

# Brewing up some lessons in marketing



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**O**NE OF THE most popular events at the Farwest Show is the annual Pub Crawl. So in this, the Farwest issue, let's talk about — you guessed it — beer.

Before we go on, I must confess that for a Portland native and current resident, I fail my city in two major ways: I don't drink coffee or beer. They haven't kicked me out of the city yet, but I imagine it's only a matter of time.

Still, the way beer manufacturers market themselves is fascinating to me, and may hold some lessons applicable to the nursery industry. In particular, let's look at three ways beer companies differentiate themselves from other beers:

**1. Stake a claim and make it your own.** What is Coors known for? Being cold. The claim Coors has made for decades is that — as a company brewed among the Rockies — it's the coldest, most refreshing beer you can drink. Think logically about this for a moment, and of course it's an absurd claim: Coors is as cold as any beer in your fridge, and can get as warm and tasteless as any other beer will when it's left out. That doesn't matter — Coors claimed the messaging territory around temperature, and it has worked for them. (Other companies in other industries make similar movies.

For example, the laundry detergent ALL, started branding itself as “the stain lifter” in the 1980s. Don't all laundry detergents lift stains? Again, it doesn't matter — the message was a success.) Sometimes, you can make a claim about yourself that other companies could also claim, but if you're the first and the loudest, it becomes your territory.

**2. Specialize for discerning tastes.** Microbreweries have become increasingly popular in the last 20 years — first around the nation, then around the world — by offering varieties and specialties that big national beer brands don't. You can get beers in your favorite flavors, organic beers, gluten-free beers, beers for every holiday you can think of, and so on. At the same time, microbreweries have made their mark by putting a sense of craft back into the beer-making process. It's not mass-produced, the claim goes — it's handcrafted by people who care more about the beer-making process. This has direct application to the nursery industry, for both retail and wholesale nurseries: How can you make a name for yourself by offering varieties of

products that your competitors don't? How can you emphasize the craft behind seeds, plants, trees and the growth cycle?

**3. When appropriate, poke the beast.** Speaking of microbreweries, one of Budweiser's Super Bowl commercials in

2015 was a commercial that mocked microbreweries and their beer. Here are some samples of the commercial's script: “Budweiser — proudly a macro beer. It's not brewed to be fussed over ... It's brewed for drinking, not dissecting ... Let them sip their pumpkin peach ale, we'll be brewing us some golden suds.” It's

telling that Budweiser — one of the largest beer companies in America — felt the need to go after microbreweries. (Those of us in Portland, where there's a microbrewery on every block, feel a little proud!) However, this form of differentiation works for Budweiser — sometimes it's easiest to point out what you're *not*. How does this apply to the nursery industry? Let the amateurs spend their money at the “garden center” in the grocery store — it will never match up to the expertise and variety of a retail nursery.

Differentiating yourself among your competition isn't always easy, but it's essential if you want to stand out in the marketplace. So, go ahead — pour yourself a drink, spend some time thinking about what makes your business special, and then tell the world. ☺



**Ian will be speaking  
August 21 at 1:30 p.m.  
FARWEST**

