GROWERTALKS

Front Lines

6/1/2019

LiveTrends Buys Plant Marketing

Chris Beytes & Ellen C. Wells



LiveTrends recently announced the purchase of a 20-acre, Mt. Dora, Florida-based foliage nursery called Plant Marketing.

"We wanted to secure at least a small part of our supply chain," answered LiveTrends founder Bisser Georgiev when asked why the innovative design and marketing company would decide to get into production—something Bisser had long sworn he wouldn't do. "We believe in outsourcing. We have 25 contract growers around the country, it's working great, and those people will stay in place. But with the booming of the indoor houseplant trend happening out there, we felt like we needed to jump in." Bisser says his goal is "to create a really attractive, very innovative line of new houseplants."

The first order of business: Rebranding as The Urban Jungle, with the tagline "Plants for Modern Living." (Former owner Larry Reit will keep the Plant Marketing name for his Eau Claire, Wisconsin, nursery, which isn't part of the sale.) They'll add more trendy foliage varieties to The Urban Jungle's mix, a portion of which will go to LiveTrends for upgrading and selling under the new brand's name, with the rest sold unbranded (for now) to Plant Marketing's existing customer base of groceries, independents, brokers and such. LiveTrends will then add infrastructure, technology and marketing to the new venture. Eventually, Bisser sees The Urban Jungle having its own e-commerce presence, too. But at the same time, he says they'll keep the "competitive price nature" of their line of basic foliage plants.

Bisser's view of the current shortage of indoor foliage is that it's not based on too much demand and too little supply. Instead, "it is always based on what plants are in demand right now. Like pilea two years ago or monstera now. [Certain plants] have become trendy really fast and growers don't have time to react—it's a slow industry. With The Urban Jungle, my goal is to use the same trend forecasting system that we use for LiveTrends, but apply it to the horticulture end and predict what is going to be trendy two years from now, and react to that before anybody else does."

Of the company, Bisser said Plant Marketing is one of the highest-quality premium foliage suppliers out there and

that they've been flying under the radar for 20 or more years. As mentioned above, LiveTrends wants to apply their system of trend forecasting—which helps to predict what will be in demand 18 to 24 months out.

"What works is real analysis and real trend forecasting," Bisser explained over the phone. "With LiveTrends, we pay a lot of money for consultants in Italy, Amsterdam, London and New York to help us predict what's coming up next in fashion, in society, in culture … so we'll try to use the same intellectual network to help us determine what is the next thing that's going to hit the indoor houseplant market."

They don't have any plans to add new varieties to the product mix for now and will, of course, honor all current orders and contracts. They're not even changing the 60-some employees at the nursery. They may add some trending varieties in 2020, and since the property is a total of 40 acres, they may consider adding some production space, too.

We asked Bisser if he had any other operations on his shopping list and received an emphatic "not at the moment." After all, LiveTrends did just begin operating in India in the past year—including building a handful of production facilities—and is on track for heading into the South Korean and Japanese markets soon.

Coming back to this market, Bisser explained that they've fine-tuned the company vision for both LiveTrends and The Urban Jungle.

"Our thing now is to fuse nature with culture and that covers all areas," he said. "If you look at this with LiveTrends, we don't exactly create museum art or super-expensive home décor. We merge nature with culture and how this thing changes with time. And all this is based on future trend forecasting, research and innovation. [This will be our] guiding light across all categories and all our companies that we build in the future."

They'll be debuting the new The Urban Jungle brand at the International Floral Expo in Miami in June, as now is the time to hammer out deals for 2020. **GP**