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Front Lines

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Bower & Branch's New Execs

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Online tree and shrub (and now perennials, grasses, gift, accessories and services, too) seller Bower & Branch has just hired two new executives to help run and guide the business. They are Brian Gerhart and Michael O'Hara. Brian will be Chief Operations Officer, leading the development and execution of short- and long-term growth strategies. Michael O'Hara is the new Chief Strategic Officer, overseeing finance, planning, development and execution of multiple marketing objectives.

What's most interesting is that these two gents don't come from horticulture: Brian's background is the petroleum industry, including Gulf Oil, Pyramid Oil and Amerigreen Renewable Fuels. He's got 27 years of experience running everything from startups to established companies.

Michael, meanwhile, has a broad range of executive experience with publishing companies, marketing firms and even Pep Boys (where he served as Chief Marketing Officer).

Curious, I reached out to B&B's Scott Chamberlain, VP of operations, who sent out the announcement, to ask why they decided to hire a guy from the petroleum business as COO. I wrote, "I'm sure he's smart … but trees and shrubs are different from barrels of oil in more than a few ways."

Scott replied by saying, "This was exactly the type of response we hoped to invoke. Perhaps I should have titled [the press release] 'Garden e-retailer hires Petroleum Industry Executive'?"

Scott continued with this answer to my question:

"One of the misconceptions about Bower & Branch is that we are a garden center or grower, when in fact, we are neither. We are an e-commerce and logistics solution for garden centers and growers to reach customers where they live, work and play under a national brand. Our solution provides a way forward for our industry, founded and started from within the industry. Without Bower & Branch, our industry is at risk from others (both from the industry and outsiders) confusing and underwhelming the marketplace at the very time we want them to share in our excitement. Think Amazon Plant Store, Proven Winners Direct, Fast-Growing-Trees.com, shrubbucket.com, Etsy, Terrain, thesill.com … the list goes on of direct-to-consumer models shaking the industry.

"While your comparison of barrels of oil to trees and shrubs is true, Bower & Branch is deep in talent who possess the knowledge, skills and abilities the industry would expect, from within our own team and through our partners localized across 25 states and 140 retail locations. No other model I'm aware of has access to this level of experience and also makes it accessible to consumers nationwide.

"While not a green thumb, Brian's addition to our team brings a fresh perspective and energy to our company. He is

also a man rooted in faith and family. He has a solid history of implementing internal systems and strategies, as well as improving efficiencies and growth.” **GP**