

# GROWERTALKS

## Features

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## Q&A: Ball's WebTrack Relaunch

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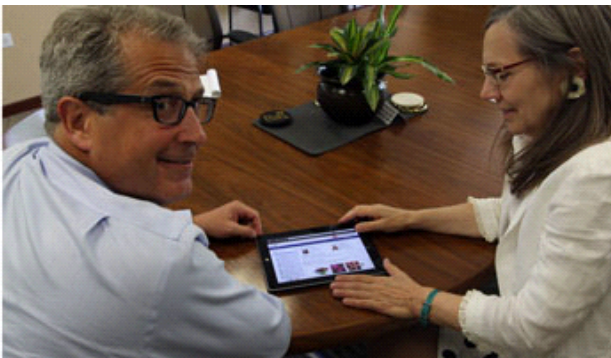
*"Business is going to get more complicated before it gets more simple, and the only salvation for the average businessman is to try to be part of the technological advances and make them work for him rather than vice versa."*

—Carl Ball

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**GrowerTalks:** Mark, WebTrack isn't new, right?

**Mark Morris:** WebTrack is actually 15 years old, but back then it was literally just order entry, that's all it was. And it was only used by a handful of customers at the time. Now it's used by 3,000 individuals, all of our internal customer service and all of our sales force.



**GT:** So what's happening in July that's cause for celebration?

**MM:** There have been a number of years of effort behind this relaunch we're doing—and it's more than just a storefront and a website for people to buy from. We've been working on how we handle master data, how we handle the inventory from hundreds of suppliers ... really working on the supply chain first, so that truly we have accurate inventory, better order fulfillment than anyone else ... all of that behind-the-scenes technology that customers won't see, but which is so important to them.

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*Pictured above: Mark Morris shows Anna Ball how WebTrack meets a key Ball Seed strategic goal: make ordering easy and enjoyable.*

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That's what we've been working on the past few years; now this [relaunch] is really just the window dressing. We've redesigned the website, we've made it cleaner, easier and more fun to use ...

I like to say that it's an extension of Ball Seed. It is not intended to be an e-commerce site. It gives customers

options for how they want to handle their ordering, handle their inventory, handle their paperwork from Ball. It's options; we're not forcing customers to replace communicating one-on-one with customer service or their sales rep.

**Anna Ball:** A few years ago, we decided that one of our key strategic goals for Ball Seed was to make it easy and enjoyable for the customer. Our whole idea is that the grower should spend more time with their customers, they shouldn't have to think about their supply. WebTrack is one of the key ways to do that. It should be easy so they don't have to spend all their time buying, they should be with their customers. And it should be enjoyable because business should be fun as well as fruitful. WebTrack came out of that.

**GT:** What percentage of Ball's business is now done via WebTrack?

**MM:** Almost 25% comes through WebTrack. And that's just orders. There are a lot of people who use WebTrack for invoicing or production planning or to access the promotion materials from our marketing department or cultural information.

**GT:** It sounds like it's pretty sophisticated and just for the big guys? What about the small growers out there?

**MM:** The sweet spot is the small to medium grower. The big growers are going to get on WebTrack and fall in love with it, then they'll take it to the next level rather quickly and ask, "How do we automate this? How do we send orders automatically?" Which we can do for them. But the sweet spot is that small- or medium-sized grower. Those are the people who are in the greenhouse all day. They'll log on and place their orders in the afternoon and evenings. That's when they're doing their planning on their laptops at the kitchen table.

**GT:** Is that when WebTrack gets its most activity?

**MM:** Yeah, it's late afternoon and evening. And quite a bit on weekends, too.

**GT:** Why would I log on to WebTrack instead of calling Customer Service or emailing my sales rep?

**MM:** The truth is, you can do any of those things. [Customer Service and your sales rep] are going to use the same WebTrack as a resource.

The most common question we get is, "Where's my stuff? When am I getting my seed? When are my plants going to arrive?" A lot of people don't want to wait for an answer. So they can look that up themselves. But they don't have to. The sales reps have access to everything. In fact, one of the things that's interesting is that everything the customer can do, the sales rep or customer service can log on and help them do at the same time. You and your sales rep can look at the same screen.

**GT:** Presumably, you can access it via modern tablet and smartphone technology?

**MM:** We have an iPad/tablet version being tested and used, and a phone version is in development—it will be called WebTrack Mobile.

**GT:** Anna, what would your grandfather, George J. Ball, think about WebTrack?

**AB:** He'd love it. And I think my dad [Carl Ball] would love it even more. Dad was funny. He didn't particularly

like technology himself, but he knew how important it was. I think we were the first company in the whole Midwest to get an IBM computer, back in the 1950s. He was always pushing to get the newest thing, the newest technologies, even though he didn't particularly understand it. He knew it was important. He'd love WebTrack; they both would. **GT**