



The country needs a shot of Vitamin F

A new, untested president, a \$700 billion bailout of the financial sector, a tight credit market and battered consumer confidence. What a great way to start off the holiday buying season -- if there's anything to buy.

The Conference Board reported that the Consumer Confidence Index fell to an all-time low in October. Lynn Franco, director of the Conference Board Consumer Research Center said the impact over the economic turmoil that occurred on Wall St. and in Washington, D.C., that began at the end of September had "taken a toll on consumers' confidence." The decline in the Index (-23.4 points) is the lowest reading on record.

Franco said consumers rated the labor market and business conditions much less favorably.

"Looking ahead, consumers are extremely pessimistic, and a significantly larger proportion than last month foresees business and labor market conditions worsening. Their earnings outlook, as well as inflation outlook, is also more pessimistic, and this news does not bode well for retailers who are already bracing for what is shaping up to be a very challenging holiday season," she said.

One of the biggest concerns among suppliers and retailers is the tightening of short-term credit markets, which has impacted most U.S. businesses. A survey of finance executives by the Association of Financial Professionals (AFP) found the tightening of credit has caused companies to hoard cash and implement defensive strategies such as reducing capital spending, hiring freezes, considering layoffs and delaying payments to suppliers. If credit access does not improve by year's end, finance executives have indicated these defensive actions will become more widespread, reports AFP. Other actions these executives would consider taking are tightening credit standards for trading partners and reducing current or planned inventories.

Exposing the public to Vitamin F

In August, the Society of American Florists and Flower Promotion Organization Alliance launched its Vitamin F campaign. This consumer program focuses on the Harvard University Home Ecology of Flowers Study commissioned by the alliance. The study shows that flowers feed compassion, dispel anxieties and worries, and provide a boost of energy. The Vitamin F campaign also features the Rutgers University Emotional Impact of Flowers Study, which found flowers create instant delight and happiness and increase enjoyment and life satisfaction.

In October, the alliance aired a 30-second Vitamin F vignette on Direct TV lifestyle channels. Featured in the broadcasts, as well as in online promotions and print press materials, is Jayme Barrett, a personal fulfillment expert and author of "Feng Shui Your Life."

Barrett's philosophy is that people can cultivate idyllic atmospheres by purposefully integrating flowers throughout their living space. "Flowers are a wonderful way to ease the stress of everyday life and refocus our emotions more constructively," she said.

Based on the stress that many people are feeling over the economy, their jobs and the endless number of activities associated with the holiday season, a shot of Vitamin F could go a long way to introduce a range of "soul-stimulating energies" in both home and office settings. ☼

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