

Business Barometer June 2010

Water Garden News regularly surveys pond and water garden companies about their business climate and sales trends. Respondents are granted anonymity. These responses came from a June 9 survey.

June 9, 2010

Putting in a Pond a Day

A full-service pond retailer and installer in Fairhope, Ala.

Last year was terrible. Business this year is starting to pick up. We're putting in a pond a day. Most jobs are pondless waterfalls or regular ponds with streams, waterfalls and such.

Ironically, I cut back on advertising this year. Most of our business comes from word of mouth and the Yellow Pages. My intention is to hang on this year. We expect it to get worse before it gets better.

Pond Maintenance, Upgrades Keep Us Steady

A full-service pond store in Hereford, Ariz.

Business is pretty steady this year. There are a few ponds being built, but more customers are maintaining their ponds. They are taking care of algae as well as putting in more filtration and adding waterfalls.

New builds remain low because customers still are scared to spend the money. They still want the feelings they get with ponds, however, and several customers are installing ponds for therapy.

We don't have a website because I'm busy with customers instead of sitting in front of a computer. We do have a local commercial and we advertise in the local newspaper and in the Yellow Pages.

For customer service, we walk do-it-yourselfers through the designing, building and product purchasing process as needed. Most builds are preformed or up to 2,000gph ponds.

Business Remains Steady

A pond product retailer and wholesaler in Castro Valley, Calif.

Business is pretty good this year. We're selling a lot of pond liner, pumps, filters, plants and fish. I think we're getting Googled a little more.

Custom Work Increases Sales

A water garden and gifts retailer in Dania Beach, Fla.

Last year sales were up 42 percent from 2008, and we're doing even better this year. Not only do we sell aquatic plants, but we're also expanding support for aquatic plants and ponds.

One thing that sets us apart is that we're pushing a lot of custom fountains. We also do a lot of fundraisers and recently won the Small Business Person of the Year award from the chamber of commerce.

Good customer service, such as greeting customers at the door, making them feel at home and offering them cold bottled water goes a long way. There are no high-pressure sales here. We take time to talk to customers and to teach them.

We constantly change up the store and offerings to keep it fresh. When customers arrive, I say, "Welcome to my home. Make yourself at home. If you need anything, please let us know." Then I give them time to look and check back with them a little later.

Customers Reinvest in Their Homes

A landscaper and garden center business in Milford, Del.

We had a better spring than last year; we're up at least 30 percent. Mostly customers are coming in for pond plants, stone and mulch. They are hiring us mainly for redoing the front of the house, especially for older homes. There's not much new construction, but people in our area are buying and then upgrading older homes.

We created a website and I've seen a few hits, but most leads come because we've been in business for 23 years. We're going to continue to capitalize on what we've been doing. We're also training staff to be more courteous on the retail end and to carry purchases to customers' cars.