

floral management

THE FLORAL BUSINESS AUTHORITY

FEBRUARY 2014 | VOLUME 30 | NUMBER 12

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Did Your Holiday Sales Measure Up? p. 32

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> COVER PHOTO BY VIRGINIE KIPPELEN



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FEBRUARY 2014 | VOLUME 30 | NUMBER 12

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WE WELCOME YOUR FEEDBACK ON THE MAGAZINE. PLEASE SEND YOUR OPINIONS AND SUGGESTIONS TO: FMEDITOR@SAFNOW.ORG.

Viewpoint BY DR. MARVIN N. MILLER

FORGET THE PITS. FOCUS ON THE CHERRIES.

> When folks think of Washington, D.C., visions of cherry blossoms surrounding the Tidal Basin and the Jefferson Memorial often come to mind. It's the photo of tourism brochures. And it's a spectacular sight.

Yet, as many Americans have also experienced, the beauty of Washington's cherry blossoms doesn't always yield prized fruit. Indeed, in the shadows of all that beauty and the monuments and memorials that is our District of Columbia, Washington also generates a fair amount of aggravation. Some blame it on the fact that Capitol Hill sits above the rest of the landscape. Perhaps, "the biggest little word in the English language," ego, also plays a part. Partisanship is played there like nowhere else. And possibly the fissure created by the Washington Beltway, separating legislators from their constituents and arguably from reality, is part of the story. Excuses all! These grumblings get repeated because we Americans often find it easier to complain than communicate with our legislators and ultimately hold them accountable.

Certainly, there are many who do communicate. I hope that most SAF members at least write lawmakers on occasion, especially when SAF sends out an Action Alert that says we need letter writers ASAP. And yes, there are representatives who hear from their constituents but decide they know better what America needs than what any one or group of constituents says. Occasionally you even hear of a representative who refuses to discuss an issue; that's when it's time to cast your vote for another. My experience is that most welcome feedback from their electorate. Sometimes they even beg for the evidence that your viewpoint is valid, as they know who the opposition is and have already heard from them. Washington is indeed a real balancing act, and it sometimes seems those who scream the loudest are the ones who get heard. Instead, I believe that consistency outperforms noise level.

As a veteran of more than 25 SAF Congressional Action Days (CAD), I contend that face-to-face visits are a

key to bolstering these relationships. Seeing legislators in their offices and how they act in their inner sanctums, looking them in the eye, and watching how they interact with aides usually reveals more about the person than their demeanor when at home in their districts. Understanding the man or woman truly is the key to gaining sway over his or her thinking.

Finally, I'd like to challenge everyone to consider their future. Yes, CAD — March 10-11 — isn't held at the best time to be away from your business. But it is held when Congress is gathering momentum for getting things done. The legislative calendar is being prepared for what will be considered. Anyone who wants to get legislation passed this year is mustering his or her forces, calling in chits, jockeying for position. Springtime is when Congress works like at no other time of the year. Springtime is when we need to make our cases, to remind them of our positions on the issues, and to remind them why they are there. Springtime is when we must make our voices heard!

Your future is the one at stake. You need to be on the Hill, speaking as part of the floriculture industry with unified precision, making the point that we, too, count. I hope to see you in Washington. We may not hit the peak bloom for cherry blossoms this year, but being there will help us avoid the pits. 🌸

Dr. Marvin N. Miller, whose doctorate is in agricultural economics, is market research manager for Ball Horticultural Company, West Chicago, Ill., and served on the SAF Government Relations Committee for 7 years, most recently as chair, a term he finished in 2013.
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What Inspires Us

> Peaks and valleys: It's a geographic reference to some, but ask any florist and they'll likely tell you it's the best way to describe their sales over the course of a calendar year. In fact, by the time you're able to come up for air and read this issue, you likely will be on the downside of the second highest peak of the year, headed into a valley that will last until mid-April.

Beginning in 2009, when the valleys seemed to deepen to gorge-like levels after the financial crisis, florists who had long written off weddings as too labor-intensive to be worth the revenue began to reconsider them — and, more importantly, the way they manage them — as an important source of in-between holiday profits.

Is prom to be the next valley-leveler for the early spring? Average spending on prom per family has increased from \$807 in 2011 to \$1,139 in 2013, according to Visa's 2013 prom spending survey. Yet, mere mention of a sooooo excited 17-year-old girl (and her mother) can elicit more wrath than even the

most "challenging" bride (or mother of the bride). After all, weddings usually generate a sale well into in the high three or four digits, while a prom customer can be just as persnickety, fickle and demanding as the most zilla-worthy bride — for a \$20 corsage.

Granted, that dollar figure can be higher, thanks to the creative geniuses behind the companies marketing the bling that so easily and efficiently ups the price tag. But still, we're talking one \$50 corsage order at a time. If you master the marketing side and manage to win over the local schools, say the skeptics, you could be looking at several hundred orders — and the sweat (read: overtime, aggravation, gnashing of teeth) it might take to make it happen.

And all for what?

Betsy Hall was answering that very question when I first met her, last October at SAF's One-Day Profit Blast in Atlanta. With the enthusiasm of a prom-goer who'd just snagged a runway dress on clearance, she was explaining to a (skeptical) florist during the lunch break



why prom business is so "great" at her business — not only in volume but also in profits.

But her experience with prom was not always so great — and that's where Mary Westbrook's story about Betsy and her team starts ("No Pain, More Profit," p. 20). It's a place that is all-too-familiar to many, but her climb from there to where she's brought her prom business today should inspire even the greatest skeptics to fill at least some of the valley after Valentine's Day. 🌿

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More Online ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON WWW.SAFNOW.ORG



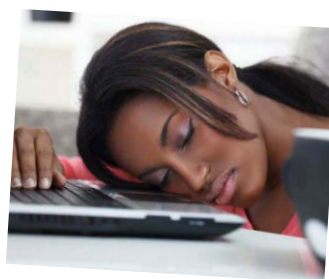
PERUVIAN BEAUTIES

In our search for stunning alstroemeria varieties, we found many, many more than would fit on this month's Fresh Choices (p. 18). Check out the full collection, at safnow.org/moreonline.



GET YOUR PROM ON

If the cover story has left you pumped up to go after prom business, we have plenty more guidance for you, from how to approach the schools and hold an in-school or in-store event to organizing the troops for efficient production, upselling and creative corsage and boutonniere ideas. Check it out, at SAF's online Prom Resource Center, www.safnow.org/prom



WEBINAR WOES

Have yet to try a one of those much-ballyhooed live, online learning sessions, better known as a webinar? It's not as high-tech and impersonal as it sounds, and it is decidedly low-budget (not to mention convenient). Check out the "Webinar FAQ," (and sign up for SAF's next webinar!) at safnow.org/webinars-education



REVISITING HOLIDAY 2013

Did all that hall-decking in November and December add up to a spike in sales for the month that you've come to expect? That's what we asked all SAF member retailers on Jan. 6. Check out the complete results of the Holiday 2013 survey (p. 32), at safnow.org/holidays (click on "Christmas").

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SAF in Action

NEW INDUSTRY PR CAMPAIGN: “LIVE LIKE A FLOWER”

➤ Through its latest consumer marketing program, SAF plans to reach consumers with positive floral messages, inspire them to make flowers and plants part of their everyday lives and encourage them to leverage the expertise of local florists. The program will draw on university research findings about the emotional benefits of flowers and plants to launch an innovative new public relations campaign, made up of these key components:

PR Push: Live Like a Flower. This new campaign launches in April and targets traditional women’s magazines, lifestyle reporters and influential bloggers. Third-party experts will use university research to offer easy-to-follow advice for a happier, more fulfilling life. “Living life to the fullest is one of today’s top consumer trends,” said Jennifer Sparks, SAF’s vice president of marketing. For the launch, SAF will host a **press event in New York** to give national magazine editors one-on-one insight about the emotional health benefits of flowers and the expertise of professional florists. Throughout the year, SAF will distribute Live Like a Flower **tips to national publications** and through SAF’s consumer sites and social media.

The VaseOff! All-Stars Challenge. SAF hosted five successful VaseOff! design challenges in 2012 and 2013, driving traffic to AboutFlowersBlog.com and new followers to Facebook.com/AboutFlowers — all in the name of showcasing the expertise professional florists bring to floral gifts. This year, SAF will host a grand finale to the series of online floral design contests. Past winners will compete to become the VaseOff! All-Stars Champion — creating a new design that relates to the Live Like a Flower program.



Robust Social Media.

SAF engages consumers daily with floral messages online. “When we get more people coming to our social media sites, the whole industry benefits,” Sparks said. **Flower Factor: A Lifestyle Blog** at AboutFlowersBlog.com features two-dozen contributors



offering inspiring posts about making flowers and plants and florists more part of the everyday life. The blog links to SAF’s:

- NationalFloristDirectory.com
- AboutFlowers.com
- Facebook.com/AboutFlowers
- Twitter.com/FlowerFactor
- Flickr.com/FlowerFactor
- Pinterest.com/AboutFlowers
- YouTube.com/SAFAboutFlowers

International Women’s Day.

SAF will use social media to promote flowers as part of International Women’s Day celebrations, and provide members with ideas and tools to build local visibility. International Women’s Day, held annually on March 8, “is gaining momentum here in the states,” Sparks said. “Around the world, people give flowers and other small gifts to their mothers, wives, grandmothers and daughters, as well as coworkers, teachers and friends in observance of the occasion.” SAF offers Facebook graphics, suggested posts and Tweets, and promotional advice to help members raise awareness for Women’s Day among their customer base at safnow.org/womensday.



SAF’s 2014 marketing programs are possible thanks to SAF retail dues and voluntary contributions to the SAF Fund for Nationwide Public Relations by wholesalers, suppliers, importers and growers. Since the PR Fund’s inception in 2001, PR Fund programs have generated more than 1.1 billion consumer impressions. Visit www.safnow.org/prfund or call (800) 336-4743 for information on how to support this important industry initiative. 🌸

GET PREPPED FOR FREE PUBLICITY AT VALENTINE’S DAY

➤ Don’t let the holiday pressure prevent you from capturing powerful free publicity around Valentine’s Day. With a little prep you’ll handle reporters’ questions like a pro – no matter how many orders are waiting to be filled. So grab a cup of coffee, sit down at the computer, go to safnow.org/vday and check out the advice under “Working with the Media.” Here’s a brief sample of what’s there:

Ace Common questions: Don’t be stumped by questions such, “Why are rose prices so high?” “How do you handle so much business in just one day?” “What if someone can’t afford a dozen roses?” Instead, review expert answers ahead of time on the site.

Master the Interview: The website offers dos and don’ts. (Do know what the story is about in advance. Don’t fidget.

Do keep eye contact with the reporter. Don’t look at the camera.). The site also has advice on how to set the stage (Make sure you have gorgeous flowers in the background. Have a few 10-second “sound bites” ready, so that your message won’t be edited). 🌸

SAF in Action

SAF ON THE HILL
CAD: MORE THAN YOUR CIVIC DUTY

MARCH 10-11, 2014
WASHINGTON, D.C.

> This year, taking part in SAF Congressional Action Days (CAD), March 10-11 in Washington, is much more than a civic responsibility, according to Corey Connors, SAF's senior director of government relations. "This is about your right

to operate your farm, shop or warehouse as you see fit."

At the top on the agenda: Making the Affordable Care Act (ACA) more workable for the floral industry. Employers are facing compliance challenges that have never been considered before, and without changes, "the outlook is bleak," he stressed.

"I wish the hours SAF has invested in advocacy and compliance assistance were enough to stem the impact of the unprecedented shift in employer/employee dynamic that ACA represents," he said. "Realistically, they are not."

Connors said that, although members of Congress are aware of the law's impact on employers, it's imperative that constituents drive that point home personally.

"Your representatives are all ears and the time to move the needle is now," he said.

CAD attendees will be pushing for restoration of a full-time employment definition that more accurately reflects seasonal employment practices used throughout our industry.

"We must inform and educate members of Congress about the impact of regulations on the benefits we currently offer and on our future profitability," Connors said. "We can win... but only by doing it together."

Register for SAF Congressional Action Days online at safnow.org/congressional-action-days, or call the SAF office, (800) 336-4743.

Have questions about ACA? Contact Corey Connors, cconnors@safnow.org. 🌸

POP YOUR SHOP IN FRONT
OF CUSTOMERS WITH NEW
SAF FACEBOOK GRAPHICS

> Ready to freshen up your Facebook page? SAF has you covered. Last month, SAF added new designs for Valentine's Day and International Women's Day (March 8) to its collection of online Facebook graphics at safnow.org/facebook-graphics. To add variety and interest to your Facebook news, alternate SAF graphics with photos of your seasonal designs, or comments relating to the holiday. Be sure each post includes a link to holiday designs on your website. 🌸

MEMBER VIGILANCE, FAST RESPONSE
HELPS STOP FLOWER BASHING

> Until a couple of years ago, the weeks leading up to Valentine's Day were filled with flower bashers. "We'd get dozens of reports from members and spend hours calling and emailing editors and marketers around the country, asking them to correct misinformation about flowers or refrain from negative advertising," said SAF Vice President of Marketing Jennifer Sparks. Since 2012 however, SAF has received only a handful of reports about Valentine's Day-related negative ads or media coverage each year. While she's careful about not attributing the drop off entirely to SAF's aggressive response, "hopefully we've changed the way some people think," she said.

Less bashing leaves Sparks more time to share positive information with the news media. "We make sure they have the facts about the size of the industry, consumer buying preferences for the holiday, color and design trends, and the services professional florists provide," she said.

But while there may be fewer instances of negative publicity, the industry still needs to be vigilant, said Sparks. "Members should report flower bashers right away so SAF can respond immediately." Send negative publicity reports to Jenny Scala, jscala@safnow.org or call 800-336-4743. 🌸



PARTY POOPER SAF responded to this negative ad last year by sending a letter to the CEO of Party City requesting that the company re-think its marketing message for future promotions

TIRED

of worrying about how health care and the economy will impact your business?

SICK

of waiting for action on important legislation like the Farm Bill, and immigration reform?

FRUSTRATED

by a Congress so divisive it brought the country to a standstill? (And could do it again!)

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Patrick Dahlson, Mayesh Wholesale Florist, Los Angeles, CA

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** Second registration must be a first-time attendee. Offer not available online.*

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4 EASY WAYS TO REGISTER

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March 10-11, 2014 **Washington, D.C.**

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 At about what time do you plan to leave for home on Tuesday? _____

NO. I will make my own appointments. Please contact SAF's Brian Gamberini (800-336-4743 , bgamberini@safnow.org) if you choose to make your own appointments. We need to keep a record of these contacts.

SAFPAC Reception and Dinner

Yes, I want to attend the SAFPAC Reception and Dinner. I understand this is limited to individuals who have contributed \$150 or more to SAFPAC. (Checking this box does not automatically register you for this event. It simply lets us know you are interested. SAF will contact you, or for more information about SAFPAC, contact Brian Gamberini at 800-336-4743; bgamberini@safnow.org.)

Registration/Refund Policy: Written cancellation requests postmarked before February 1, 2014 will be refunded less a 15 percent handling charge. No refunds after February 28. Payment must accompany this registration form. Individuals are not considered registered for the conference until payment is received.

Hands On

TIPS, TRENDS AND TACTICS FOR THE SAVVY RETAILER

FIRSTHAND ACCOUNT

WHITE-GLOVE SERVICE FOR APW

"The idea started 16 years ago, when we treated our own secretary to a limo ride – her family was waiting in the limo with lunch," said Sid Allen. "She loved it and I thought, 'Hey, this could be a good promotion.'"



LIMO LOVE At Rochette's Florist in Farmville, Va., Sid Allen (center, in tux) uses partnerships with a local restaurant, funeral home and radio station to promote APW and treat a deserving assistant to an afternoon on the town.

➤ Every year, the phones start ringing a bit more frequently on the Thursday of Administrative Professionals Week (APW) at Rochette's Florist in Farmville, Va. Customers have one question: Did I win? For nearly two decades the family-run florist has partnered with a restaurant and radio station to give one lucky assistant a VIP lunch, complete with limo ride and live-commentary by a local DJ. "The idea started 16 years ago, when we treated our own secretary to a limo ride – her family was waiting in the limo with lunch," said Sid Allen. "She loved it and I thought, 'Hey, this could be a good promotion.'"

Since that time, the promotion has become part of the shop's identity. Allen now borrows a limo from a local funeral home (the original limo company is no longer in business) and drives the winner around himself, in a flower-bedecked tux. Each year, every local APW recipient is entered into the contest. Winners are selected late in the day on Thursday, and Allen picks up the winner, along with three guests, on Friday for an hour-long ride (including a quick stop at a local restaurant, Charley's Waterfront Cafe, to pick up lunch.) A radio personality also joins the fun, riding along with the winner and narrating the trip for local listeners; he talks about how delicious the lunch is (free publicity for Charley's), how hard the winner works (free shout-outs for his or her employer) and, of course, Rochette's Florist. Listeners are also encouraged to call in when they spot the limo around town; those who do are invited into the shop for a free rose.

Like many florists, the team at Rochette's has fought for APW sales in recent years; the promotion isn't a silver bullet, but it has helped Allen and his team stay in front of local residents each year: In addition to the radio coverage, the newspaper always covers the promotion. "We really enjoy doing it," Allen said. "It's still surprising how heads turn when a limo passes by." 🌸

BY MARY WESTBROOK **Hands On**

IN A PICKLE
AFTER THE HOLIDAYS, REV UP CREATIVE ENGINES

Problem: Worn-Out Designers **Solution:** Design Workshops

> Just six days after Valentine’s Day last year, Patti Chandler, general manager of Hall’s Flower Shop and Garden Center, found herself at a prom workshop in metro Atlanta, busily working on low-temp gluing techniques and surrounded by hair clips, faux gold and silver leaves. Turns out, the shot of new ideas was just what the design fairy ordered to help Chandler recover from the mad rush of Valentine’s Day and prep for the onslaught of high school sweethearts. She was so excited about her new skills (and the new products she picked up), she hosted a creative session with the rest of the Hall staff that weekend. “I showed them all a great new way to glue dendrobiums,” she said. “(Our designers) really embraced it.”

The train-the-trainer approach was exactly what owner Betsy Hall had hoped for when she invested in the workshop — put on by Fitz Design through burton+BURTON. With new skills and products, her team became more excited about prom last year; since then, the in-store creative sessions have continued for other areas, including a pre-Valentine’s Day workshop. (Read more about Hall prom business on p. 20.)



CONTINUING EDUCATION A Fitz Design workshop helped inspire the design team at Hall’s Flower Shop and Garden Center — including GM Patti Chandler, above — to improve their design techniques.



VISUAL IMPACT
IN-STORE, THINK SPRING WITH FLOWERING PLANTS

> Nothing says “so long Cupid and hello spring” quite like flower plants and Dutch gardens, according to Theresa Colucci AIFD, PFCI. At Meadowscent in Gardiner, N.Y., she and her team are quick to work bursts of spring into displays once Valentine’s Day is over, with miniature irises, daffodils and hyacinths around the store and ready to bloom, to the delight of chapped-lipped, bundled customers. The shop also offers classes on how to create Dutch gardens, complete with flowering branches. “Plants are perfect for this time of year in the North,” she said. “Everyone is ready to say good-bye to winter.”



SOCIAL MEDIA
DIY FACEBOOK GRAPHICS



MOTHER’S LOVE In 2013, Bridgette Arnold used a free app to create a custom graphic for Facebook that encouraged early deliveries for Mother’s Day.

> Ever dream of having a graphic designer on call? Thanks to a free app, Bridgette Arnold has just that in Jonesboro, Ark., where she creates custom graphics for Posey Peddler Flowers and Emporium’s Facebook page with just a few clicks and swipes.





Using natural light, a white backdrop in Arnold’s office, and InstaQuote, Arnold creates dozens of graphics each year to promote holidays and everyday buying. She generally dreams up the text and takes the picture with her iPhone 5 then sends the photo to her husband who quickly creates the final graphic. While many messages are straightforward, Arnold doesn’t shy away from funny or irreverent text, and she stockpiles quirky expressions.

“Years ago I had a sign outside the store that said, ‘Come in and buy stuff,’” she said. “I’m always on the lookout for the phrase that will make people stop in.”

On My To Do List

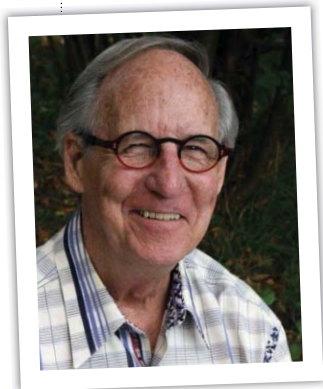
MARCH 2014

Twitter, Facebook posts | Calls to b-days, anniversaries | Change website products to reflect buying trends | Attend networking event

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<p>This month's calendar includes tips from Theresa Colucci, AIFD, PFCI, of Meadowscents in Gardiner, N.Y.; Jeff Corbin, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, of Radford City Florist in Radford, Va., and the team at Hall's Flower Shop and Garden Center in Stone Mountain, Ga.</p>						
<p>2 </p> <p>Blog about green flowers (natural vs. stem-dyed vs. sprayed)</p>	<p>3 </p> <p>Remind designers: Take pics of ALL prom work</p>	<p>4 </p> <p>Webinar: Birthday and Anniversary Sales, safnow.org/events-education</p>	<p>5 </p> <p>ASH WEDNESDAY</p> 	<p>6 </p> <p>FB contest: Guess which white flower will absorb the most green dye</p>	<p>7 </p> <p>Text corsage/boutonnieres pics to teens as the work is complete</p>	<p>8 </p> <p>Plant specials through St. Patrick's Day</p>
<p>9 </p> <p>DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME BEGINS</p> <p>Update prom albums on social media</p>	<p>10 </p> <p>(10-11) SAF'S CONGRESSIONAL ACTION DAYS</p>	<p>11 </p> <p>Slow day? Hit the pavement and connect with new clients</p>	<p>12 </p> <p>Blog about prom trends; cross-promote on social media</p>	<p>13 </p> <p>Take APW promo shots</p>	<p>14 </p> <p>Text corsage/bout pics to teens as the work is complete</p>	<p>15 </p>  <p>(15-16) PURIM</p>
<p>16 </p> <p>Update prom albums on social media</p>	<p>17 </p> <p>ST. PATRICK'S DAY</p> 	<p>18 </p> <p>Drop flowers by 5 prospective corporate clients</p>	<p>19 </p> <p>Sign up a staff member for local design workshop</p>	<p>20 </p> <p>Staff lunch & learn: APW/Easter specials and add-ons</p>	<p>21 </p> <p>Text corsage/bout pics to teens as the work is complete</p>	<p>22 </p> <p>In-store workshop: Dutch gardens & flowering plants</p>
<p>23 </p> <p>Update prom albums on social media</p>	<p>24 </p> <p>Review Mother's Day 2013 sales</p>	<p>25 </p> <p>In-store refresh: Tidy corsage bar and ribbon areas</p> 	<p>26 </p> <p>Review Mother's Day 2013 staffing needs</p>	<p>27 </p> <p>Design brainstorm for Mother's Day</p>	<p>28 </p> <p>Text corsage/bout pics to teens as the work is complete</p>	<p>29 </p> <p>VIP shopping event: spring home décor</p>
<p>30 </p> <p>Update prom albums on social media</p>	<p>31 </p> <p>E-blast: Don't forget APW</p>					

MASTER THE ART: SPRING CLEANING

Richard L. Milteer, AIFD, CFD, AAF, PFCI, TMF, Koehler and Dramm Wholesale Florist, Minneapolis



By the end of Valentine's Day, your customer has been seeing red for months, so introducing new colors, in the window displays and throughout the shop, could be just what the doctor ordered. Perhaps now is also the time to step outside and look at the front of the shop. Is your window display inviting, designed to lure in passersby? Then, walk inside and stop: What makes your

shop a destination for the customer? Why would you want to shop in your store? When was the last time you gutted the showroom of your shop and rearranged all of the fixtures – perhaps even changing the direct path from the front door to the sales area? Are you still using fluorescent lighting? Have you tried halogen spots for highlights? Do your displays cause you to

move throughout the shop, from one intriguing item to the next? Perhaps it is time to move your fixtures and add "high buy" spots or redesign the interior of your display cooler. With a few changes, you can lead your team to a more profitable and fun year. (For sample photos of great displays, go safnow.org/moreonline)

GET THE MOST POWERFUL, FLEXIBLE, AND SUCCESSFUL ONLINE PRESENCE

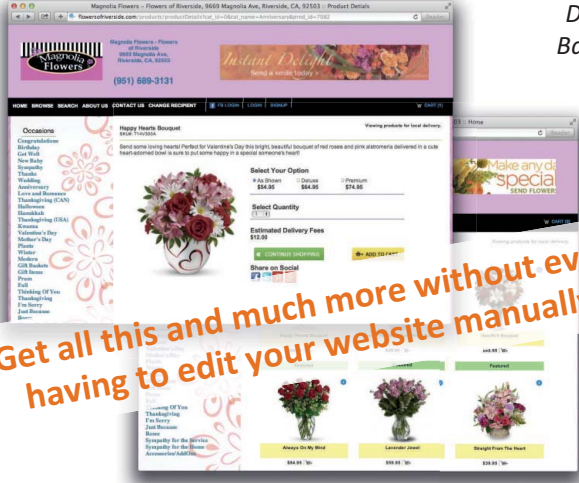


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CSI: Flower Shop

LISTEN IN as Huckabee makes birthday and anniversary calls on unsuspecting florists, **March 4 at 1 p.m. EST.** Not available? Sign up anyway: You can access the webinar and train your staff all month long! www.safnow.org/webinars.

The Call

SHOP: A florist in Seattle
SCENARIO: A customer wants to remain anonymous on his Valentine's Day order

EMPLOYEE: Thanks for calling 123Flowers. My name is Maribel, how can I help you?

TIM: Hi Maribel. I would like to send roses to a special lady.

EMPLOYEE: OK. Do you want red, pink, yellow or white? And are you interested in one dozen or two?

TIM: I want to make a splash so let's go for two dozen red.

After taking the recipient information and delivery date:

EMPLOYEE: And what would you like to say to Stephanie on the card message?

TIM: Just sign it, "Your Secret Admirer."

EMPLOYEE: No name?

TIM: Nope. I don't want her to know it's from me, yet.

EMPLOYEE: Our company policy is that we either need to have a name on the card message; if not, we do reveal the sender's name if the recipient calls and asks.

TIM: No, that doesn't work for me. I'm paying good money for these roses, so please just fill out the card as I asked and make sure no one reveals my name.

EMPLOYEE: Sir, as I just explained, I can't do that, it's against our store policy.

TIM: Fine. Then I will find a florist who understands that the customer is always right! Thank you for your time.

The Analysis

👍 Maribel maintained a professional demeanor even as she explained and reinforced company policy to a disgruntled customer. Bonus points for offering the two-dozen roses option.

👎 Maribel lost the sale *and* ticked me off in the process. Maybe she could have saved either the sale or, if not that, the prospect of getting future (non-anonymous) business from me had she handled the situation with a bit more finesse.

The Fix

I have seen many different ways of handling an anonymous order, ranging from no policy at all to strict enforcement of one (like at Maribel's store), to not releasing sender information until the police call the store. Which is best? That depends on what you think is best for your store, staff and community.

Adopt a Policy — and Diplomacy

Don't require staff to make a judgment call on the character of the customer — innocent and playful, or spooky and stalker-ish? — every time this situation arises. Have a policy, and make sure it is simple, clear, concise and easily understood by staff and customers alike.

While I give Maribel kudos for following the rules, she could have handled the situation better to possibly save the sale, or at least keep the customer for future business. A few tips:

- **Play up what you *can* do, not what you *can't*.** If a customer requests anonymity, try: "Of course, we can leave your name off the card. But our policy is to divulge the sender's name if the recipient calls to ask."
- **Reinforce your interest in their business.** If he's not amenable to your policy, you'll have to diplomatically refuse the sale. Try, "Your business is important to us, Mr. Huckabee. Our policy is designed to protect customers, as I'm sure you can understand. Alternatively, I can have the flowers ready for you to pick up and/or you can have them delivered through another service."

Bottom line

Operate like a big business – have rules and stick to them! Whether your policy is to allow anonymous orders with no restrictions or to divulge the sender's name if requested by the recipient, review the policy with your staff before Valentine's Day. 🌸

Tim Huckabee, an international flower shop sales and customer service trainer, is founder and president of Floral Strategies LLC and the American Institute of Floral Sales Experts (AIFSE), a retail floral sales certification program. If you would like Tim to test-call your shop for this column, contact him at (800) 983-6184 or tim@floralstrategies.com

Please visit the **NEW, RELAUNCHED** www.FloralStrategies.com to learn about webinars, training, coaching and more from Tim Huckabee and his company.



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Fresh Choices TREND-SETTING TIPS FOR BUYING FRESH CUT FLOWERS AND GREENS

AMAZING ALSTROEMERIAS

> Consider the alstroemeria the little flower that could.

"It's nicknamed 'the restaurant flower' because it can survive in low-light conditions and with much abuse, and still bloom fantastically for a long period of time," said J Schwanke, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, who called alstroemeria "one of the best flower inventions in recent decades."

Many florists appreciate alstroemeria's affordability, but this workhorse flower has far greater attributes, said Schwanke, the host of JTJ at uBloom.com and a Floral Management columnist, who loves to use alstroemeria in everyday designs, event work and personal flowers to wear. Among its assets: longevity (with a vase life up to 15 days), durability, long laterals (a godsend to designers) and variety (it hits almost all the colors of the rainbow). "What more could you ask for?"

For Georgianne Vinicombe, of Monday Morning Flowers and Balloon Co. in Princeton, N.J., and Yardley, Pa., alstroemeria is a go-to flower when she wants to add texture to a design. "The clusters of flowers are great for centerpiece designs, as well as bouquets," and its broad color spectrum makes it easy to pair with roses, carnations, hydrangeas, hypericum berries and tulips, she said. 🌸



'AVALANCHE'
Golden Flowers



'BELLA STAR'
Golden Flowers



'CHERISH'
Flores la Conchita



'K2'
Flores Funza



'SYLVAN'
Flores Funza

Fresh Choices



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DVFLORA



'CHICAGO'
DVFLORA



'LUCERO'
DVFLORA



'TIGER'
DVFLORA



'COCKTAIL'
Len Busch Roses



'REVOLUTION'
Suata Plants S. A.



'ORRISSA'
Len Busch Roses



'RABANNE'
Len Busch Roses



'WHITE DIAMOND'
Len Busch Roses



'HIMALAYA'
Flores Funza



'VOYAGER'
Flores Funza



'NORA'
Suasuque

DANCE QUEEN. By creating, photographing and marketing prom designs that are both profitable and unique to her store, Betsy Hall increased her prom sales by 11 percent.



Prom!

NO PAIN.

MORE

PROFIT.

A Georgia florist takes the pain out of prom season with standard designs and procedures that increase profit, while delighting local teens and their parents.

BY MARY WESTBROOK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY VIRGINIE KIPPELEN

> NO PAIN. MORE PROFIT.



Prom Player

HALL'S FLOWER SHOP AND GARDEN CENTER

Stone Mountain, Ga.

High Schools served

15-20 annually

Prom sales increase

11 percent from 2012 to 2013

2013 prom orders

670

Average ticket growth

From \$9.99 to \$15.99 for boutonnieres; from \$24.99 to \$39.99 for corsages

Secret to profitability

Sell customers on your designs, not stock photos. Make add-ons easy and second nature. Streamline communication and reduce errors with an updated website. Use design names and label add-ons and materials; embrace an organized workspace.

If you had asked Betsy Hall three years ago about prom, you might have gotten an eye roll, a deep, weary sigh and a one-word answer: "Painful." Her business, Hall's Flower Shop and Garden Center in Stone Mountain, Ga., is well situated within metro Atlanta to capture prom sales from up to 20 high schools each year, but in 2011, the business hardly seemed worth the effort. With about 533 orders that year, Hall had the volume she wanted but not the margins; prom just wasn't profitable. Consultations stretched to 30 or even 45 minutes, as designers patiently walked kids through color choices and bling, while other customers waited, or went elsewhere. Average corsage orders hovered stubbornly in the low- to mid-\$20s. Every year, some orders had to be redone because of miscommunications among staff, or with customers. Designers were logging late nights on Fridays before each prom and spending too much time (and product) on custom designs and re-dos. And, of course, prom season overlapped with more lucrative work from spring weddings and Mother's Day.

It was almost enough to make Hall write off the business entirely. "I felt so frustrated," she said. Worst of all, many of her headaches — including an outdated website that featured generic prom pictures instead of original designs — felt self-inflicted. "It was like we were setting booby traps for ourselves," she said.

Like many florists, Hall saw promise in prom — the immediate sales and the potential lifetime value of each kid — but she knew she had to reconsider her approach to make the segment profitable, and worth the work. She made a commitment to do just that — make prom profitable. Three years later, the effort has resulted in consultations that rarely take more than 10 minutes (and are often done in seconds online), happier designers and more satisfied customers, along with standard designs that don't sacrifice creativity. Most important of all, Hall's efforts have led to better margins, and a double-digit percent increase in prom sales, from 2012 to 2013. Her practical, comprehensive approach just might make you rethink how you court teens in your neighborhood.

Step One: Sell What You Want to Sell

For Hall, the path to better margins started with better photos. She wanted to create demand for designs that were beautiful, profitable and unique to her store — while still maintaining a range of price point options extending from carnations to orchids. That meant ditching generic photos and creating a custom prom catalog online.

To build that catalog, Hall asked her designers to take a picture of every thing the shop created for prom in 2011, from modest spray-rose boutonnieres to the super-blinged-out corsages. "I wanted customers to see exactly what they were ordering," she said. "The only way to do that was to create it, photograph it and post it."

The process wasn't easy. Many of the photos Hall and her team captured that first year, well — "they stank," said Hall, with characteristic candor (think: blurry images, busy backgrounds). Still, by the end of the season, she had enough good shots to incorporate more original work onto her website for prom the following year, in 2012. That year, she also migrated to a new website (through Florist 2.0), which gave her more creative control over her online presence — along with new functionality that she had long craved (more on that later).

Building on what she learned in 2011, Hall approached the 2012 prom season

Average spending on prom per family

2013: \$1,139

2012: \$1,079

2011: \$807

SOURCE: VISA'S LIFE 2013 PROM SPENDING SURVEY

with new energy. Once again, she photographed all of the year's prom work, but this time Hall, who had been honing her own photo and Photoshop skills, streamlined the photo process with a low-cost "photo studio": a white foam board, a bench in the greenhouse that had plenty of nice, natural light, and a piece of blue

shower curtain. (Designs with a lot of white could be photographed against the blue backdrop to ensure that petals and details were distinct in pictures; later, in Photoshop, Hall could put all of the photos on the same white background — no busy backgrounds or bad manicures to work around.)

After the 2012 season, Hall and her team edited the photos again. From hundreds of photos, they pulled out about 75 designs that were 1) replicable 2) profitable and 3) representative of the shop's aesthetic, abilities and wide price range. (Hall is determined to work with kids across the budget spectrum; "Here, price doesn't dictate pretty," she said.) Those photos became the catalog for the shop's 2013 season.

Step Two: Formalize Your Process

Since mistakes are margin-suckers, Hall also wanted to streamline and improve communication channels, both among staff members and between the shop and its customers.

Before 2012, one of the sticking points internally stemmed from inefficiencies in the order-taking process: The sales team member who took the initial order wasn't always around when the design team was creating the work, so when questions arose — *which gold speckle-ry ribbon do you think this girl wanted?* — the designer had to guess. If she guessed incorrectly, it might mean a last-minute redo on prom day, while the teen (or her mother) waited impatiently in the showroom.

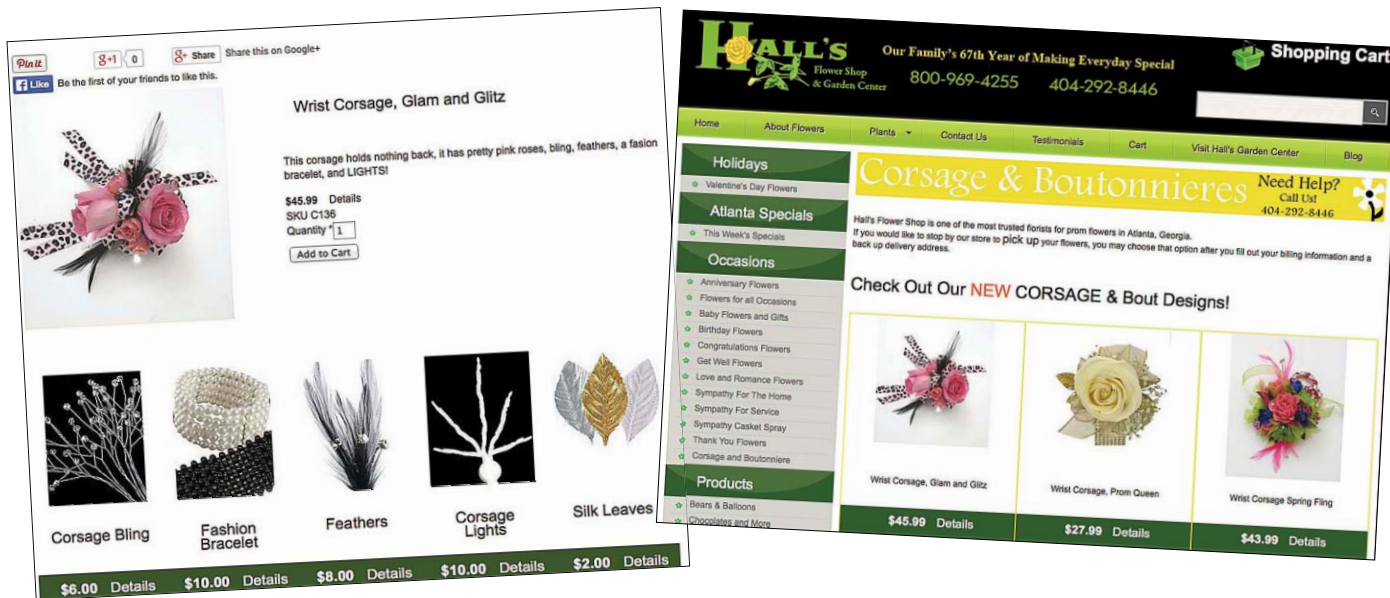
The fix was easy, but it required some legwork and a new system. Today, all of the materials used in prom — including ribbon and bling — receive specific names or numbers. It doesn't matter if Susie from Main Street High orders online, in-store, or talks to one staff member or three; everyone speaks the same language. "Once we had numbered our ribbons and created recipes for everything, there was no judgment call," and far less room for error, said Hall. The process also allowed for better organization in-store, with ribbons, for instance,

WELCOME WAGON While 60 percent of Hall's prom orders come in online, in-store, the staff makes sure that teens and their families feel appreciated, with cheerful signage and great customer service.



GROUP THINK Improving prom profitability has been a business-wide effort at Hall's, with renewed attention on process, education and organization that extends to the sales and design rooms. From left: Patti Chandler, Dodie Stien, Betsy Hall, Brian Baldwin and Ken Hall

> NO PAIN. MORE PROFIT.



WEB WISE By prom season in 2012, Betsy Hall had ditched an outdated website, replacing it with a new platform that gave her more creative control, showcasing her catalog of custom prom images and add-ons.

labeled and grouped by color, so that designers can work through like-designs more quickly. Those changes have led to more efficiency: While late Fridays were common in the past, the 2013 prom season saw very little overtime.

In 2012, Hall and her team also started naming each design, creating standard recipes and assigning each design a specific SKU, for more effective, post-prom analysis. “The names have been really popular” with students, Hall said. (Among the recent standouts: Divalicious, a silver-accented white lily wrist corsage, and Prom King, a boutonniere with gold leaves and white spray roses.) The new website made it easy for Hall to include detailed descriptions of the designs, along with easy upgrades (including fashion bracelets, lights and feathers). Website users can also request color and flower changes in a “special instructions” box (Hall and her team will follow up on the rare occasion that requests become too specialized or complicated), and teens can choose to pick up their orders, or have them delivered, which has proved to be a surprisingly popular option for some customers in outlying areas. Thanks to the improved website and original photos, communication with customers has dramatically improved. Before, the shop might get a same-day request for a terra cotta lily boutonniere, even though no such flower could be found in the cooler. Now, what customers see is what they can get.

Naming the designs also helped build on Hall’s identity as *the* place to go for prom flowers, with orders coming in from around metro Atlanta. By 2013, Hall was in a much better position for prom — and on track to realize significant increases in sales — through the “magic” of hard work and stick-to-it-ness.

“We aren’t in the trendy side of town and we can’t sell in our local schools,” she explained, so becoming a hot spot in town among teens was something of a (hard-fought) miracle, and the direct result of Hall’s vision. “It wasn’t that the sales weren’t there before, or even that the customers weren’t happy,” she said, “but we weren’t leading them where we wanted to go.”

Step Three: Push It

When Hall uploaded the pictures for the 2013 prom catalog, she also began promoting the offerings through the shop’s social media channels, including the shop’s blog, Google+ page, Facebook and Pinterest. She’d made similar efforts in the past, but last year, the high quality of her photos, and the procedural improvements in-store, gave her more confidence. Last fall, she also revamped her social media process, to make the work more efficient, and to ensure that she was directing traffic back to her site. “Our blog is now at the center of all we do,” said Hall, who writes most of the entries herself and then posts them to her different channels. “This year, we’ll post independently to Facebook and other sites, but the blog is the cornerstone; that’s what drives our social media.”

Hall’s Prom Timeline

- January:** Call area schools and find out prom dates.
- February:** Update online prom catalog with new images.
- March:** Prom season begins. Take photos of all designs.
- May:** Prom season ends
- June-August:** Review sales figures, prom pictures
- September-December:** Clean up selected new images in Photoshop
- Year-Round:** Invest in Google AdWords; Communicate regularly with customers via email and social media; Photograph new work; Use downtime for skills-building workshops for designers — and creative sessions for new designs.

With an eye always toward the following year, Hall also hosted a Facebook contest last year; prom customers who posted a picture of their prom flowers and reviewed the shop on Facebook were automatically entered into a raffle for a Mother's Day arrangement valued at \$75. The effort generated chatter on the page and ensured that customers in 2014 will see plenty of (positive) reviews when they start shopping for their flowers this year.

Year-round, Hall also invests in Google AdWords and email blasts as part of her overall marketing strategy. (At this point, she said, she doesn't feel that it makes sense to segment out a separate email for prom customers, since they are generally done with prom flowers after one or two seasons.) Her multi-faceted approach worked wonders last year, when Hall also estimated that 60 percent of the shop's roughly 670 prom orders came in via the website solely, or via a phone call with a customer who had already thoroughly perused the catalog online. Most of those transactions were completed in seconds, no hand-holding required.

puts together a corsage bar for teens who need the tactile experience of seeing the ribbon and bling options.

"You have to make your store look great for the students, and make them feel significant," she said. She and her staff also communicate with teens on the students' terms. "We're more than happy to email or text pictures as orders are done," she said. "They love that."

Step Four: Do It All Again

By the end of the 2013 prom season, Hall had proof her diligence had paid off. Overall, prom sales rose 11 percent from 2012 to 2013 and average transactions increased, too: from \$9.99 to \$15.99 for boutonnieres and \$24.99 to \$39.99 for corsages. Waste and inefficiency were also down. In fact, in 2013, the shop had just one do-over design, down from about six the year before.

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FOLLOWED BY: THE SOUTH (\$1,203); THE WEST (\$1,079) AND THE MIDWEST (\$722).

SOURCE: VISA'S 2013 PROM SPENDING SURVEY

While Hall loves the fact that so many of her orders now come in online, and require so little consultation time, she also wants to make sure teens know they are valued. Beginning in early January, Hall calls the schools to get their proms on the shop's calendar, so she can mention the dances online, through social media and in-store, where a cheerful chalkboard greets the week's prom-goers ("Welcome, Stone Mountain High School!"). She also still

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POPULAR MECHANICS Inspired by a prom design workshop just after Valentine's Day last year, Patti Chandler brought back new ideas on mechanics and products to the design team, including Dodie Stien.

"2013 was really the year that we hit our sweet spot," Hall said. "We turned an individual, specialized item into a kind of everyday item for us" with the standard pictures and recipes, and "took our pain and suffering out of the process."

That process is ongoing. Hall and her team have spent the last 12 months updating their technical skills and photos whenever the shop has downtime. In fact, Hall said, a renewed focus on design education has been crucial to the transformation. Last February, Hall sent Patti Chandler, a designer and the flower shop's general manager, to a prom workshop put on by Fitz Design and hosted at burton+Burton in Atlanta. Chandler came back inspired;

she immediately shared her new skills with the rest of the design team, including new techniques for gluing dendrobium orchids and new products such as

gold and silver leaves. These "creative sessions" have become part of the routine at Hall's, where you're likely to find designers playing, brainstorming and helping each other with mechanics on slow afternoons throughout the year, not only for prom but also for holidays such as Valentine's Day. (Hall also hosted a design workshop in her store in October 2013 with the Midwest Floral Group; Fitz Design produced the event.) "On quiet Saturdays, we'll just get out the glue and practice," Hall said. "Mechanics can be a little tricky... you don't want to be working on skills while a student is standing in front of you, tapping her foot."



REAL SIMPLE Mistakes are margin-suckers, according to Betsy Hall. That's why all prom accessories — from feathers to ribbon — are now labeled to prevent mix-ups and costly redos.

Parents pay for **59 PERCENT** of prom costs. Teens pay for 41 percent.

SOURCE: VISA'S 2013 PROM SPENDING SURVEY

IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME

When the team at Hall's Flower Shop started to reimagine their prom work in 2011 and 2012, they weren't positive their teen customers

would go along with some of their wilder (and more expensive) design ideas. Guess what?

They did. That's another lesson Betsy Hall has learned: For the right item, teens are more than willing to spend money. "I never thought I would sell a corsage with lights on it, but once the kids saw it, they loved it." General Manager Patti

Chandler was also dubious about

Divalicious (photo), a super-sized wrist corsage with a large Casablanca lily and ribbon that was "wider and heavier" than the shop had ever used. She loved the look of the design right away but worried petite high school girls might balk. Not a chance. "It sold hand over fist," she said. "The mothers loved it." **M.W.**



The sessions are also a great way to encourage creativity and discover new scalable, profitable and — of course — unique designs for the coming prom season, said Hall, who has been known to take out her camera and capture a new design during the sessions, for use in the next season. They also keep morale high and help staff set goals. This year, for instance, Chandler is hoping to focus on getting more customers to three upsells (instead of one or two) with add-ons such as hair clips, shoe clips and fashion bracelets.

In the last year, Hall has also hired a former staff member as a work-from-home contractor to support her web efforts, including updates to the prom catalog, freeing Hall to focus on other issues within the business. For all the challenges that prom can present, Hall said that, to her store, the hard work has paid off, not only in terms of sales but also loyal customers. Former prom customers will "come up and say, 'Hey! You made my first corsage,' and they're usually really excited about that," she said. "All florists are struggling with order-gatherers, big boxes, Sam's and Costco, but we're still the people who have the bling for prom. This is our chance to show them how much we can do." 🌸

Mary Westbrook is a contributing writer and editor for the Society of American Florists. mwestbrook@safnow.org



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PROM TRENDS 2014:

BY MARY WESTBROOK

Red, White and Color Block?

Wondering what to expect from your local teens this year? Hollywood's glamorous award season offers some clues, said Theresa Colucci, AIFD, PFCI, of Meadowscent in Gardiner, N.Y. She noted the many coral and red dresses at the Golden Globes, on Jan. 12, and plenty of eye-popping, colorful jewelry, which for teens, could be replaced with custom floral pieces. (The Academy Awards ceremony — sure to provide even more inspiration — airs March 2.) Overall, "bling is still very hot," Colucci said. "We display all of our bracelets, ribbons and add-ons out on the floor and give girls a sheet where they can check off what they want." To translate some of that Hollywood glamour into prom chic, we turned to TeenPROM Editor Jane Fort, who helped us create a look book of popular trends.



Red. Colucci isn't alone in predicting a wave of red dresses among teens: Fashion editors were delighted with the crimson, cardinal and cherry shades at the Golden Globes on stars such as singer Taylor Swift and actress Julia Louis-Dreyfus.

DRESS BY BLUSH, BLUSHPROM.COM



Black and White. America's latest sweetheart, Jennifer Lawrence ("American Hustle"), accepted her Golden Globe in a black and white ball gown (with green drop earrings and a cropped haircut); Harper's Bazaar called the color combo, also sported by Allison Williams ("Girls"), "the height of chic."

DRESS BY MAGGIE SOTTERO, FLIRTPROM.COM



Color blocking also was a fashion movement of note at the Golden Globes, with stars such as Sandra Bullock ("Gravity"), in pink, black and blue, and Julie Bowen ("Modern Family"), in red and purple, making use of creative color combinations to stay on trend.

DRESS BY MIGNON, MIGNONFASHIONS.COM



Embellishments. In a trend that seems made for florists to capitalize on, hipster sweetheart Zoey Deschanel and Michelle Dockery (“Downton Abbey”) shimmered in ensembles with plenty of texture and decorative trimming — spangles, sequins and beads; the gurus at Harper’s said that the paillettes and appliques provided “the power of something extra” to the night’s dresses.

DRESS BY COYACOLLECTION.COM



Lace. Actress Leslie Mann and Cate Blanchett (“Blue Jasmine”) were among the stars sporting lace at the Globes. That’s a versatile trend for prom this year — both sophisticated and, on a crop top for instance, playful, said Fort.

DRESS BY ANGELAANDALISON.COM



Capes. Note to shops in colder climates: Outerwear for prom might be decidedly in this year. Amy Adams (“American Hustle”) and Lupita Nyong (“12 Years a Slave”) set the fashion world abuzz with capes at the Golden Globes; Nyong’s frock was actually a cape dress (reminiscent of a white dress worn in 2012 to the Oscars by Gwyneth Paltrow). Nyong’s gown was made by Ralph Lauren and retails for \$7,000, but Fort said a more prom budget-friendly version of it has yet to hit the runway.

CAPE BY SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Gentlemen Only

For men at the Golden Globes — and younger men following in their style footsteps — classic is still a winner. Several guys named Bradley Cooper (“American Hustle”) the night’s best-dressed man, in a perfectly tailored midnight blue tux. Fashionistas also liked the textures and colors worn by Matthew McConaughey (“Dallas Buyers Club”), in a forest green, velvet, three-piece, one-button tuxedo, and presenter Mark Ruffalo, in a brown and gray, three-piece, two-button, tux with a subtle, broken-weave texture. Still, it was Usher Raymond who kept the fashion experts talking the day after the Globes: The singer accessorized his oxblood tux with a vintage diamond brooch. “This is a real breakthrough in man jewelry,” promised the editors of The Cut fashion blog on New York magazine.



Statement Pieces. Stars such as Emma Roberts (“American Horror Story”) and Sofia Vergara (“Modern Family”) chose a relatively muted backdrop — black or dark navy gowns — to showcase colorful jewelry: turquoise earrings for Roberts and a mega-watt turquoise necklace for Vergara.

NECKLACE BY GLENNETHB.COM

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FLORISTS Weigh in On CHRISTMAS SALES

BY MARY WESTBROOK

> For most florists, Christmas 2013 was caught some place between merry and blue. While a Society of American Florists post-holiday season survey found that nearly 44 percent of florists had higher sales for the 2013 holiday compared to the year prior, about 34 percent said sales dropped. Twenty-one percent said sales were about the same. (The remaining 1 percent weren't sure.) Among florists who experienced higher sales, the average increase was about 11 percent. Among florists who saw a drop, the average decline was steeper, at about 14 percent.

The survey also found that about 37 percent of respondents' December holiday sales came from electronic sources (excluding incoming wire-in orders). Overall, the average holiday transaction was just under \$61.

Why the Uptick?

Florists weighed in with myriad reasons for changes in sales; results seem to indicate that one shop's Scrooge (inclement weather, poor local economy, new competition) was another store's Santa (favorable weather, improving economies, less competition).

Among florists who experienced an increase in sales, about **44 percent credited the boost to online/website sales** and nearly **40 percent attributed the increase to walk-in sales**. Roughly the same number, about 39 percent, credited phone sales. Other popular factors attributed to higher sales: corporate business (31 percent); event/party work (19 percent); higher price points (19 percent); social media efforts (19 percent); increased store marketing and advertising (17 percent); wire-in orders (16 percent) and decreased competition (14

percent). Anecdotally, several respondents said they felt the improved economy was behind their increase; at least one florist pointed out that Hurricane Sandy, in 2012, had hurt sales for some florists in the Northeast.

Why the Drop?

Among florists who experienced a decrease in sales, **44 percent blamed the regional economy; the same number blamed the national economy**. Other factors behind the drop, according to respondents: competition from order-gatherers (39 percent); decrease in corporate sales (37 percent); competition from supermarkets and mass marketers (37 percent); fewer wire-in orders (35 percent); less walk-in traffic (35 percent); weather (34 percent); fewer Internet orders (24 percent); competition from

online floral vendors (24 percent); competition from wire services (20 percent); competition from non-floral online vendors (15 percent); and cost of goods (14 percent). A number of florists who wrote in their own responses also noted the negative effect of a shortened holiday season, due to a late Thanksgiving.

Poinsettias Sales by Year, and 5-Year Track

About **44 percent of respondents said poinsettia sales were about the same this year**; 41 percent said they were down and about 10 percent experienced an increase. The remaining respondents either do not sell poinsettias or weren't sure of their sales numbers. **The average increase in poinsettia sales among respondents was about 10 percent**; the average sales decrease was 22 percent. On average, respondents said **more than 81 percent of their poinsettia sales were traditional, red poinsettias**.

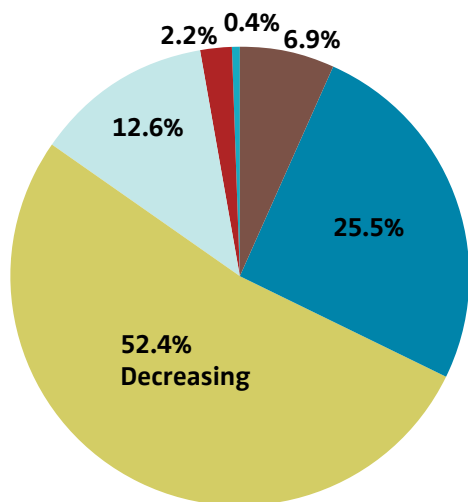
When asked to consider poinsettia sales as a five-year trend, about 53 respondents said sales have been on the decline; 26 percent characterized them as flat and 12 percent called them irregular/fluctuating. Almost 7 percent noted an upward trend. The rest of the respondents weren't sure of sales trends or they did not sell poinsettias this year.

Tried and True Marketing Efforts (and Some New Tricks)

More than 60 percent of respondents said the amount of shop promotion was about the same in 2013, compared to 2012. **Thirty percent increased promotions and almost 6 percent reduced them**. Sixty-eight percent of respondents used Facebook to promote their December specials and offerings. Window displays (68 percent), online advertising (56 percent) and indoor signage, posters and displays (56 percent) also were popular, as were email promotions (51 percent), outdoor signage (42 percent) and newspaper or magazine ads (42 percent). **Less than 5 percent of respondents reported using apps or mobile marketing**; roughly the same number relied on telemarketing.

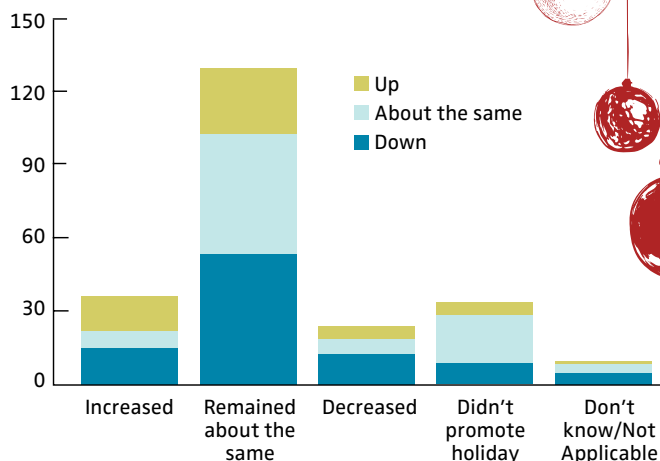
Five-Year Poinsettia Sales Trends

Increasing Flat Decreasing Irregular/Fluctuating Don't Know I don't see Poinsettias



Source: Christmas 2013 and Valentine's Intentions 2014 Survey, emailed to 2,979 SAF retailers on Jan. 6. Based on 234 responses.

2012 vs. 2013 Holiday Sales



Décor Services – Steady for Most?

Respondents were nearly half and half when it came to offering **décor services for the holiday: 49 percent said they did and 51 percent did not**. Among those who did, 82 percent said they offered home décor services, 80 percent provided business decorations (including country clubs, hotels and restaurants); and 48 percent offered party-planning and setup services; 49 percent offered decoration services to customers such as churches and subdivisions. Two respondents noted that their shops offered tree setup/decorating to customers. About half of the florists who offered décor services said the segment remained steady in 2013, compared to 2012; almost 31 percent saw an increase and about 19 percent saw a drop.

Open Houses: Closed for Most

Sixty-three percent of respondents did not have a holiday-themed event or open house; the rest did. While most shops (99 percent) were closed all day on Dec. 25 and Jan. 1 (94 percent), about **62 percent of respondents were open part of the day on Christmas Eve**; 35 percent was open all day and almost 3 percent were closed. Fifty-one percent were open part of the day on Dec. 31; 42 percent were open all day and about 6 percent were closed.

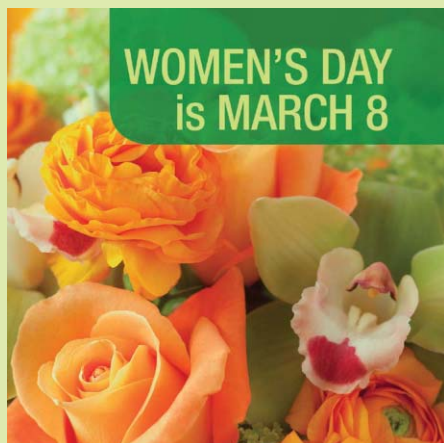
Post-Holiday Plans: Discount City

About 55 percent of respondents planned to run, or were running at the time of the survey, post-Christmas sales. Among respondents who shared their ideas, 50 percent off Christmas merchandise was an overwhelming popular idea. 🐦

Mary Westbrook is a contributing writer and editor for Floral Management.
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Promoting Women's Day



SAF members can access Facebook shareable graphics and other Women's Day promotional advice and tools from safnow.org/WomensDay.

International Women's Day is observed annually on March 8 to raise political and social awareness of the struggles of women. More than 100 nations recognize Women's Day (35 declared it a national holiday) with thousands of events held by organizations, governments, charities, educational institutions, women's groups, corporations and the media. People give flowers and other small gifts to their mothers, wives, grandmothers and daughters, as well as coworkers, teachers and friends to show respect, appreciation and love.

This occasion is gaining traction in the U.S., and is an opportunity for florists to build visibility locally. Capitalizing on the Women's Day momentum, SAF is using social media to promote flowers for the occasion and providing members with ideas and materials for local promotions. **Among the tools available from safnow.org/WomensDay:**

- Shareable graphics
- Web banner ads
- Print ads
- Suggested Facebook posts
- Suggested tweets
- Color fliers
- Press release
- Radio commercial scripts
- Ideas and advice for promoting the holiday

Not sure where to start? Follow SAF's lead. Follow and share SAF's Women's Day posts from Facebook.com/AboutFlowers and Twitter.com/FlowerFactor.

SAF's Women's Day member materials and social media campaign are possible thanks to the **SAF Fund for Nationwide Public Relations**, which is a direct result of SAF retail dues and voluntary contributions by wholesalers, suppliers, importers and growers. Find information about the SAF PR Fund, its programs and research studies, as well as tips and materials for shop promotions at safnow.org/prfund.



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Its success is possible thanks to contributions from the industry leaders listed below. **Wholesalers** give 5 cents per case of hardgoods purchased from **suppliers** who match those contributions. **Growers** and **importers** also participate through annual contributions.

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We thank these companies who voluntarily contributed more than \$133,000 in 2013, and continue to support the SAF PR Fund. A special thanks to the Flower Promotion Organization for the contribution of \$300,000 in 2012 for current and future PR Fund programs.

Please consider supporting the fund — we need your help to increase opportunities for floral promotion to the consumer. 800-336-4743; memberinfo@safnow.org

EDITORS' NOTE *Paul Goodman, CPA, PFCI, and Derrick Myers, CPA, CFP, love a good financial management challenge, however big or small. Send your questions to fmeditor@safnow.org, and we'll challenge the experts to tackle them in an upcoming article.*



Master New Tax Regulations

BY DERRICK MYERS, CPA, CFP

Q: I'm looking at form 8903 and see a line for Domestic Production Activity Deduction — what is this, and how do I calculate it?

If you design or build it, it's DPGR, (e.g., fresh flower arrangements, silk arrangements, and gift baskets created in-house). If you just market and sell the product, it's non-production income (e.g. plants, balloons, gifts, and service income such as delivery and relay fees).

To decipher Form 8903 instructions, you have to translate at least a dozen acronyms, but the process starts with separating your DPGRs (manufacturing income) your non-production income.

Once you have DPGR, you must determine the cost of the goods produced. To do so:

1. Add together the cost of the your DPGR raw materials, labor, supplies, etc.
2. Subtract these COGS from the DPGR; this will give you the Gross Profit generated from production.
3. Determine what percentage of total income your DPGR represents.
4. Apply that percentage to the indirect cost of your business (everything not in COGS).
5. Subtract this figure from the Gross Profit from production and you have your Qualified Production Activity Income (QPAI).

Remember that QPAI cannot exceed 50 percent of the W-2 wages paid by the company. (The deduction can be up to 9 percent of the QPAI.)

Q: I renovated my building in 2012. Can I still amend my returns and expense those improvements?

Yes. In fact, the 2010 Small Business Jobs Acts and the 2012 Tax Reform Act extended the ability to apply code section 179 to Qualified Leasehold Improvements of up to \$250,000 for the years 2010 to 2013. These changes help taxpayers reduce their income, dollar for dollar, up to \$250,000 for money spent on building improvements. Some specific rules apply. The building must be at least three years old. (So, no new construction.) The property must also be a "Qualified Retail Property" or "Qualified Restaurant Property," according to IRS definitions.

The total 179 deduction for 2013 is \$500,000, on purchases not to exceed \$2 million. The total 179 deduction for 2014 is \$139,000, on purchases not to exceed \$560,000.

Q: How do I deduct expenses related to repairs, maintenance and supplies?

Extremely complex regulations governing these deductions go into effect for tax years beginning on or after Jan. 1, 2014. First and foremost: You'll need to keep detailed records and it's a good idea to consult with a CPA. Here's a summary of these rules:

Supplies Starting Jan., 1 2013, business owners can expense any individual supply that costs \$200 or less and lasts for less than 12 months, along with fuel, lubricants or similar items used in 12 months or less. You should track Supplies separately in your general ledger; enter any expense meeting the above category in this account. Individually analyze supplies costing more than \$200 to determine if they are qualified expenses or depreciable assets.

Equipment Repairs and Maintenance You can write off any individual equipment item, equipment repair or maintenance item costing \$500 or less. Enter these individual items in your Repairs account of your general ledger. Generally, you will have to individually analyze items costing more than \$500 to determine if they are qualified expenses or depreciable assets.

Building Repairs and Maintenance If your building has a cost basis of \$1 million or less, a special rule applies (whether you own the building or rent): Any repairs that are a) expected to be made more than once in 10 years and b) cost less than \$10,000 individually may be written off as repairs. You must also individually examine items you don't expect to replace or repair more than once in 10 years, to determine if they are expenses or depreciable assets.

The IRS requires that you examine each individual item in excess of the limits above to determine if it has resulted in a "**betterment, restoration or adaptation**" of the main unit of property. According to the IRS:

1. A **Betterment** occurs when you fix a condition that existed at purchase or increase the physical size or capacity of an asset. Betterments must be capitalized and depreciated, so they should be added to your equipment account.

2. A **Restoration** is the cost you incur to return a non-functional asset to use, the cost of rebuilding an asset after the end of its depreciable life or the cost of replacing a component of the unit of property.
3. An **Adaptation** cost comes when you change the function of a piece of equipment or property.

A final point: A unit of property is now defined as the inter-related parts composing one larger unit. For example, a unit of property could be a delivery van composed of inter-related parts; repairs to the van must now be examined to determine betterment, restoration or adaptation of the van as a whole, rather than its individual components.

For buildings, the test must first be applied to the building as a whole and then applied to its components (HVAC, plumbing, electrical, structure, elevators, security, fire protection, gas distribution, etc.). Anything considered a betterment, restoration or adaptation cost under these rules must be depreciated and listed as equipment, otherwise it may be expensed as repairs.



Q: Last year, a bank had to forgive one of my loans after I hit a rough patch. What forms will I need to fill out to account for this transaction?

In these difficult economic times, you aren't alone. If a lending institution forgave a debt such as a credit card balance or bank loan, you can expect to receive Form 1099-C (Cancellation of Debt Income), in the mail from the lending institution. The debt that they wrote off is income to you and it will be taxable unless you meet one of the following exceptions: student loan, bankruptcy, insolvency, qualified farm debt, qualified real property business debt or qualified principle property business debt exception. (Consult your CPA for guidance here.)

Derrick P. Myers, CPA, CFP, is vice president of Crockett, Myers & Associates, Inc., a financial management firm that has been working with florists for 29 years. Derrick@crockettmyers.com

Industry News

INDUSTRY REMEMBERS GUENTHER VOGT, AAF: JUNE 24, 1947- DEC. 23, 2013

► Friends and family gathered Jan. 5 to celebrate the life of Guenther Vogt, AAF, co-owner of the award-winning Bouquets in Denver and an active volunteer leader of SAF. He was remembered as a man who put others first, and made others laugh – and as a person of keen insight and deep intelligence who led others, invariably, with kindness.

“I will miss so much his industry knowledge and thoughts, the twinkle in his eye and stories that he told,” said SAF President Shirley Lyons, AAF, of Dandelions Flowers and Gifts in Eugene, Ore., who met Vogt during SAF events and recalled his “wit and gracious, caring spirit.”

“It is a sad day for the floral industry,” she said.

“The floral industry has lost one of its finest, most brilliant minds and fun loving and generous hearts,” said Floral Management Editor in Chief Kate Penn, to the more than 400 in attendance at the memorial service, where Penn spoke about Vogt’s contributions to the floral industry.

Industry members around the country have expressed a similar feeling of loss — and shock: Vogt, 66, died Dec. 23, two weeks after being diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia. He asked his partner of 37 years, BJ Dyer, AAF, AIFD, not to share the news of his death until after Christmas, so as not to “dampen their friends’ holiday spirits,” according to a touching tribute in *The Denver Post*.

Over the years, Vogt and Dyer operated as a kind of dream team, earning numerous awards for their business, including *Floral Management* magazine’s Marketer of the Year award, which they won twice, in 2002 and 2009.

Vogt, a former Peace Corps volunteer who helped develop a master environmental plan for Iran before joining the floral industry, was also active within SAF leadership, serving on both the Retailers Council and the Business and Economic Trends Committee. Whenever those groups met, he brought both high spirits and perspective to meetings, said Jo Buttram, AAF, of Shirley’s Flowers Inc. in Rogers, Ark., who remembers “laughing

like a school girl” while trading notes with Vogt when the council’s conversation became too dry. “We knew we had to split up to keep ourselves out of trouble.”

Vogt’s sharp sense of humor helped him find something fun, or funny, even in mundane tasks, but he also had a serious side and a cultivated attention to detail that set him apart from others and made him an “excellent businessman,” said Dr. Marvin Miller of Ball Horticultural Company in

Chicago. “Guenther was great at observing and spotting trends he suspected were occurring, and then he’d check his store’s sales records to find evidence to support what he thought he was seeing. He would check with other retailers to get their confirmation as well, often before these retailers had spotted the trends themselves.”

David Boulton, AAF, PFCI, of Flowers by George in Arlington, Wash., also recalled Vogt’s tireless interest in sharing information, for the betterment of the industry. While Dyer and Vogt developed a particular expertise in high-end (often, beautifully, wonderfully, over-the-top events), they were also frequent contributors to industry stories and efforts to push new ideas in marketing, technology, customer service, and much more.

In fact, in 2009, Vogt and Dyer donated a portion of their Marketer of the Year Award winnings to the SAF Fund for Nationwide Public Relations, and last September, Vogt told *Floral Management* editors he hadn’t ruled out the possibility of a third Marketer of the Year win – not for the glory of another honor, but for the chance to broadcast new ideas. “Sharing ideas helps grow the industry, he said, “and if the industry gets bigger, so do the participants.”



SIMPLY THE BEST.

More than 400 people attended the memorial service and reception honoring Guenther Vogt, AAF, who died on Dec. 23.

A third win wouldn’t have surprised Vogt’s many admirers. Vogt’s “think tank” was always full of ideas,” Boulton said. “He was one of the best in the industry.”

Flowers and floral designs came in from around the industry for Vogt’s Jan. 5 memorial reception at the Walker Fine Art Gallery in Denver, including more than 1,000 roses — in colors ranging from peach to rust — from Eufhoria Flowers in Nipomo, Calif. At the memorial service, in the Denver Art Museum’s Lewis Sharp Auditorium, flowers were also beautiful and prominent. “We had an art nouveau vase filled with nothing but white calla lilies,” Dyer said. “All together, it was about seven feet tall. That was his favorite flower.”

Dyer quickly came to the decision to have the service at the auditorium; he’d been in the room for another event last fall, alongside Vogt. “We’d been there many times before (for other events),” Dyer said, “but on that particular day, as we waited for a program to start, he looked over at me and said, ‘I love this place.’”

Memorial contributions to the Colorado Symphony or Friends of Painting and Sculpture, 454 Jackson St., Denver 80206, are suggested. 🌿

— Mary Westbrook

Industry News

AFE INTERNSHIP DEADLINE: MARCH 1

> Calling all aspiring floral industry members: The deadline for applications for the American Floral Endowment (AFE) Vic & Margaret Ball Intern Scholarship Program and the Mosmiller Intern Scholarship Program is **March 1**.

The Vic and Margaret Ball Intern Scholarship Program, made possible through a generous gift from Vic and Margaret Ball, offers paid internships for three, four or six months and provides scholarships of up to \$6,000 upon completion.

The Mosmiller Intern Scholarship Program honors the late Col. and Mrs. Walter E. Mosmiller Jr. and gives students real experience working with leaders in floral retail, wholesale or allied trades. The Mosmiller Intern Scholarship program offers paid internships for 10 to 16 weeks and provides scholarships of \$2,000.

For information, visit endowment.org.
— **Suzanne McClosky**

DVFG ACQUIRES MASS. WHOLESALER

> The Delaware Valley Floral Group (DVFG) has added another wholesaler to its fold: The company completed a letter of intent with Adam P. Zamis and Sons Wholesale Florist, in Worcester, Mass., to acquire certain assets and complete the asset purchase agreement on Dec. 16. Zamis and Sons will be consolidated into Delaware Valley Wholesale Florist (dvflora), a division of DVFG. DV's distribution centers in Shrewsbury, Mass., and Cromwell, Conn., are "strategically located to serve DVFG's growing New England customer base," according to a company press release. Key Zamis and Sons employees will join DVFG and work from Shrewsbury. "Throughout the years the Zamis family has built a solid reputation with New England Florists for excellent quality and service; we look forward to extending this tradition," said Ken Wilkins, DVFG's vice president of business development, who added that the company remains "interested in further acquisition opportunities." 🌿

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February 20-22 SAF Pest & Production Management Conference

San Diego, Calif.
San Diego Marriott Del Mar



March 10-11 SAF Congressional Action Days

Washington, D.C.
Ritz Carlton Pentagon City,
Arlington, Va.



June 10-11 SAF Retail Growth Solutions

Chicago, Ill.
Hilton Rosemont-Chicago
O'Hare



August 13-16 SAF Marco Island 2014 130th Annual Convention

Marco Island, Fla.
Marriott Marco Island Resort

Visit www.safnow.org/events

or contact **Laura Weaver, (800-336-4743)** or lweaver@safnow.org



Plugged In BY RENATO CRUZ SOGUECO

WHY YOU REALLY DO NEED A MOBILE POLICY

> You have a mobile device and, more than likely, most of your employees do, too. In fact, you may have even given them a device to help them efficiently complete a component of their job: checking email and text messages, using GPS on deliveries, taking pictures of recipients with flowers, and more. Smartphones have become powerful, almost essential business tools, but what happens when an employee loses or damages the device? Wants to use her own device and not the one you prefer? Or gets into an accident while using it for company business? If you don't have an ironclad mobile policy, the answers to these questions can be costly for your business. This month, we walk you through the essentials of a mobile policy so you can develop your own.

Define Your Terms

When you craft or revise a mobile policy, you need to clearly identify the devices it covers. Smartphones running on Google's Android, Apple's iOS or BlackBerry are obvious mobile devices, but the category also include tablets, cellular "hot-spot" cards or USB sticks, wireless-enabled laptops and GPS devices. Like smartphones, these devices are mobile and can be lost, damaged or abused.

Once you've defined what the policy covers, establish its purpose. For example, the purpose of SAF's mobile policy is to support employee's job duties, promote safety when using devices, improve management costs and enhance corporate data security — each of which contributes to the ultimate goal of limiting corporate liability. (That policy is available as a template to SAF members at safnow.org/mobilepolicy.)



Be Clear on Job Roles

Issuing mobile devices to staff members is like opening Pandora's box: employees who need them may not want them, and people who don't need devices will covet them. In deciding who should get a device, refer to your purpose, e.g. the device should "support employee's job duties." Proceed from there, but don't assume you know everything about a person's role. You may not be aware, for instance, that some folks regularly check email off-hours or take photos for social media while on a job site. Talk to your team and bring supervisors into the conversation. Revisit the topic at least every year, or when the job changes.

Your Smartphone. Your Rules.

With the growing diversity of mobile devices, managing two, even three types of smartphones can pose a challenge to any small shop. That's why I strongly recommend keeping your life simple with one platform, one device.

In SAF's case, we went with Apple's iPhone and AT&T (businesses that have higher turnover or need to be able to pass a phone between different employees may opt for the T-Mobile model, which requires a higher up front cost but lower monthly fees — and no contract.)

Qualified employees received the base model phone (iPhone 5s, 16Gig, \$199); those who want the biggest and the best (iPhone 5s, 64Gig, \$399) pony up the difference.

The iPhone's easy-to-use management software allows us to do two key things: help locate missing devices (with "Find My iPhone") and wipe the data of lost phones. This should be an absolute essential in any policy, in order to protect data. Remember to state explicitly that employees pay replacement costs; doing so ensures they care for the device like it's their own — even though they may not own it 100 percent.

Negotiating BYO Device

Employees who want to use their own device for work-related purposes pose another real challenge. Remember, more devices mean more overhead and headaches for you. But if an employee insists on an alternative to the device you've se-



lected, the final agreement must require the employee to submit the device as business inventory that can be managed, the same as a business-owned device: It must be password protected, trackable and remotely wiped. These capabilities depend on the management software — solutions to investigate include Apple Profile Manager, McAfee, Symantec, MobileIron or AirWatch.

Prevent Distracted Driving

Driving using a mobile device is downright dangerous; in some situations and places, it's illegal. Don't allow your employees to engage with their devices while driving. At the minimum, you should provide a hands-free kit and your mobile policy should require that employees use it. Of course texting, checking email, using apps or surfing the web is prohibited.

Although many aspects of a mobile device may seem draconian, recall that the ultimate purpose is to ensure the safety of the employee and protect your business from a liability and cost perspective. And remember, once your policy is set, make sure the employee signs it. 📱

Renato Sogueco is SAF's chief information officer, and a regular speaker on technology topics at events throughout the floral and association community. rsogueco@safnow.org

Ready-to-Adapt Mobile Policy

Want to write your mobile policy? Use SAF's as a starting point, which you can tailor to your business's needs. SAF's mobile policy — which includes all of the issues mentioned here and more — can be found at safnow.org/mobilepolicy.

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Business of Design



GOLDEN ARCHES Bundles of alstroemeria, weighed down with glass beads, gives this design a larger presentation, “and thus a higher perceived value,” Anderson said. Wholesale costs: \$20. Suggested retail price: \$50 to \$60. Labor: less than 10 minutes.



BLUSHING BRIDGE Anderson used screening material, available at any home improvement store, “for an interesting design mechanic.” Wholesale costs: \$14. Suggested retail price: \$50. Labor: less than 10 minutes.

BLUES BUSTERS

> For a customer seeking an antidote to winter’s cold, dark days, consider recommending an arrangement filled with alstroemeria. Available in a wide scope of cheery colors, from bubblegum pink to rubber-duck yellow, alstroemeria also lasts and lasts (take that, Seasonal Affective Disorder!).

The flower’s low price point, long laterals and many blooms per stem also make alstroemeria an attractive choice for florists eager to minimize their Costs of Goods Sold.

The only drawback? Public perception that alstroemeria’s cheap. “If we want to generate sales with this common flower, we have to do something that the usual ‘bunch buyer’ cannot,” said Cindy Anderson, AIFD, PFCI. We tasked the Colorado Springs, Colo., designer with just that. Here, she shows two arrangements with an intrinsic, high end look that belie the actual labor involved.

“The thought behind these designs was simplicity,” Anderson said. She chose to use alstroemeria exclusively because “monofloral arrangements can really highlight your design technique,” she said. She also used top-grade alstroemeria “because the quality difference is another reason customers will seek out professional florists.” (For a list of high-caliber varieties, see *Fresh Choices*, p. 16.) 🌿

Find complete recipes at safnow.org/moreonline.

Katie Hendrick



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floral management's



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Entry deadline: May 30, 2014

Care and Handling



EASY, BREEZY, BEAUTIFUL ALSTROEMERIA

> Alstroemeria are the darlings of consumers, ranking just behind mini-carnations as a top seller. Consumers love them because they last forever — easily 12 to 14 days — and they're easy to care for; wilted stems perk back up even when they're left out of water for hours. The flowers are also fragrance-free, so they don't irritate allergy-sensitive flower lovers, and they're available in all kinds of interesting colors and variegations. Even the foliage has an interesting twist: The leaves are always upside down. (Because of a condition called "resupinate," a spiral growth pattern forces the leaves to twist as they grow from the stem, forcing the bottom of the leaf to face skyward.)

If you have shied away from alstroemeria before, or if you've been taking them for granted, they may be worth a closer look: A more open cut point, careful netting of florets, and strong, sturdy stems place these flowers in a class of their own.

Prevention From Grower to Retailer

Because this perennial crop is ethylene sensitive, ensuring longevity starts at the grower level. That means growers must make sure the first drink after harvest contains STS, an anti-ethylene solution to ward off the negative effects of ethylene exposure. Exposure causes transparent petals and short vase life.

Premature leaf yellowing can also be a problem. Growers, wholesalers and retailers can avoid the problem by processing alstroemeria in a solution specific to bulbous flowers to rebalance cell chemistry. Chrysal and Floralife both offer bulb food, and the best effects are achieved when bulb food is used at every step as blooms move through the chain — all the way to the consumer level with bulb flower food sachets.

Alstroemeria should be shipped and stored between 33 F and 38 F. Upon arrival in your design room, process

BY ANY OTHER NAME?

The only thing difficult about alstroemeria is the correct pronunciation of its tongue-twisting name. The name comes from Clas Alströmer, the Swedish baron who named the genus and also happened to be a close friend of Carolus Linnaeus, the Swedish botanist who developed binomial nomenclature, the plant classification system still used today.

Some of your customers may call alstroemeria by another name: Peruvian lilies. That's how they were sold in the 1970s, when the flowers debuted in U.S. markets. By the end of the decade, however, the Dutch had started exporting improved hybrid alstroemerias and selling plants to Latin American growers.

As growers discovered how well-suited the plant was to a high-altitude environment, the plant took off. It helped that alstroemeria handled the rigors of long-distance transit very well. As interest grew, the Peruvian lily name fell away and the flowers were marketed, bought and sold as alstroemeria, the true genus name. Today almost 100 percent of the alstroemeria grown for the U.S. market comes from Latin America. — G.S.

bunches by cutting on arrival one inch off the stems and then placing the stems in cold bulb food. Condensation will need to evaporate, so allow breathing room in your buckets and always work clean. Clean tools, clean buckets and clean solution are key to vase longevity.

New Waves of Vibrant, Colorful Blooms

Remember that today's varieties of alstroemeria are bred from crosses between the summer-growing species from Brazil and winter-growing species from Chile. (See sidebar, for more history.) Shipping conditions from Latin America have perpetuated a tight harvest stage. When stems are allowed extra time developing on mother plants, however, the color vibrancy and bloom size are both spectacular. 🌸





Gay Smith is the technical consulting manager for Chrysal USA. gaysmith@earthlink.net




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