**First-Hand Account**

**Here Comes the Bridal Bouquet**

Ian Prosser, AAF, AIFD, of Botanica International Florist in Tampa, Fla., wows brides at wedding shows with a flower fashion show where models dressed in black carry a monochromatic bouquet and wear a matching scarf. Weddings account for 35 percent of Botanica's annual sales.

While Prosser’s flower fashion show is a crowd pleaser, not all florists can afford to put on their own show. If you’d rather go the booth route, wedding designer Shari Miller, AIFD, of Esprit de Fleur, whose booth won a best visual display award at last year’s Seattle Wedding Show, recommends several pointers: Build your booth high, above attendees heads so they notice it in the crowds. Request the corner booth for more open space and draw in brides with a huge wedding cake or bright bouquet. Spend some extra money to make your signs look professional. To read more tips on how to lure brides at wedding shows (and online), click on the Info to Go logo on SAF’s member Web site, www.safnow.org, or get it via SAF’s Fast Fax by calling (888) 723-2000 and requesting document #671.

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**Boost Your Bridal Image**

Last summer, BJ Dyer, AAF, AIFD, and Guenther Vogt of Bouquets in Denver met with Grace Ormonde, editor of high-end wedding magazine, Grace Ormonde Wedding Style. During the meeting, Ormonde “charmingly interrogated” Dyer and Vogt about their floral design, not because she was looking for a floral designer, but because she was looking for an advertiser capable of producing an ad that would “match her vision,” Dyer says. After agreeing to the contract, the first few ads Dyer and Vogt submitted to Ormonde were rejected. Why put forth such effort just for an ad? Because the type of brides looking at Grace Ormonde Wedding Style are just the type of brides Dyer and Vogt want to do business with.

When deciding how to advertise for weddings, Dyer trusts “(his) gut feelings that come from knowing the brand (he) wants to build and trying never to deviate from anything that does not support the image of that brand,” he says. Dyer and Vogt, whose wedding business accounts for more than 11 percent of annual sales, follow these guidelines when mapping out their wedding advertising (which accounts for 17 percent of their advertising budget):

- **Plan and stick to a wedding-marketing budget.** Figure out how much return is required from each advertising investment to get the most return for every dollar spent.
- **Ask brides casually during consultations how they heard of your shop.** Track this information.
- **Pay attention to other advertisers in publications you’re considering advertising in.** Dyer and Vogt recently dropped their ad in a regional bridal magazine when they noticed an ad for an herbal supplement that “guaranteed to increase breast size naturally.” “I believe that businesses are judged by the company they keep,” Dyer says.
- **Position yourself as bridal-floral experts.** Dyer and Vogt offer flowers for editorial bridal photo shoots with the agreement that the publication quotes them or mentions Bouquets in the article or caption.
Heard it Here First

Grooms Gain Ground

It used to be that grooms could breathe easy once they popped the question and received the much-anticipated three-letter answer back — wedding planning wasn’t their responsibility. But, times are changing. Most major bridal magazines agree that more than 80 percent of grooms are involved in wedding planning, says Sharon Naylor, author of 23 wedding books including “The Groom’s Guide: A Wedding Planner for Today’s Marrying Man.”

“Twenty years ago, a wedding was the bride and her mother’s domain,” Naylor says. “But now, couples are older when they’re getting married and (the wedding) is not just a party. (The bride and groom) want it to reflect who they are.” Today’s more “sophisticated and worldly” grooms especially want a say in the menu, music and gift registry, Naylor says. Grooms are getting more involved in the technological tasks of wedding planning, including creating a wedding Web site and designing save-the-date cards, says Naylor. Gift registries are becoming more male-friendly as couples venture from the traditional department store to places such as Home Depot, Lowe’s and REI (an outdoor sporting goods store) for their registry, Naylor says.

So What? As grooms get more involved in wedding planning, wedding vendors “have to understand the groom’s mindset,” Naylor says. “Don’t worry about the old stereotypes, grooms are just as interested (as brides) in designing unique boutonnieres and how they’ll be accessorized.” Naylor recommends asking grooms the same questions you’d ask brides, such as “What are some flowers that are special to you mother?” Have graphics on hand so grooms can see different options, Naylor says. And, be prepared for the groom to ask for “a moment alone” with you to order a surprise bouquet for the bride or her mother on the wedding day.

Have an opinion about anything you’ve read here? Additional thoughts to share with readers? E-mail ckohler@safnow.org or call (800) 336-4743.

Did You Know?

Weddings Evolve Electronically

The increase and acceptance of electronic communication has caused some major changes in the wedding industry. “While the movement has just begun, and traditionalists will resist the changes, a new age is dawning in this important rite of passage,” say Joyce Gioia and Roger Herman, strategic business futurists of the Herman Group in Greensboro, N.C. Print invitations may still be the norm, but Gioia and Herman have seen an influx of brides and grooms sending their invitations via e-mail, using www.evite.com. They predict that in the near future RSVPs will be done electronically, either with a return e-mail or by completing a form on a special Web site. And, if the invitation is electronic, certainly the thank-you notes will be too. “Some couples will send simple e-mails. More sophisticated couples will use services similar to the electronic cards available from Hallmark and other vendors,” Gioia and Herman say. “(Others) will send their appreciation through video e-mail.”

It’s no surprise the Internet’s role in weddings is growing. Wedding vendors should be prepared. If brides and grooms are sending invitations and thank-you cards electronically, then certainly they’re doing other wedding tasks, such as choosing flowers, electronically too. Be prepared with a professional Web site that has a thorough wedding section. (See Web Wise for a good example, p. 13.) Also, the newlyweds-to-be may find it easier to communicate electronically, so be ready to e-mail price quotes and flower specifics back and forth. But WeddingChannel.com editor-in-chief Rosanna McCollough says not to overuse e-mail when it comes to communications with the bride: “E-mail is good for giving facts and figures, but you don’t get the subtle meanings conveyed by tone of voice. I discourage it from being the only communication with the bride.”

Industry Benchmarks

Floral Management editors combed wedding Web sites and resources for interesting statistics. Here are some that caught our attention:

- The average cost of a U.S. wedding is $20,000 to $25,000.
- The average number of guests invited to a U.S. wedding is 178.
- One third of engaged couples hire a wedding consultant.
- Almost 90 percent of couples register together.
- Forty-two percent of couples do the majority of planning together.
- Sixty percent of brides say they’ll take the groom’s last name.
- Istanbul, Turkey is the most popular wedding city among international brides.
- Top wedding destination locations for U.S. brides include Las Vegas, Hawaii, the Bahamas, Jamaica and U.S. Virgin Islands.

One-hundred thousand fewer U.S. weddings were performed in 2004 than 2003 (June to June figures).

- 2003: 2,244,000 weddings
- 2004: 2,144,000 weddings

Number of weddings from 2000 to 2004 is shown in the chart.
Brides are inundated with pictures and more pictures when they visit the wedding section of www.beachbouquets.com. Donnie Wise of Beach Bouquets in Orange Beach, Ala., updates the shop’s Web site with new pictures after each wedding so he and his business partner/wife, Glenda, can continue courting online destination brides. “I would say 98 percent of our brides don’t live here and a high number of them come in and say, ‘I saw your Web site,’” Glenda says. She and Donnie also include information on wedding packages on their site. Although most brides choose customized flowers at Beach Bouquets, the packages section “gives them a feel for pricing,” Glenda says, which makes consultations more time-efficient.

Fruitful Follow-Up

Have you ever received a follow-up call on service done on your car? It’s a nice touch and helps cement your relationship with that dealer or mechanic.

You can offer a similar service by following up with recipients of your deliveries. Before your mind starts racing, let me clarify — I’m not talking about orders sent to hospitals, hotels, schools or funeral homes. I only call “happy-order” recipients: birthdays, new babies, anniversaries, etc. When I worked in a New York flower shop, I made these calls for years and found they enhanced customer loyalty. Here’s how you can do the same:

1. **Get your list:** Most order-entry systems let you run a report of yesterday’s deliveries — or you can work with hard copies.

2. **Qualify the list:** Again, pull out only the “happy orders.” I tend to avoid calling recipients of get-well orders because it’s unclear how serious their illness is.

3. **Start dialing:** Once you have the recipient on the phone, confirm she received the flowers (maybe they were left at the front door and she always goes in the back) and ask if she’s pleased with them. This will give you good insight on customer satisfaction. Offer her proper care instructions (keep them out of direct sunlight, away from extreme heat or cold and topped off with fresh water). Close by asking if she’d like to be placed on the mailing list (and confirm her address). Call (800) 983-6184 for a complete follow-up script (or e-mail tim@floralstrategies.com).

4. **Handle the ups and downs:** Naturally some of the recipients you follow up with will have complaints or problems. Don’t get defensive — this is a perfect opportunity to correct the mistake and win the recipient as a customer. Remedy the situation as quickly as possible. Alternately, when you get rave reviews, be sure to share them with your design staff.

Invest some time in these calls each day and you’ll reap rewards: happy recipients (who will hopefully turn into happy customers) and satisfied customers (who will be pleased when they hear their florist called to make sure the flowers were received and liked).

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