



By Dave Edenfield

Trends & Resolutions for 2013: Are You Ready?

With a new year comes new opportunity. Have you been keeping an eye on the trends? Are you ready to capitalize on them?

As we approached the end of 2012, it seemed that every article, newsletter and magazine was filled with either trends or resolutions that we need to be aware of and will make us all extremely successful in 2013. I must also admit that I really enjoy reading the majority of them and thinking about how our industry will react and hopefully takes advantage of some of the trends.

Look into the Crystal Ball

If you haven't had the time to read all of the predictions and trends then let me share a few with you. As you read them, I hope that you will consider how you might apply them to your business.

"Made in the USA" is making a comeback:

In a recent New York poll 52 percent of the public believes it is very important that products they buy are made in America. Made in the USA tags are on the rebound. Do you know where your inputs are coming from and more importantly are you telling your customers that you choose to buy, when possible, Made in the USA?

From the HR department: Put a little fun in your business plan. The experts are suggesting that we place a much higher price on the value of fun in the workplace as well as its contribution to

the bottom line. The prevailing wisdom is that a spirit of playfulness builds teamwork by bringing employees together toward the common goals of company success.

Hot foods: American consumers are buying and demanding food products with a bite. To quote a recent article "Hot Sauce has caught fire." Research recently released indicates that spicy condiments are one of the top 10 fastest growing industries with the overall market growing by over 9.3 percent per year over the last decade. Why the growth? It is tied to the increasing popularity and exposure to international foods. I see a real opportunity with this one.

Energy-enhancing products: From caffeine enhanced products or naturally occurring jolt in an organic snack, energy products are demanding that we take another look. I particularly like this quote from Tom Vierhile, director for Data-monitor, a business information and market analysis firm. "Looking toward the future, we are starting to see companies getting outside the beverage area. Consumers are seeking products on the basis of what they naturally contain." The public is interested in energy. I think there is an opportunity for growers here as well if we think creatively.

Trust and distrust: A common theme among several prognosticators for 2013 is that consumers have had enough of false promises and conflicting marketing claims and are simply seeking brands they can trust. Experts are suggesting that it is the emotional benefits of products that make brands successful and motivate consumers to buy them repeatedly. A recent survey by Concerto Marketing Group found that when people trust a brand, 83 percent will recommend it to others; 82 percent will use its products frequently; 78 percent will look to it first for the things they want; and 78 percent will give its other products and services a chance. Impressive numbers. Does your product speak to the emotional side of the consumer?

Technology: This is the area that had the most predictions, trends and resolutions to sort through. One prediction in particular caught my eye and made me think about our industry. Market research firm Parks Associates reports that the digital health technology market will be worth \$5.7 billion by 2015, up from \$1.7 billion in 2010 with chronic care, wellness and medication management leading the charge. Chris Hogg, cofounder and CEO of 100 Plus, says, "People are hungry to learn more about themselves. They haven't had the power and access to the tools and services to make this possible before. So don't be surprised if, in a

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If we continue to emphasize the value and relevancy of our products, then spring should be a relatively good one.

housing market bubble; that isn't perfect, but may be enough to ease credit for many consumers. Net worth has recovered much of the ground lost to the recession.

Home prices, in particular, have bottomed and are moving up again. This, coupled with expectations that home prices will continue to rise, is important because the wealth effects tied to housing are much larger than those tied to equity holdings. It's easier to repair and upgrade (i.e., landscape) a house that is appreciating than one that is depreciating in value; it is a game changer when it comes to spending.

Refinancing has increased, reducing mortgage payments and leaving more for consumers to spend each month. Consumer sentiment has picked up and returned to levels not seen since before the recession. Assessments of current economic conditions, the largest determinant of current spending, have improved. This has made it easier for consumers to convert refinancing savings into spending for big-ticket purchases. Hence, the precipitous drop we saw in the saving rate last summer.

What Lies Ahead?

The need for our government to do something about reducing the long-

term deficit is very important, though, because that is what will restore corporate confidence. That is what is necessary to get companies to hire and invest more aggressively.

Rising home values are a game changer because they make it easier for consumers to decide to spend and invest in their homes and, ultimately, sell what they bought at a profit. Housing got us into the mess we are in and, in fits and starts, will be the accelerant that eventually gets us out.

Given all of these factors, I remain optimistic about the future growth of the green industry in 2013. We definitely won't be setting any land speed records getting back to Lake Wobegon (and I'm not sure we will ever get back there).

But if we continue to emphasize the value and relevancy of our products, then spring should be a relatively good one. I hope as you are reading this, our leaders have made some smart decisions and we are not picking ourselves up at the bottom of the cliff. ■

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BIG
GROWER

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few years, your (virtual) doctor's visit ends with a prescription for both pills and apps." Are consumers ready for the virtual plant doctor as well?

What's Going to Happen?

I know some of these are a little bit out there but they are interesting to think about as a new year gets started.

What we do know is the following trends will clearly be a part of the equation for growth in 2013:

Sustainability: It is clearly still on the consumer's mind and will continue to be important as long as they do not have to pay more to have it. Consumers are looking for environmentally friendly solutions grown and delivered by companies who have a sustainability story to tell.

Grown locally: This trend continues to be asked for and demanded by the consumer. The grown locally message is stronger than the grown organically message. There is research suggesting that the "Grown Locally" message is getting a boost from consumers who also want to "Shop Locally."

An aggressive social media presence: This is more important than

ever before. I'm not referring to just having a company website. Companies no longer have the ability to sit on the sidelines. I realize that many owners have no idea how to get started but the resources (many free of charge) are abundant. This is no longer an option to successful business growth but a requirement just as tagging plants was 20 years ago.

Trained leadership and management: Without young aggressive managers excited about your business, the opportunities for a great 2013 will be limited. Do you have a plan to address and challenge your management team to be the best ever in 2013?

Food for thought.

I was reminded while researching and writing this article of a few words from an old Tim McGraw song: "I ain't as good as I'm gonna get, but I'm better than I used to be!"

Here's to a Happy New Year! ■

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