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on the record

BY SUSAN PORTER / EXECUTIVE EDITOR

It's not business as usual

How refreshing it was to see many of your contemporaries at the recent Green Industry Expo and to hear that they're planning for an "anything can happen" year in business. Like a defensive player poised to move in either direction when the ball comes their way, they are ready to move quickly.

You should be, too. These savvy professionals have already prepared two budgets for 2002 — one for growth (usually pretty modest) and one for no growth. Like most entrepreneurs, they are optimistic by nature and hope the economy picks up, but they also know that if our economy continues to stall, they'll need that Plan B to put into place.

I'm just glad they've made those budgets. The worst thing you can do this winter is to act like it's business as usual. As I write this in late November, there are plenty of confusing signals making it really hard to tell which way the economy is moving. Although we all want things to perk up early in 2002, this is one race that's too close to call.

Your best bet

The best way you can spend your winter is to build a realistic budget and decide how you'll achieve it. Your revenue-growing plans may include special sales incentives, different payment options, inventive new service packages or even new services you offer. Your profit-growing plans may mean internal cost cutting, tweaking operations for more efficiency, higher prices or different vendor relationships.

Make sure you understand how business will be different in 2002 and plan accordingly. This isn't the slow season — it's the season for creating change that will safeguard and enhance your business in the future.

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