

## Columns

9/15/2010

### Retail Ready: It's October—Be Afraid!

*Judy Sharpton*



In last month's column, I reminded you that spring officially starts on March 20, 2011, and I gave you a preparation checklist. If you don't yet have a large poster on the wall with that date plus the date of your store's spring grand opening in plain view of your entire staff, stop reading and do that now.

October is the month to be afraid: It's exactly six months until spring 2011 and it's time to get ready. Have you scheduled meetings with each of your primary vendors? Have you taken an aged inventory and figured out a plan to clear that inventory before the end of the year? Clearing inventory does not include repacking that stuff for another year. Do you have a site plan and a set of photographs of the store? Together, these graphics show you more about your store than anything your tired eyes

can see.

Now, stop reading again and go to the local office supply store. Purchase a set of six of those big write-on wall calendars. Don't skimp; buy a set of erasable markers in several colors, too. Now, find a wall to mount all six calendars and label them October 2010 through March 2011. Buy more if your grand opening is later than March. Don't worry, it's an investment—you'll use these calendars year after year.

Begin placing important dates on these calendars:

- Start with the dates of every weekly staff meeting. I said weekly staff meeting. I don't care if everyone can't be there at the appointed time. Discuss the best times with staff and then plant your planning flag on a day and time. Anyone not able to attend is responsible for getting the information. If you record every decision as a date on the calendars, everyone can see. If training materials are distributed, place copies in a staff development folder mounted on the calendar wall for everyone to find. Attending a staff meeting is a paid activity; that should encourage attendance by those not scheduled to work that day.
- Add dates for every in-store event. These should be weekly activities, as well. If you want to establish in-store programs as a signature product, a schedule is essential. Staff recognizes these events as a part of the

store's marketing program and customers learn to anticipate the events. Make all programs product-oriented, not process-oriented. Allow customers to learn how to do something they can take home with them, like a container or a mailbox planting, not how to prune a shrub. Give your program a name and make it a part of your electronic communications. For a crash course in product-based events, see the Bemis Farms Nursery website ([www.bemisfarmsnursery.com](http://www.bemisfarmsnursery.com)).

- Add important national and local holidays and events. National Administrative Assistant's Day (formerly Secretary's Day) can sneak up on you just like March 20. If your community has big annual events, put that on your calendar so you can prepare to participate.
- Include local and national cause-marketing opportunities. Selecting a single cause to support can limit your exposure to donate to every cause. Causes relating to women's health are perfect for our demographic. The Invincibelle Spirit Campaign from Proven Winners ColorChoice to raise \$1 million dollars for breast cancer research is one opportunity. The Survivor Series of geraniums from Dümme in support of heart health is another. Or create your own with staff input. Bringing the cause home to your community with local associations makes your involvement even more powerful.
- List major product categories to focus on monthly along with the related promotional activities for each, and emphasize on coordinating product with electronic communications.
- Finally, list target dates for clearing inventory. Set a date for being out of all flats. Set a date for clearing out all the aged gift inventory. Set a date for being out of spring containers.

As I told you last month, Henry David Thoreau said, "Humans tend to hit what they aim at." Give yourself and your staff some targets to hit. Then October won't be so scary. **GP**

---

*Judy Sharpton is owner of Growing Places Marketing, which specializes in garden center renovation to create a retail-ready environment. She can be reached at [judy@growingplaces.com](mailto:judy@growingplaces.com) or (770) 815-1052.*