



GCA says catering, clothing and gifts were June bestsellers

THE GARDEN Centre Association's (GCA) Barometer of Trade (BoT) results for June (2012) have highlighted a shift away from more traditional categories in members' key areas of trade.

The results, which are compiled using actual sales figures and provide an up-to-date trading position statement, revealed catering, clothing and gifts to be the best performing categories during the month.

Phil Slinger, GCA Chief Executive, explained: "Our recent BoT results have shown a shift to see non-traditional categories, such as gifts and clothing, become key products in our member garden centres.

"These categories become more imbedded in the sector and are growing to become substantial proportions of members businesses. The BoT results highlight how well our members are embracing the changes and working to promote these areas of their business."

Catering sales are 15.4% up on last June and 7.12% up for the first six months of the year. Clothing was up 14.2% in June, as compared to the same month last year (2011) and now shows a 4.88% increase year on year. Gifts were up 12.42% as compared to June 2011.

Phil added: "All in all June was a good month, garden centre sales were up 7% as compared to last year, however everyone in the industry was hoping for an even better month to bring the year to date figures up, which currently stand at 6.81% down.

"Unfortunately the absence of warm, settled weather meant that footfall was disappointing during the month. The end of the season has been extended and members have ramped up their promotional activities to try to drive footfall and clear additional stock.

"All of our members have made valiant efforts to do everything they can to boost sales, but unfortunately there is no better marketing strategy than the sunshine. It must be said that to keep the year on year trading figures to a single digit decline is a remarkable achievement, given all the industry has faced this year."

The lack of sunshine has affected furniture and barbecue sales most noticeably, the category now stands at 14.83% down for the year to date. Outdoor plant sales have also suffered, also standing 15.03% down.

The BoT reports produced by the GCA allow member garden centres to compare their trading positions with other GCA garden centres.

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Phil continued: “Again catering has shone through as the star performer and we expect this to be the case going forward. We are advising members to continue to link with national events and to make the most of every opportunity to do something different as this certainly helps to drive customers through the door.”

The GCA represents nearly 200 garden centres nationwide.

Through sharing information and its inspection programme the GCA helps members to achieve high standards in customer service, plant quality and reliability.

Norma Moore, General Manager of Monkton Elm Garden & Pet Centre in Somerset, which is a member of the GCA, said: “We have definitely had to rely on the success of our Four Seasons Restaurant and Pondsides Café during the unpredictable weather we’ve experienced this year. Our catering facilities are extremely popular and we have many regular customers who visit for their lunch every week.

“We find that our calendar of free events helps generate footfall and return customer visits too. For example, in August we are going to host a Scone Fest in the Pondsides Café where visitors can sample lots of different scones for free and share their own recipes for this popular Westcountry treat. We will also be inviting them to vote for their favourite scone, which will then go on the menu.”

For further details about the GCA, please call 01993 871456, visit www.gca.org.uk, log on to www.facebook.com/pages/Garden-Centre-Association or follow the organisation on Twitter at www.twitter.com/GC_Association.

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