



AE02-51

Measuring and Assessing the Image of Retail Garden Centers

Charles R. Hall
Professor
Agricultural Economics

E12-4115-00-001-02

The Agricultural Extension Service offers its programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, disability or veteran status and is an Equal Opportunity Employer.
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS
The University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture and county governments cooperating in furtherance of Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914.
Agricultural Extension Service, Charles L. Norman, Dean

Measuring and Assessing the Image of Retail Garden Centers

Image is the impression that the retailing public (which includes both customers and non-customers) associates with your business. The image of one's business has a profound impact on the number of customers attracted and their purchasing patterns. **Image analysis** is an effective planning tool that can be used to identify and evaluate the relative strengths and weaknesses of retail stores and their competitors. Image studies can also provide information regarding market penetration, merchandising strategies, effectiveness of advertising and promotional efforts, feasibility of expansion, and store layout and design. Image analysis also provides the necessary data for the development of a detailed profile of the typical consumer in a trade area.

One method of image analysis that has been used for several years by the retail industry is to employ an **image assessment survey** (see attached). While an image survey is readily applicable to any retail operation, retail nurseries and garden centers are the focus of this paper. By employing this type of survey, retail nurserymen and garden center operators are able to profile the image of their company and their competitors. In Tennessee, the Agricultural Extension Service assists retail nurseries and garden centers in measuring and assessing their image. This paper outlines the procedures used in conducting such a survey.

Developing an image survey can be a beleaguering task, but it doesn't have to be. To aid in the survey development process, garden center operators are provided an example of previously successful surveys. The garden center operator then modifies the sample image assessment survey to meet the needs of the garden center being analyzed. Questions may be added or deleted as the manager sees fit. The survey instrument is quite flexible and can be altered to provide the exact information desired by the management of the cooperating garden center.

One of the important attributes of the survey is third party representation. That is, the survey is distributed with a cover letter on University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service letterhead. This allows the cooperating garden center to remain anonymous, which in turn helps to remove any biases the respondent may have. We theorize that it also enhances the response rate.

Obtaining a representative mailing list is usually the responsibility of the garden center manager, although we can oversee this process as well. There are, of course, numerous companies that can assist with this task. Mailing lists can be readily segmented by numerous ways (by income, age, etc.). Most mailing list companies will also duplicate the cover letter, the survey instrument, and the return postage envelopes.

As administrators of the survey, the Agricultural Extension Service supplies the following: (1) a camera-ready copy of the cover letter, (2) a camera-ready copy of the survey instrument, and (3) a camera-ready return envelope. The mailing list service then duplicates the cover letter, the survey instrument, and the return postage envelope. The return envelope has the address of the mailing service company, who in turn sends them to the Department of Agricultural Economics at The University of Tennessee. Details such as the number of surveys to be sent, time frame for obtaining results, modification of the survey instrument, etc. depend on each individual garden center situation. These details need to be defined prior to the survey being sent out.

After the surveys are returned, data are entered and tabulated. A computerized version of SPSS (statistical analysis software) is used to handle statistical procedures. A report is generated which summarizes the survey results and a meeting is held with the garden center operator to assist in interpreting the results of the survey.

There are many advantages of image assessment surveys to retail nurserymen and garden center operators. Besides being able to develop a demographic profile of trade area populations, the results may be used to determine market share, to assess impacts of merchandising programs, and to identify marketing strategies based on an analysis of strengths and weaknesses relative to competitors.

Sample Survey Instrument

Garden Center Image Assessment Program

Dear resident:

Greetings! We need your assistance! Quality, prices, selection of products, employee courtesy, cleanliness, and many other items are important to most retail nursery customers. ***The University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service is conducting market research*** on these and other factors that consumers consider important in selecting a garden center. We are conducting this research in ***selected cities*** in Tennessee and would like your opinion about retail nursery operations (garden centers) in your area.

Attached is a survey form and a self-addressed, postage paid envelope. The information which you furnish will ***provide up-to-date information about consumers' opinions and values in analyzing retail nurseries***. The results will be useful to students, consumers, and managers of retail nurseries and garden centers as they seek to better serve their customers.

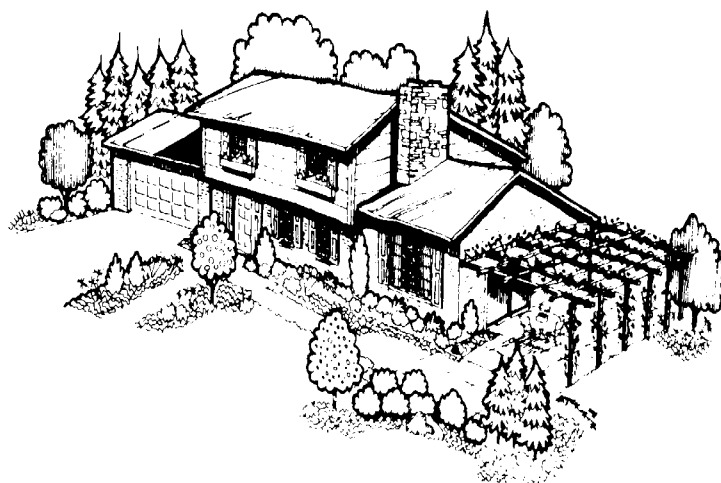
Because your household is one of a number drawn at random, it is important that each questionnaire be completed and returned as soon as possible. This is to insure that the results truly represent the feelings of people in your area. As you will see, the questionnaire is very short and will take very little of your time.

You will notice that the questionnaire has no identification numbers so that you may be assured of complete confidentiality. We would like to express our appreciation and thanks for your consideration and your cooperation in completing the enclosed questionnaire and returning it to us at your earliest convenience, but please try to have it in the mail ***no later than two weeks after receipt***. Thanks again for your time and cooperation!

Sincerely,



Charles R. Hall
Director - Garden Center Image Assessment Program
Professor & Extension Economist
University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service
Email: crh@utk.edu Phone: (865) 974-7410





Garden Center Image Assessment Program Customer Survey

(1). The following is a list of services that are not traditionally offered by garden centers. We are interested in which of these services you might be interested if they were to be offered at your selected garden center location. On a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate your level of interest using the following scale:

- 1 = Yes, this is a good idea. I would definitely be interested if this were offered.
- 2 = I would use this service occasionally.
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = I would seldom take advantage of this service.
- 5 = No, this is a bad idea. I would never be interested even if it were offered.

		(Circle one please)				
		<i>Good Idea</i>				<i>Bad Idea</i>
A. Restaurants:						
1. Coffee bar	.....	1	2	3	4	5
2. Café/sandwich shop/Pie shop	.....	1	2	3	4	5
3. Health-oriented foods/products	.....	1	2	3	4	5
4. Fresh farmer's market (vegetables)	.....	1	2	3	4	5
B. Nature exhibits:						
1. Birds (aviary)	.....	1	2	3	4	5
2. Fish (aquarium)	.....	1	2	3	4	5
3. Water gardens	.....	1	2	3	4	5
4. Pets (petting zoo)	.....	1	2	3	4	5
C. Apparel & gifts:						
1. Clothes (country garden attire)	.....	1	2	3	4	5
2. Accessories	.....	1	2	3	4	5
3. Scents	.....	1	2	3	4	5
4. Giftware	.....	1	2	3	4	5
5. Florist	.....	1	2	3	4	5
D. Spaces:						
1. Meeting room	.....	1	2	3	4	5
2. Wedding chapel	.....	1	2	3	4	5
3. Classroom	.....	1	2	3	4	5
4. IMAX theater	.....	1	2	3	4	5
5. Conference center	.....	1	2	3	4	5
6. Library/bookstore	.....	1	2	3	4	5
E. Services:						
1. Internet facilities	.....	1	2	3	4	5
2. Gardening information line (fee-based)	.....	1	2	3	4	5
3. Plant diagnostics laboratory (fee-based analysis)	.....	1	2	3	4	5
4. Distance shopping (internet catalog, etc.)	.....	1	2	3	4	5
F. Special events:						
1. Art shows	.....	1	2	3	4	5
2. Antiques shows	.....	1	2	3	4	5
3. Distance learning	.....	1	2	3	4	5
4. Workshops/seminars	.....	1	2	3	4	5
G. Accessories:						
1. Outdoor grills/cooking appliances	.....	1	2	3	4	5
2. Casual furniture	.....	1	2	3	4	5
3. Outdoor/landscape lighting	.....	1	2	3	4	5

(2) a. What is the name of the garden center in which you primarily shop?

c. In what other garden center do you frequently shop?

b. How far is this garden center from your home?
 A ... < 1 mile
 B ... 1-2 miles
 C ... 2-4 miles
 D ... 4-6 miles
 E ... 6+ miles

d. How far is this garden center from your home?
 A ... < 1 mile
 B ... 1-2 miles
 C ... 2-4 miles
 D ... 4-6 miles
 E ... 6+ miles

(3) Please rate the QUALITY of the products offered by the garden centers listed below that you are familiar with. Circle your response using the following rating system: A=Excellent; B=Good; C=Fair; D=Poor

Garden Center Attributes	Friendly Nursery	Plants & More	Plants R Us	Simply the Best	Plant & Pray
a. Quality of bedding plants and houseplants	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
b. Quality of landscape shrubs and trees	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
c. Quality of gardening/lawn care supplies	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D

(4) On a scale of 1 to 4, please rate the importance of the following sources of information about retail nurseries and garden centers. (Circle your response)

	<i>Not Important</i>	<i>Of little Importance</i>	<i>Somewhat Important</i>	<i>Highly Important</i>
a. Newspapers	1	2	3	4
b. Radio	1	2	3	4
c. Television	1	2	3	4
d. Direct Mail	1	2	3	4
e. Yellow pages	1	2	3	4
f. Friends	1	2	3	4
g. Front Marquee signs	1	2	3	4

(5) Which newspaper do you most frequently read? (Circle one please)

- A ... Morning News
- B ... Evening News
- C ... Other _____

(6) Do you frequently listen to radio programs such as: (Circle those you listen to)

- A ... Celebrity Host on WHIT
- B ... Heza Wannabe on WKBT

(6) Please rate the PRICES of the products offered by the garden centers listed below that you are familiar with. Circle your response using the following rating system: A=Excellent; B=Good; C=Fair; D=Poor

Garden Center Attributes	Friendly Nursery	Plants & More	Plants R Us	Simply the Best	Plant & Pray
a. Prices of bedding plants and houseplants	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
b. Prices of landscape shrubs and trees	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
c. Prices of chemicals/fertilizers	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
d. Prices of gardening/lawn care supplies	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D

(7) What is the age of your house or dwelling? (Circle one please)

- A ... 0-5 years
- B ... 6-10 years
- C ... 11-15 years
- D ... 15+ years

(8) What would you estimate your annual garden center purchases to be?

- A ... Less than \$100
- B ... \$101 - \$200
- C ... \$201 - \$300
- D ... > than \$300

- (9) Please rate the quality of the SERVICES offered by the garden centers listed below that you are familiar with. Circle your response using the following rating system:

A=Excellent; B=Good; C=Fair; D=Poor

Garden Center Attributes	Friendly Nursery	Plants & More	Plants R Us	Simply the Best	Plant & Pray
a. Return merchandise policy of the store	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
b. Ease of credit payments (checks, credit cards)	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
c. Resolution of customer complaints	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
d. Technical competence of employees	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
e. Friendly/courteous staff	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
f. Appearance of employees	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
g. Efficiency of employees	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
h. Hours of business	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
i. Waiting time for checking out items	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
j. Waiting time for general assistance	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D

- (10) Please indicate your age?
(Please circle the appropriate response)

A ... 18-25 D ... 41-50
B ... 26-30 E ... 51-60
C ... 31-40 F ... 60+

- (11) Number of children under age 12 in your household.
(Please circle the appropriate response)

A ... 0 C ... 2
B ... 1 D ... 3+

- (12) Please estimate your total household income?
(Please circle your response)

A ... Less than \$50,000 D ... \$101-125,000
B ... \$51-75,000 E ... More than \$125,000
C ... \$76-100,000

- (13) Do you attend educational seminars or demonstrations?
(Please circle your response)

A ... Yes B ... No

- (14). Please rate the SHOPPING ATMOSPHERE of the garden centers listed below that you are familiar with. Circle your response using the following rating system: A=Excellent; B=Good; C=Fair; D=Poor

Garden Center Attributes	Friendly Nursery	Plants & More	Plants R Us	Simply the Best	Plant & Pray
a. Parking facilities	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
b. Convenient location	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
c. Store layout for ease of shopping	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
d. Overall cleanliness of the garden center	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
e. Attractiveness of displays	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
f. Variety/selection of merchandise	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
g. Plant labeling (varieties, care, planting)	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
h. Products clearly priced	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
i. Overall signage in and out of the store	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D

Thanks for Your Assistance!

Sample Survey Results

Mean Scores of Respondents.

Garden Center Attributes	Friendly Nursery	Plants & More	Plants R Us	Simply the Best	Plant & Pray
1 Quality of bedding plants and houseplants	2.81	3.16	3.71	3.50	3.00
2 Quality of landscape shrubs and trees	2.78	3.12	3.59	3.27	2.92
3 Quality of gardening and lawn care supplies	3.19	3.04	3.28	3.10	2.93
4 Prices of bedding plants and houseplants	3.28	2.94	2.38	2.36	2.28
5 Prices of landscape shrubs and trees	3.10	2.84	2.25	2.33	2.19
6 Prices of chemicals and fertilizers	3.12	2.70	2.28	2.10	2.28
7 Prices of gardening and lawn care supplies	3.21	2.70	2.23	2.20	2.24
8 Return merchandise policy of the store	3.42	3.06	3.19	2.89	2.76
9 Ease of credit payments	3.43	3.11	3.20	2.67	2.69
10 Resolution of customer complaints	3.08	3.00	3.21	2.43	2.50
11 Technical competence of employees	2.39	3.14	3.72	2.90	3.08
12 Friendly/courteous staff	2.86	3.18	3.55	2.90	2.96
13 Appearance of employees	3.06	3.09	3.32	2.70	2.87
14 Efficiency of employees	2.60	3.10	3.48	2.90	2.91
15 Hours of business	3.54	3.11	2.88	2.60	2.79
16 Waiting time (checking out & assistance)	2.77	3.18	3.36	2.70	2.83
17 Parking facilities	3.38	3.06	2.57	2.58	2.81
18 Convenient location	3.50	3.31	3.42	2.75	3.29
19 Store layout for ease of shopping	3.04	3.25	3.29	2.83	3.04
20 Overall cleanliness of the garden center	3.05	3.25	3.62	2.82	3.00
21 Attractiveness of displays	2.73	2.93	3.58	3.00	2.85
22 Variety & selection of merchandise	2.88	3.07	3.25	2.67	2.85
23 Plant labeling (varieties, care, planting)	2.76	3.15	3.22	2.18	2.72
24 Products clearly priced	2.88	3.14	2.96	2.22	2.75
25 Overall signage in and out of the store	2.96	3.01	2.89	2.50	2.80
Mean Score of All Attributes	3.03	3.07	3.14	2.68	2.77

Means in **RED** indicate all ratings below the "Good" classification (4=excellent; 3=good; 2=fair; 1=poor)
Means in **BLUE** represent the highest rated garden center for that particular attribute.

Rating of potential services.

Service	Mean	Std. Deviation
Landscape lighting	3.81	1.19
Farmers market	3.72	1.43
Workshops/seminars	3.71	1.14
Plant diagnostics lab	3.63	1.27
Water Gardens	3.61	1.29
Florist	3.39	1.36
Casual furniture	3.39	1.27
Giftware	3.37	1.33
Library/bookstore	3.30	1.35
Aviary	3.17	1.36
Outdoor cooking	3.08	1.30
Classroom	2.94	1.37
Distance shopping	2.93	1.35
Garden attire	2.75	1.36
Scents	2.74	1.35
Internet facilities	2.73	1.39
Information line	2.73	1.43
Distance learning	2.70	1.29
Art shows	2.59	1.33
Health products	2.57	1.26
Coffee Bars	2.54	1.36
Cafe	2.43	1.39
Petting zoo	2.38	1.34
Meeting room	2.30	1.31
Wedding chapel	1.82	1.04

Scale of 1 to 5 with 5=good idea; 1=bad idea.