

Business Barometer July 2008

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Increased Sales for Plants, Fountains

Water garden retailer in Cedar Park, Texas

Many people are asking for disappearing fountains and aquatic plants. Pond-building follows. Many of our disappearing fountains are custom-made, and we have seen a 40 percent increase in their sales the last two years. I think disappearing fountains and pond accessories will become more popular. We expect about a 25 percent increase in sales for both items this next year. So far, the housing slump hasn't affected us at all.

The way we increase customer visits is by being a destination location. We have three acres of land with 100 different water features. Most people come regularly to see what is new. Our website provides customers with a little information in hopes of driving people here, but we haven't been able to measure its success yet.

Postcards, radio and newspaper advertisements also bring in a lot of traffic for us. There are other retailers and big box stores in the area, but they don't really compete with us.

We also target do-it-yourselfers with weekend seminars that cover aspects of water gardening. They usually draw 50 to 70 people per seminar. Attendees buy products over the next two days.

Algae Control, Maintenance on the Rise

Water garden retailer in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Algae control is selling well. We sell the products to control algae and provide maintenance guys to go out and deal with it. Our most popular items are algae-eating pond sharks.

Because people aren't taking vacations, they want to add something with water to their homes. Their back yards are their vacation spots, and they want a complete experience: a fountain and a fireplace. That's their vacation.

To keep sales strong, we have a lot of regulars, and some have been coming here for 15 years. We also have a pond club with the meetings held at the store. Once a month, a speaker comes; each discusses a different topic. For example, one time we made a container garden. Once, we had a how-to-build-a-pond-in-a-hour with the store's maintenance guys.

We share tips and tricks for water gardening with attendees, which definitely helps with sales. If our plant speaker talks about a particular plant, everybody will buy it.

The other part of our business is the construction and maintenance. We are doing more maintenance than installations.

The weather affects our sales. April was busy because the sun was out and the weather was nice. May has been slow because of poor weather. When the sun comes out, we are busy again. I think we will do well as soon as the weather warms up.

Gloomy Weather Causes a Late Start

Water garden retailer in Spokane, Wash.

Our season usually doesn't start until early May, but because the weather has been gloomy, we've had a late start. We also get a lot of complaints about the drive to our store, probably because of gas prices.

To drive store traffic, we send out newsletters through e-mail and do advertisements on the radio and on TV. We are not overly concerned with competition.

People mostly are asking for algaecides, both the products and the maintenance. We offer a weekly cleaning maintenance plan which is booked solid right now.

Since we find that people think about building ponds most at the beginning and the end of the season, that is when we usually sell a lot of filtration systems and other items needed to build a pond. I think fish and plants will be popular this

season. People are waiting for fish and plants to come in to our store. Because the weather gets hot quickly here, I expect bacterial products for string algae to continue to sell well.