

Front Lines

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Looking Into the 2023 Crystal Ball, Part 2

Jennifer Polanz

Last month, we asked retailers what they're planning for 2023 and I still have more thoughts to share from business owners around the country.

Casey McCollum, owner, Plant Perfect Garden Center, Bismarck, North Dakota

Q: What are you anticipating next year in terms of customer traffic and buying habits?

CM: I'm planning for about the same as this year. I know some people might say with inflation and things going up people might adjust their buying habits. I'm not planning to do less. Product shrink can be hard on the bottom line, but at the same time you can't sell what you don't have. I don't like to plan for failure. We're planning on doing volume-wise about even to last year. There are some departments we'll pull back on slightly, but overall, no major changes.

For annuals, similar or better than last year. On nursery, we're pulling back a bit. We are going to have a lot of carryover from this year, but that should set us up good for early spring sales. We're planning on buying in less nursery. In perennials, we're planning the same. We had a late start this year—sales didn't get started right away—but we're still looking about level. We're looking at ways to improve that department and looking at refining the product mix to cut back on where we were long and find opportunities where we missed the boat on this season. That's an area where we can really expand our selection and key in on vendors that have better quality.

Q: What are the Top 3 things you're going to focus on for 2023 and why?

CM: The overall customer experience is my main focus.

A late summer hailstorm took out all our greenhouse coverings and retail roofs—this sparked a store-wide remodel that will give us a fresh look coming into the 2023 season. Aside from making the place look better we are addressing shopability and traffic flow with new greenhouse benches and layout.

Marketing will become a big priority. We are creating a full-time position to handle social media, direct-to-consumer marketing and in-store point-of-purchase signage.

Better merchandising will go hand in hand with our marketing and new store layout. The last few years have been crazy, good retailing methods have kind of gone to the wayside—the focus was primarily to just keep the place standing and keep the shelves full. Now the dust has settled and we are looking at getting back to the basics of being a good retailer. This includes better product placement, better signage, more cross merchandising and more organized departments.

Q: What's one new thing you'd like to try for 2023 that you haven't done yet?

CM: With creating a marketing position, we will be trying more social media platforms. Right now, we are primarily Facebook and Instagram. We will be looking at adding TikTok and Pinterest. With that, creating better content on a more consistent basis.

Renaë Bobbett, co-founder, Beaver Bark Gift & Garden Center, Richland, Washington

Q: What are you anticipating next year in terms of customer traffic and buying habits?

RB: We are expecting spring fever 2023 to arrive as it always does. If weekends cooperate with sun (and no wind or rain), spring enthusiasts will come out to see what's new and to start their food/flower gardens and landscape improvements. If the weekends are rainy and windy, traffic will be slower and management of inventories and strategies to turn products in a shorter timeframe will be the play. It's a short 10-week spring season. We track our KPI numbers to assess the score card and make adjustments as needed.

We cannot control the U.S. economy, but we can control our own economy.

Q: What are the Top 3 things you're going to focus on for 2023 and why?

RB: A) Team-building goal: "Building a stronger team" (a bench) so each key position is covered by another teammate that is capable of performing the job duties of the key position in a fun and positive environment. Also, attraction and retention of the team we are building.

B) Succession planning of the business to the second generation over a five-year plan.

C) More systems in place to run the business and not running it from the top of our heads as much. Also, a branding focus on our "local grown " inventory.

Q: What's one new thing you'd like to try for 2023 that you haven't done yet?

RB: In 2023, we want to add a full-time social media/marketing position to our team and engage our customers more through stepping up our online presence. **GP**