



# Reviewing some of the big issues of 2009

What retailers and suppliers think about today's Christian products industry

An industry survey by *Christian Retailing*

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With topics ranging from church stores and consolidation to staff training and coupon use, 2009 offered plenty of meaningful dialogue about important issues facing the Christian products industry.

Retailers, suppliers and interested associates participated in six Vital Signs surveys throughout the year. Here are some highlights from results of those surveys, with commentary designed to encourage even more discussion:

## WORKING TOGETHER

A majority of Christian retailers and their suppliers thought that a consolidated trade show sponsored by CBA, the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association and the Gospel Music Association would be "likely to succeed." However, not all agreed, with some citing the possibility of "information overload" and "leadership conflicts" in "deciding which organization would take the lead" on a combined show. [July 2009]

There was very little support in July for the idea of combining all three associations into a single entity, but we wonder if the departure of two of the groups' leaders—GMA's John Styll and CBA's Bill Anderson—might produce a different response today?

## REVISING RETAIL

Slightly more than half of Christian stores (51%) expected sales the 2009 Christmas season to be better than the previous year, and 5% were looking for a "significant" increase. [September 2009]

Meanwhile, 48% of stores were stocking a broader range of products. One owner commented on a shift in her store's mission, saying "the store is becoming more and more like real life—a Christian LIVING center." [September 2009]

Both of these comments point to a shift in the way many stores are approaching growth or sustainability. Rather than pulling back and cutting expenses, a growing number are adding services and hours, and increasing production selection in an effort to attract more customers.

## RECESSION REALITIES

One in five workers predicted more downsizing by their employer [through 2009]. Nearly half of supplier employees (48%) and almost as many retail workers (41%) told us they were not sure if they'd still have their jobs at year end. [February 2009]

Some retailers suggested that a weakened economy made books a better entertainment value. [February 2009]

Just over one-quarter of stores (28%) reported an increase in coupon redemption. Sales of books dealing with financial challenges are up 27% in stores. Two in five stores (42%) said they had seen an increase in the number of people buying with credit cards. [June 2009]

Two-thirds of stores (67%) reported that their gift inventories were "steady or up" over the previous couple of years. One retailer commented that "gifts are keeping my store alive." [January 2009]

As always, the purpose of our Vital Signs series is to generate meaningful dialogue on topics of importance among industry participants. As you connect with colleagues at the start of 2010, ask each other:

- What changes did you make in 2009 and what were the results?
- Based on what you've observed, how will you do things differently in 2010?
- Is your internal list of "things that will never change" longer or shorter than it was last year?

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