

TexasSuperstar.com - Web-based Promotion of a Plant Trialing Program

Christine MacAlpine, D. Lineberger, J. Parsons, M. Arnold, S. George, W. Mackay, C. McKenney

T. Davis, and G. Grant

The Horticulture Program, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas 77843-2133

Abstract

Texas A&M University research scientists and Extension specialists have operated the CEMAP plant trialing program for over 5 years. Outstanding ornamental plants are evaluated, improved, and tested at sites representing the diverse environments of Texas and selections deemed meritorious are designated "Texas Superstars™" and are released to the industry for rapid increase. Two Web sites are used to deliver information about Texas Superstars™. One is housed on the educational Web site *Aggie Horticulture*, while the other is operated as a .com domain. The .com Web site is constructed using frames technology, so that most of the content actually resides on the .edu Web site. Additional features of the .com site include a searchable database of cooperating retailers, plant description pages, large format color images, and informational leaflets related to landscape gardening in Texas.

<http://TexasSuperstar.com/>



Coordinated Grower Education and Marketing Assistance

The hallmark of CEMAP (Coordinated Education and Marketing Assistance Program; 1,2), the group that initiated and trademarked Texas Superstar™, is ensuring plant availability at times of peak demand.

Researchers solve production problems and develop new plant selections while Extension personnel conduct regional trials and assist growers in developing production schedules.

A commercial Web site, TexasSuperstar.com, is the main vehicle for information providing to:

- ★ Newspapers
- ★ Nursery/floral industry
- ★ Consumers

The Web site contains full screen color images of the plants, plant descriptions and information about suitability in the landscape. Links to Extension publications and other information about landscape ornamentals is provided. A description of the CEMAP program and personnel involved is also available.

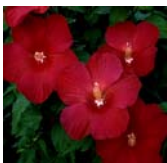


Figure 1 'Flare' Perennial Hibiscus is one of the 33 plants currently listed as Texas Superstars™. Pictures and growing information can be found on the Web

Finding TexasSuperstars™

A Web-accessible database allows consumers to find retailers selling Texas Superstars™ by store name, city, firm type, county or zip code. Records are added to the database from a password-protected form.



Figure 2 Database records help consumers find the plants seen on the Web site.

Clickable image maps assist the consumer in finding retailers closest to them. The site provides the address, email, Web site, and other information about the retailer. The page links to Mapquest.com to provide driving directions to the store.

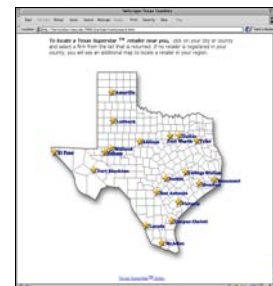
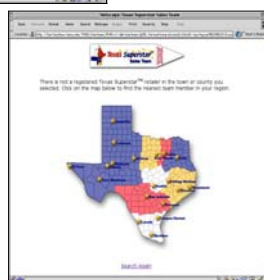


Figure 4

If no retailers are available in the county, users may choose from eight districts to find the closest nursery.



Dual Purposing Information

Having the Web address TexasSuperstar.com is important for marketing the information. University regulations prohibit serving a .com domain name. We used frames to allow a .com "front door" while serving the majority of the information from the .edu CEMAP Web site.



Figure 5: The left frame holds users in the .com site and displays the TexasSuperstar.com address.

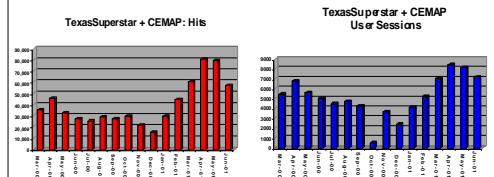
Figure 6

The plant information, Extension publications, and accessory files are stored on the CEMAP Web site in *Aggie Horticulture*.



User Statistics

Statistics for the .com Web site alone are not available; hits to the combined sites show seasonality, peaking in April, 2001 at 80,000 hits/month. This translates to over 8,000 WebTrends user sessions.



Figures 7, 8

Web log statistics for the combined Web sites for the period between March, 2000 and June, 2001.

Literature Cited

1. Arnold et al. 2001. The Coordinated Education and Marketing Assistance Program (CEMAP). A Case-Study in Cooperative Industry / University State-Wide Plant Trials and Promotion. <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/cemap/cemappaper.html>
2. Mackay et al. 2001. Texas Superstar and the Coordinated Education and Marketing Assistance Program: How We Operate. HortTechnology 11: 389-391.

Christine MacAlpine is a Masters candidate in Horticulture at Texas A&M University.

