

Once Upon a Wholesaler

Floral Management's
14TH annual
Marketer of the Year

Sponsored by Design Master color tool, Inc.

By Kate F. Penn

Baisch & Skinner Wholesale, Inc. is trying to make retail florist dreams come true, with the St. Louis Florists Network.

There's nothing fairy-tale-like about running a flower shop. Long hours. Messy work. Tough finding good help. Nonetheless, for 31 retail florists in the St. Louis metropolitan area, Baisch & Skinner is a fairy god-wholesaler of sorts. The second generation family business sees the best in its retail florist clients. And the wholesaler is convinced that, with some support, the retailers' "prince" (read: general consumer) will see that as well. So it applied its "magic wand" and is giving the local, flower-buying public in St. Louis a renewed appreciation for (and reason to visit) their local retail florist. Much like Cinderella's fairy godmother, Baisch & Skinner evades the limelight, preferring to stand in the wings and watch the fruits of its efforts. But its deeds have not escaped the notice of the judging panel, which chose the company as the winner of Floral Management's 14th annual Marketer of the Year award and \$5,000 cash prize sponsored by Design Master color tool, Inc. Here is Baisch & Skinner's story.

A Tale of One Wholesaler

Baisch & Skinner's "magic wand" comes in the form of the St. Louis Florists Network (St.LFN), an idea conceived early in the spring of 2006 by John Baisch, president and Steve Frye, vice president and general manager. "We were trying to figure out what we can do to help make the retail florist more

visible in the local market," says Baisch. "The fact that people love flowers is evident. But the retail florist is getting lost amidst all of the competition."

What the retailers needed, they decided, was a campaign to convince the general public that a local retail florist is their best bet when they want top notch flowers. Their plan: Launch a cooperative marketing effort that would get retailers

local media exposure — in newspaper ads, television and radio spots — and create billboards, an internet presence, vehicle signage, product promotions and giveaways and more. They told local retailers, in a letter seeking retailer interest, "We know you are the best at what you do, and we think the general public should be reminded of this as well." The St. Louis Florists Network would be their tool to help make it happen.

When Baisch and Frye pitched the idea to a handful of retailers, it "got rave reviews," so they immediately moved forward with developing a logo and a marketing plan to put in front of potential participants. Baisch & Skinner, which has 10 branches in the Missouri and Illinois bi-state area, provided an initial contribution of \$25,000 for start-up costs, amortized over five years, and an additional \$15,000 for the first year, and participating florists pay annual membership dues of \$500. They also approached growers and manufacturers, who could participate by paying an amount — in dollars or product donations for Network events — equal to one percent of the company's gross annual sales to Baisch & Skinner.



DRIVING IN STYLE: A bold, colorful van wrap promoting the St. Louis Florists Network tells consumers to “buy quality. buy local.” Pictured from left are the brainpower and muscle behind the Network, John Baisch, Tom Hofeditz, Steve Frye and Kim Hoffer, all with Baisch & Skinner.

Your Chariot Awaits

Almost from the beginning, the Network had 31 participating retailers and 20 growers and suppliers — and an \$80,000 budget. Baisch & Skinner has also dedicated a sizable proportion of the time spent by two of its employees — Tom Hofeditz and Kim Hoffer, both marketing directors — to running the day-to-day operations of the Network.

Once the logo and Web site were created, the Network equipped 10 vehicles from Baisch & Skinner’s fleet of delivery vans with a wrap that includes the full St. Louis Florists Network logo, the tagline, “buy quality. buy local,” the Web site address, www.StLFlorists.org, and the phone number 1-8778-FLORAL.

The idea behind having a phone number was to create a path to a retailer for consumers’ who didn’t already have a relationship with one. “That’s an important element,” says Hofeditz, but it initially scared off some retailers, who

were concerned that it was some type of order-gathering effort.

“We have really good relationships with these retail florists,” Baisch says, “but some still had to get over the notion that this was some scheme from Baisch & Skinner.” They soon learned that consumers who call the number are greeted by an operator who says, “Thank you for calling the St. Louis Florists Network, Experts in the Art of Expression. Please enter your home zip code, and we will direct your call to the nearest member of the Florists Network,” after which they’re transferred to the florist.

Romancing the Consumer

An integral element of the marketing and advertising mix is a collection of promotional coupons, which range from free bouquets (\$15 retail value) to “Roses for a Year” (one dozen roses every month for 12 months). Consumers

Meet the Winner

Winner: Baisch & Skinner, Inc., St. Louis

Campaign: St. Louis Florists Network

What: Radio, print, event promotions, funded by cooperative marketing dollars from Network participants.

Network members: 31 retail florists; 20 growers and manufacturers

Annual budget: \$80,000, plus \$25,000 in start-up costs (amortized over 3 years)

Results: 10,000 stems of roses with redeemable coupon distributed; 1,300 potential customers added to database; 300 coupons redeemed at member shops; \$40,000 in additional Valentine’s Day business from one radio campaign.

Next steps: Get more retailer participants, create and market Network designs on Web site.

get the coupons in a variety of ways: by registering online — after which they’re added to a database and receive monthly e-newsletters — by receiving a brochure at one of the Network events or by winning promotional contests. “Redeemed daily,” Hofeditz says, “these coupons have connected countless con-



GROUP EFFORT John Baisch, pictured second from left, encourages retail members to designate someone on their staff to take the lead on and manage all Network efforts. Said designees from their respective St. Louis area shops are, from left, Carla Emert, Troy Flower Shop in Troy; Michael Bozzay, Bozzay Florist in Kirkwood; and Clare Kramer, Alex Waldbart Florist in Richmond Heights.

sumers with their local florist.”

With a limited budget, Hoffer sees the industry’s product as its best marketing tool. “Sending out a piece of mail can be very expensive with little return, and the consumer sees it and throws it away,” she says. “Our industry’s product has staying power, it puts the consumer hand-in-hand with the product and engages them in a way they’re otherwise not engaged.” Hoffer is quick to point out that every time they hand out a flower, it’s labeled with the Network logo and Web site, so they drive sales to the Web site, and the promotional coupons have codes that correspond with the event, so they can track response.

The Magic of Radio

The Network has also capitalized on its natural synergy with St. Louis’s No. 1 radio station, which “supports anything and everything considered ‘local,’” Hofeditz says. The station, KEZK 102.5 FM, wanted to construct an online flower shop and integrate it into its Web site, www.kezk.com, so the Network’s local florists are a natural fit for filling orders made on www.shopkezk.com. In addition, Hofeditz says the St. Louis Florists Network has been involved with more than a half dozen events with the station, ranging from promotional product

giveaways to 10-foot by 10-foot booth displays. In turn, KEZK aired 30-second commercials describing the St. Louis Florists Network both through their on-air programming and also via their online streaming production.

In February 2007, the Network partnered with St. Louis’ public radio station KWMU 90.7 FM for its annual “For the Love of KWMU” fundraising drive. The station accepts bids from local companies to be the rose, chocolate, bed and breakfast or jewelry vendor. The station then offers the items, at inflated values, in exchange for contributions, so the station earns money and the consumer gets a nice gift for themselves or someone else. “One florist had filled the rose orders for the previous five years,” Hofeditz says. “We sold them on the fact that we’re 31 shops and we could really co-op on this.”

Florists concerned about their ability to fill an additional influx of orders for an already-overwhelming holiday, relaxed when they realized that KWMU required that orders be placed by Feb. 10 and delivered no later than 2 p.m. on Feb. 12. The florists would receive \$75 for furnishing and delivering the one-dozen rose orders in a vase, and \$40 for half-dozen orders.

As orders came into the Network, they were divided up evenly among member shops in the various zip codes.

Over the course of six days leading up to Valentine’s Day, Network members filled 561 local orders and sent 127 out-of-town orders around the country — for a total of \$40,520 in additional business for the Network florists.

“That was very easy, very good [business] for us,” says Michael Bozzay, co-owner of Bozzay Florist in Kirkwood, Mo., a member of the Network’s board.

Take Me to the Ball

In addition to the radio promotions and print ads that promote the Network florists, events are a big part of the group’s strategy for reaching the consumer, where the Network has a booth, and participating florists hand out roses, coupons and brochures. The group has participated in three of the area’s largest consumer trade shows since the beginning of the year: St. Louis Best Bridal Show, St. Louis Home & Garden Show and, the largest of the three, the Working Women’s Survival Show, which alone attracted more than 30,000 consumers over two and a half days. The Network has a 10’ by 10’ booth, and Network florists taught workshops, such as “Corsage-making 101” and “Table Arrangements,” and passed out hundreds of roses, brochures and coupons that are redeemable by visiting one of the Network’s florists. “We capture information on them and track the event code,” Hofeditz says. “So we know this event was very successful.”

“Rooms in Bloom” took place in May on the campus of Saint Louis University. Created to give the school’s graduation week an on-campus activity, Hofeditz says the Network florists “transformed a Victorian-styled mansion, the Samuel Cupples House, into an artistic floral exhibition.” The florists were assigned a hallway or room and could interpret its characteristics through floral arrangements. More than 1,000 visitors came through the exhibit and received coupons

What Makes a Marketer of the Year?

When Floral Management launched the Marketer of the Year Award in 1994, we hoped to draw attention to some of the industry's outstanding marketing efforts — and inspire the rest of the industry with their ideas. Floral Management invites, retailers, wholesalers and growers to take part in the contest, luring them with the prospect of a \$5,000 cash prize. For the 13th year in a row, that cash prize is sponsored by Design Master color tool, Inc.

The Criteria

What constitutes an outstanding marketing effort? The judges are charged with reviewing the entries and rating each entrant in the following four categories: effectiveness of campaign, originality, professionalism and overall excellence.

The Judges

We know that only experienced marketers with a track record of success are qualified to judge other marketing efforts. So, each year we choose a panel of seasoned professionals within and outside the floral industry.

Paul Bachman, Bachman's Inc.

James M. DelPrince, associate professor of floral design at Mississippi State University

BJ Dyer, AAF, AIFD, and Guenther Vogt, AAF, owners of Bouquets, Denver

Marty Loppnow, Waukesha Floral & Greenhouse, Inc., Waukesha, Wis.

Danielle Mackey, marketing director for Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide, the agency that handles the consumer relations campaign for the Society of American Florists (SAF).

Rod Saline, Engwall Florist & Greenhouse, president elect of the Society of American Florists (SAF).

How to Enter

Want to be an entrant in Floral Management's 2008 Marketer of the Year? Call, fax or e-mail an entry request to Kate F. Penn, at Floral Management, (800) 336-4743; fax (800) 208-0078; kpenn@safnow.org. Applications for the 2008 award will be mailed after the first of the year.

Past Winners

- 2006** Lyn and Skip Shipman, Brenda's House of Flowers, Inc., Woodstock, Ga.
- 2005** Frances Hopkins, Under A Foot Plant Co., Salem, Ore.
- 2004** Marty & Jane Loppnow, Waukesha Floral & Greenhouse, Inc., Waukesha, Wis.
- 2003** Scott Carlson, Florabundance, Inc., Carpinteria, Calif.
- 2002** BJ Dyer, AAF, AIFD, and Guenther Vogt, AAF, Bouquets, Denver
- 2001** Andrew Manton-Zamora and Rutger Borst, Apisis Group, Miami
- 2000** Southern California Plant Tour Days
- 1999** Greg Katz, Al Manning Florist, Kansas City, Mo.
- 1998** Bill Cutting, Kuhn Flowers, Jacksonville, Fla.
- 1997** Brook Jacobs, Greenbrook Flowers, Jackson, Miss.
- 1996** Sylvia Nichols, AIFD, PFCI, The Window Box, Cheshire, Conn. and United Floral Exchange, Vista, Calif.
- 1995** Mary Dark, Broadmoor Florist, Shreveport, La. Greg Royer, Royer's Florist, Inc., Lebanon, Pa.
- 1994** Mary J. Lore, McFarland Florist & Greenhouses, Inc., Birmingham, Mich. Tom Aykens, AAF, Memorial Florist & Greenhouses, Appleton, Wis. 🌿

— K.P.

E-mail: kpenn@safnow.org

and information about the Network.

At the St. Louis Best Bridal Show, Network members collected booth visitors' names and addresses and followed up with a coupon for free toss bouquet for their wedding, as well as a personalized voucher for \$100 off their wedding order. Carla Emert, of Troy Flower Shop in Troy, Mo., participated in the show and picked up 10 additional weddings as a result.

Hofeditz says he has received a lot of positive feedback from the events. Network florists "are all getting new customers in different ways," he says. "Some got five new brides from the wedding show; others have been

redeeming coupons that get printed off the Web site or are included in some of the brochures." As the customers come in to redeem the coupons, that's the florists' opportunity to shine. "We've helped get that consumer into their shop, then they can up-sell and build that relationship."

Not a Free Carriage Ride

Reflecting on those 10 new wedding accounts, Emert acknowledges that that they would not have come her way had she not worked in the Network's booth at the show. In other words, "If you

don't participate, you won't get anything out of this," she says. "Baisch & Skinner is really giving us the tools to help us get more business. But it's up to us to work these events and make it happen."

Hofeditz acknowledges that most of the Network promotions don't result in thousands of dollars effortlessly falling into its members laps — but they can result in thousands of consumers being exposed to the Networks' message, for florists who get involved in the events and follow up on the connections made. "What you get out of it is what you put into it, because it's a cooperative group," he says.

An Unlikely Prince Charming

Perhaps one unforeseen benefit of the group is the camaraderie that's developed among the retailers. "It's really become an association where we can mingle with your peers, get to know them, exchange ideas," says Emert. A member of the group's board of directors, Emert held one of the Network board's quarterly meetings at her shop and was pleasantly surprised that all eight members were able to make the trek to her shop — an hour's drive for some — and that the ideas were flowing throughout the evening, about Network business as well as "shop talk." "That's where I think we sometimes fall short" as florists, she says. "We're so busy getting through each day, we don't have the time to network with the people in our industry who really count."

Hofeditz says the monthly meetings for all Network members are lasting

longer and longer. Network members "are becoming friends and colleagues," Hofeditz says. "Kim and I find ourselves gazing left and right while they talk about all the great things they're doing."

Bozzay likewise enjoys the opportunity to exchange ideas with other florists that the Network affords him — even when it's

GET THE WORD OUT
"buy quality. buy local" is the driving message behind all of the St. Louis Florists Network's promotional efforts, including a brochure that's handed out at all events. The brochure gives consumers advice on increasing the life of floral arrangements and ordering tips, and reminds them that, "the local, retail florist is your source for the best selection of fresh flowers the world has to offer!"



the florist up the street, who happens to be a Network member. "Our competition isn't always the florist up the street," he says. "It's the grocery store, the gas station selling flowers, other [non-floral] gifts."

Frye and Baisch point out that the Network's inclusion of the supply side not only helps build the coffers but also makes it a vertically integrated program, which benefits everyone. Network florists get preferential pricing on items from suppliers that are being promoted through the Network's marketing efforts. "As we move this forward we can run specials and promotions through the Network and promote the vendor's products," Baisch says.

"Plus," Frye adds, "retailers know that every time you buy a case of, for example, Brody Glass or Rio Roses, you're contributing financially to the program."

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When the Clock Strikes Midnight

As the efforts of the St. Louis Florists Network move into the second year, Hofeditz says the group hopes to bring on more retailers, so the budget and impact of the Network will continue to grow.

As for the retailers? "I'm hoping for increased sales, for people to be more knowledgeable about flowers and quality and services that a professional florist can offer, as opposed to another outlet," Bozzay says. "But I don't expect it to happen overnight, I'm more realistic than that."

Emert, who already feels like she's gotten her money's worth out of it for the first year, is thankful for an effort so focused on getting the message out about the value and quality of the local florist. "It's redefining the consumer's floral buying experience: Go back to

the local flower shop, they'll get to know you by name, like Norm on Cheers."

That notion is at the heart of what prompted Frye's and Baisch's brainstorm for the Network — and it's what has them convinced that the Network's impact can only grow. "We are an industry that still recognizes the local, independent Mom and Pop storefront as the flagship for all that we hold dear to our hearts," Frye says. "I'd like to believe that when David and Goliath are in the ring, most of us are still rooting for David. This marketing campaign works to tap into that core belief."

And that will translate into more sales for the local florists, bets Hofeditz, who laughs and says, "Kansas City Florist Network is on the horizon." ❁

Kate F. Penn is Floral Management's editor in chief and SAF's vice president of publishing and communications. E-mail: kpenn@safnow.org

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