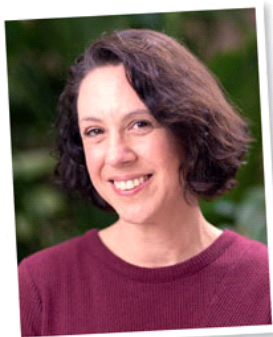


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Keeping the Lines Open

Jennifer Polanz



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The last couple of months have produced some turmoil in our industry. Some are things out of your control—they're situations you have to react to, rather than be proactive. Costs continue to rise in many categories, too, and there's not a whole lot you can do about it.

Except, there is, in a way. This is my space to offer my personal take on things, and I usually try to keep my nose out of "what you should do" and instead offer up inspiration, commentary and concepts that you can adopt or discard as necessary. This time I'm going to wade carefully into a suggestion for action: If you don't know people from the companies who make the products you sell, now is a great time to get in touch. If you do know them well, keep those lines of communication open.

This is a small industry made up of real people, not AI chatbots (at least not yet). People who work together can solve seemingly insurmountable problems. I'm not saying this method is foolproof, but I've always found picking up the phone or having a meeting over lunch can solve an awful lot of issues that can't always be solved through email or text. Many of these companies have sales representatives with whom you can build a relationship.

Many of the supplier companies out there have resources available to help increase sales and promote repeat business. They can help you build the strength of your brand through their products, and by offering education to the end consumer they can direct more customers to your garden center.

There are lots of suppliers moving into social media, too, where they'll talk about their own products and direct customers to find them in your stores. All this to say, use your supplier partners! Of course you're independent, and that's why your customers love you, but that doesn't mean you can't use all the resources available to you.

Every time I talk with a vendor company I ask them about what they can offer retailers to help sell more products, and I hear all kinds of things that may not be widely known, from signage/POP/product information to on-site education for employees and customers. So when you're doing your planning this fall and winter, consider reaching out to vendors who you do a lot of volume with (or think you have the potential to do more with) and ask them how you can grow that business further. While we love to talk about new products, often the gains are made by selling more of what your customers are already buying.

I think with some of the uncertainty we may be facing—and the unique opportunities we have to meet the moment of increasing interest in health and wellness—that opening the lines of communication with your partners can create untapped advantages.

OK, enough about my opinion, which in this day and age along with \$2.75 will get you a cup of coffee (boy, when I started saying that it was a buck!). On to the stories in this issue, which are numerous—we absolutely JAMMED this issue with good stuff.

What started me down the path of working with your vendors was the two stories I wrote related to selling more soil products. You can find out more on tapping into that customer loyalty related to soils (I only have anecdotal info on this, but some people LOVE their soils). I talked with Jonah Nelson, CEO of Family Tree Nursery, on how they approached their private label soil lineup, which led into more private label products.

Our team of editors who report on the California Spring Trials every year are back at it this month with the new introductions they found for foliage, tropical and gift plants. See if any of those fit in to your mix. And speaking of gifts and the holidays coming up, contributor David Williams visited long-time friends and colleagues at Bob's Garden Center in Egg Harbor Township, New Jersey, to see how they do Christmas (spoiler alert, they do it up BIG).

There's SO much more in this issue, I've barely scratched the surface. Our columnists are absolutely on point, per usual, and I'll let you find all the other hidden treasures scattered throughout. My final request—I'd love to keep the lines of communication open with you, too! Want to chat? Start with an email jpolanz@ballpublishing.com and we'll set up a call, a Teams, a lunch, a visit—whatever works! **GP**

Here's to staying in touch!