

PLANTNAPPING

JOSEPH C. SHAW
Shaw Nursery & Landscape Co., Inc.,
8510 South Red Road,
South Miami, FL 33143

Abstract. Plant thievery is rapidly being recognized as one of the horticulture industry's major nemesis. Referred to by many as the cancer of agribusiness, it spreads quietly but deals its deadly blow not only to commercial and retail growers but is now regarded by many police agencies as the number one crime in Florida, based on occurrence statistics and dollar value. Precautionary, corrective and punitive measures must be initiated, instituted and monitored, very much like the use of cobalt in the treatment of cancer in humans.

Plant thief profile

The "Jesse James" of the plant world is predominantly male, white, age eighteen to twenty-seven, of non-foreign descent, often housed in commune-type accommodations, thus enhancing the arena of success through on going in-house planning and strategy conclaves. These headquarters are typically old homes in varying degrees of disrepair and decay, heavily overgrown with vegetation and usually located in low income neighborhoods either on the outer fringes of cities or in the hard core downtown ghetto areas.

Merchandising the product

To operate successfully the plant pilferer must apply sound management principles to merchandise his product in a manner that insures quality, minimum cost, and safety. Further, he must be skilled in taking his merchandise to market.

To meet the criteria of getting quality material safely and with little overhead, the plant thief does his product research in disguises that take the form of a sight-seeing bicyclist, a meter reader, garbage man, lawn man, door-to-door salesman, or in the height of sophistication, air re-

connaissance. The latter usually targets in on large commercial nurseries and groves.

Another method used to insure good source of supply can be simply captioned as "plant-plant," i.e. gain employment at the nursery to be victimized thereby tabulating data on stock, operational procedure, and company security. The rest is purely academic.

Merchandising the product is another matter. The "northern mall market" was the most lucrative and often used client for specimen plants in early 1974, but in the years that followed, the most dependable buyer has become the nursery industry itself.

Nabbing the plantnapper

In Dade County, Florida, through the efforts of a nurserymen's vigilante group, hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of stolen plants were documented from the scene of the crime on down to the sale to propagators and commercial nurserymen in the Redlands area. Other caches were traced from origin to sales to growers in Broward, Palm Beach and Collier counties as well as more distant sporadic deposits.

Constant surveillance, industry education, inter-nursery "hot-line" activities by the vigilantes, including actual apprehensions, made great strides to discourage the plantnapper. But even more successful, was the threatening and cajoling of nurserymen not to buy suspect material, thereby cutting off the plant thief's market place.

Additional activities by this watchdog group has involved, services for the often plagued residential community, the installation of security methods among nurserymen and has prosecuted fellow nurserymen who continued to aid and abet plant criminals by continuing to buy obviously stolen material after repeated warnings.

Statistics on so nebulous a subject are not readily compiled. However, estimates by industry leaders have indicated a marked decrease in plant crime activity following an all time "millions of dollars" high in 1976. Stronger legislation, greater community awareness and residue from correctional work done to date all point to a sharp decline of plantnapping in future years.

MERCHANDISING THE HORTICULTURAL COMMODITY

JOSEPH C. SHAW
Shaw Nursery & Landscape Co., Inc.,
8510 South Red Road,
South Miami, FL 33143

Abstract. "Selling your place of business" is the name of the game; not in the sense of putting a price tag on the company, but instead marketing two commodities: (1) image, and (2) authority in the community. This philosophy, coupled with the basics of good merchandising will open doors toward success. Through trial and error the author has built an inventory of programs that work.

Image Builders

Diagnostic services. Send a trouble shooter to your customers' homes at least once a week. Identifying diseases and other customer problems by telephone is a mortal sin. For greatest efficiency, be sure the clerk that handles the request gets accurate information and details to the point that the trouble shooter can check the client's request even if no one is home. A simple field memorandum stuffed in the mailbox accomplishes the purpose and satisfies the homeowner.

Continuing education. Build programs for the public. These can take the form of evening classes with guest