

## Business Barometer May/June 2009

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### Sales Slowly Picking Up

A landscape contractor from El Mirage, Ariz.

Business started out bad this year, but it is picking up. We are receiving more phone calls, which we attribute to word-of-mouth referrals.

Last year was terrible. We did only about 20 percent of what we did in previous years. It has a lot to do with people losing their homes. The housing market in Arizona is in the pits, but it's starting to pick up.

### Enthusiasm for Water Feature Additions Remains

Co-owner of a water garden store in Malvern, Iowa.

Our business closes from Christmas until April, so we just reopened. We're surprised so many people still want to do construction jobs. Customers ask about water features and disappearing fountains. We have the same number of job orders this year as the same time last year.

We did a couple of landscape shows. People were enthusiastic about what they could do at home.

Requests for smaller water features keep coming in. Customers are looking at the ways they can add water to their homes. I've done a couple of seminars about growing lotus in containers outside of the pond. Responses indicate that people also are interested in ways to grow large water plants outside of the pond.

### Sales Slowed by 50 Percent

A nursery owner in Independence, Ore.

Business is much slower than last year, with only half of the sales. Because of the economy, people don't want to spend money.

Customers want plants that produce something edible, such as blueberries. Small plants sell well.

### Web Launch to Help Business

A water garden contractor and designer from Los Angeles, Calif.

Business remains steady. Last year was good. We had a lot of large, substantial projects that kept us going.

Other than launching a website campaign, we haven't changed much. We do home shows and use contractor-finding websites.

One new offering for us this year is an e-mail newsletter to existing clients. The newsletter tells clients about new projects, regulations and our business.

### Small Jobs, Retrofits Same

CEO of a water garden company from Brick, N.J.

Maintenance stayed about the same for us. We have seen many rebuilds and are fixing a lot of ponds done by other contractors.

Over the past year, people are starting to go ahead with smaller projects. The economy is still on people's minds.

### Expanding Work Helps Sales

Owner of a landscape design company in Santa Rosa Beach, Fla.

This year is pretty good; it's very steady. We haven't implemented new marketing techniques, but we are expanding the work we do.

We offer new services, such as expanding our cast and concrete offerings and some other products. Now we provide a

product and a service.

#### Economy Still Slows Builds

A water garden contractor from Savoy, Ill.

Business is as good as expected. It's about the same as last year.

A lot of people are looking for estimates. They want to start new projects, but they keep waiting on the economy.

We are looking into rain water recycling. We have done a lot of research to see if this is something future clients might be interested in.

#### Reputation Sustains Business

Owner of a nursery and garden center in Southington, Conn.

We're holding our own, because we've been in business for 48 years and have a solid customer base. Reputation is essential.

The garden center is slow. Grass seeds are selling.

Businesses have to be patient, downsize, and they will survive. People are spending more money on improving their homes than on other things.

#### Upkeep Up, Installs Down

President of a landscaping company in Waleska Creek, Ga.

Business is going pretty well, not as bleak as the news reports. Maintenance and landscape projects are up, but water gardens are down. We think people are avoiding new water garden installs in Georgia, because we have water restrictions from the drought.

#### Backyard Nature Sells Well

A wholesale distributor in Mexico, Mont.

Sales are up significantly more than this time last year. We strive to deliver products to retailers quickly, which they seem to value.

Backyard nature products sell well across the board. More nursery and water garden stores are adding hard goods to their inventories. They place plants, water gardens and wildbird items together.

Retailer inventory is increasing in variety instead of quantity of one product type. Recycled and green products also sell well.

#### Expanding Work to Help Sales

Owner of a koi and water garden business in Salt Lake City, Utah

The weather is starting to get warm, so things are picking up. A lot of people are upgrading and expanding existing ponds.

Koi sales are doing pretty well with all price ranges selling. We use word-of-mouth to market, and we held some seminars for local koi clubs about pond building.

The economy has not affected us negatively. People tend to stay home and improve their yards instead of going on vacations.

#### Sales Hold On, New Marketing Increases Traffic

A nursery manager from Las Vegas, Nev.

Our business is not record-breaking, but we're holding our own. We were down last year due to the economy.

More people are buying color, such as flowers. They want to beautify their homes without major projects.

To increase clients, we started a new marketing technique this week. We now use electronic billboards throughout the city, and we already received store traffic from it.

#### Customers Show Interest, Networking Helps Business

President of a design, installation and garden center business in Yulee, Fla.

We're not doing as many installations as we used to, but we've received quite a few calls this month about disappearing

water features and lower-maintenance ponds.

Budgets are less than they used to be, but interest remains. People still want water sounds but with less maintenance required.

Our sales are about the same as this time last year. People are spending a little less, but the volume is there.

We're doing a lot more networking this year. We're getting into the community — through trade organizations, chambers and garden groups — to let people know what we do.

We increased our number of talks with garden groups and offer presentations about different types of landscaping — especially sustainable living. People better understand the concept of sustainable living and respond with increased interest.

Overall, water's a big issue now. Government agencies and the general public are more involved in how to deal with water issues. Our industry can take this liability and make it an asset — an aesthetically pleasing one.