prior to inception of any proposed activity. Consequently, it is important that you answer all questions accurately. If you need help or have questions about how to complete this application, please call the Research Compliance Office at 532-3224, or e-mail us at [comply@ksu.edu](mailto:comply@ksu.edu).

Please provide the requested information in the shaded text boxes. The shaded text boxes are designed to accommodate responses within the body of the application. As you type your answers, the text boxes will expand as needed. After completion, print the form and send the original and one photocopy to the Institutional Review Board, Room 203, Fairchild Hall.

Principal Investigator: Lauri M. Baker  
Project Title: Green Growth: An Exploratory Study of Rural and Urban Garden Centers use of Social Media Marketing  
Date: 4/30/14

### **MODIFICATION**

Is this a modification of an approved protocol?  Yes  No If yes, please comply with the following:

If you are requesting a modification or a change to an IRB approved protocol, please provide a concise description of all of the changes that you are proposing in the following block. Additionally, please highlight or bold the proposed changes in the body of the protocol where appropriate, so that it is clearly discernable to the IRB reviewers what and where the proposed changes are. This will greatly help the committee and facilitate the review.

**The number of garden centers has been increased from two to six with up to twenty-four participants, including customers. Additionally, object-elicited interviews have been added as a data collection tool. Customers will receive a \$25 gift card, paid by the grant, to the garden center for their participation. This project will also evaluate the Facebook Insights of each garden center Facebook page.**

### **NON-TECHNICAL SYNOPSIS** (brief narrative description of proposal easily understood by nonscientists):

**The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of stakeholders of mid-western urban and rural garden centers as they use or interact with social media marketing in their business. Up to twenty-four in-depth and object-elicited interviews lasting approximately 60-90 minutes each will be conducted with the stakeholders of both the rural and urban garden centers.**

#### **I. BACKGROUND** (concise narrative review of the literature and basis for the study):

**One factor limiting the expansion of garden centers and nurseries within the Great Plains region, which includes Kansas, is marketing. Garden centers spend the majority of their advertising dollars on the Yellow Pages and print media (Behr, Dennis, Hall, Hodges, & Brumfield, 2008). Research conducted on garden centers also identifies the most influential marketing channel was word-of-mouth (WOM) (Ekanem, Singh, Tegegne, & Muhammad, 2000). Yet despite these attempts to reach customers, different populations and market segments require different marketing efforts, and mass media advertising is expensive and lacks the impact that WOM has. Marketing campaigns via social media are free or low-cost, and if used correctly, could lead to further promotion. Furthermore, businesses not utilizing social media as part of their marketing plan could be losing ground to their competitors and putting themselves at a disadvantage (Meyers, Irlbeck, Graybill-Leonard, & Doerfert, 2011).**

#### **II. PROJECT/STUDY DESCRIPTION** (please provide a concise narrative description of the proposed activity in terms that will allow the IRB or other interested parties to clearly understand what it is that you propose to do that involves human subjects. This description must be in enough detail so that IRB members can make an informed decision about proposal).

Garden centers will be purposively selected by a state extension specialist based upon the specialist's recommendations. Once the three rural and three urban garden centers are identified, participants will be asked to volunteer for the study. Confidential interviews of the garden center employees or owners will take place in a private setting at the garden center. Two customers from each garden center will also be asked to participate in confidential interviews at the location of their choice or via Skype or telephone. Each garden center will supply the researchers with Facebook Insight data to be analyzed. Semiotics will also be used to evaluate publically-displayed and accessible information on each garden center Facebook page.

- III. **OBJECTIVE** (briefly state the objective of the research – what you hope to learn from the study)  
 To explore the experiences of rural and urban garden centers as stakeholders use and interact with social media to market their business.
- IV. **DESIGN AND PROCEDURES** (succinctly outline formal plan for study):
- A. Location of study: \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. Variables to be studied: Satisfaction, enjoyment, confidence, ease of use
  - C. Data collection methods: (surveys, instruments, etc– Interviews and semiotics  
**PLEASE ATTACH**)
  - D. List any factors that might lead to a subject dropping out or withdrawing from a study. These might include, but are not limited to emotional or physical stress, pain, inconvenience, etc.: Time to participate
  - E. List all biological samples taken: (if any) NA
  - F. Debriefing procedures for participants: Following the interviews, participants will be debriefed by another member of the research team to check for accuracy.

- V. **RESEARCH SUBJECTS:**
- A. Source: Purposively selected from the six garden centers
  - B. Number: Twelve rural participants and twelve urban participants
  - C. Characteristics: (list any unique qualifiers desirable for research subject participation) Stakeholder within the garden center (owner, manager, employee, or customer).
  - D. Recruitment procedures: (Explain how do you plan to recruit your subjects? Attach any fliers, posters, etc. used in recruitment. If you plan to use any inducements, ie. cash, gifts, prizes, etc., please list them here.) The state extension specialist will identify rural garden centers and urban garden centers to be included in this study. Invitations will be given to the participants. Although no financial incentives will be given to the garden center employees or owners, they will be given a list of resources to use for marketing their campaign via social media and an analysis of Facebook Insight data. Customers will be recruited by the garden centers. Garden centers will make a Facebook post asking for participants. Fans of the page will be compensated with a \$25 gift card to the garden center purchased by the grant project.

VI. **RISK – PROTECTION – BENEFITS:** The answers for the three questions below are central to human subjects research. You must demonstrate a reasonable balance between anticipated risks to research participants, protection strategies, and anticipated benefits to participants or others.

- A. **Risks for Subjects:** (Identify any reasonably foreseeable physical, psychological, or social risks for participants. State that there are “no known risks” if appropriate.)



- No known risks**
- B. **Minimizing Risk:** (Describe specific measures used to minimize or protect subjects from anticipated risks.)
- No known risks**
- C. **Benefits:** (Describe any reasonably expected benefits for research participants, a class of participants, or to society as a whole.)
- Participants may begin to more closely evaluate their social media use as it relates to the promotion of the business. Additionally, increased sales may occur by using social media techniques.**
- Customers will receive a \$25 gift card to the garden center.**

In your opinion, does the research involve **more than minimal risk** to subjects? (“Minimal risk” means that “the risks of harm anticipated in the proposed research are not greater, considering probability and magnitude, than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.”)

Yes       No

**VII. CONFIDENTIALITY:** Confidentiality is the formal treatment of information that an individual has disclosed to you in a relationship of trust and with the expectation that it will not be divulged to others without permission in ways that are inconsistent with the understanding of the original disclosure. Consequently, it is your responsibility to protect information that you gather from human research subjects in a way that is consistent with your agreement with the volunteer and with their expectations. If possible, it is best if research subjects’ identity and linkage to information or data remains unknown.

Explain how you are going to protect confidentiality of research subjects and/or data or records. Include plans for maintaining records after completion.

**All participants will be given a gender-neutral pseudonym in publications to protect their identity. Additionally, all recordings will be kept confidential from other employees, employers, customers, and the public. All identifying information will be removed from participant responses that could jeopardize confidentiality. After the interviews have been conducted, the files will be transcribed by an outside firm and kept in a locked cabinet in a locked office only accessible to other university employees. Additionally, the audio recordings will be stored on a separate drive. All data will be destroyed following the conclusion of the study.**

**VIII. INFORMED CONSENT:** Informed consent is a critical component of human subjects research—it is your responsibility to make sure that any potential subject knows exactly what the project that you are planning is about, and what his/her potential role is. (There may be projects where some forms of “deception” of the subject is necessary for the execution of the study, but it must be carefully justified to and approved by the IRB). A schematic for determining when a waiver or alteration of informed consent may be considered by the IRB is found at

<http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/policy/consentckls.html>

Even if your proposed activity does qualify for a waiver of informed consent, you must still provide potential participants with basic information that informs them of their rights as subjects, i.e. explanation that the project is research and the purpose of the research, length of study, study procedures, debriefing issues to include anticipated benefits, study and administrative contact information, confidentiality strategy, and the fact that participation is entirely voluntary and can be terminated at any time without penalty, etc. Even if your potential subjects are completely anonymous, you are obliged to provide them (and the IRB) with basic information about your project. See informed consent example on the URCO website. It is a federal requirement to maintain informed consent forms for 3 years after the study completion.

- Yes**    **No**    **Answer the following questions about the informed consent procedures.**
- A. Are you using a written informed consent form? If “yes,” include a copy with this application. If “no” see b.
- B. In accordance with guidance in 45 CFR 46, I am requesting a waiver or alteration of informed consent elements (See Section VII above). If “yes,” provide a basis and/or justification for your request.

- C. Are you using the online Consent Form Template provided by the URCO? If "no," does your Informed Consent document has all the minimum required elements of informed consent found in the Consent Form Template? (Please explain)
- D. Are your research subjects anonymous? If they are anonymous, you will not have access to any information that will allow you to determine the identity of the research subjects in your study, or to link research data to a specific individual in any way. Anonymity is a powerful protection for potential research subjects. (An anonymous subject is one whose identity is unknown even to the researcher, or the data or information collected cannot be linked in any way to a specific person).
- E. Are subjects debriefed about the purposes, consequences, and benefits of the research? Debriefing refers to a mechanism for informing the research subjects of the results or conclusions, after the data is collected and analyzed, and the study is over. (If "no" explain why.) Attach copy of debriefing statement to be utilized. Participants will be debriefed following the study by a member of the research team in order to make sure their statements were accurately reflected.

**\*It is a requirement that you maintain all signed copies of informed consent documents for at least 3 years following the completion of your study. These documents must be available for examination and review by federal compliance officials.**

**IX. PROJECT INFORMATION:** (If you answer yes to any of the questions below, you should explain them in one of the paragraphs above)

- | Yes                                 | No                                  | Does the project involve any of the following?   |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | a. Deception of subjects   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | b. Shock or other forms of punishment  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | c. Sexually explicit materials or questions about sexual orientation, sexual experience or sexual abuse            |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | d. Handling of money or other valuable commodities   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | e. Extraction or use of blood, other bodily fluids, or tissues   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | f. Questions about any kind of illegal or illicit activity   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | g. Purposeful creation of anxiety  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | h. Any procedure that might be viewed as invasion of privacy   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | i. Physical exercise or stress   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | j. Administration of substances (food, drugs, etc.) to subjects  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | k. Any procedure that might place subjects at risk   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | l. Any form of potential abuse; i.e., psychological, physical, sexual  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | m. Is there potential for the data from this project to be published in a journal, presented at a conference, etc? |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | n. Use of surveys or questionnaires for data collection  |
- IF YES, PLEASE ATTACH!!**

**X. SUBJECT INFORMATION:** (If you answer yes to any of the questions below, you should explain them in one of the paragraphs above)

- | Yes                      | No                                  | Does the research involve subjects from any of the following categories?       |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | a. Under 18 years of age (these subjects require parental or guardian consent) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | b. Over 65 years of age  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | c. Physically or mentally disabled   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | d. Economically or educationally disadvantaged                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | e. Unable to provide their own legal informed consent                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | f. Pregnant females as target population                                       |

- g. Victims  
  h. Subjects in institutions (e.g., prisons, nursing homes, halfway houses)  
  i. Are research subjects in this activity students recruited from university classes or volunteer pools? If so, do you have a reasonable alternative(s) to participation as a research subject in your project, i.e., another activity such as writing or reading that would serve to protect students from unfair pressure or coercion to participate in this project? If you answered this question "Yes," explain any alternatives options for class credit for potential human subject volunteers in your study. (It is also important to remember that: Students must be free to choose **not** to participate in research that they have signed up for **at any time** without penalty. Communication of their decision can be conveyed in any manner, to include **simply not showing up** for the research.)
- j. Are research subjects **audio** taped? If yes, how do you plan to protect the recorded information and mitigate any additional risks?  
 Participant names will be removed after transcription. The audio recordings will be transcribed by an external firm and then kept in a locked room accessible only to employees. All participants will be given a gender-neutral pseudonym to protect their confidentiality. All recordings will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.
- k. Are research subjects' images being recorded (video taped, photographed)? If yes, how do you plan to protect the recorded information and mitigate any additional risks?

XI. **CONFLICT OF INTEREST:** Concerns have been growing that financial interests in research may threaten the safety and rights of human research subjects. Financial interests are not in themselves prohibited and may well be appropriate and legitimate. Not all financial interests cause Conflict of Interest (COI) or harm to human subjects. However, to the extent that financial interests may affect the welfare of human subjects in research, IRB's, institutions, and investigators must consider what actions regarding financial interests may be necessary to protect human subjects. Please answer the following questions:

- | Yes                                 | No                                  |  |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | a. Do you or the institution have any proprietary interest in a potential product of this research, including patents, trademarks, copyrights, or licensing agreements?  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | b. Do you have an equity interest in the research sponsor (publicly held or a non-publicly held company)?  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | c. Do you receive significant payments of other sorts, eg., grants, equipment, retainers for consultation and/or honoraria from the sponsor of this research?  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | d. Do you receive payment per participant or incentive payments?   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>            | e. If you answered yes on any of the above questions, please provide adequate explanatory information so the IRB can assess any potential COI indicated above.<br>This project is a part of a grant from the Federal State Marketing Improvement Program. The grant application is attached. The assistantship for the M.S. student on the project is funded through this grant. |

**XII. PROJECT COLLABORATORS:**

- A. **KSU Collaborators – list anyone affiliated with KSU who is collecting or analyzing data:** (list all collaborators on the project, including co-principal investigators, undergraduate and graduate students)

<b>Name:</b> Scott Stebner	<b>Department:</b> Agricultural Communications	<b>Campus Phone:</b> 785-532-5804	<b>Campus Email:</b> scottstebner@k- state.edu
<b>Lauri M. Baker</b>	<b>Agricultural Communications</b>	<b>785-532-1140</b>	<b>lmbaker@k-state.edu</b>
<b>Cheryl Boyer</b>	<b>Horticulture, Forestry, and Recreational Services</b>	<b>785/532-3504</b>	<b>crboyer@ksu.edu</b>
<b>Hikaru Hanawa Peterson</b>	<b>Agricultural Economics</b>	<b>785.477.0726</b>	<b>hhp@ksu.edu</b>

**B. Non-KSU Collaborators:** (List all collaborators on your human subjects research project not affiliated with KSU in the spaces below. KSU has negotiated an Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), the federal office responsible for oversight of research involving human subjects. When research involving human subjects includes collaborators who are not employees or agents of KSU the activities of those unaffiliated individuals may be covered under the KSU Assurance only in accordance with a formal, written agreement of commitment to relevant human subject protection policies and IRB oversight. The Unaffiliated Investigators Agreement can be found and downloaded at <http://www.k-state.edu/research/comply/irb/forms/Unaffiliated%20Investigator%20Agreement.doc>

**C.**

The URCO must have a copy of the Unaffiliated Investigator Agreement on file for each nonKSU collaborator who is not covered by their own IRB and assurance with OHRP. Consequently, it is critical that you identify non-KSU collaborators, and initiate any coordination and/or approval process early, to minimize delays caused by administrative requirements.)

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Organization:</b>	<b>Phone:</b>	<b>Institutional Email:</b>
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

**Does your non-KSU collaborator's organization have an Assurance with OHRP?** (for Federalwide Assurance and Multiple Project Assurance (MPA) listings of other institutions, please reference the OHRP website under Assurance Information at: <http://ohrp.cit.nih.gov/search>).

No

Yes

If yes, Collaborator's FWA or MPA # \_\_\_\_\_

**Is your non-KSU collaborator's IRB reviewing this proposal?**

No

Yes

If yes, IRB approval # \_\_\_\_\_

**C. Exempt Projects:** 45 CFR 46 identifies six categories of research involving human subjects that may be exempt from IRB review. The categories for exemption are listed here:

<http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/policy/checklists/decisioncharts.html>. If you believe that your project qualifies for exemption, please indicate which exemption category applies (1-6). Please remember that only the IRB can make the final determination whether a project is exempt from IRB review, or not.

**Exemption Category:** 45 CFR, 46.101(b)(2)

**XIII. CLINICAL TRIAL**  Yes  No  
(If so, please give product.)

**Export Controls Training:**

Last revised on January 2011

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-The Provost has mandated that all KSU faculty/staff with a full-time appointment participate in the Export Control Program.

-If you are not in our database as having completed the Export Control training, this proposal will not be approved until your participation is verified.

-To complete the Export Control training, follow the instructions below:

Click on:

<http://www.k-state.edu/research/comply/ecp/index.htm>

1. After signing into K-State Online, you will be taken to the Export Control Homepage
2. Read the directions and click on the video link to begin the program
3. Make sure you enter your name / email when prompted so that participation is verified

If you click on the link and are not taken to K-State Online, this means that you have already completed the Export Control training and have been removed from the roster. If this is the case, no further action is required.

-Can't recall if you have completed this training? Contact the URCO at 785-532-3224 or [comply@ksu.edu](mailto:comply@ksu.edu) and we will be happy to look it up for you.

**Post Approval Monitoring:** The URCO has a Post-Approval Monitoring (PAM) program to help assure that activities are performed in accordance with provisions or procedures approved by the IRB. Accordingly, the URCO staff will arrange a PAM visit as appropriate; to assess compliance with approved activities.

If you have questions, please call the University Research Compliance Office (URCO) at 532-3224, or [comply@ksu.edu](mailto:comply@ksu.edu)

INVESTIGATOR ASSURANCE FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

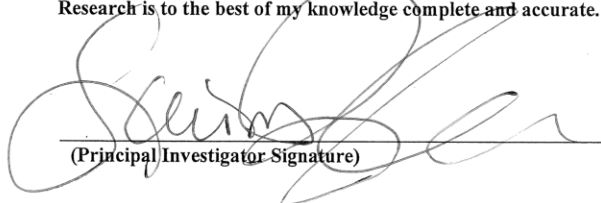
(Print this page separately because it requires a signature by the PI.)

P.I. Name: Lauri M. Baker

Title of Project: Green Growth: An Exploratory Study of Rural and Urban Garden Centers use of Social Media Marketing

XIV. **ASSURANCES:** As the Principal Investigator on this protocol, I provide assurances for the following:

- A. **Research Involving Human Subjects:** This project will be performed in the manner described in this proposal, and in accordance with the Federalwide Assurance FWA00000865 approved for Kansas State University available at <http://ohrp.osophs.dhhs.gov/polasur.htm#FWA>, applicable laws, regulations, and guidelines. Any proposed deviation or modification from the procedures detailed herein must be submitted to the IRB, and be approved by the Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) prior to implementation.
- B. **Training:** I assure that all personnel working with human subjects described in this protocol are technically competent for the role described for them, and have completed the required IRB training modules found on the URCO website at: <http://www.k-state.edu/research/comply/irb/training/index.htm>. I understand that no proposals will receive final IRB approval until the URCO has documentation of completion of training by all appropriate personnel.
- C. **Extramural Funding:** If funded by an extramural source, I assure that this application accurately reflects all procedures involving human subjects as described in the grant/contract proposal to the funding agency. I also assure that I will notify the IRB/URCO, the KSU PreAward Services, and the funding/contract entity if there are modifications or changes made to the protocol after the initial submission to the funding agency.
- D. **Study Duration:** I understand that it is the responsibility of the Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) to perform continuing reviews of human subjects research as necessary. I also understand that as continuing reviews are conducted, it is my responsibility to provide timely and accurate review or update information when requested, to include notification of the IRB/URCO when my study is changed or completed.
- E. **Conflict of Interest:** I assure that I have accurately described (in this application) any potential Conflict of Interest that my collaborators, the University, or I may have in association with this proposed research activity.
- F. **Adverse Event Reporting:** I assure that I will promptly report to the IRB / URCO any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others that involve the protocol as approved. Unanticipated or Adverse Event Form is located on the URCO website at: <http://www.k-state.edu/research/comply/irb/forms/index.htm>. In the case of a serious event, the Unanticipated or Adverse Events Form may follow a phone call or email contact with the URCO.
- G. **Accuracy:** I assure that the information herein provided to the Committee for Human Subjects Research is to the best of my knowledge complete and accurate.

  
(Principal Investigator Signature)

9/25/14  
(date)