

Pond Business Ideas for Autumn

Tuesday, Sept. 8, 2009, 4:30 p.m., EDT

To increase repeat visits, Across the Pond regularly modifies store displays. I recently returned from Independent Garden Center Show 2009 in Chicago, Ill. The most interesting thing I saw was ... a crowd.

Attendance was up by 33 percent over the previous year. Retailers, especially independent garden centers, seemed to be out in full force, gathering ideas and sharing strategies. That's encouraging news for me and our industry.

According to the press, the economy is waking up. International indicators suggest that other regions of the world already are back on the upswing.

It's time to be positive, assertive and excited about what's ahead. With that said, Across the Pond is investing heavily in our future. We designed a new area in our Bulk Materials Yard. It features 300 feet of decorative retaining walls and a path with 20 styles and types of pavers. We are building a 3,000-square-foot covered patio to house our outdoor furniture line. Near the lotus ponds, we are working on landscaped display beds to feature pottery and statuary in a natural setting. Inside the store, we are freshening up our garden gift displays along with major rearrangements quarterly. One of our tag lines is, "Something different every visit, every season." We truly want that to be each customer's experience.

While autumn might be a quieter time in the pond business, but it need not be a dormant time. We can catch our breath from a busy spring and summer, reassess what went well and pinpoint what needs improvement.

Most importantly, quiet autumns offers time to re-stock and re-educate. With the overall economical confidence level rising, now is the time to position yourself as a leader.

Find new ways of doing things. Change and adapt.

Who says "spring cleaning" must be done in the spring? Excite your customers by modifying your displays. It encourages them to change their own projects, and it inspires them to spend their money with you. Such changes train customers to come to you for new ideas.

We tweak our Website weekly and overhaul it monthly with new photos and updated events. Throughout autumn, we offer a variety of free, hands-on classes.

Our annual Holiday Sale is one of our biggest events of the year. It kicks off with an Open House right after Thanksgiving, and it runs through mid-December.

It is a fun event for employees as well as customers. We host the event and staff it with our employees who do all the cooking and entertaining. The Open House generates high non-traditional sales as well as promoting the positive sense of family among our customers and employees.

We also use this slower time to travel for training, getting new ideas and looking at new products and suppliers. We look for ways to reduce costs, buy more competitively and consider alternate methods of product sourcing.

There are vendors out there that are hungry to grow their businesses. Find them!

Stay abreast of new technologies. We must work on our business as well as in our business.

Strong local economies do not exist without small businesses like ours and yours. Sunny skies are ahead. Get out there and get ready!