

Business Barometer March 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 March 1 survey.

Tuesday, March 9, 2010

Small Jobs, Maintenance Good

A pond and water garden designer in Louisville, Ky.

Last year was very good. The big projects that we used to do -- \$8,000 to \$30,000 jobs -- weren't around, but a lot of small jobs -- \$3,500-\$4,500 -- as well as maintenance, retrofits and add-ons were real good.

The best thing that's come up is maintenance. People are willing to pay for monthly or weekly maintenance.

Big Installs Down, Fountains Good

Owner of a pond service business in Boca Raton, Fla.

Business is down, especially from two years ago. The pond business has taken a beating in South Florida.

Because of the economy, people want me to come less frequently or to teach them how to maintain their ponds themselves. Installation of larger jobs has dropped by more than 50 percent.

When things began to go downhill, I refocused and started to work more on decorative fountains -- fish-free water features -- as well as multi-tiered fountains at development entrances. Diversifying into the fountain side supplemented my business and allowed me to stay in business. I keep my business simple and my overhead low.

Flat Sales Despite Interest

Co-owner of a retail and wholesale aquatic garden center in Lawrence, Kan.

We had a pretty good year. There were fewer major projects, but people remain very interested in bringing new elements into their gardens. They want decorative elements and smaller water features.

Contractor sales are down, but retailer sales are up, and our garden center sales are about the same. It reflects the rise in do-it-yourselfer customers and people who are not affording others to do it for them.

There are more ponds out there to maintain, so a larger percentage of our sales are about maintenance or enhancements to existing systems. More people show interest in small water features and projects they can complete in an afternoon to a weekend instead of a full-blown water garden.

Repair, Cleaning Calls Coming In

Owner of a retail business in Portland, Ore.

I have received several calls in the past couple of weeks for onsite repair work, cleanings and that kind of stuff. It's hard to tell what the upcoming year will be like.

Last year I was actually pleased, despite the crappy economy. My overall amount of business held steady from 2008.

Maintenance Up, Expansion Planned

Owner of a full-service pond business in Moore, Okla.

Business is stagnant. We were about 35 percent down with installs in 2009 compared to 2008, 15 percent down in the store and maintenance grew by about 10 percent.

People are buying firewood, pond heaters, temperature gages, winter wheat germ, nets and Scarecrows because it's blue heron season. We are pushing maintenance harder and doing more newsletters.

We receive a pretty good response from our newsletters. They drive traffic to the store, and we always put cleanout request forms in the newsletter. That jogs peoples' memories to fill out and fax it or mail it in. It does pretty good on getting them to sign up for a cleanout.

We're even trying to expand. We're adding a new fish retail section, so we're actually spending a little money.