

# GOT THOSE SLOW SEASON DOLDRUMS

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Slow seasons are inevitable in the floriculture and horticulture business. Nobody likes those times but there are ways to turn this slack time into an advantage for your operation. Here are some things you can do:

**Set goals.** Many growers and marketers have good intentions but simply never get around to writing long term goals for the business. Now's the time to do it. Sit down, meet with

your key employees and decide where the business is headed. Put the plan and goals on paper so all will know the destination.

**Meet with your banker.** Even if you don't have immediate plans for borrowing money, or even if your line of credit has been repaid, it's a good idea to have a formal meeting with your banker at least once a year when you're not in a panic money-stricken mode. Find out what concerns your banker about your operation. Maybe you can get clues about how to invest money or find out whether any of your customers are extreme credit risks.

**Set up formal meetings with each of your suppliers' representatives.** Find out if you've missed any new advertising or buying programs. See if you've been missing out on any services your supplier offers. Arrange for a tour of the headquarters or regional offices and meet some of the people you've only known over the phone lines or e-mail messages.

**Look into new product lines.** Is there anything that would complement your business and possibly bring in customers during the slow times? This is a good time to try it out. You'll have time to work with a new supplier's representative and find out if you're missing a good opportunity.

**Completely clean the operation.** When was the last time the operation had a thorough power scrubbing? Move all the hard goods, at least, out of the buildings and power wash the facilities. Clean and overhaul all the machinery. Clean out old files from the office. Throw out anything that's taken up space for more than a year, especially if it's unproductive or out of date.

**Take a complete inventory.** While you're cleaning the operation, take an exact, complete inventory. No matter where you are in your fiscal year, this can't hurt. Once you've completed the inventory, evaluate it for the slow moving items (what and why).

**Have a yard sale.** Follow the examples of households across the country and hold your own form of garage sale. Sell any out of style or damaged products for rock bottom prices. If you've decided to eliminate any products from your inventory, get rid of them here. This activity will get customer traffic which may very likely buy some items that aren't part of the sale.

**Set up special promotional events.** Have the local FFA, FHA, FBLA or 4-H group or volunteer fire department set up a min-carnival in your parking lot. This too gets customer flow.

**Plan your yearly open house.** This may not be the best time to hold an open house for your customers, but it can't hurt to have the event completely planned months beforehand. Start checking with your suppliers to see how they can help. Set the date and make necessary reservations.

**Throw a company picnic.** When was the last time you told your employees they were the most important part of your business? Now's a good time to do it. Invite them and their families to an evening picnic. Or give each employee a surprise Friday off.

**Redesign your floor space.** Have you ever thought about taking out a wall, moving some shelving around, or adding windows to the office (or store if you're in retail)? This is the perfect time to tackle any of those major projects.

**Work on your displays and merchandising.** While you're thinking up projects to keep your employees busy, see if they can revamp your merchandising. You might be surprised at the results. Hold a contest to see which employee (or group of employees) can build the most eye-catching display. Or put a team of employees to work coming up with display ideas that can be used throughout the year.

**Revamp your advertising program.** Set a definite budget for advertising then evaluate how best to spend it. Work with your supplier and the local media to design a strong program.

**Go to trade shows and educational meetings.** Most national and regional trade shows are held during the slow seasons for a reason — they want you to attend. You'll meet other business people who share your problems. Maybe they've come up with some solutions too.

**Re-evaluate your credit and accounting procedures.** Have your accountant suggest ways to streamline your current system. Set up revised credit policies, and inform your customers what they are. Now's a good time to review your customer base or portfolio — who has special needs and who needs nudging and who needs removal from your customer list?

**Hold a safety training seminar.** Remind employees of all the safety precautions they should take. Ask the local fire and police and emergency response departments to visit so they can become better aware of the premises and the people.

**Catch up on your reading.** Read those trade journals and newsletters. Jot down any ideas that could help your business. Experiment.

**Take time to enjoy yourself and your family,** and relieve some of the stress that built up during the busy season. Don't push yourself or your employees. Relax and gear up for the next busy season. "Success is getting what you want; happiness is wanting what you get."— Anonymous