

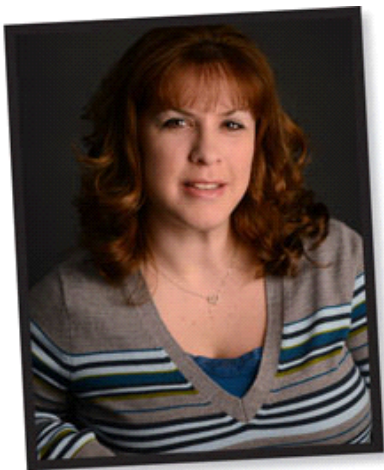
GROWERTALKS

Inside Look

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The Risks of Business

Jennifer Zurko



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As a new freshman at Northern Illinois University in 1994, (and someone who's never had a problem chatting people up) I quickly realized that I was one of the few people on my dormitory floor that had actually declared a major.

After subtracting the ones that had a specific major, the rest were split between "Undeclared" and "Business." Whenever someone told me they were a Business major, I would ask, "What does that mean?" Most of the time, they shrugged their shoulders. Apparently, "Business" was a broad term for "Whatever."

I was lucky; I knew what my strengths were ... and they were NOT in business. Finance, accounting, economics, etc.—the classes that make a right-brained, liberal arts major shiver like she's covered in spiders were the

ones that many of my confused peers had to slog through at 8:00 a.m. (Thankfully, journalism professors don't get up before noon.)

I suppose the reason I looked at them like they were exhibits in the Ripley's Museum is because I was amazed at their bravery. They were learning how to run and operate something that makes up the foundation of America: business, capitalism, job creation, all of which in turn affects the economy. While I was covering the women's basketball team for the student paper, they were learning how to eventually own their own franchise if they wanted.

And this is why I've said on this page many times how much I admire all of you business owners out there. To me, business is scary. And for many, hearing the words "consolidation" and "monopoly" is even scarier. They represent the unknown, ONE having the power over ALL, "the big getting bigger."

I hear that more and more when I talk to growers, especially after we report on a major acquisition. To some of them, our friendly little industry will someday rival the conglomeration of "Big Ag."

As I was writing this, the news had just come out about AT&T's \$85.4 billion merger with Time Warner, which the Justice Department had originally tried to block on antitrust grounds. One news organization joked, "At this rate of consolidation, we'll be the United States of Amazon in no time." It's a scary thought.

But isn't some consolidation good? When is there too much consolidation? Has horticulture experienced the right amount, going through the typical life cycle that all industries experience? I wanted to find out, so I asked a handful of

industry professionals their thoughts about consolidation and how it's affected the grower, breeder and distributor segments.

With many breeders consolidating, the map for the California Spring Trials sites has changed a lot, even within the last five years. Brands and series have come and gone, but it's also opened the door for new innovations for both large and small breeders. You can see some of them in the first part of our Spring Trials coverage.

And, finally, if you want to see how another industry—cosmetics and beauty—reels in young consumers to buy their products by using sexy, double-take language, read Lauren Kirchner's column. There aren't many businesses who tout that one of their products is better than sex.

Lauren asks: Why we can't we compare one of our plants to the business we do in the bedroom? It may be a scary proposition for some, but what's business without a little risk? **GT**