

Party With the Best of 'Em



BY KATE F. PENN

Bouquets didn't just sit around waiting to get invited to Denver's exclusive event planning scene — they invited themselves.

It's an unlikely vision to those who know them: BJ Dyer, AIFD, and Guenther Vogt wearing western garb — boots, shirts, jeans, the whole Urban Cowboy look — to a meeting where they presented a proposal for handling \$25,000 worth of event décor for a Denver fundraiser themed “Old-Fashioned Western Americana.” While the outfit may have defied Vogt’s and Dyer’s typically understated-yet-fashionable attire, the “duds” were in keeping with their signature approach to marketing flowers that leaves no detail untouched. “We even played cowboy songs from the Sons of the Pioneers’ ‘I’ve Got Spurs That Jingle Jangle Jingle’ while we showed a computerized presentation of our work,” laughs Vogt, who co-owns the retail floral business Bouquets with Dyer. “It set the spirit of what we’re all about,” agrees Dyer. “We were interested in the event, we wanted it bad.”

Western Fantasy, the group running the event, was impressed enough to put the event’s décor in hands of the Bouquets team. Dressing the part alone didn’t get Vogt and Dyer the business. A highly methodical approach, combined with unbridled design creativity and good old fashioned networking resulted in capturing that event, close to \$200,000 worth of additional high-end floral décor event work — and Floral Management’s 9th Annual Marketer of the Year Award.

Photo by Steven Adams Photography



BJ Dyer, AIFD, and Guenther Vogt of Bouquets in Denver impressed judges for Floral Management's Marketer of the Year with their creative, persistent — and successful — pursuit of high-end event work.

LOOKING FOR THE LAST OF THE BIG SPENDERS

Bouquets' gross sales have grown steadily the last 10 years — about 10 percent on average and upwards of 20 percent during periods of expansion (a second location opened in nearby Beaver Creek

in 1997). With an annual advertising and promotion budget of \$12,000, Bouquets had \$780,000 in gross sales in 2000. Yet the soft economy made its imprint on the 17-year-old company by spring of 2001. Brides began spending less on weddings. Commercial accounts

cut back on weekly flowers. And the average price of a delivered arrangement dropped from \$50 to between \$40 and \$45. "Our goal of 10 percent growth in gross sales was giving way to the flat national economy," Dyer says.

Seemingly immune to the nation's economic woes were Denver's larger charity fund-raising events. "Denver is a very big town for events," Dyer says. And it has big décor budgets to match: many upwards of \$10,000. (There's even a Web site dedicated to showcasing Denver's society events and fund raisers, www.blacktie-denver.com.) Conspicuously absent from galas' vendor rosters were the direct services of a retail florist. Instead, non-floral event planning companies handled large-scale event décor and subcontracted the work to florists or did it in-house using freelancers.

MAKING THE LIST

After years of watching event planners dominate the party scene, Vogt and Dyer set out to build on their established reputation and enter the event-décor business. Their financial goals: bring in about \$80,000 of new business, a 10 percent increase in annual sales, Dyer says.

Reputation is everything when it comes to getting — and even being invited to bid on — event business. Bouquets boasts a well-established brand, proven by its cult following and accolades from Denver's slick city magazine, *5280*, as Denver's best florist six years running and "the choice of the most discerning brides." With a signature hot pink bag that's recognized all over town, Bouquets is regarded as one of Denver's "coolest" places for everyday, occasion, gift and wedding flowers. "But just because somebody can take care of get well soon flowers with style," admits Dyer, "doesn't mean they can come in and handle the décor for a 1,500 seat event."

Event planners want, for starters, a décor company with plenty of experience on large events. In 2001, Bouquets began



running radio ads on Colorado Public Radio promoting “Bouquets: designers of unique flowers and event décor.” But Vogt and Dyer didn’t have any large-scale events under their belts — outside of weddings. What they did have: a history of satisfying clients at non-profit organizations with flowers they delivered.

During the spring of 2001, one such client, Denver Center for the Performing Arts (DCPA), requested proposals from party décor companies — not florists — for a large annual event. Dyer made sure that the Bouquets brand was constantly visible to the entire DCPA staff by providing complimentary flowers for the cabaret tables in a DCPA theater. The Bouquets ribbon and logo-ed coaster were attached to each.

Their efforts — and product — convinced the DCPA’s event chair to invite



Bouquets’ new print campaign reflects the owners’ philosophy on event décor: make flowers — not props — the focal point of the event.

Bouquets to present a proposal on event décor for its 2001 Saturday Night Alive event, which had a \$10,000 budget. But getting invited

was more of an act of courtesy than one of serious consideration. “The chair . . . at the time did not consider Bouquets a serious contender for the business,” Dyer admits.

LIFE OF THE PARTY

Reputation and goodwill may have gotten Bouquets’ foot in the door, but getting the business would get down to the “wowness” of their idea. “With event work, each committee wants their event to be completely different,” says Dyer. “They want to wow whoever is walking in the door.” The Bouquets co-owners say they had an edge on the uniqueness factor over the event companies vying for the business. “As florists, we tend to start with the centerpiece and then go outward — so the table is the décor — as opposed to event companies who tend to look at the other elements first, and then say, ‘oh, we need some flowers

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PARTY RULES

So far, Bouquet's investment in capturing large scale events has paid off. They spent \$5,550 to get almost \$200,000 (and still growing) worth of business (see inset for details). But anyone who has done large party or wedding work knows how easy it is to lose money by getting too caught up in the glamour of the event. Vogt and Dyer have three (at least) hard and fast rules to keep Bouquets well in the black on black-tie events:

Everything has a price. Don't do anything for free, or customers will expect it next time. "Event committees want everything — if they have a \$30,000 budget, they want \$60,000 worth of décor. You have to help them prioritize how to spend their money," says Dyer.

Do what you do best. "The biggest way to lose money is to do something you've never done before," says Vogt. For Bouquets, one unknown territory is making foam core props. "We're really not equipped to make props; there are other people who can do that much better than us," he says.

Be resourceful. When Bouquets provided tons of lush tropical foliage plants for the Lion King opening event gala, rather than renting the plants, they purchased them and resold them in their shop after the event. 🌿

— K. P.



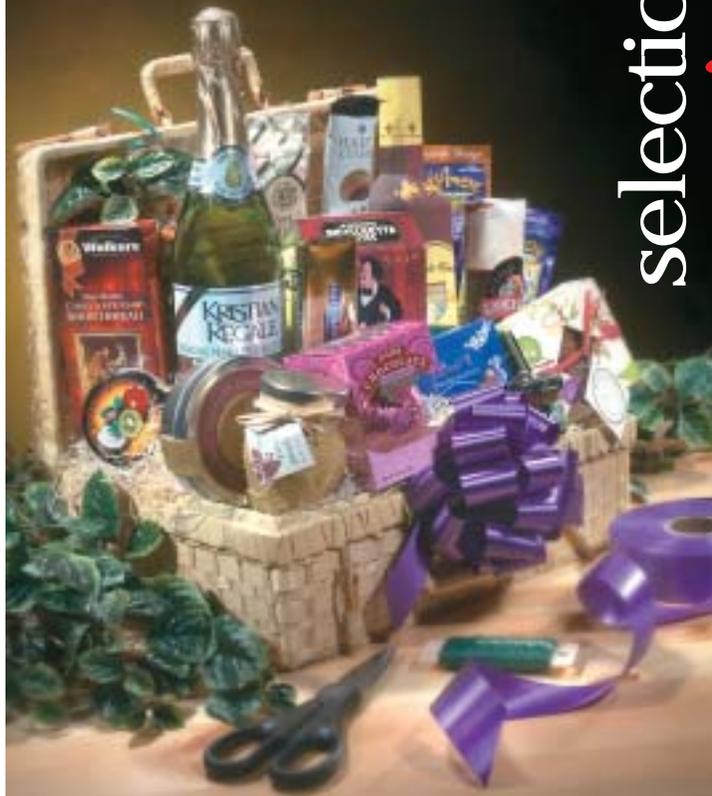
The Investment

DCPA cabaret table flowers	\$1,800
Radio advertising	\$800
Samples, interview material	\$750
Apple iMac, photos	\$2,200
Total	\$5,550

The Payoff (through Jan. 2003)

Saturday Night Alive "Up, Up and Away"	\$10,000
Denver Botanic Gardens "Fete des Fleurs"	\$7,000
Fine Arts Foundation 2001, 2002 Balls	\$16,000
Saturday Night Alive "Fire"	\$10,000
Lion King Premiere Gala	\$37,000
DCPA Founder's 90th Birthday Gala	\$16,000
ADP Corporate Events	\$22,000
Children's Hospital Foundation Fund-raiser	\$30,000
Western Fantasy Gala	\$25,000
Heart Association Heart Ball	\$16,000
Total Revenue:	\$189,000

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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. 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 ninth 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.

J. Sten Crissey, AAF, retailer, Crissey Flowers & Gifts, Seattle, Wash., and past president of the Society of American Florists (SAF).

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

Sylvia P. Nichols, AIFD, owner of The Window Box, Cheshire, Conn., 1996 Marketer of the Year.

Janet Silva Kister, owner of Sunlet Nursery, Inc., Fallbrook, Calif., 2000 Marketer of the Year.

James DelPrince, Ph.D., AIFD, PFCI, is associate professor of floral design in the department of plant soil sciences at Mississippi State University.

How to Enter

Want to be an entrant in Floral Management's 2003 Marketer of the Year? Call, fax or e-mail a request for an entry to Cheryl M. Burke, at Floral Management, (800) 336-4743; fax (800) 208-0078; e-mail cburke@safnow.org. Applications for the 2003 award will be mailed after the first of the year. 🌿

— K. P.

The DCPA invited Bouquets to bid on its 2002 Saturday Night Alive event, for 650 people, with the theme “Fire” commemorating the Pointer Sisters. Dyer and Vogt got the attention of the DCPA — and the local press who raved about it afterwards — with floral arrangements that gave the illusion of flames flickering atop silver chalices. A Denver Post society columnist editor described the effect in a post-party write-up: “Real fire would have never passed muster with the fire department, so Dyer made strips of delicate fabric look like the real deal by packing each container with orange lights and canisters of forced air.”

DCPA's Mitchell then invited Bouquets to bid on what would be the center's most celebrated event of the year: the premiere opening of The Lion King's national tour. But Mitchell admits, “I invited them to bid as a favor, since they had done such a great job with ‘Alive,’ but I didn't think they — as florists vs. an event company — would be able to handle the décor for this event.” Denver's party-planning companies pulled out all the stops to compete for this coveted event with a “jungle party” theme and a \$37,000 décor budget. True to form, Bouquets presented a proposal that, in addition to showcasing spectacular florals, left no detail to chance: an aerial centerpiece of tropical flowers and foliage that canopied over tables dressed with imported jungle print overlays and hand-carved animal napkin ring party favors; lush tropical plant vignettes with 9-foot waterfalls and grass huts with African warriors.

“Other companies had fancy cutouts of tropical foliage,” with relatively minimal use of live product, says Vogt. “But we know plants. We know how to create tropical environments with fresh flowers and live plants.”

TALK OF THE TOWN

Bouquets didn't miss a beat in maximizing press coverage for the event. Dyer sent press releases to six local colum-

for the table.” For the DCPA's “Up, Up and Away” theme, Dyer and Vogt came up with a sample 4-foot diameter helium balloon anchored by a basket of monochromatic matching flowers that would sit on each table. The committee was impressed. “Bouquets definitely came up with the best look,” recalls DCPA's Linda Mitchell, and they got the business.

AT ALL THE RIGHT PARTIES

Confident from a successful first event and pumped up from glowing press reviews, Bouquets was well-positioned to be invited to present proposals for more Denver galas. Subsequent big ticket events they bid on and won included the Denver Botanic Gardens annual fund raiser, “Fete des Fleurs,” followed by its annual ball.



Unique party favors — wood-carved napkin rings, for The Lion King national tour premiere, and mint julep cups, used at the birthday celebration for the Donald Seawell 90th Birthday Anniversary Celebration — drive business back to Bouquets long after the event's over, thanks to tasteful stickers with the shop's Web address.

nists; four picked up on it, as well as a radio talk show. The event was enough to prompt one society columnist to write a personal note to Dyer and Vogt: "Denver really hasn't had a party like that probably ever, and I know that without your creativity it would have been just another night . . . I've heard nothing but positive comments, even from the ones who think they've seen it all." Locals who had read about the event stopped in to congratulate Bouquets on the event. "Some came in to check out our store after reading about us in so many publications," says Vogt.

Other strategic marketing strikes to make the Lion King premiere attendees think of Bouquets long after the event: a small sticker on the take-home napkin ring with the Bouquets Web site address. "What can you do with just one napkin ring?" asks Dyer, about his tactic to entice attendees to contact the shop to buy more. Bouquets carried the Lion King fanfare right into their shop window. "We did a display with an African motif," Vogt says. "People would walk down the street, see the African theme and say, 'they are the Lion King folks.'"

The media attention and society buzz were still fresh one week later during décor selection for Denver's second largest annual event, the 25th Anniversary Gala Fund Raiser for

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Denver's Children's Hospital Foundation (CHF), with 1,300 guests and a \$30,000 décor budget.

Bouquets raised its presentation panache a notch for the CHF decision-makers by investing in an "Apple iMac" with OS-X technology and I-Photo fully loaded. Vogt uploaded photos of Bouquets party work and put a 76-

photo presentation to music. "We really excited the 10-member committee with the Bouquets experience and new brand as Denver's newest creators of unique party décor for a variety of large events." The CHF committee made its choice an hour after the final presentation: Bouquets.

More events made their calendar for the second half of 2002 and early



Bouquets sent fact-filled press releases (see Info To Go box) to local editors about the much celebrated Premiere Gala for The Lion King.

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2003, including Western Fantasy's fundraiser for Volunteers of America, DCPA founder's 90th birthday gala, a week of corporate events in Beaver Creek for payroll company ADP and the Heart Association's Heart Ball. And, while it's too early to assess the retail impact of the exposure of these events, Dyer and Vogt say they've noticed an increase in new customers and customer traffic overall.

MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE RANCH

Managing more than \$100,000 worth of event work begs the question: What about the retail business? How do you keep two shops running while immersing yourself in 800-seat events? In a word: organization. Vogt and Dyer are natural organizers and say they run about as tight a ship as a small business can be. Vogt is proud that he has yet to put a "closed due to a major event this weekend" sign up in the window.

During large event work, some of Bouquets' nine full-time and three part-time employees join the event team, while others, who are trained and accustomed to making on-the-spot management decisions without the owners' approval, keep things running. "In some flower shops, the staff may find [large event work] to be a disaster," says Vogt. "If it's not organized well and no one knows what they're doing, it's no fun for anyone."



Dyer likens pulling off events to holiday work — albeit less complex, since events give you a specific quantity of flowers sold in advance. “Logistically, we’ve built on our good organization of holidays [to do large event work],” says Dyer. “We’ve made certain that all the staff, from the people on the phones to the managers, are empowered to do their jobs and understand the systems in place, right down to the profit margins.”

It wasn’t always like that. Dyer still recalls their early years in business, setting up those systems. “If I had been out doing event work, the business would have suffered.”

For businesses thinking about taking on large event work, try the Dyer/Vogt

test: take a month off and let the business function without you. “If there’s a business left when you return,” says Vogt, “then consider it.”

With a half dozen large events on their dance card and two shops to run, an extended vacation is not in the cards for Dyer and Vogt in the next few months. And while Denver’s society set might regard Bouquets as the town’s best in

event décor, Dyer and Vogt know that fame may be fleeting. Words for event florists to live by, says Dyer: “You’re only as good as your last party.”

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Info To Go

Catching Up with Past Marketer of the Year Winners

Admit it. You love reading those “Where are they now?” stories in People magazine. Check in with past Marketer of the Year winners. Go to www.safnow.org/public/floral_manage/infotogo.htm.

Getting Media Attention

“Columnists are more likely to pick up on factual information than on some florist’s ego,” says Bouquets’ Guenther Vogt of the key to getting press releases noticed. See a few of Bouquets’ event press releases at www.safnow.org/public/floral_manage/infotogo.htm.

Building a Brand

Bouquets established its brand as a high quality retail florist long before it attempted to enter the event décor market. Read about the company’s branding efforts in an article published in Floral Management’s Nov. 2001 issue. Lost your copy? Go to www.safnow.org/public/floral_manage/infotogo.htm.

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