

GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Business

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Do You Know?

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The folks on the deck of the Titanic didn't see the iceberg they were rushing toward soon enough to be able to begin to avoid it. In the movie, they didn't even know where the binoculars were. Do you? If you find your binoculars you may be able to avoid becoming a casualty of the economy. But one thing's for certain: If you continue on the same course, you'll sink your own ship. The iceberg? Intensified competition.

There are realities in the marketplace. Picture this: Try delivering your flats of annuals by throwing them Frisbee-style toward your customers' stores. The law of gravity will ensure that your best efforts will fall short. Like gravity, we must work within the principles that are already in place, whether we know about them or not.

Sometimes success comes in spite of our ignorance or inattention to basic principles. Over the years, demand for our products exceeded our ability to provide parking spaces for the end consumer. That situation makes even the stupidest and least-effective marketer look pretty smart, while the success was largely accidental. Quadruple the number of plant retailers and the ubiquitous supply of parking spaces changes everything.

Competition is good for everyone, and has been the sole driving force of improving the quality and standard of life in America for people who actually work for a living. And as you know, the government will care for the rest, which is not all bad. The good news is that we can still be nice and civil people while competing aggressively. To compete effectively, though, we need to develop a balanced, complete view of the marketplace. Mark Twain once said, "It's not what we know that gets us in trouble. It's what we know for sure that just ain't so."

The time has come for us to know what we're doing in the marketplace.

Do you know the end consumer better than ever? This is insanely difficult as people morph from wanting what they want when they want it, to being price-conscious, and back again—and that's just in one shopping visit!

Do you know your company realistically? I work with my clients on business strategy first, which is tied directly to their marketing plan. How does their business already function from a numbers view as well as emotional

view? This is important because most companies haven't set aside money to invest in new initiatives. We must begin by making our current resources more productive. In this process, it's sometimes necessary to abandon resources that don't positively contribute to your business.

Do you know your competition well? Don't ever underestimate them. I advocate "friendly competition"; however, we must choose friends wisely and keep them close. We should keep enemies even closer. Instead, we've become complacent and lazy because we haven't had to compete fiercely to attain a decent lifestyle.

You might recognize these questions as three timeless principles, but even if you do, you may be no further ahead than the person who's never heard them before.

You know how to grow plants. Now it's time to become more than an armchair expert of the consumer and the retail marketplace. Change your paradigm of learning mostly (if not solely) from your peers this year. I don't have to tell you that it hasn't been working out so well. You need much more than new ideas. Find the right people who will ask you the tough questions. They shouldn't come with all the answers, but they should help you find the correct solutions to your specific situation. Then keep them involved along the way so you have the help to implement your solutions effectively.

Moving forward, we must compete aggressively, constantly and vigilantly. This simply means we have to know that we know what we're doing, and we have to do it very well.

The trouble is that, as Mark Twain pointed out, what we think we know may be completely wrong.

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