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Thriving, Not Surviving

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Retail had a tough row to hoe once the recession hit. And if you had to make the tough choices of laying off staff/holding off on maintenance/trying to figure out how to keep the lights on for the next month, well, you've earned a little grace here.

But here's the facts, ma'am (and sir)—the economy has long since recovered and consumer spending is back to what it was pre-recession. In fact, it's not only back, but it's higher now. Except garden spending is only very modestly growing. How do we stage our comeback? We kill the zombies.

Yeah, that's what we have on our cover and it's for a good reason. Sid Raisch came to me with his story, "Death of Discounts" a couple of months ago and it's never been more timely. He eschews the dreaded discount, which many retailers relied heavily on as consumers pulled the purse strings tight during the recession. We picked the zombie metaphor to highlight how thoughtless discounts can feed off your profits, sucking them dry (plus it's super dramatic and it made great cover art). Sid's point is, we as an industry, have to move away from the discount race to the bottom and instead instill value in our products.

A quick digression: Lately, I've been obsessed with the music from the Broadway smash "Hamilton." This is somewhat relevant because prior to the show's debut in 2015, it was ridiculous to think someone could create a legit hip-hop musical about our Founding Fathers and the creator of the U.S. financial system. I mean, what? But listening to Lin-Manuel Miranda's creative lyrical blend of history and humanity shows that even the craziest idea can become a masterpiece in the right hands (as long as it comes from a place of authenticity and passion).

Now that show is selling out every night and there certainly are no discounts on those tickets. People are shelling out hundreds of dollars (even for the worst tickets) just for a chance to be in the house when the lights go down, simply for the experience. In short, people are willing to pay for what they think is important.

Let's get back to the zombies; find out how to get rid of them and how to build value. As you start crafting your new plan for spring 2018, take a look at the new products that might help with that from this year's IGC Show.

We enlisted Katie Elzer-Peters to find out from garden communicators what they're excited about for next spring, too. We think it's important for retailers to know what's going to be talked about in the media before it

happens. And, instead of discounts and promotions, connect with food-loving customers in other ways that build value. The research dynamic duo of Heidi Lindberg and Bridget Behe continue their four-part marketing series with "Appealing to Foodies."

We've got time to prepare for spring 2018 and it's a great time now to reassess the plan to see where you can rid yourself of profit-draining zombies. And, to paraphrase Hamilton, don't throw away your shot. **GP**