

NURSERY PAPERS

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A taster of innovative technologies for the nursery & garden industry

Using innovative computer technologies creatively can provide a leading edge to your business, but currently how many in our industry can put their hand on their heart and say they have exploited it to its full potential? These days the technology is more often than not being designed with a desire to keep it simple, user-friendly and often very cost effective. With society using these technologies as a ubiquitous part of their lives, why are we not exploiting these benefits and opportunities more for our industry?

In this Nursery Paper, Marcus Ragus of the Natural Resources Department, TAFE Tasmania and Peter Bobbi, NGIT Industry Development Officer, provide examples of innovative technologies that are readily available and detail on what these can do for our industry.



A taster of innovative technologies for the nursery & garden industry

We now have the capability to start looking beyond where we usually think of new technologies in our business. Past the immediate conservative needs of business, technologies such as that new point of sales equipment, the email, the MYOB software or the incredibly expensive video promotion we had professionally done last year.

Are you aware that at an internet and finger tip reach away we can exploit current technologies in ways that we have not been able to before?

These days the technology is more and more being designed with a desire to keep it simple, user friendly and often very cost effective. Hardware costs are dropping nearly every quarter as computer companies compete in an ever expanding market. A laptop today can be as cheap as a lower quality mobile phone and its capacity tenfold of those produced only a few years ago at 10 times the price.

The basis of this Nursery Paper is to provide examples of innovative technologies that are readily available and to provide some detail

on what these can do for our industry. It is by no means a full and exhaustive list, with the initial purpose being to introduce some ideas and discussion with further ideas for future papers. So, on the one hand the purpose of this paper is to direct people to a few technologies that can be immediately useful, and on the other hand it is to provide a taster rather than a complete guide; that people can check out with minimal time commitment and without feeling initially overwhelmed.

The content of this topic can be divided up into two main sections, Section One will be presented in this paper and Section Two in future papers. Section One will look at a selection of existing new software technologies, most of which belong to a current revolution of applications that are available, often for free through the world wide web, known as Web 2.0. These applications provide a variety of uses and are usually quick and straight forward to set up, even for those with only a limited amount of computer experience. In many cases the software applications have been specifically designed for the uses that we

are suggesting, but in other cases we are proposing creative alternatives for their use in business.

The second section we will look at is directed at a select group of creative computer hardware technologies with an emphasis on mobile and smart tag technology. Once again we are very focused on cost effective technologies that are not a huge expense to set up and initiate but can also provide the clever business with potentially good returns.

There are so many variables out there that will influence the uptake of technology within a business. Probably one of the greatest issues for some is justifying the need for technology within such a practical hands on industry. The other is the mindset that "We have done without technology for so long so why do we need it now?" or "I'm too old to learn about that stuff, that's the generation to come." You have all heard that old adage "You are never too old to learn," well it's true!

The Web 2.0 and its potential

Before Web 2.0 became a popular phenomenon we had a web that was not very interactive, yes companies could promote themselves, details could be seen and emails sent, but the average Joe Blogs, unless a computer expert, had very little direct interaction within websites and it cost money to own your own web space. Web 2.0, known by those in the know as the 'architecture of participation' due to its emphasis on so called 'open' ownership of the web, where everyone has the ability, and for what some might say the 'right' to own and interact in their own space of the web. Its basic ideals work on social networking, free expression and often free access to tools and resources. It also relies

on self dedication and input from others who often provide vast amounts of knowledge and product information for what sometime seems nothing more than a selfless act of public generosity for the social good.

Almost all the basic office computer software packages and applications that we usually buy with our computers, is available as 'open source' essentially free software, often associated with the Web 2.0 philosophy. You are now probably wondering how a business can give something away and still survive? They do this in many ways, some through advertising onsite, additional user pay add-ons, periodic promotions and more. 'Google' the well known internet business initially

famous for its web search software and chief rival of Microsoft, is often touted as the evolutionary base of Web 2.0; they are still a leading force in this area today.

For whatever the reasoning the Web 2.0 area has great potential for business, however like all things it can have its pros and cons; and issues like security, quality of information, management of intellectual property and others can be handled in very different ways depending on what you may access and what sites or tools you use. Always familiarise yourself with the options available and the requirements of the individual providers of content on the web.

Internet technologies: A brief overview

Blogs (FREE to set up and use)

The name is derived from Web Log, and they are a type of online public diary or date scheduled entry area. People use blogs for all kinds of reasons these days including for journalism, promotion, politics or just to keep relatives up to date.

They are quick and straight forward to create and as long as you have an email address you could start one in less than 15 minutes using a series of stepped wizard task areas and professional background templates

Examples of nursery blogs using blogger at: US <http://lasumidanursery.blogspot.com/> and <http://www.baianicchia.blogspot.com/>

And another using Word Press at: <http://behnkes.bluekeyblogs.com/>

Potential business use:

- Advertising and promotions
- Product display
- Customer loyalty programs
- Customer product information

One of the earliest blog sites,

Blogger
<https://www.blogger.com>
(set up one in three steps)

OR

Wordpress
<http://wordpress.org/>

For more information on bloggs checkout:
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog>

WIKI (FREE to set up and use)

From the Hawaiian "Wiki wiki" or quickly

These were and still are one of the mainstays behind Web 2.0 and social networking. The idea is that anyone can create these spaces in a series of easy steps. They have inbuilt editors that allow you to add text, images and other useful items simply, similar to that of blogs. In this case however, you have the ability to set access to editing so that any of your wiki members (anyone you choose or anyone at all) can edit and add to the site.

These are very popular areas for public discussions, meetings and online discussions.

One of the most well known Wiki sites that is used by thousands around the world is the online Encyclopaedia known as Wikipedia at: <http://en.wikipedia.org>. This site allows users to set up their own pages of information based on a suitable topic, this could easily include your business. A garden centre page in Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garden_centres

Potential business use:

- Business web and sales pages
- Advertising and promotions
- Product display
- Customer loyalty programs
- Customer product information

Here are four quick options to start a wiki page:

Wikispaces
<http://www.wikispaces.com/>

Wetpaint
<http://www.wetpaint.com/>

Wikidot
<http://www.wikidot.com/>

Wikipedia
<http://en.wikipedia.org>.

Photo (image) sharing (FREE to set up and use, size limitations; some options can cost)

Images can be uploaded to these sites and then accessed by others either through a specific site web page or through viewing tools that can be added to other web pages.

Some promotional examples by nurseries on Flickr: http://www.flickr.com/photos/grn_acres/

Potential business use:

- Advertising and promotions
- Product display
- Staff training

Flickr
<http://www.flickr.com/>

Photobucket
<http://photobucket.com/>

Podcasting (FREE to set up and use, size limitations; some options can cost)

Originally named after the portable music player the Apple™ iPod, the concepts basis revolves around the promotion and distribution/broadcasting (casting) of text, audio (sound, voice) and audio visual (video) products to others through mostly free personal web spaces. Allowing others to easily view and enjoy content and even have new editions of content automatically sent to the area or piece of technology they wish to view them in, eg personal web page or mobile phone; as the new content becomes available.

They are straight forward to set up in minimal time.

NOTE: This 'casting' or 'feeding' of information and content on the web is now a very common feature of many of the tools already discussed above.

A commercial example: A previously lesser known blender manufacturing company in the US has become a well known company by using home grown videos of their blender product munching through an array of well known products, in their popular You Tube™ web area called "Will it Blend". Due to this they have an incredible fan base of millions and have done this with minimal financial input.

See the examples at: <http://www.youtube.com/user/Blendtec>

See their famous video i-Phone blend at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLxq90xmYUs>

It is interesting to note that the videos were produced in house, using simple video editing software. There are two free video editing software products that we would recommend; Microsoft Photostory™ and Microsoft Movie Maker™. These are both straight forward to use and can be mastered quickly; plus they are ideal for producing material suitable for web marketing.

MS Photostory™ allows you to create a still image slide show with special effects (such as panning and zoom through images), transitions, voice overs and background audio, created by working through a series of simple 'wizard' steps.

If you would like to save an MS Photostory™ produced video to play back on a DVD then you will also need an additional piece of software called Sonic, see link.

MS Movie Maker™ is an excellent program if you are first timer to video editing and base level video resource development, even for those who have minimal IT skills. It provides a straight forward platform and with some base level instruction it can be a great way to put together some great video.

NOTE: MS Photostory™ in its current version will not play on a computer that runs an MS Vista platform™, a new version is in production. MovieMaker™ can be loaded on all platforms and comes standard with MS Vista platform™, if you have not got it download it using the links provided in this paper.

One other product that is worth mentioning is Animoto. This product will produce professional looking video productions in three simple steps. Basically the user uploads still images to the site (you need to register for an account, it is free) then you add music, next step will generate the video with movement, sound and transitions, finished versions look great. The only issue is that in the free version you are restricted to viewing your videos through the site or exporting them to another site like You Tube. If you would like to use them on DVD or CD then you have to pay for the commercial version. Additionally the music is held under copy right, but if you purchase the commercial version it covers copyright on all items. Worthwhile looking at the example videos on the home site and have a go yourself.

Potential business use:

Business web pages
Advertising and promotions
Product display
Customer product information

Low bandwidth dialup internet connection could result in slow connection for users wishing to access these sites, however most broadband services would be suitable.

You tube™

<http://www.youtube.com/>

Podomatic™

<http://www.podomatic.com/>

Google™ video

<http://video.google.com/>

Survey and market analysis tools (FREE to set up and use, size limitations; some options can cost)

There are a number of tools available for survey and market analysis. Survey Monkey is possibly one of the most powerful online survey producing programs and is used widely. It has a range of options include question templates, choice of languages and more. Once again straight forward to use and quick to master.

Potential business use:

Customer survey and evaluations
Special reviews
Staff evaluation
Staff training

Survey Monkey™

<http://www.surveymonkey.com>

Content management systems (CMS) (FREE to set up and use, own server required)

(These software platforms are often freely available but you will need to place them in your own server space or have them hosted elsewhere which usually costs a small fee per year)

These have all the tools needed to set up a complete environment for delivery and sharing of information amongst individuals on a team, document storage and review, discussions, training delivery and more.

NOTE: These environments do require a higher level of skills to set up and maintain than the others mentioned above.

Potential business use:

Communications
Document sharing and review
Meetings through live text chat
Staff training

One of the main open source platforms,

Moodle™

<http://moodle.org/>

Other Web space

(Free online web space and hosting)

Google™ offers a free online tool called Google™ Sites that enables you to set up a web page in a few easy steps. The details can be seen at the sites blog: <http://googlesitesblog.blogspot.com/>.

Like with all Google™ products you will need to have set up a free account with Google, which is straight forward and simple to do. This will get you a Google™ Apps account which entitles the user up to 10 Gig of server space which is huge.

Additionally Google™ also offers another web creating tool called Google™ Page, it is also worth looking into and offers up to 400 MB of web space for free.

Potential business use:

- Business web and sales pages
- Advertising and promotions
- Product display
- Customer loyalty programs
- Customer product information

Google™ Sites

www.google.com/sites/overview.html

Google™ Pages

<http://pages.google.com/-/about.html>

Online voice technology and live conferencing (Some are completely free and some are free with certain limitations such as one person to one person only or one to three maximum, additionally some are public and are therefore not secure lines)

These essentially allow for live voice communications between individuals via their computers, plus they can provide for live text chat, live document sharing and viewing and video sharing.

VOIP, Voice over the internet protocol services are also commercially available by many providers, these are slightly different to the above products as they are at cost and they can work with existing tele communications services such as standard phones and mobile networks, but at a lower cost.

Low bandwidth internet connection can be an issue with these products, most broadband services would be suitable however.

Potential business use:

- Communications
- Live document sharing and review
- Meetings
- Staff training

Vyew™

absolutely free for up to 50 people, full web conferencing (Excellent)

<http://vyew.com/site/>

Illuminate™

V-room is free for up to three people :

<http://www.illuminate.com/vroom/index.jsp>

Google™ talk

(One to one)

<http://www.google.com/talk/>

Skype™

(One to one and group discussions)

www.skype.com

Online sales - e-Bay and PayPal

Most businesses have excess stock or lines that are moving slowly, have you every thought about selling them online?

Well if you are interested the well known online sales site e-Bay would be one of the first places to look at. There are many companies that sell excess stock on e-Bay and do very nicely out of it.

e-Bay provides user friendly set up pages that can be easily completed with automated money transfer options.

Additionally if you would like to set up an online sales page you will have to also organise an easy and secure online payment and money transfer system.

PayPal is possibly the most well known and well used online payment solutions company. They are a multi award winning company and they claim to be the best in their field globally. They are the principle payment system behind E-bay and many thousands of online payment purchasing sites worldwide.

Once you have a free account with them you can include online payment options through most online web spaces including many of the web areas already discussed in this paper.

Potential business use:

- Online sales
- Online money transfers

e-Bay™

<http://www.ebay.com.au/>

PayPal™

<http://www.paypal.com.au/au>

Conclusion

Whether your business is a production nursery, retail nursery or an allied trader this paper demonstrates that there is enormous potential to use these available technologies to benefit your businesses. However the key with these new technologies is to use them innovatively to maximise their benefits. One of the main objectives of this and future papers is to get you to think beyond the square as some of the examples provided have demonstrated.

Future papers will provide more information on other creative technology options, so keep an eye on the NGIA website for upcoming workshops that will provide training in these areas. For further advice on these topics and how to set them up in your business contact Marcus.Ragus@gmail.com

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Marcus Ragus is from the Natural Resources Department, Institute of TAFE, Tasmania and Peter Bobbi is Industry Development Officer, Nursery & Garden Industry Tasmania.