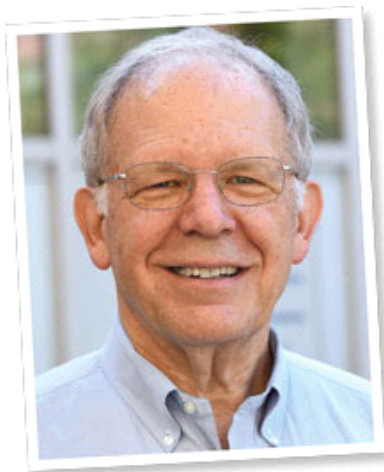


3/1/2022

## Get On Board With 2022 Sales Reality

*Bill McCurry*



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Spoiler Alert: There's no "new normal" in 2022. Quit wasting time and emotional energy wishing for the old days. Focus on what you can do today, not what you did before or during COVID.

An "off-the-record" conversation with a leader of one of the largest global container shippers revealed the supply challenges won't be equalized this year. He listed two dozen different components, all having "knock-on" impacts on container shipping. Shipping costs won't dramatically decline in 2022.

Garden centers must realize the consumer has forever changed. Some changes are good, some are frustrating.

I always appreciated calls from readers to help me focus on things that interest you. After the 2020 spring season, an owner called to say he started curbside pickup, but it was such an operational challenge he dropped it. He sold out of almost everything he had. He didn't see any loss in sales, but he was being urged to start it again, especially for the fall season.

I asked the caller if his POS system listed his top 2018 and 2019 customers. Could he then look at which customers didn't buy from him in 2020? He called his five top former customers and all said they were nervous about COVID. After some prodding, most admitted they'd found a new garden center which provided curbside or even home delivery, so now they shopped there. Would they return to his store? The customers were polite and wouldn't say "never," but he felt he'd lost them.

Offer curbside pickup. Promote it and measure the volume. If there's no demand, you can safely drop it. If there is demand, evaluate if you care the past customers found another source. What's important is how your customers emotionally feel about their safety.

Many retailers reported enthusiastically from MANTS, TPIE and other shows that "finally products are available." Actually, many products have availability, while many others will remain sporadic at best. We must maintain flexibility. Be ready to switch instantly to what's available and what's on your bench, not what you wish were being unloaded today.

Prices are higher. Your customers know cost increases are continuing so don't hide it. Consider posting a statement saying costs for transport, labor and raw materials have increased and look like they'll continue to

increase. Tell your customers you're doing everything possible to keep your selling prices as low as possible while maintaining your high quality.

The last two years many of us saw new customers because their previous retailer had bare shelves. That tailwind is likely to be a light breeze this season. With many products available, the searching customer may not need to find you this year. What are you doing to bring back new customers who shopped with you during the COVID peak?

Social media is ideal for keeping your customers aware of what came in this week. Don't mention product shortages. Talk about what you have and how great it is to grow what's currently on your bench. Remind customers to come in often as green goods arrive daily and what you grow is getting ready to be sold. Give them multiple reasons to visit your store.

These have been tough times for employees and bosses alike. Touch base with each team member. As best as you can, listen and respond to their concerns. Most employees' attitudes toward their jobs have shifted over the last two years. How's your team feeling today?

Thoughts for retail survival:

- Flexibility is vital. Sell what's in stock.
- Customer experience is still the driving force of repeat business.
- Help your team retain patience and concern for your customers.
- Charge the higher prices you need to rebuy product at your new higher costs.
- Remember you can control your destiny with the tools at your disposal.

Take a new look at your organization based on Spring 2022 perspectives. Reality is different today. Embrace it! **GP**

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*Bill McCurry would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future columns. Please contact him at [wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com](mailto:wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com) or (609) 688-1169.*