



Malta's leading garden centre, Piscopo Gardens, is on a par with its European counterparts. The family-run garden centre has increased its product lines over the years and now has extensive displays of giftware, garden furniture and pet products.

Following a rebranding exercise in 2009 the family-run Piscopo Gardens has a younger image. It prides itself with being able to communicate the most relevant information to its clients through its dedicated and motivated staff, and takes a personal interest in the well-being of the plants it sells.

Market

The local market for garden centres is far from being mature. It is growing at a fast rate but there is still a way to go before Malta reaches European levels. Piscopo Gardens is the leading local garden centre that is closest to European levels and is also the most innovative. It is more in line with English garden centres than Dutch garden centres, with which it is in contact and compares product lines.

Like English garden centres, Piscopo Gardens has a wide giftware range for the home, pet food and related products, traditional clay and plastic pots, and plants of all types, which are the bedrock of its business. Its main customer is the retail buyer – cash and carry – and, as a result the strategy adopted is to offer a quality service that makes it stand out. Great emphasis is placed on staff training, and the constant and never-ending need for improvement (CoNI), to ensu-

re clients obtain valid advice on where plants should be placed, what fertilizers they need and how often they should be watered.

The garden centre business is also highly seasonal, with new plant varieties coming into favour and barely 2% of plants still being marketed five years after they are introduced. Piscopo Gardens concentrates on quality brands and a wide variety. Among its strengths is its excellent location on the main road in Burmarrad in the north-east of the island, where there is the largest concentration of villas, from Santa Marija Estate in Mellieha to Madliena.

Piscopo Gardens is spread over 10,000 m² and, apart from on-site parking has a large display area with a large variety of stock. Its well-trained, highly dedicated staff are also among its strengths.

Achievements

For the third year running, Piscopo Gardens organised its annual Herb Day, which has now extended over a weekend.

Extra effort has been put to organise the display layout, making it more customer friendly. The company has also made it its mission to assist as many abandoned animals as possible.

History

Company founder Emanuel Piscopo, an economist with a post-graduate diploma in Business Administration, started the business as a hobby in 1989. It was always his wish to work with nature and Piscopo Gardens was the fulfilment of his ambition. Initially, he traded as a sole owner and then set up the company in 1994.

This coincided with the introduction of Value Added Tax, with a clear set-off by 1 January, 1995, including official cash registers in line with the new legislation. The two employees who were first engaged, Censu (surname?) and Louis (surname?), are still working for the company.

As the years went by, in line with developments in garden centres in Europe, Piscopo Gardens expanded its product offering beyond plants, to pots, garden furniture and, later on, pet products. Vinny Piscopo, the founder's daughter who has a degree in communications and psychology, joined the company in 20xx and is now responsible for the day-to-day management, apart from accompanying her father on regular trips to the UK and Holland to buy new stock.

Product

The Piscopo Gardens product line is worthy of a European garden centre. A Maltese producer is contracted to grow many seasonal plants, in addition to the plants that are grown on site. The company buys other plants locally and from suppliers in Sicily, which has a similar climate to Malta's. The majority of indoor plants are imported from auctions in Holland.

Pet products and garden furniture are sourced from both local and foreign suppliers, mainly in Europe, with which it has built an excellent relationship over the years. Even though the company does not sell pets, with the exception of fish, its extensive opening hours, seven days a week, means that clients can stock up even when they run out on their favourite pet food over the weekends. The company is constantly on the look-out for new products to keep the items in stock as fresh as possible with new items are regularly exhibited on its shelves.

Giftware items it stocks include glassware, ornaments for the garden, all kinds of candles and

whatever goes with them, seasonal gifts for Valentine's Day, Halloween, Christmas, Mother's Day, including floral arrangements, Father's Day and decorative items for the home.

Recent Developments

The company undertook a rebranding exercise, including its corporate logo incorporating a palm tree, a favourite of Mr Piscopo's, in 2009. This has lent the company a younger image.

Ms Piscopo created the company mascot, Polly, which is also used in its TV commercials. In the latest commercial, Polly is seen playing in gazebos, planting, with her dog. The message is: 'We are not just plants!'

The giftware area has been increased as growth potential is seen in this line.

With the exception of Sundays in July and August (when it opens in the mornings only) Piscopo Gardens opens seven days a week throughout the rest of the year.

Promotion

Apart from television advertising and the company website, www.piscopogardens.com, the company communicates with its clients through a monthly newsletter, banners, e-mail and an increasing amount of printed leaflets, which have constantly improved in quality over time.

Clients are attracted to targeted events, like the annual Herb Day, when a chef is hosted on site to cook live, using the herbs and interacting with

visitors, enabling them to make a fun outing. Another event was the aloe vera day, promoting awareness of the benefits of aloe vera.

Piscopo Gardens assists many MCAST students with their projects and have been given credit by a few. The owners are regularly asked to give lectures and demonstrations in schools for which they do not charge since they believe that, where children's education is involved, they should do their best to help.

The company helps many charities, most animal sanctuaries, which leave baskets to collect donations from clients, and also the Dar tal-Providenza, Inspire and other charitable initiatives that occur from time to time.

Brand Values

The company has evolved over the years and its brand values reflect this evolution. Piscopo Gardens encourage homes to be greener and foster greater knowledge of plants in general among its clients. It is more important for the client to receive the right information from an authoritative source to enable them to take decisions themselves.

Apart from that, the company offers the highest quality plants and other items. After selling and delivering plants on request – the owners call back later to ensure everything is going well. This call back service is not only to ensure that the client is satisfied; the owners also want to make sure that their employees are doing their jobs in the most professional manner possible

Customer satisfaction is a primary brand value since it is thanks to the customer that staff can be retained. The highest value Piscopo Gardens promote is honesty and personal integrity. If an item is not suitable for display on the shelves, they would not wish to sell it. Thanks to this approach, the company has the lowest rate of absenteeism. Employees go to work with a sense of duty and dedication.



Did you know?

- Call back service – after delivery, the owners call clients to check up on 'their' plants.
- Loyalty cards – loyalty points can be redeemed at any time as long as clients have enough points to redeem an object. They do not need to collect thousands of points. They can already redeem a hundred points for some items.
- Clients who have their own pots can bring them over and Piscopo Gardens place fresh plants in them while they shop on site, or choose pots and plants which can immediately be repotted for them.
- If clients have a sick plant, they can take a leaf to Piscopo Gardens so that they will be told what the problem is, providing advice to help make the plant healthy again.