



By Ralph Gaudio

BECOMING A CHRISTMAS WONDERLAND

Successfully converting your garden center into a profitable Christmas Wonderland requires astute planning and forethought.

Garden center retailers who do a seasonal manner like Christmas business face the monumental task of constantly transforming their retail operations without crippling existing year-round business. You need to develop a well-thought-out plan to successfully complete this task.

Start Early

At G Boys Garden, Christmas & Patio Center, Marlton, N.J., we begin our holiday changeover in July. We start by moving our fall and winter merchandise into our largest greenhouse — this becomes our winter garden center. We keep our grass seed and fertilizer departments in tact in the front of the store until mid-September and begin setting up our Christmas section in the rear of the store to prevent disruptions of any remaining garden business. We hold weekly management meetings to assess the finished aisles and make sure all merchandise has been set up to maximize combination sales.

Because we have been so successful at this task, you can be too. You should try setting up Christmas displays and merchandise in your garden center, but make sure to critique each aisle and make the necessary or appropriate changes. This allows you to get an early start without disrupting daily business.

We begin receiving holiday merchandise in June. The merchandise is received, checked in and broken down. SKUs are written on the outside of each case. Then each case is brought into the store and dropped in its appropriate aisle to be priced. This allows us to control receivables and move them to the shelves as quickly as possible. Having all cases prominently marked helps eliminate pricing mistakes during the busy season.

Perfection Is Key

Artificial trees account for 30 percent of our holiday business, so it is important that each sample is opened, properly shaped and displayed in the best fashion. Make sure each tree in your garden center contains a large, easy-to-read spec sheet with the tree's size,

number of tips, girth, number of lights, warehouse number and sales price.

Another tedious but helpful task is to assign each tree model a number. Place this number prominently on the outside of each box and on the sample tree. Provide cashiers with a number sheet at each register. We use the number system because tree model numbers



To ensure a successful Christmas season, start planning early, hire the right people, pay close attention to your strongest selling products and always keep tabs on your warehouse stock.

are often long and very similar. This 1- or 2-digit number system helps prevent an employee from pulling the wrong tree and costing precious sales dollars.

Prioritize Good Employees

Over the years, most retailers learn which employees truly understand good merchandis-

ing. These people make great department heads. It is also important to keep the aisles looking like they did the day the store opened for business. Department heads along with the warehouse manager can make sure all merchandise is on the sales floor and not in the backroom. In all my years of retail, I have never made a sale of merchandise when it was in the warehouse.

It is also very important to have a competent warehouse manager. One of the biggest enemies can be the warehouse — check to see that all merchandise is on the sales floor each and every day. Merchandise has a tendency to get buried in a large warehouse. If merchandise never makes it to the sales floor, those dollars are lost from the bottom line. Even the most researched, hottest item cannot be sold if it remains in the warehouse.

Be Prepared

Having the store ready for the holidays as soon as you can and maintaining it throughout the season is key to financial success. Change end cap displays regularly and run weekly specials. Highlight a specific category each day with the goal of increasing that category's sales by 10 percent on that day. Keep the aisles fully stocked, neat and easily accessible. Always make sure enough staff is on hand to manage crowds. Remember, information is key to add-on sales. Be there, provide information and help customers envision the final product in their own homes.

So as you sit down to plan your store turnover, work out your plan. Believe that you have all your bases covered and face the crowds with utmost confidence in your business operations. 🌿

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