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## A Hint of Things to Come

**W**ell, it's over — Christmas, that is. And with the 2001 season behind us, retailers are adding up numbers and evaluating sell-through on what is for many the second most important selling season of the year.

And much to the surprise of store owners and analysts alike, there's actually good news to report.

While not experiencing the double-digit growth seen during the 1999 and 2000 seasons, for many, there was a several point growth this past Christmas, an occurrence few expected after the September 11th tragedy and the formal recession announcement. Others reported sales equal to or slightly below last year. (The Christmas Review on page 16 has more detailed information about the season's sales.)

So what happened? Who or what turned the tables?

### THE EARLY BIRD

Selling greenery, trees, accessories and poinsettias is not at all like Christmas sales in other markets. A 50-percent sale on Christmas trees on December 26th doesn't generate much revenue, nor can you continue selling poinsettias through March like they were cozy sweaters. Pretty much all sales that are going to happen need to happen between Thanksgiving and Christmas. And they did.

Rather than compete on price point, lawn and garden retailers attracted customers the old-fashioned way — by working for them. Buoyed by an increased interest in quality of life items, retailers in our market tied together quality merchandise and knowledgeable staff, and they made the tough sales.

One of the biggest advantages that our retailers had this year was time. They knew the season would be tough, and they spent two months preparing — planning displays, training staff, adjusting the product mix. When the season finally hit, we saw store after store capitalize on the opportunities that already existed, as well as creating new ones.

So if a season that was supposed to be awful was saved, what about the upcoming spring season? The recession is easing, weather predictions are good and home sales are up. Could a saved Christmas simply be a hint of things to come?

### A WORD OF THANKS

I don't want you all to think that I'll be writing about the magazine every month, but I am going to impose on you once more to extend our thanks for such a successful launch.

Having a certain amount of exposure to this market through sister publication *GPN*, we knew this to be a great industry and expected a good response to our new publication. We did not, however, expect the rush of calls, letters and kind words we have received over the past few weeks.

If we haven't talked to you yet, we'd love to hear what you think about the magazine or just talk about happenings at store level. We know now that the market has been hungry for a magazine such as ours and look forward to providing you with the best strategies, tips and solutions that will make your business more profitable.

*Bridget C. White*

# LAWN & GARDEN Retailer

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