

11/1/2023

The Power of Community

Jennifer Polanz



Jennifer Polanz

This fall I witnessed a powerful sight—more than 250 people, some in the same competitive market, coming together to share information and help try to move the needle in each other's businesses.

It happens every year at the annual Garden Center Group Fall Event, but every year I'm amazed at the frankness of the discussions, the helpfulness of each attendee to share with others and the camaraderie gained by simply being in the room. It was also fascinating to see the transitions happening in our industry from one generation to another. I heard a lot of "where's so-and-so," with the answer being "they're enjoying their retirement in X location."

If you've been around long enough, it's not hard to get burned out—especially with the harried spring pace that only seems to get more demanding. It's events like these that can rejuvenate that spark of creativity or at least let you commiserate with folks who've been through it, too. For me, it helps to get a more accurate picture of what's happening in retail. We hear about spring seasons through our newsletters and at Cultivate in July, but here I find out how the rest of summer and into fall went. This year, extreme weather was a hindrance in many regions, eroding what in some places were record gains in peak spring. Lots of discussion focused on finishing strong, by controlling both inventory management and staffing levels.

Some discussions focused on 2024, and the plan of action for buying, staffing and marketing. I was impressed with retailers who set goals of knowing their marketing plan by week as of January 1. Another retailer focused on staffing levels by week for the whole year, with the goal of having it set before January 1. These are all ways to reduce the stress of peak spring by already having the plan in place. There's no winging it—it's all well thought out to tie staffing levels to previous years' sales data well in advance.

I also heard discussions of simplifying offerings by reducing the number of SKUs. Keeping it simple helps both seasonal employees and customers who are paralyzed by too much choice. Are you offering too much? Can you look at what's not selling and reduce your SKUs in certain categories to the best-sellers?

In the end, that community was all about asking questions, and creating discussions that could generate more ideas down the road. But it takes a community to do that. Do you have a community? Do you need one?

We try to create a community here at Green Profit, too, with lots of different takes from a variety of voices about what's happening around the industry. For example, in this issue, you'll see products found by Editor-in-Chief Chris Beytes at two trade shows this fall, as well as highlights from the inaugural Casual Market Atlanta this summer and

our favorite picks for this year in our annual Stuff We Love feature. Then, don't miss a story that could help save your business—Bill McCurry talks disaster preparedness. And freelance writer Wendy Komanchek visits community-focused Colonial Gardens. **GP**