While some signs point to an economy that is recovering, it’s likely that some of you did well this past spring and others didn’t. The time to take stock is now. It’s the time to debrief your employees and review your sales figures and get a jump start on next spring.

Sales, shrinkage
The obvious place to start is sales. But as you look at the figures, first ask if they’re giving you the information you need to make sound decisions for the future.

It would be great to say sales were up. But look deeper into those figures to determine what was largely responsible for the uptick in sales. If you don’t have enough details to know what contributed to a good year, consider upgrading your company’s inventory system.

Another item to discuss is discarded plants. Consider shrinkage as lost revenue and profits. Maybe it’s also time to offer an incentive ($50 to $500) to employees who can help develop ideas to reduce shrinkage.

Check pricing
Did you see your competitors’ pricing? If you didn’t, add that to your calendar.
for next spring. It is critical to see what is going on in your area. You may not be able to go personally, but send out some key employees to systematically look at what’s going on in your market.

Remember that there are benchmark items (most retailers sell this product) in your product mix that consumers draw generalizations from. For example, if consumers think your 4-inch geraniums are a good deal or value, they may think other products of yours are an equally good value. Benchmark items are common among retailers and among consumers (meaning that many consumers have bought these products). This is why consumers are so accurate in knowing a good price when they see one.

Given that this may have been an atypical year for many retailers, this is an ideal time to discuss what price points worked, the reaction to price increases, and what items might be good targets for price increases next year.

**Training, delegating**

Training is another key debriefing issue. It’s unfortunate, but one of the first casualties of a tough economy is training. Now might be a great time to ask your staff what areas they felt they were well-prepared to handle and ones that were more challenging.

Do experienced staff play a key role in the instruction of others? This might be a good time to identify staff that did an exceptional job with different product categories or customer service. If employees can summarize key points to remember about the products or services now, they will be in a better position to present a brief refresher to others next spring.

Delegating some of the training responsibilities to experienced staff helps lighten the load and brings everyone more up-to-speed on topics that aren’t their forte.

**Advertising, data collection**

How did your advertising plan work? One of my pet peeves is spending on advertising without determining its impact. You can’t measure the impact of every ad you place, but determine what did work?

How many hits did your Web site receive? Were there some pages that received a disproportionate number of hits compared to others? Did you collect e-mail addresses and distribute any electronic newsletters that had coupons or other ways to track Internet interest that drove sales? Now would be a great time to work with your Internet service provider to consider changes for both you and your provider next year.

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