

GROWERTALKS

Guest Column

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Ukraine: Marketing in a Crisis

Regina Razumovskaya & John Stanley



Many industry people heard Regina Razumovskaya speak at the Garden Retail Conference in February 2022. At that time she and her husband, Volod, had a successful garden center just outside Kiev, Ukraine. Regina and Volod have two children, and are now official refugees in Australia, being supported by John, who's helped her and her family escape the war.

Pictured: From left to right: Volod and Regina Razumovskaya with John Stanley. The couple fled Ukraine for Australia with their two children and John is now hosting them.

In Ukraine, all of its citizens are all living in a crisis that they've never faced before. In a war, where no country will remain untouched, we as businesses can be part of the solution. It means that you cannot stay outside and say it's not your game. Not this time.

The vast majority of the world's governments have responded to it by stating that they stand with Ukraine. These governments have supported Ukraine with money and armaments, while big businesses have responded by leaving Russia and millions of Ukrainian people have protested the war around the world.

What about medium or small-sized businesses? To be more precise, what does a nursery or garden center do? And if it doesn't sound too pragmatic, what could we use for our marketing and earn revenue—both monetarily and reputational.

Small businesses have limited marketing budgets and therefore have to use it strategically while being socially responsible. Start with easy things:

Support a Ukrainian family: Host a Ukrainian family at your premises. Local businesses are all dependent on our local community and they'll appreciate it. Start promoting and initiating some actions in order to help the refugees in your local community, such as fundraising, a welcoming event, collection of essential clothing, etc. New potential local customers will become more aware of your business. And contact your local media—they'll often write an article or take pictures of the newly arrived refugees. And your business will be the background of all news.

Set up Ukrainian-style plant compositions: This could be at the front of your business. Point out or add

goods/items (plants, decorations, etc.) that are unique or familiar in Ukrainian gardens: viburnum, willow, mallow, etc. Allocate a fraction of these sales to go to a charity fund. Customers would love to have some of these plants at home where they could become a talking point, and would love to feel they are in some way standing with Ukraine.

Conduct workshops on Ukrainian crafts: Workshops on how to decorate eggs will draw attention to your business. Kerby's Houseplant Shop in Seffner, Florida, promoted Ukrainian eggs (called Pysanky) workshops using a kistka and wax pens to decorate eggs. This style of workshop promotes the traditional skill of egg decorating that's unique to Ukraine.

Partner with a similar business in Ukraine: Once the war is over, it should be possible to partner with nurseries and garden centers in Ukraine—not in terms of money, but in terms of your expertise (marketing, technology, etc.).

Make your own Vinok: At Chestnut Brae Farm in Australia, we partnered with a local florist to develop a workshop where the guest made a Vinok, the traditional Ukrainian floral crown. This was combined with the local Nannup Flower Festival with donations going to Ukraine.

Help rebuild the green industry in Ukraine: One way the global garden industry is capable of helping is with the green reconstruction of Ukraine once the war is over. Today, the Association of Nurseries in Ukraine is approaching the Ukrainian government with a donation plan from some of the world's nurseries who would like to support Ukraine with plants or covering landscape design costs. (Visit www.svsm.ua for more information. It's in Ukrainian when you first get there, but you can change it to English by tapping the flag at the top right.)

The plan includes making direct connections between nurseries and specific cities or towns for a certain greenery project. The donor is aware what park, school or hospital has been restored with plants and local residents will know the name of the donor. These actions will be highlighted in the press at both ends during each step of the process.

To find out more, contact Regina at karymova@botanicmarket.com.ua or spilkasvsm@gmail.com. **GT**

Regina and Volod (Vladimir) Razumovskaya are the owners of the biggest Ukrainian nursery (Fabrika Dekorativnykh Rasteniy) in the Donetsk Region and a modern garden center (Botanic Market) near Kiev. Both nurseries have been completely destroyed by artillery, all machinery has been confiscated by the Russian army and the plants have died because of lack of water. The garden center has remained untouched by the direct war actions, but as a business it's not operating due to lack of customers and supplies. Both of the businesses are being operated by volunteer workers to support Ukraine with plants to restore green life in the country while Regina and Volod are in Australia with their family. John Stanley is based in Western Australia and consults garden centers around the world, including in Ukraine.