

floral management

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Mid-Year Checkup: How's Business? p. 32

THE FLORAL

SEPTEMBER 2015 | VOLUME 32 | NUMBER 7



EMAIL'S NOT DEAD

Why the earliest form of online communication reigns supreme (and how to use it to breathe life into your sales)



drop-shipping got you down?



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A PUBLICATION OF THE SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FLORISTS
WWW.SAFNOW.ORG

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management

THE FLORAL BUSINESS AUTHORITY
SEPTEMBER 2015 | VOLUME 32 | NUMBER 7

KATE F. PENN EDITOR IN CHIEF
CHIEF CONTENT OFFICER
KPENN@SAFNOW.ORG

SHEILA S. SANTIAGO COMMUNICATIONS
AND PRODUCTION MANAGER
SSANTIAGO@SAFNOW.ORG

MARY WESTBROOK CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
FMEDITOR@SAFNOW.ORG

KATIE HENDRICK CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
FMEDITOR@SAFNOW.ORG

DESIGN AND PRODUCTION
BUSSOLATI ASSOCIATES
JAMIE MITCHELL, ART DIRECTION AND DESIGN

PUBLISHING ADVISERS
PETER J. MORAN, SAF CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
DREW GRUENBURG, SAF CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

EDITORIAL OFFICES
SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FLORISTS
1601 DUKE STREET, ALEXANDRIA, VA 22314-3406
(800) 336-4743; (703) 836-8700; FAX (800) 208-0078
WWW.SAFNOW.ORG

ADVERTISING SALES
KELLI NILSSON
KELLI@SAFNOW.ORG
214-291-3652

FLORAL MANAGEMENT (ISSN 1067-4772) (USPS-936-400) IS PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FLORISTS (SAF), THE ASSOCIATION THAT PROVIDES MARKETING, BUSINESS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES FOR THE ENTIRE FLORICULTURE INDUSTRY. STATEMENTS OF FACT OR OPINION IN FLORAL MANAGEMENT ARE THOSE OF THE AUTHORS AND MAY NOT REFLECT THE OFFICIAL POLICY OF THE SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FLORISTS. PERIODICALS POSTAGE IS PAID AT ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA 22314-3406 AND ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES. ALL MATERIAL IN THIS MAGAZINE IS COPYRIGHTED 2011 BY SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FLORISTS. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. \$25 OF SAF MEMBERSHIP DUES REPRESENTS A MEMBER'S SUBSCRIPTION TO THIS PUBLICATION. SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR NON-MEMBERS ARE AVAILABLE FOR \$49 PER YEAR. SINGLE COPIES: \$4. MATERIALS MAY NOT BE REPRODUCED WITHOUT WRITTEN PERMISSION.

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Viewpoint BY SHIRLEY LYONS

IT'S ABOUT PASSION

> This is an industry full of passion.

I left the banking industry in 1974 to start our family flower business. Bankers shake hands. A lot. After 40 years I am still surprised that the handshake of THIS industry is a hug. The floral industry knows how to care. It's what we do.

As I pass the gavel to our next president, my good friend and fabulous Oregon flower grower, Martin Meskers, AAF, it's time to reflect on my term. One of the great joys as your president has been receiving member support in so many ways. Phone calls, cards, emails and, of course, hugs.

Just a year ago in August, an especially personal and powerful moment for me came during the American Floral Endowment dinner at SAF Marco Island 2014. I received news of the passing of industry giant and personal friend to thousands, Tom Butler, AAF, PFCI. No one knew the power of the industry "hug" better than Tom. Immediately, groups gathered to share stories and offer prayers as we mourned the loss of a blessed friend whose actions, infectious smile and HUGE hugs deeply impacted everyone he met. While we mourned, we also celebrated the love and passion he and so many others have for this industry.

You have all been inspiring. From retailers to growers and wholesalers, this is a group of crazily hardworking people devoted to touching lives through the beauty, inspiration and emotional power of flowers. And you do!

In the past several years, SAF has developed new educational opportunities across the country to supplement its annual convention: the 1-Day Profit Blast and Retail Growth Solutions conferences. Our wholesale members generously joined to sponsor these powerful events, knowing how critical education is to their customers. Retailers large and small, established and new, came together around the tables to learn from great speakers and share ideas, successes and challenges with one another.

I witnessed the birth of a new holiday as Lane DeVries, AAF, from Sun Valley Floral paced the floor of an SAF board meeting, passionately promoting the initial concept of Women's Day and its potential as a floral holiday in the United States based on its stature in Europe. Within a few months, our staff was giving us the new SAF Women's Day graphics to put on our own websites and social media pages.

I can still picture SAF members walking the halls of Congress, calling on their representatives as the floral industry introduced the STARS Act last year. I hear members asking questions, looking for resources, and finding the answers with a quick phone call or email to our team at SAF headquarters.

In record numbers, you came to your first SAF event and had a personal "aha" experience: "Wow! So this is what SAF is all about. This was just the jump start I needed to reinvigorate my business."

To see you, like myself many years ago, realize SAF is not "them," faceless people in Alexandria, Virginia. SAF is you and me. And it is in all of our businesses every day. SAF is busy floral leaders volunteering their time to grow this great industry. WE are SAF!

Thank you for the privilege to serve you. I am proud to be a part of the organization whose mission is to make this industry strong and successful. Now give someone a hug and keep sharing the power of flowers! 🌸

Shirley Lyons, AAF, PFCI, of Dandelions Flowers and Gifts in Eugene, Oregon, completes her two-year term as SAF president on Sept. 10, and President-Elect Martin Meskers of Oregon Flowers Inc., in Aurora, Oregon, takes over as president. Lyons will continue as chairperson of the board for two years.





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KOEHLER & DRAMM INSTITUTE OF FLORISTRY
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WILJA HAPPE
FARMERS' WEST FLOWERS & BOUQUETS, INC.
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DAVID MITCHELL, AAF
MITCHELL'S FLOWERS
ORLANDO PARK, ILL.
MITCHELLDAVE@SBCGLOBAL.NET

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What Inspires Us

> Nature vs. nurture.

Coke vs. Pepsi.

Mets vs. Yankees.

Social media vs. email.

While that last pair doesn't possess the time-honored rivalry of the first three, it can nonetheless get some folks pretty riled up. Pose the "social media or email" question to a gathering of marketing execs, and chances are you will inspire a heated debate that goes something like this:

"Social media. Definitely social media. Email is soooooo 2010. It's older than dirt."

"So is the Acropolis. And millions of tourists flock to it every year."

"Yeah, but there are 1.44 billion Facebook users and 316 million Twitter users."

"Not impressed. Try 4.9 billion projected email accounts by 2017 — and that's a 25 percent bump since 2013. And three times the number of Facebook and Twitter accounts combined."

"Yeah, but people live on their Twitter feeds and Facebook pages. They hang out there. Try saying that about an inbox. Inboxes are the enemy."

"An enemy we're sleeping with, apparently. Open rates for email are 20 to 30 percent, compared to a pathetic 6 percent of fans who see your post. Do the math: Your message is five times more likely to be seen through email than on Facebook."

And on, and on and on . . .

I went to retail strategist Jim Dion to settle the debate. Dion's on the cutting edge of all things relating to retail — consumer, technology and marketing trends, and more. When he spoke at SAF Retail Growth Solutions in June, he spent most of the time talking about text message marketing and geo-fencing — pretty cutting edge stuff for the floral industry. So I half expected Dion to be in the "older than dirt" camp when I asked him about the relevance of email, but his reply was: "A big yes on email marketing!" He threw out these stats as proof: 82 percent of Americans online open email from companies, and 64 percent have printed a coupon from an email.

When you dig a bit deeper and get beyond the "mine is bigger than yours" dialogues — there is no shortage of online debates about this topic — it's clear that it's not a one-or-the-other situation, but both. Even the most zealous social media advocate will admit that the most effective marketing strategy includes both social media and email marketing.

Realizing this, I wondered whether we offer balanced coverage of both in Floral Management. I searched the word "email" in issues dating back to January 2013, and it comes up on 80 different pages (in a marketing context — I didn't count email address refer-



ences). Pages featuring a Facebook reference: 183. Guilty. Our programming at SAF events suggests a similar favoritism. During the last two years, we've presented more than a half-dozen seminars and webinars focused on social media best practices — and not one on email marketing. Guilty again. (Ironically, email is SAF's most effective marketing vehicle for promoting our events.)

With our cover story on p. 20, we attempt to redeem ourselves. Contributing editor Katie Hendrick picked the brains of some of the most respected digital marketers for their best practices on email, and she sought out retail florists who seem to be following those practices with great success. Sit back, grab a Coke (no, a Pepsi!) and soak in the advice. 🌸

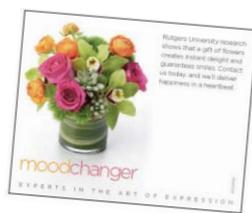
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More Online ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON WWW.SAFNOW.ORG



REN'S VIDEO

If Renato's interview with Maris Angolia (Plugged In, p. 40) has you looking into Adwords, check out his video for even more guidance. He'll talk about how to create landing pages and buy Adwords in a way that improves search engine results. Youtube.com/safvision



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SUBJECT IS KING

Looking to step up your email marketing game after reading this month's cover story? Get more pointers on writing subject lines that get opened and content that inspires clicks. safnow.org/moreonline



FOLLOW THAT CONVENTION!

If schedules, finances (or both) prevent you from leaving the shop to attend SAF Amelia Island 2015, stay tuned into at least some of the action by following the convention on Twitter and Facebook. The SAF staff and attendees will be posting a regular stream of photos, soundbites and more throughout the four day event, Sept. 9-12. [@safconv](https://twitter.com/safconv)

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> **Editor's Note:** In our August issue, Manny Gonzales, of Tiger Lily in Charleston, South Carolina, shared his experience in the aftermath of the June 17 mass shooting at the nearby Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, which left nine parishioners dead. His words (Viewpoint, "In Charleston, What Can I Do?") prompted several readers to write to him directly.

You Did A Lot

> Manny, what *didn't* you do? Thank you for giving light to those who saw none, thank you for listening to others who had no words, and thank you for instilling the fact that we are alike, not so different.

God bless you, your family and staff, and, of course, Charleston.

Jessica Cosentino, AAF
Cosentino's Florist
Auburn, New York

> Manny, I just finished reading your article in Floral Management. It was so well written. At times I thought I was reading a story in the New York Times or Washington Post. I appreciate your love of our country and our fellow man. It was a pleasure to see that we have people in our industry with tremendous insight and a passion for what they do that flows in and around their community. Thank you for your work and thoughtfulness in a difficult and trying time. 🙏

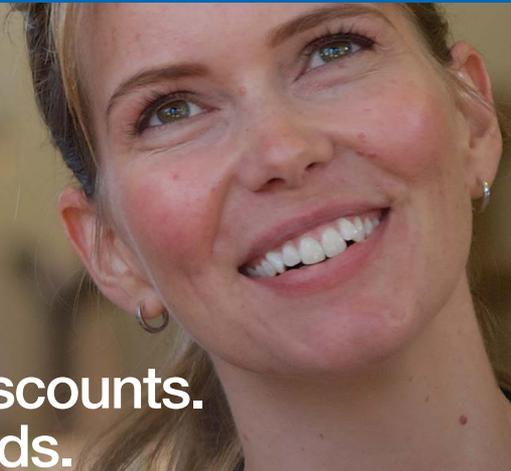
Ron Dorazio
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SEND US YOUR FEEDBACK

Go ahead, tell us what you think of what's in this month's issue — we have thick skins, we can take it! See an error? By all means, let us know that, too. (And, of course, we gladly accept compliments.) Email kpenn@safnow.org or call 703-838-5227.

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SAF in Action



YOUR TICKET TO PARADISE: SAF MAUI 2016

➤ Picture it: fresh seafood from the Pacific Ocean, luxurious hotel rooms with plush featherbeds, floor-to-ceiling windows and a spacious lanai, puarani (that's Hawaiian for "beautiful flowers"), and floral industry business experts.

That's right...SAF is heading way, way south for 2016. Due to popular request, next year's convention returns to Maui for the first time since 2004. (You know what that means, right? A tax-deductible Hawaiian getaway!)

Held at the swanky Ritz-Carlton Kapalua, which is extending economical room rates to attendees, SAF Maui 2016 will feature the same top-notch

educational programs members have come to expect.

"This venue has always been a good draw for the convention as attendees get a chance to recharge their batteries with outstanding education in a magnificent setting," said SAF President Shirley Lyons, AAF, PFCI.

Mark your calendar now for Sept. 21-24, 2016, because you won't want to miss this opportunity to better your business while experiencing one of the most beautiful places in America. 🌺



PARADISE CALLS The Ritz-Carlton Kapalua will welcome attendees to SAF Maui 2016, SAF's 132nd Annual Convention, Sept. 21-24, 2016.

PETAL IT FORWARD: PROMOTE YOUR SHOP WITH SAF'S FEEL-GOOD EVENT

➤ Earlier this summer, a father took his daughter out for dinner and broke into tears when he received the check, which had been covered by an anonymous couple who left a note saying they both grew up without dads and admired his devotion. He posted their kind words online and the gesture went viral on social media channels and traditional news outlets. As tragedies seem to be an almost daily reality, human benevolence and "pay it forward" stories serve as welcome reprieve.



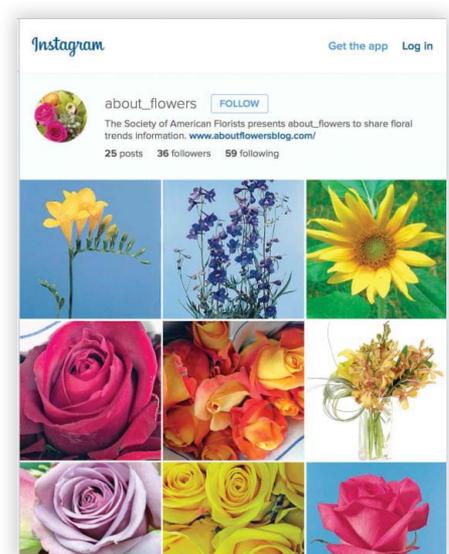
PROMOTIONAL POWER SAF's consumer marketing programs and materials are possible thanks to SAF retail dues and voluntary contributions to the SAF Fund for Nationwide Public Relations by wholesalers, suppliers, importers and growers. For information, visit safnow.org/prfund.

SAF is taking part in this feel-good trend through its Petal It Forward campaign. On Wednesday, Oct. 7, SAF will randomly present people in New York City two flower bouquets apiece. Recipients will be asked to "Petal It Forward" by giving one of their bouquets to someone in their life — or even a stranger — who could use a smile.

The campaign leverages study findings that flowers have an immediate impact on happiness and a long-term positive effect on moods. It also reinforces what people say is the best reason to receive flowers: "Just Because."

Bouquet recipients will be encouraged to share how they Petal It Forward by posting a picture on social media using the #PetalItForward hashtag and tagging @About_Flowers on Instagram. They'll also be reminded that they can continue to spread happiness throughout the year by visiting their local florist.

The campaign aims to generate media coverage (through social and traditional media outlets) highlighting the benefits of flowers — the positive impact flowers have on our work productivity and emotional well-being — and positioning SAF's consumer websites (aboutflowers.com and aboutflowersblog.com)



#PETALITFORWARD SAF aims to generate media coverage that highlights the positive impact flowers have on emotional well-being and positions SAF's websites, such as aboutflowersblog.com, and social media channels, including Instagram.com/about_flowers, as viable consumer resources.

com) and social media channels as viable resources for consumers.

Want to Petal It Forward in your community and help take the campaign nationwide? You'll find how-to steps and advice at safnow.org/PetalItForward. 🌺

SAF in Action

CAR SHOPPING? GET FOUR-DIGIT VEHICLE SAVINGS THROUGH SAF

➤ Shopping for a new vehicle is fun; haggling over price is not. SAF's latest membership benefit arms you with a deal that will have you peeling out of the dealership grinning ear to ear. Thanks to a partnership between SAF and Fiat Chrysler Automobiles US (FCA US LLC, formerly Chrysler Group LLC), SAF members now qualify for savings totaling \$1,500 on many Chrysler, Fiat, Dodge and Jeep vehicles, with no minimum number of automobiles purchased. At press time, seven vehicles had been sold to SAF members through the program, which launched in July.

"Delivery and transportation are fundamental to the floral industry, and buying, operating, equipping and maintaining vehicles are major expenses for SAF members," said SAF Membership Manager Brian Walrath. "By offering our members savings on fuel-efficient, reliable vehicles, SAF and SAF and FCA US LLC are helping lower the cost of doing business."



MEMBERSHIP BENEFIT Between the Chrysler, Dodge, Jeep or Ram lineup and the FIAT 500L, SAF members, their employees and family members can combine a stackable cash allowance with most retail incentives toward the purchase or lease of a vehicle. See details at safnow.org/chrysleroffer.

Through the partnership, SAF member business owners, employees and immediate family members at the same residence may receive a \$500 cash allowance toward the purchase or lease of select new Chrysler, Jeep, Dodge, Ram Truck and FIAT brand vehicles. The \$500 discount is off the final negotiated price of the vehicle and in most cases can be combined with other offers to increase savings.

In addition, SAF member business owners and their employees may qualify for "On the Job" program allowances, including up to \$1,000 to add new equipment or a company logo or graphic to their work vehicle.

The "On the Job" program allowance enables the business owner or employee purchaser/lessee to choose from one of four offers:

- Up to a \$1,000 vehicle graphic allowance for car/truck
- Up to a \$1,000 equipment "upfit" allowance for add-ons like a ladder rack or toolbox
- A Bosch toolkit, including items such as table saw and drills
- Two years of free oil changes (up to eight)

The select FCA US and FIAT brand vehicles include:

- Ram Truck brand: 1500, 2500 and 3500 pickup trucks (Regular, Crew or Quad Cab); 3500, 4500 and 5500 Chassis Cabs; Pro Master Van and C/V
- Jeep brand: Cherokee and Grand Cherokee (excluding SRT)
- Chrysler brand: 200 (excluding LX), 300/300C (excluding SRT) and Town & Country
- Dodge brand: Dart, Durango, Charger (excluding SRT), Grand Caravan (excluding AVP) and Journey (excluding AVP)
- FIAT brand: 500L

Details about eligibility and instructions on how to take advantage of this discount are available at safnow.org/chrysleroffer.

MORE WAYS TO SAVE THROUGH SAF

SAF's partnership with FCA US LLC is the latest in a growing list of business service discount programs available to SAF members. Other companies offering discounts to members include:

- **Hortica Insurance & Employee Benefits:** This program covers SAF members, their employees and eligible family members with medical, prescription drug coverage, dental insurance and life insurance in one convenient plan.
- **Avis and Budget:** SAF members are eligible for discounts on Avis and Budget rental cars.
- **Enterprise Fleet Management:** This program provides vehicle acquisition, maintenance management, insurance programs, vehicle disposal, fuel programs, license and title renewals, and monthly reporting for businesses with between 15 and 125 vehicles.
- **Ford Fleet Discounts:** SAF members with an active Ford Commercial Fleet Identification Number (FIN) can receive discounts on select new vehicle purchases.
- **FedEx Advantage:** SAF members save up to 21 percent on select FedEx Express® services and up to 15 percent on select FedEx Ground® services.
- **Paychex:** SAF members save 15 percent on Paychex Payroll Processing services and HR services setup fees.
- **SoftSearch:** SAF members have free access to a custom catalog of floral industry specific software that enables them to purchase software online.

For details, visit safnow.org/business-service-discounts.

Hands On

TIPS, TRENDS AND TACTICS FOR THE SAVVY RETAILER

FIRST HAND ACCOUNT

FROM SCHOOL SPIRIT TO SCHOOL PROFITS



HEAD OF THE CLASS In the past, Betsy Hall of Hall's Flower Shop & Garden Center in Stone Mountain, Georgia, loaned plants to schools on a complimentary, first-come, first-serve basis. Today she charges a discounted rental fee and uses a formalized rental policy tailored to schools' year-round needs, which maximizes her profit.



GO DEEPER

Check out two more in-store displays from Winston Flowers, review Betsy Hall's rental contract and learn about how Hall's Flower Shop & Garden Center has leveraged its school connections to build a strong prom business at safnow.org.

> As local schools go back into session this fall, many florists will face a common dilemma: how to handle the many requests for donations, product loans and support from area schools, without alienating community members or sacrificing profits.

In Stone Mountain, Georgia, Betsy Hall of Hall's Flower Shop & Garden Center has freed herself of that worry. Five years ago, Hall realized her shop was receiving far too many requests from area schools for loaner plants, often used in school ceremonies and programs.

"We hated saying no to schools," said Hall, who works regularly with 12 to 15 high schools and four to five elementary schools. "We tried to be generous with them, but with so many requests, it became difficult."

Difficult — and potentially harmful to the business. Without a formalized rental policy in place, school requests were handled in a scattershot manner. A school rep would request a specific type or number of plants; Hall and her team would hustle to oblige, then loan the plants for free to the school. If plants came back to the shop damaged (and therefore unsealable) Hall had no real recourse. Occasionally, Hall had to turn down people she wanted to help in favor of early birds.

"Schools that were good customers sometimes missed out if another school asked first for loaned plants needed for the same day," she explained.

To make her system fair and profitable, Hall developed a rental policy and a scheduling calendar. Now, instead of giving out plants on a complimentary basis, she offers schools a discounted rental rate (cost plus 15 percent). During the busy spring graduation season, "we're able to rent the same plants three weekends in a row and then sell the plants in-store at a special price," which helps maximize profits, she explained, adding that her rental policy covers details such as transportation, proper care, storage guidelines and standards for return quality. She can also include extra fees for additional services, including extensive set-ups. (Some of her local schools hold their most important events at the nearby Georgia Dome.)

Far from alienating the schools, the new system seems to have strengthened bonds and professionalized the shop's relationships, in part because Hall and her team are now proactive about calling administrators to set up rentals.

"We set up house accounts for them and work to build a relationship with [key contacts such as] the principal and bookkeeper," Hall said, adding that the goodwill pays off year-round, not just at graduation time.

"Schools are our largest vocation base for Administrative Professionals Week and Boss's Day," which falls on Oct. 16 this year, she said. "Our schools send flowers for the Teacher of the Year winners and retirement parties. Many times the teachers and faculty that order on behalf of the school they work for become good customers for their own personal floral purchases." 🌸

VISUAL IMPACT
FROM 'HO-HUM' TO 'OH WOW'

> You've probably retired your beach towels for the year, but it's a tad too soon to pull out the jack-o-lanterns, skeletons and cobwebs.

The early days of fall can be tricky territory for retailers, who often fall into the trap of creating in-store vignettes more likely to produce yawns than oohs and ahhs. But you don't need a special occasion to make a special display. In fact, SAF Amelia Island 2015 speaker Nicole Reyhle, founder of Retail Minded, says it's important for retailers to "turn the ordinary special" when considering visual merchandising.

That's the objective of David Winston, co-owner of Winston Flowers, and his team when they craft looks for their seven retail locations. While the storied Boston-based business aims for high levels of artistry, they don't sacrifice practical considerations such as space, materials and labor.

Some of Winston's tips for livening up non-holiday displays:



EMBRACE CHANGE YEAR-ROUND "We change our signature color palettes approximately nine times per year — but the actual flower tables themselves change daily and will never look the same twice," Winston said. (Winston fills vases with twisted stems of the best flowers of the season.) "This strategy keeps our clientele engaged and builds anticipation to see and experience what is next."



SHOW DON'T TELL Eschewing plastic sleeves and using very scant signage, Winston makes displays "as fresh and natural as possible." "We mix both cut flowers, pre-made arrangements and dramatic foliage," he said.



CONTAIN YOURSELF Winston sells many exclusive containers not found at other area businesses, and the staff is eager to show off these unique finds. "This is a display of plant material merchandised in a variety of our featured vessels, which promotes both our containers and the plants we are merchandising," Winston said. "The display features whites, browns, greens and earth tones, in a manner that is easy to touch and feel." 🌿

BENCHMARK
SENIOR SENSATIONS

> Grandparents Day (coming up on Sept. 13) doesn't have the widespread recognition of Mother's Day or Father's Day, but today's aging population — there are now more Americans over 65 than at any time in our history, according to census data — is giving younger generations plenty of reason to show their appreciation. 🌿



72 PERCENT of U.S. grandparents take care of their grandchildren on a regular basis; **13 PERCENT** are primary caregivers

60 PERCENT live close to their grandchildren; **46 PERCENT** wish they lived even closer



70 PERCENT see the kids at least once a week; **66 PERCENT** travel with their grandkids

92 PERCENT have changed their grandchild's diaper



SOURCE: Grandparents.com internal survey; MetLife survey, "Grandparents Investing in Grandchildren"; Pew Research Center report

THE HR FIX
WHERE ARE ALL THE GREAT EMPLOYEES?



Q: I can't seem to fill an opening on my sales team. Most of the candidates are total duds, or the good ones have taken positions at other businesses, with higher wages or better benefits. What am I doing wrong?

A: First, consider two job postings from two coffee shops.

The first reads: "Counter help needed. Experience preferred. Minimum wage."

The second reads: "Looking for a motivated barista for a dynamic, team-oriented coffee shop that values creativity and community spirit. Full-time benefits and stock options after one year employment — plus 1 lb of free coffee every week!"

If you were an applicant, where would you want to work? Shop No. 2, of course!

To attract talented people, you must clearly articulate the value proposition of your business. What do you offer employees, beyond pay and benefits? How do you recognize and reward people? How do you speak to employees and interact with them on a day-to-day basis? When someone makes a mistake, how do you treat him or her?

These ideas — the value proposition of your business — need to come through clearly in your job postings. To attract and keep good people — to essentially hire them every day — you have to think not only of your expectations but also about the value you bring to their lives. Most important, this philosophy needs to permeate everything you do and to be made clear in job descriptions and evaluations.

Brainstorm ideas that relate to your value proposition. Bring employees into the process; ask them what they like best about working for your shop. While you're at it, encourage them to share areas that could be improved. 🌿

On My To-Do List

OCTOBER 2015

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>MANY THANKS to the sources in our cover story this month for contributing to this month's calendar, focused on best practices for upping your e-mail marketing game.</p>					<p>1 </p> 	<p>2 </p> <p>Write copy for homecoming email</p>	<p>3 </p> <p>Photograph designers in action for future email</p>
SUKKOT							
<p>4 </p> <p>Browse bridal blogs for FAQ</p>	<p>5 </p> <p>Revise homecoming email with staff input</p>	<p>6 </p> <p>Email high school customers corsage trends/offerings for homecoming</p>	<p>7 </p> <p>Write copy for Boss's Day email</p>	<p>8 </p> <p>Revise Boss's Day email with staff input</p>	<p>9 </p> <p>Send Boss's Day email</p>	<p>10 </p> <p>Browse bridal blogs for FAQ</p> 	
SUKKOT							
<p>11 </p> <p>Scan inbox for click-worthy emails, take notes</p>	<p>12 </p> <p>Webinar: Best Flower Shop Management Skills, floralstrategies.com/webinars.html</p>	<p>13 </p> <p>Email high school customers corsage trends/offerings for homecoming</p>	<p>14 </p> <p>Check inventory for excess containers to use in shop special</p>	<p>15 </p> <p>Work with designers to create shop special, write copy</p>	<p>16 </p> <p>BOSS'S DAY</p> 	<p>17 </p> <p>Photograph designers in action for future emails</p>	
<p>18 </p> <p>Browse bridal blogs for FAQ for email fodder</p>	<p>19 </p> <p>Revise copy and send shop special email</p>	<p>20 </p> <p>Run ad for extra help for December holidays</p>	<p>21 </p> <p>Email high school customers corsage trends/offerings for homecoming</p>	<p>22 </p> <p>Photograph designers in action for future emails</p>	<p>23 </p> <p>Write "Save the Date" copy for holiday open house</p>	<p>24 </p> <p>Review open rate/click thru/opt out stats</p>	
<p>25 </p> <p>Register for LIVE Test Calls to REAL Flower Shops webinar (Nov. 11), floralstrategies.com/webinars.html</p>	<p>26 </p> <p>Revise "Save the Date" copy with staff input</p>	<p>27 </p> <p>Send "Save the Date" email for holiday open house</p>	<p>28 </p> <p>Work with designers to create Halloween special</p>	<p>29 </p> <p>Email Halloween special</p>	<p>30 </p> <p>Email Halloween special</p>	<p>31 </p> <p>HALLOWEEN</p> 	

I RECOMMEND: THE BEAUTIFUL GAME

Martin Meskers, AAF, Oregon Flowers, Aurora, Oregon, SAF President-Elect



MARTIN MESKERS WITH HIS (SOCCER-LOVING) FATHER, DAUGHTER AND GRANDSON

My family and I live on our farm, and the business is 24 hours a day. Even when we vacation, it's often to go back home to Holland or attend an industry event, which we love, but you're still in the middle of the business of growing flowers. **Soccer relaxes me.** I started playing when I was six or seven. Back then, in Holland, all the boys played — at home, in the streets, in the little pastures by our houses.

Today, **I play once a week** in an over-50 league in Portland. Everyone's the same on the soccer field. It doesn't matter who you are or where you come from. It's about kicking the ball. I like that. **Playing tires me out, gets me out of my head,** helps me look at life a little differently. Watching a good game can produce the same effect. Ajax Amsterdam was my boyhood favorite team, but over the years living in the

U.S., it's been easier to find the English Premier League on TV. I like Manchester United. My life really revolves around my marriage, my family, my kids and grandkids and our business, but soccer is a big part of it, too. All my kids played growing up, and **I used to watch games with my dad,** who died last spring, about eight months after my mom passed away. Those memories are nice to look back on now.

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Dear Tim...

WHERE'S THE SPARKLE?

I am constantly reminding (ok, nagging) my staff to sound perkier and more engaging when they answer the phone and greet customers on the shop floor. Help!

VIRGINIA BELMORE | OWNER | FLOWERS ON MAIN | BURLINGTON, VERMONT

Yes, Virginia, there is a way to get your staff to sparkle when engaging customers. I preach the importance of good customer service and confident salesmanship every month, but we haven't tackled the important precursor to those transactions: how to make that best first impression on customers.

First Impressions Count

When I make test calls to shops, I pay close attention to the greeting. Sometimes I hear, "Flower Shop ..." barked at me in an angry tone. I think, "She must have hit some nasty traffic on the way to work today!" or I wonder, "Did all the wedding flowers come in wilted? Because he sounds ticked off!"

I completely understand what's happening in many flower shops today: They have fewer people on staff and employees are pulled in many directions. Without malintent, they (and even you from time to time) may greet customers with a mindset of, "OK, let's get through this quickly; I am in the middle of a funeral spray that has to be delivered by 10 am!"

Tell your employees on day one of training (and every day if you have to): *You have the ability to make a customer feel either great or regretful about shopping with us. It's your job to make them feel the former — it's shop policy and we have a very specific way of doing this that must be followed on every call.*

An opener that inspires confidence has four key components: greeting, flower shop name, your name and customer status:

Good morning, Flowers on Main, this is Virginia. Have you shopped with us before?

If the customer is new, thank her for choosing you and ask how she found out about you. If she's a previous customer, ask for her name (and then pull her shopping history and better guide in her purchase).

When you overhear anything other than what's above, remind the employee about the shop policy.

Go Beyond Perky: Think About TVs

For customers who come into the shop, a friendly and engaging greeting is just as important, but there are some other dynamics at play as well. I like to use the experience of shopping for a new TV to illustrate: You go to the local Big Box electronics store, walk into the TV department and stand staring at the 30 choices all lined up on the wall.

Scenario One: A young man walks up to you and asks, "Can I help you?"

Scenario Two: The same young man walks up, notices that you are scanning the wall of TVs, and cheerfully asks, "Are you looking for a plasma TV or an LCD?"

What a difference a few words and a change in tone can make! That opening statement in Scenario Two changes everything — you immediately feel like you are dealing with a confident expert. He mentions which TVs are best-sellers or his favorites. You follow his recommendation, spending a bit more than you had planned, and finish your shopping sooner than you had thought, feeling good about your purchase and appreciative that they took the time to train the staff to be engaging and knowledgeable. You'd want to shop at that store again and probably even recommend it to family and friends!

That's the type of service you and your team should aspire to give every customer. In your shop, the question you ask the customer looking into the cooler might be: *Are you shopping for yourself, or are you looking for a gift?*

Whether you are on the phone or greeting someone on the floor, regardless of how busy you are (or how badly they messed

up your order at Dunkin' Donuts that morning!), you need to project a warm, inviting, professional and *engaging* demeanor to customers. That may seem like it will take longer, but the perky, engaging staff consistently finishes sales quicker (and gets right back to that standing spray order). 🌿

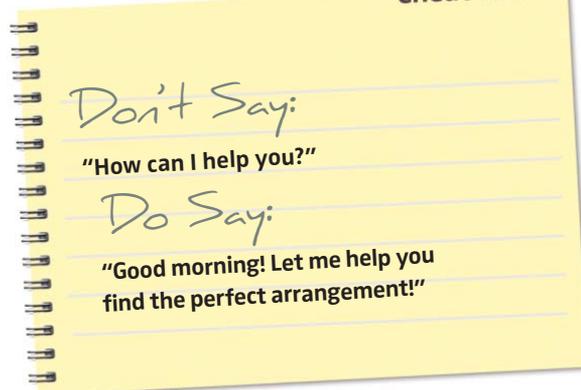


Tim Huckabee is the president of FloralStrategies, which provides sales, service and POS system training. Tim has spent the last 17 years traveling the

globe and educating florists of all sizes to engage customers in bold new ways while learning how these successful shops operate on all levels. tim@floralstrategies.com

Got a sales or service challenge? Tell Tim about it, and he'll tackle it in an upcoming column. Email tim@floralstrategies.com, or call him, (800) 983-6184.

Cheat Sheet



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

AN UNASSUMING PALETTE

> Anyone who's ever stood beside her friend at the altar, especially in the 80s and 90s, likely did so in something very vibrant (turquoise, orange, lime) or super saccharine (bubblegum, periwinkle, mint). These former bridesmaids might be shocked to learn the color du jour is as neutral as can be: "greige," a combination of gray and beige.

Though at first glance, this shade may look drab (it is the same color of cement, after all), it actually gives florists a lot more flexibility when it comes to wedding designs, explained Ardith Beveridge, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, of The Koehler & Dramm Institute of Floristry in Minneapolis. "Greige is the color of creativity," said Beveridge, who received the Tommy Bright Award in 2012 for her lifetime achievement in floral presentation and education. "It is one of the simplest colors for the eye to process and one that permits a variety of color accents and accessories."

For this month's column, we borrowed swatches of popular greige dresses from the popular Charleston, South Carolina bridal boutique LulaKate and asked Beveridge to create complementary bouquets. Below are four ways to make greige pop. 🌿

Katie Hendrick

katiehendrick@gmail.com



Dress swatch: Sea Mist

Blue evokes water. "In Minnesota, I might name this look 'Lakeshore,' while florists in coastal states might call it 'Seaside,' and accent it with shells," Beveridge said. This cascade bouquet includes a base of hydrangea, **delphinium**, thistle and **gentiana**, with **bachelor buttons**, dusty miller and eucalyptus as accent pieces for depth and texture. "Add some peach flowers, a complementary color, or create analogous harmony with bright greens or blue violet," she said.



'BLUE RIVER' DELPHINIUM
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BACHELOR'S BUTTONS
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Fresh Choices



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'WINE' CELOSIA
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JADE TRACHELIUM
DVFlora



Dress swatch: Pecan

"Greige is actually an orange with very low brightness and saturation," Beveridge said. For a fall wedding, you can draw out its coppery qualities with **golden grevillea**, **brown cymbidium orchids**, and burgundy anemones (or roses, dahlias, callas, etc.). "In Minnesota, I'd describe this look as 'Wildwood'; in the South, you might say 'Butterscotch,' and on the coasts, you could use 'Tropical Bamboo' or 'Spice Box,'" she said.



BROWN CYMBIDIUM
NZ Bloom



Dress swatch: Fog

This bouquet, "a cascade with a crescent crossing line," features **garden roses**, **pink cockscomb celosia**, rose godetia and freesia. It's ideal for the bride who loves a romantic aesthetic, but craves something a little different from the ubiquitous hand-tied look. Beveridge would call this design "Queen of Hearts."



'CAREY' DAVID AUSTIN GARDEN ROSE
Green Valley Floral



Dress swatch: Desert

"With greige, you can use all colors without fear," said Beveridge of this polychromatic bouquet that includes roses, **cocculus**, golden grevillea, eucalyptus, aster, lisianthus, **trachelium**, hypericum berries, and amaranthus. "It's perfect for dramatic, outgoing brides who want to express their joy with a kaleidoscopic display of color," she said.



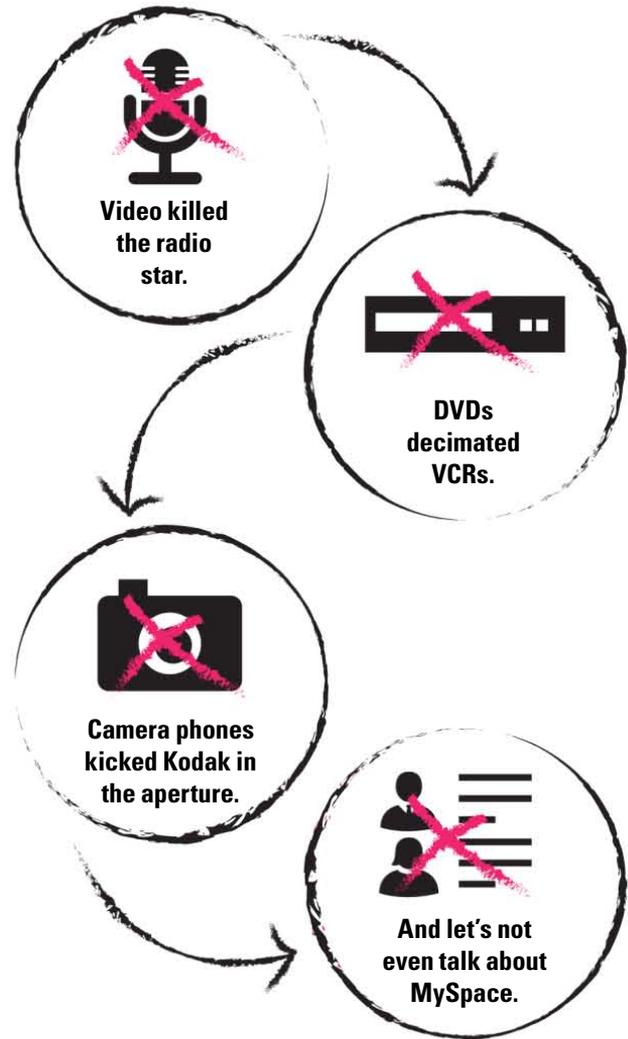
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BY KATIE HENDRICK

STAY OUT OF THE TRASH!

*Are you trigger happy
with lame, spammy messages?
Learn what makes customers
open their emails (and wallets)
with glee.*



As we rush to embrace shinier, easier and faster ways to communicate, today's hot new thing evaporates faster than a SnapChat.

Follow the digital evolution and you'd assume email is headed toward extinction.

Not so fast, say online marketing experts, armed with impressive statistics and compelling reasons that suggest the inbox won't be joining the cassette tape anytime soon. Low costs, creative control and sophisticated tracking capabilities are just a few traits that give marketers reasons to live for email.

> STAY OUT OF THE TRASH

Still need a convincing vital sign? Email boasts the most numbers of any form of digital communication. By year's end, there should be 4.3 billion email users, according to The Radacati Group, a market research firm. Its 2014 report found that 84 percent of Americans use email and 91 percent check it at least once a day. Those with a smartphone are checking it 34 times daily, according to a 2014 article in *Personal and Ubiquitous Computing*, a peer-reviewed scientific journal.

"Email may be an old tactic, but it remains a vital one," said Peter Roesler, president of Web Marketing Pros and a columnist for Inc. That vitality owes plenty to affordability and readability. Unlike texting, which eats up data and racks up charges, email exists beyond the phone, doesn't cost anything to receive and offers more space for content, "allowing for better marketing," he said. Customers avoid data drain; marketers avoid content restraints. (Imagine how lifeless your open house invitation or "Best Mom" contest would look reduced to a few characters on a phone screen!)

"It's definitely the most effective way to connect with and engage consumers," said Jason Dulay, founder of Dummy Proof Marketing, a Washington, D.C.-based firm that educates small businesses about search-engine optimization, social media and e-commerce.

According to McKinsey & Company,

a consulting firm, email is 40 times more successful at acquiring new clients than either Facebook or Twitter. Similarly, Campaign Monitor, an online marketing application, found customers are six times more likely to click on a link in an email than one in a tweet.

Additionally, email marketing gives small business owners something they crave: control.

"You decide when your message goes out, who receives it and how it looks," Dulay said. Social media marketing, by contrast, "puts you at the mercy of the hosting site. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram — they make the rules." Organic posts (i.e., the ones you don't pay to promote) "have a very small reach."

On Twitter, where Dulay has 1,547 followers, he contends with a conversation stream that's refreshed by the second. And on Facebook, there's the much acknowledged, but little understood algorithm. "Basically, Facebook will increase the number of people who see your post based on the number of likes, comments and shares you get," he said. So unless your post gets a lot of interaction right out of the gate, chances are, most of your followers won't see it.

"There are literally millions of Facebook statuses written each day," with the vast majority only appearing before a fraction of the desired audience, he said. "The 'viral post' everyone dreams of having is extremely rare."

Email faces a lower barrier to entry. Send an email and, barring the rare full inbox, you can assume it will arrive. Whether it gets opened? Well, that's where the message — not the medium — is key. It's up to you to give that message life beyond the screen. And when you do, it pays.

According to a 2013 Direct Marketing Association survey, 66 percent of consumers report having made an unplanned purchase online as a result of email marketing. When they click through to "buy now," businesses get not only a sale but also valuable information about the email-induced customer.

"Technology has advanced so companies can easily track website and purchase behavior and use that to send targeted, personalized emails," said Kristin Bond, author of the blog "Email



GOODWILL HUNTING Karin's Florist in Vienna, Virginia, uses email to inform customers about the shop's charitable efforts and to encourage them to help out too by purchasing a special arrangement.

Snarketing," who's coordinated campaigns for Warby Parker, One America and Food52.

The sobering news? Consumers have also become savvier in how they use email, Bond said. Many sign up for just the first-time "welcome" discount. The challenge is converting these "one and done" subscribers to lifelong readers and flower buyers.

Compelling emails share certain traits: substance, style, a personal hook and a sleek look. And the most successful email marketers are analytics addicts who monitor open and opt-out rates and consistently fine-tune their approach. They're keeping email alive — and you can, too, with these five hacks to dodge the delete button and deliver powerful messages.

HAVE A CLEAR GOAL IN MIND

Gone are the "You've got mail" days of joyfully checking your inbox. The average American sends/receives an average of 121 emails a day. With no clear reason



DAILY DEAL Ashland Addison Florist in Chicago keeps holiday reminders subtle (and not tiresome) with email messages that change every day.



“You don’t want to be the brand that’s sending emails all the time just because they drive a little site traffic.”

Kristin Bond

Email Snarketing

d'être, your email is headed toward the trash. Send aimless, worthless messages too often, and you'll quickly be part of an unsubscribe digital cleanse. According to a survey by The Relevancy Group, a market research firm, 44 percent of consumers say receiving too many emails is their biggest pet peeve and the primary reason they ditch companies' lists.

Before you click the send button, ask yourself: What do I want to achieve (a sale, a signup, a chance to brag)? And then try to identify the benefit to your customer. If either answer is hazy, hold back.

For Rick Rivers, “email fatigue” is a grave concern. The owner of A Floral Boutique in Ormand Beach, Florida, recalls several big brands that “exhausted” him with daily messages and consequently landed on his unsubscribe list.

To ensure his shop doesn't meet the same fate, Rivers practices email restraint, limiting them to **delivery confirmations and holidays**. Through call-em-all.com, he invites customers to opt in for an email (or text) receipt of their order, which arrives with a photo and a coupon for their next purchase. So far, 20 have signed up and Rivers reports a “phenomenal open rate” of 97 percent.

Beyond this, Rivers reserves email marketing for “flower dominant occasions”: Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, birthdays and anniversaries. “These are the times I know my (mostly male) clients really want my products, but they might have forgotten they do,” he said. When he emails them reminders, they're grateful. “I've done them a service keeping them out of trouble.”

Rivers' customers get three pre-holiday emails: seven days, three days and then one day before the holiday.

SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT

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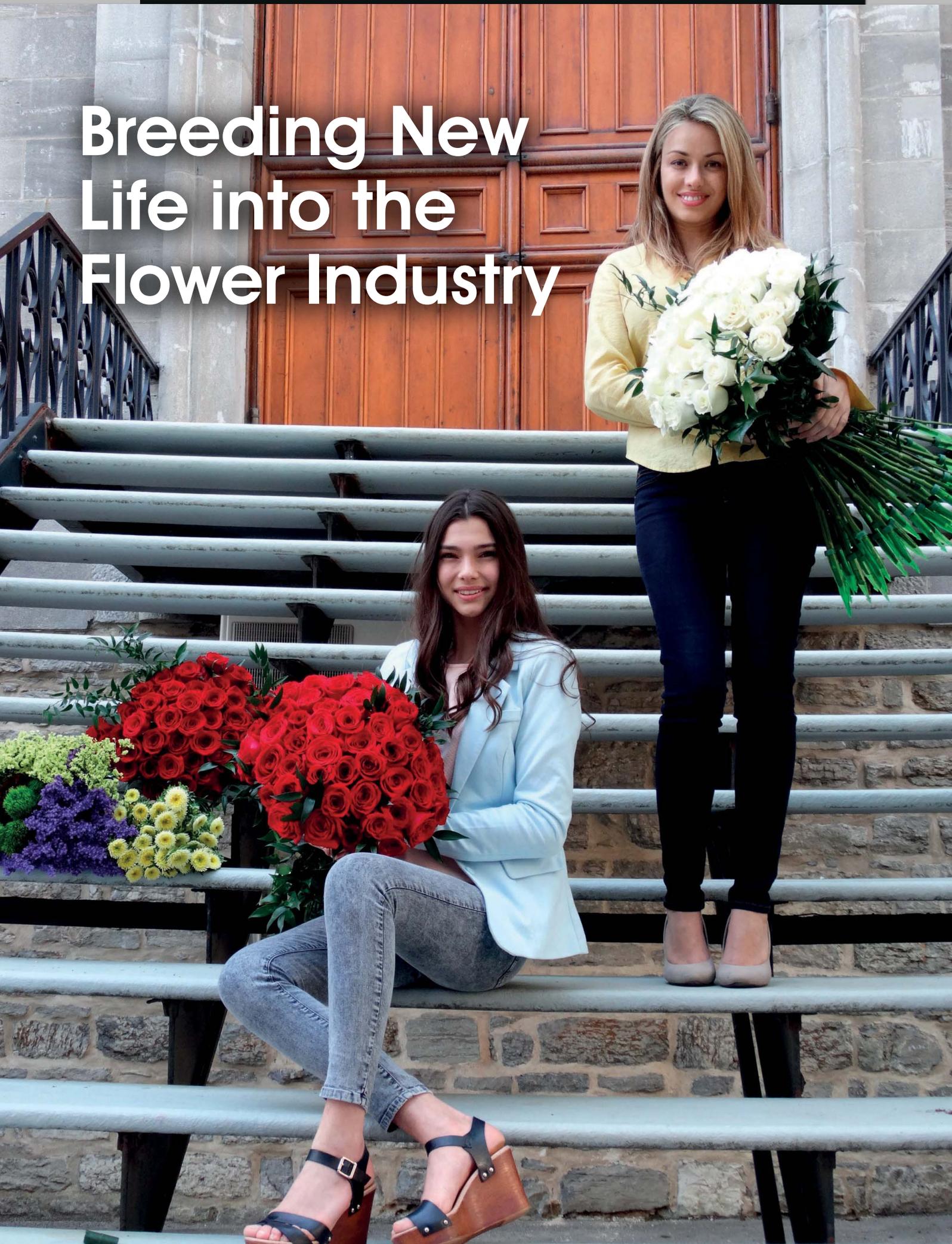
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> STAY OUT OF THE TRASH

To catch their attention, he uses playful "fear" tactics: for Valentine's Day 2015, he featured a cartoon of a sad woman in the office, surrounded by colleagues smiling with their flowers; in 2014, it was a guy sleeping on the couch. The respective subject lines: "Don't let this be your girl" and "Don't be this guy."

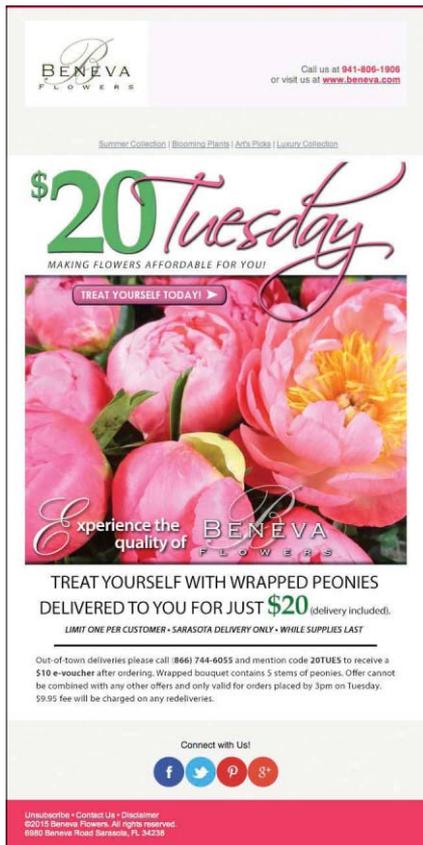
In Chicago, Ashland Addison Florist, which has five locations, also treats email as a digital string around the finger for big holidays. From Feb. 9 through 13, Marketing and Communications Director Bridget Carlson, AAF, emailed a different daily deal for Valentine's Day.

"It was a way to remind customers the holiday was coming up without being obvious," Carlson said, and to make them curious and excited to see the next offer. "It's like clothing stores that do a month of summer sales," she said. "They might kick it off with sun dresses, which you don't want or need, but you'll keep checking in every day until you see a deal for swim-suits or tote bags."

It's important to consider customers' shopping habits and schedule your emails accordingly, Bond said.

"If you're marketing a product that people buy every week, like food, multiple emails a week might be okay," she said. "If you're marketing something people tend to only buy a few times a year, then daily, year-round emails can be really annoying."

Emails sent outside your busy season(s) keep you top of mind, but they must have a strong purpose, Bond said. "You don't want to be the brand that's sending emails all the time just because they drive a little site traffic," she said, emphasizing it's not worth soliciting a few clicks if you have dozens who unsubscribe at the same time.



IRRESISTIBLE OFFER Bouquets available at a remarkable price point get customers clicking on Beneva Flowers' email messages.

Retailers need to ask themselves, "Is what I'm about to send something of value to the customer?"

Offer tips such as "what to send a friend in the hospital" or "flowers that hold up well for an outdoor summer wedding." Bond recommends keeping a list of frequently asked questions ("What should I bring to my wedding consultation?" or "Could lilies poison my

cat?," for instance) and using them for email fodder during slow weeks.

Maris Angolia, AAF, president of Karin's Florist in Vienna, Virginia, uses email to highlight the shop's good deeds through a charitable program called "Karin's Gives." Each month, Karin works with a different community organization in northern Virginia, Washington, D.C., or Maryland, and creates a special arrangement in its honor; Karin donates 10 percent from each one sold to the organization. The messages net a few additional sales every month and generate goodwill, Angolia said, adding "Customers like reading about people who make their community a better place to live."

At Beneva Flowers in Sarasota, Florida, owner Art Conforti, PFCI, aims for impulse purchases with his \$20 Tuesday email campaigns.

"It's a deal that is simply too good to pass up," he said of the weekly bouquet specials, which include delivery. They consistently sell out (sometimes within an hour or two, as was the case when the shop featured peonies this past May) and have earned him "more corporate business than you'd ever imagine."

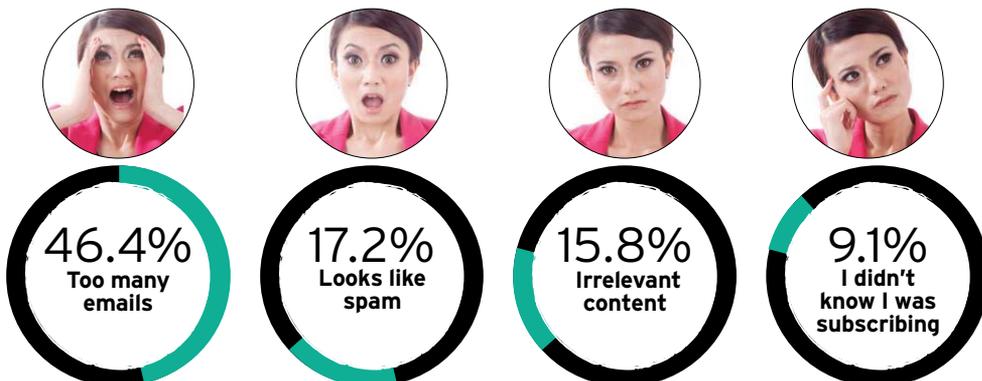
These emails "get us in the door," Conforti said. A lot of people don't view \$20 ("less than the price of two movie tickets") as indulgent and thus give in to the temptation. Then, when the flowers arrive "looking much more expensive than what they paid for," people are impressed, appreciative "and eager to do business with us again," he said.

Carlson strikes a similar approach at Ashland Addison.

"We want to capture people who would buy flowers for no particular reason," she said. "If we could get every

THE WORST OFFENDERS

What turns customers off? Earlier this year, software developer Get Data queried 500 Americans between ages 25 and 44 about why they unsubscribe from brands' email lists. Here are their top pet peeves.



one of our existing customers to buy one extra arrangement a year 'just because,' it would have a huge impact on our bottom line."

About 70 percent of Carlson's email campaigns center around **selling a particular design that uses excess containers** and flowers purchased in bulk. Carlson's subject lines convey urgency with phrases like "limited offer at a great price point" or "don't miss our biggest rose sale ever."

Other times, she'll use email to advertise something unusual and exclusive, such as lilac or proteas, to **generate in-store foot traffic**.

The messages "aren't always about getting a fabulous deal," she said. "But our goals are usually the same: to encourage an impulse purchase and to move specific product."

SHOW SOME PERSONALITY

The most captivating email campaigns have a voice. Even as the world seems to revolve more and more around technology, "people still crave human interactions," Dulay said. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube may have moved the conversations online, but "deep down, they're all about connecting with other people."

If you want to resonate with customers (and not come off as overtly sales-oriented — one of customers' top pet peeves, according to GetData), you want them to see your true colors and how you can make their lives richer.

"**Telling a story** is one of the best ways to make a positive impression," Dulay said.

Instead of issuing a bland, generic pitch ("Buy flowers for Mother's Day!"), talk about a new father picking out his



"Whether you make them laugh or cry, if you strike an emotion, that's good."

Jason Dulay
Dummy Proof Marketing

wife's bouquet — how he chose marigolds because they corresponded with their daughter's birth month (October) and how he deliberated over the card message ("Thank you for giving me the greatest gift of my life.") Wrap it up by saying how your staff "can't wait to help you pick out the perfect bouquet, customized for the special woman in your life."

During prom season, you might start a message about the latest design trends with an anecdote (accompanied by a delightfully dated photo, of course) about what you wore to your own big dance. Segue with a sentence about how you wish you were a modern day teenager, so you could wear "the glamorous illusion-neckline gowns and flower crowns so popular these days" and what you would give "to relive the fun days of young love and childhood friendships."

"Whether you make them laugh or cry, if you strike an emotion, that's good," Dulay said.

Furthermore, with stories, you're shifting the focus from your products to the people.

"It shouldn't be about the flowers," he said. "It's about the service. People want to see how you can benefit them."

Showing some personality means ditching the stilted, professional tone for a **conversational one**.

Consider these two messages:

Hello. Thank you for ordering flowers from us. We are very appreciative of your business.

Hi! Thanks for shopping with us! We're thrilled to be a part of your special moment and can't wait to show you what we can do!

Which sounds friendlier?

"If you use language that's too formal, too structured, you sound robotic," Dulay said. "People who give you their email address like you. And they want to read

an email that sounds like you would if you were greeting them in your shop or over the phone."

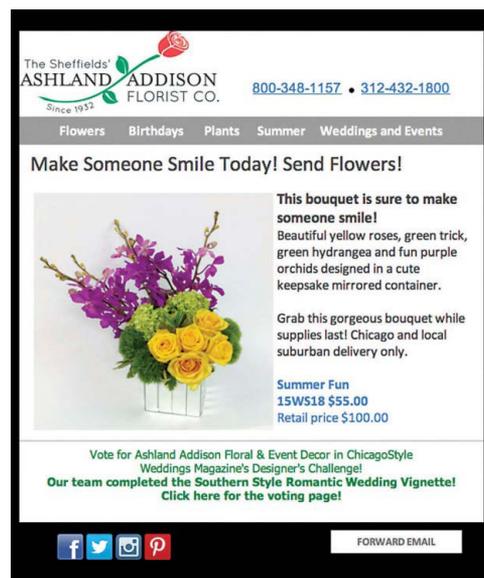
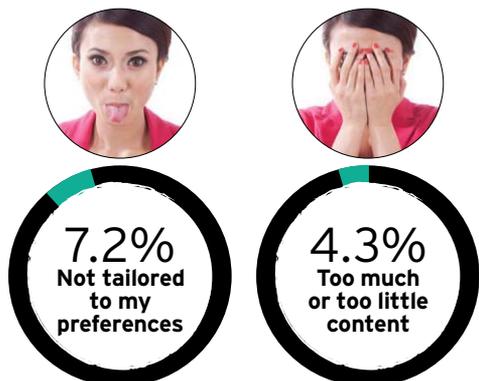
To bring Ashland Addison to life in her emails, Carlson likes to **name-drop**. "For a teaser, I might say, 'Wait till you see what Suzanna created this week!' It reinforces that we're a local, family run business with real people making custom designs," she said.

Personal photographs shot behind the scenes at the shop give customers a snapshot (literally) of what goes on in the design room and are yet another way to form a bond, she explained. "It's also important that they see what the flowers really look like," she said. "That builds trust."

Afraid amateur phone photos aren't "good enough"? Well-lit, professional photography has its place (your website and wedding portfolio, for instance), but when it comes to email marketing, "you make more of an impact with photos shot on your phone," Dulay said. Why? "If the photo looks too good, customers might think it's Photoshopped and their 'oh no, this corporate entity is trying to market to me' guard goes up."

GET PERSONAL

Many things are one-size-fits-all, but shouldn't be. Chief among them: lingerie (agree to disagree, Hanky Panky) and email marketing.



CLOSET CLEANER Bridget Carlson, AAF, markets weekly specials through email to move excess containers with impulse purchases.

> STAY OUT OF THE TRASH



“Your success rate goes way up when you match your offerings to their preferences.”

Art Conforti, PFCI
Beneva Flowers

Back when email marketing was in its infancy, “blasts” to a company’s entire list were the norm. Today, email providers offer sophisticated tools to send precise messages.

“Emails that are targeted well almost always perform better than bulk messages, because they have content that’s relevant to the users,” Bond said. “It takes more time, but it’s worth it.”

Florists have long been sending targeted emails for customers’ birthdays and anniversaries, but **age, gender and previous purchases** are springboards for more segmented campaigns, Bond said.

For instance, a teenage girl who comes in for a prom open house may have a graduation party in the near future. She might pledge a sorority (an occasion for which many mothers send flowers to their daughters), fall in love, get married and have a baby, all within a few years of that party.

When you have a wedding consultation, get the email addresses for both bride and groom. “Chances are, the new husband is going to need flowers for future Valentine’s Days,” Bond said. And, as weddings typically add relatives to the family dynamics, you could also put your newlywed customers on a list for a “don’t forget your mother-in-law!” email in May, she suggested.

Carlson targets customers by **ZIP codes**. “When we did a ‘Free Flower Happy Hour’ at one shop, we made sure the email only went to customers in that geographic area,” she said.

Many email platforms will track not only who opened the message but also the time spent on links clicked. You can use that information to **send tailored messages based on shopping patterns**.

“Your success rate goes way up when you match your offerings to their preferences,” Conforti said.

For instance, if he sees a customer spent half an hour deliberating between a \$195 tropical design and a \$200 rose arrangement, Conforti assigns him or her to his “luxury items” list. Customers who click from one \$25 design to the next will receive emails promoting Beneva’s “best value” items.

Emails triggered by customers’ browsing history and past purchases average 70.5 higher open rates and 152 percent higher click-through rates than traditional bulk messages, according to Epsilon, a marketing consulting firm in Irving, Texas.

MAKE IT EASY TO TAKE ACTION

In Chicago, where many commuters ride the “L,” Carlson assumes a lot of her customers read her messages on the go. To make it easy to order while in transit, she **embeds everything with a link**: the product code, the price, the name of the design, the images. “They shouldn’t have to go to another window or pull out a piece of paper to write anything down,” she said. “They should be able to just tap through to get to the appropriate landing page.”

And it must **be mobile-optimized**: 65 percent of consumers read their email on a mobile device, according to Movable Ink, and a 2015 study by The Relevancy Group showed that 21 percent of respondents said they immediately delete messages that aren’t well formatted for their phones.

If your email platform doesn’t automatically optimize messages for mobile devices (most do — see sidebar), make sure they look good on tiny screens by adopting the adage **“less is more,”** Dulay said. Multiple calls to action, photographs, sidebars and links to your website or blog will distort your message and “confuse customers about what you want them to do,” he said.

Consumers like **short, direct sentences** that follow the “subject + verb + direct object” construction.

“It’s what newspapers do and it’s easy to read,” Dulay said. “Your paragraphs should only be one or two sentences long. Make the return key your friend.”

The optimal word length depends on your content, he said. If you’re sharing a really compelling story, people will keep scrolling. Generally speaking, though, 500 characters is a good target, Dulay said. “People are remarkably lazy and will quit reading if you ramble at all.”

And **don’t neglect the “little details”** that influence open rates: the “from” field, subject line and **pre-header** (the text that appears to the right of the subject line).

If you send an email from noreply@abcflowers.com, you’re subliminally saying, “we don’t want to talk to you.” A message from adam@abcflowers.com, on the other hand, reinforces that there’s a real live human ready and eager to help.

Your **subject line** is your first impression and arguably the trickiest piece to write. “They take a lot of experimentation,” said Dulay, who urges florists to try two different subject lines for every email to see what works best. To kick off your brainstorming session, here are a few tips :



ON TARGET Customers who click on high-end arrangements after opening a Beneva Flowers email get assigned to the shop’s “luxury shoppers” list.

- Keep it short (50 characters or less).
- Avoid the proven spam triggers, such as “salesy” words (“buy,” “free,” “order,” “discount,” “clearance”).
- Avoid gimmicks (“click here,” “not junk,” “you won’t believe your eyes”) and excessive exclamation points.
- Use personalization. (Most platforms can automate your subject line to include your recipient’s name.)
- Ask a question.
- Add an emoji.
- Tell a joke.

“A lot of brands mostly focus on the body of the email and the subject line, and forget about the pre-header,” Bond said. She observes numerous pre-header bloopers, such as omitting one, repeating the subject line verbatim, using the default, “to view this email in a browser, click here,” or, “worst of all, showing a bunch of code or a very long URL” (common on image-only messages).

A good pre-header “can supplement the subject line, and give the subscriber more reason to open the email,” she said. They are especially useful for brands that use very short or coy subject lines meant to pique interest without revealing the message’s content and are “also a great way for brands to show a little personality,” she said. (Remember hack no. 2?) Try a call to action, a personal message or an incentive (such as a coupon) to increase your open rates.

(See infographic, right, for more samples, and find more advice with detailed examples at safnow.org/moreonline).

TEST IT AND TRACK IT

There are dozens of variables, from subject lines to time of day sent, that impact open rates. “Figuring out what works best is a matter of trial and error,” Dulay said.

Professional marketers use a process called “A/B testing,” in which 50 percent of the email list receives one form of a message and the other half sees something slightly different. This function is standard on most email marketing platforms, Dulay added.

“Send some the message in the morning and the others in the afternoon or try two different subject lines,” he said. “You could even experiment with what you’re offering.”

ANATOMY OF AN EFFECTIVE EMAIL

Emails that boast the highest open rates and the most click throughs have stellar substance, but they don’t neglect style. Give due attention to the nuts and bolts of your emails, making each piece personal and precise.

SUBJECT LINE

Happy birthday, Amy!

Use the subject’s name

Are you ready to celebrate?

Ask a question

“FROM” EMAIL

From **katie@abcflowers.com**

use a name, never “noreply@” or “info@yourshopname”

PRE-HEADER

Treat yourself to some flowers! 🌸
No fete is complete without a bright, beautiful bouquet!

Use an emoji

BODY

Dear Amy,



We hear it’s your special day! To celebrate, your friends at ABC flowers would like to present you with a colorful, fragrant, calorie free treat. Stop by any day this week to receive a complimentary bouquet or enter the code BIRTHDAY and get a 30 percent discount on any online order.

- Short sentences
- Conversational
- Purpose: Drive store traffic

> STAY OUT OF THE TRASH



“There are dozens of variables, from subject lines to time of day sent, that impact open rates.”

Jason Dulay

What’s a more popular special: orchids or roses? “You’ll never know unless you A/B test it,” Dulay said.

Nearly every email platform provides statistics for each email you send. When evaluating the effectiveness of your campaign, these are the five key metrics you should study, Bond said:

- **Open rate:** the percentage of recipients who opened the email
- **Click-through rate:** the percentage of recipients who clicked on a link in your email
- **Unsubscribe rate:** the number of recipients who opt out of your emails
- **Conversion rate:** the number of purchases divided by the number of emails sent
- **Average order value (AOV):** the average dollar amount spent out of the people who made purchases

There is no standard “good” numbers for any of these, Bond said. “You’ll just want to track them and see how they change between emails,” looking for some correlation between subject line, or the timing of an offer, for example, and a higher (or lower) response rate.

And don’t hesitate to dig deeper than the numbers. With her weekly special emails, Carlson always checks the order sheets to read the customers’ card enclosure messages. “Happy Birthday!” indicates a sale Ashland Addison likely would have gotten, with or without the email. But when Carlson sees, “Just thought this would brighten your day” or “A beautiful bouquet for a beautiful girl,” she smiles. That suggests her email spurred a coveted “just because” purchase. 🌸

Katie Hendrick is a contributing writer and editor for the Society of American Florists. katiehendrick@gmail.com



EXPERT-TESTED EMAIL MARKETING PLATFORMS

There are a dizzying number of companies that provide email-marketing templates. Our sources shared some of the best, based on price point, simplicity and tools for customization. Among them:

MailChimp mailchimp.com

Key traits:

- Subscriber profiles that show a customer’s engagement and website activity
- Automated emails based on customer behavior and preferences
- Advanced analytics reports you can access on your computer or mobile device

Pricing: Clients with fewer than 2,000 subscribers can send up to 12,000 emails a month for free. For \$10 a month, gain access to extra features such as delivery by time zone and chat support.

Constant Contact constantcontact.com

Key traits:

- Mobile friendly templates
- Statistics on clicks, opens and forwards
- Unlimited emails no matter how many people are on your list

Pricing: \$20 to \$45 a month for a month for unlimited emails up to 500 subscribers; \$35 up to 2,500 subscribers; \$55 up to 5,000 subscribers.

iContact icontact.com

Key traits:

- Mobile friendly templates
- Easy-to-navigate user interface
- Tools to integrate email and social media marketing

Pricing: \$14 a month for unlimited emails up to 500 contacts; \$32 for up to 2,500 contacts; \$52 for up to 5,000 customers.

AWeber aweber.com

Key traits:

- Mobile friendly templates
- Seamless integration with WordPress, Facebook, PayPal and many other sites
- Live customer support available seven days a week

Pricing: \$19 to \$49 a month for unlimited emails up to 500 subscribers; \$29 for up to 2,500 subscribers; \$49 for up to 5,000 subscribers.

Robly robly.com

Key traits:

- Mobile friendly templates
- OpenGen, a retargeting tool that identifies who doesn’t engage with your emails and automatically switches tactics (subject lines, time of day sent, etc.) in subsequent emails
- Complimentary consultation with marketing and design experts once a year

Pricing: Robly offers multiple tiers of services. Its standard package starts at \$15 a month for clients with up to 2,500 subscribers. Its comparable professional package starts at \$29 a month.



For a comprehensive assessment of these and other providers, visit the

Email Marketing Services Review at email-marketing-service-review.toptenreviews.com.

THERE'S
A MYTH OUT
THERE THAT YOU
CAN'T DO IT ALL.



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THE POWER TO INTIMIDATE

Ram's 2.4L Tigershark[®] gas engine generates best-in-class 178 horsepower, and 174 LB-FT torque. Combine that muscle with an exclusive 9-speed transmission, and you get an unsurpassed standard 29 MPG HWY. It's a smarter and more efficient engine: It operates longer at lower RPMs, and the unique clutch technology results in smoother shifts and a smoother ride. Acceleration is also improved—0 to 30 takes 3.7 seconds.

CURB APPEAL

The 60/40-split rear doors are designed with deliveries in mind. The driver's-side door opens first, allowing you maximum access to your cargo and a clear path to the curb without the passenger rear-door obstruction seen on other vans.

RAMTRUCKS.COM/PROMASTERCITY

BEST-IN-CLASS
PAYLOAD
1,883 LB.

5-YEAR
100,000 MI.
POWERTRAIN LIMITED WARRANTY

BEST-IN-CLASS
CARGO ROOM
131.7 CU-FT.



1) Based on latest competitive information. Class is small commercial van segment when properly equipped. 2) Comparison of small commercial vans. EPA est. 21 city/29 hwy with 2.4L I-4 and 9-speed transmission. Actual results may vary. 3) See dealer for a copy of the powertrain limited warranty. Ram and Ram ProMaster are registered trademarks of FCA US LLC.

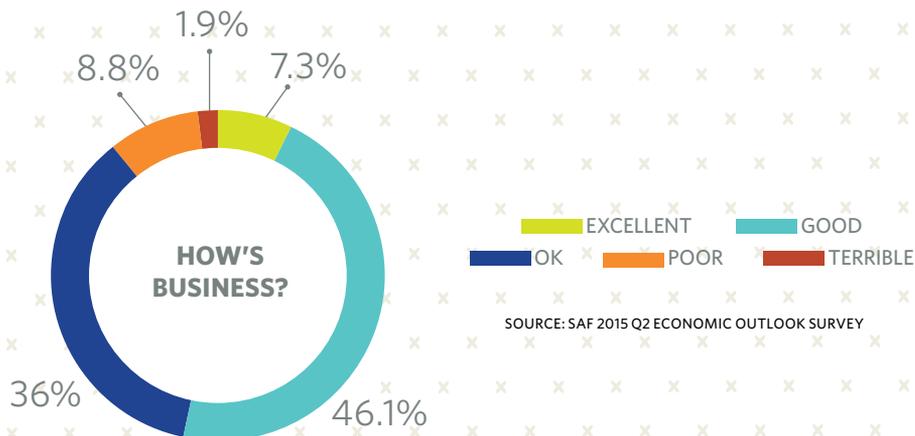


Halftime Report

BY KATIE HENDRICK

With six months down and six to go, this summer SAF members shared stories of mostly strong sales results for 2015.





> For many floral industry members, the first six months of 2015 seemed to bring welcome news: Record low gas prices. Booming local real estate markets. Consumers (finally) ready to spend some cash. In fact, at the end of the second quarter (June 30), when SAF queried members across segments about the state of business, 316 people responded, with 46 percent of them saying things were good — and another 7 percent classifying them as excellent.

Of course, not all survey respondents expressed the same positive sentiment: 36 percent said business was OK, and 9 percent said they'd call it poor. (Less than 3 percent identified the state of their business as terrible.)

Still, the mostly upbeat report could bode well for the rest of the year, and sales for the remaining major holidays. (Get those jingle bells ready; Christmas is just three months away.) This month, we'll take an in-depth look at some of the highlights of that survey.

Results Overview

The basic question driving the second-quarter survey — “So, how's business?” — generated different responses among industry segments.

For instance, 53 percent of **growers** classified business as good, 13 percent said it was excellent, 27 percent said it was OK and 7 percent said it was poor.

Wholesalers, suppliers and importers appear to be seeing even stronger results: 67 percent of these respondents said business was good and 11 percent called it excellent. Meanwhile, 22 percent said it was OK. (No respondents in this group said it was poor.)

About 45 percent of **retailers** said business was good and 37 percent said it was OK, while 7 percent termed it excellent. Nine percent said it was poor, and about 2 percent said it was terrible.

When comparing the second quarters of 2014 to the second quarter of 2015, 50 percent of all respondents said gross sales increased, 23 percent said they dropped and 24 percent said they stayed about the same. (About 3 percent said they weren't sure how the quarters compared.)

Among respondents who said 2015 second-quarter sales were lower than 2014 second-quarter returns, more than half (59 percent) said the drop was between 1 and 10 percent; about a quarter reported an 11 to 20 percent drop; 9 percent saw a falloff of 21 to 30 percent; and only 4 percent saw a steeper decline of 31 to 50 percent.

Among those who experienced higher second-quarter sales over the previous year, nearly three quarters (71 percent) saw a bump of 1 to 10 percent, less than a quarter (22 percent) saw gains of 11 to 20 percent, and 10 percent had increases higher than 21 percent.

> HALFTIME REPORT

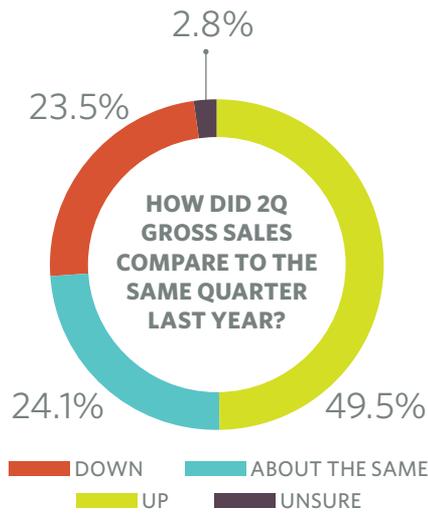
Feeling Good...

Overall, **48 percent of all respondents said they were optimistic** about sales expectations for the remainder of 2015 (13 percent said they were very optimistic) — a positive indicator that seems to echo the earlier sentiments by SAF Chairman Bob Williams III, AAF, PFCI, vice president-North American operations at Smithers-Oasis, who predicted a positive year for many in the industry during last year’s State of the Industry address with SAF CEO Peter Moran. About 32 percent of respondents said they were neutral or uncertain about sales projections for the remainder of the year. Only 7 percent of respondents were pessimistic, and less than 1 percent reported feeling very pessimistic.

Looking again at those numbers by segments, 50 percent of **growers** reported feeling optimistic and 50 percent were neutral or uncertain.

Among **wholesalers/suppliers/importers**, 75 percent characterized expectations as optimistic, and 25 percent said they were neutral or uncertain.

About 45 percent of **retailers** said they were optimistic, and another 13 percent said they were very optimistic. Thirty-four percent of that group said they were neutral or uncertain. Seven percent said they



SOURCE: SAF 2015 Q2 ECONOMIC OUTLOOK SURVEY

were pessimistic, and about 1 percent said they were very pessimistic.

... But Staying Cautious

Time to break out the victory dance? Not so fast.

In write-in responses, many respondents — from all segments — expressed **relatively cautious optimism**, noting continued concern over challenges such as competition from order gatherers,

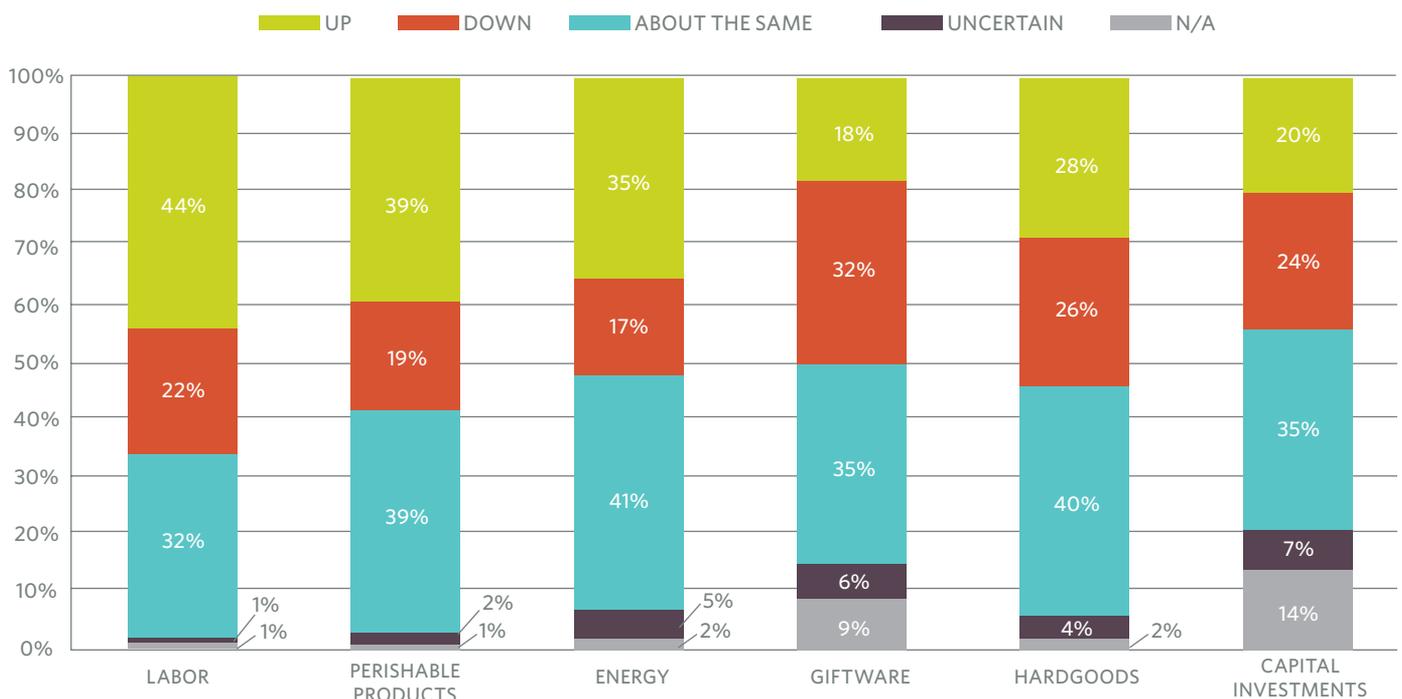
mass-market chains and supermarkets, along with the value of some wire orders; outside factors, including immigration reform, health care and energy costs; as well as perennial challenges, such as finding skilled or qualified workers, keeping costs in check and planning for the next generation of industry businesses.

“The economy is very volatile,” said one northwestern wholesaler. “Any number of insane acts could upset the apple cart, as can international events, like Greece’s bankruptcy or terrorist attacks. There’s no way to plan for these things.” (Indeed, at press time, investors in the U.S. were reacting to a dramatic stock market drop in mid-August — just the type of news that could rattle some consumers.)

Another respondent, a grower in the Northeast, saw an improvement over last year’s sales but is uncertain about how the rest of the year will pan out, due to national politics, particularly the upcoming presidential election. In response to the Affordable Care Act, he plans to reduce employee hours and only hire part-time workers.

Cost cutting led several respondents to profit gains over 2014. One Midwestern retailer, who described business as “excellent,” lowered his costs of

HOW WOULD YOU CHARACTERIZE YOUR SPENDING EXPECTATIONS IN THE FOLLOWING KEY AREAS IN 2015 COMPARED TO 2014 SPENDING?



SOURCE: SAF 2015 Q2 ECONOMIC OUTLOOK SURVEY

goods sold by buying containers in bulk (for a discount) and sourcing some flowers directly from farms. Several wholesalers eliminated positions and reduced benefits. One northeastern grower reduced his electric bill with LED lights.

Several retailers, all across the country, credited their uptick in business with sales training, which raised their average order value. One, in Virginia, spent the past few months nurturing relationships with her local funeral directors, and saw her sympathy business grow accordingly.

Despite a slight sales dip (1 to 10 percent) from Q2 2014, one Colorado retailer is confident she'll end the year on a high note. "Gas prices are down, real estate in our area is strong, and our florist business is up," she said. "The challenge has been the weather with our garden center. If it hadn't been a rainy spring, we would be doing very well."

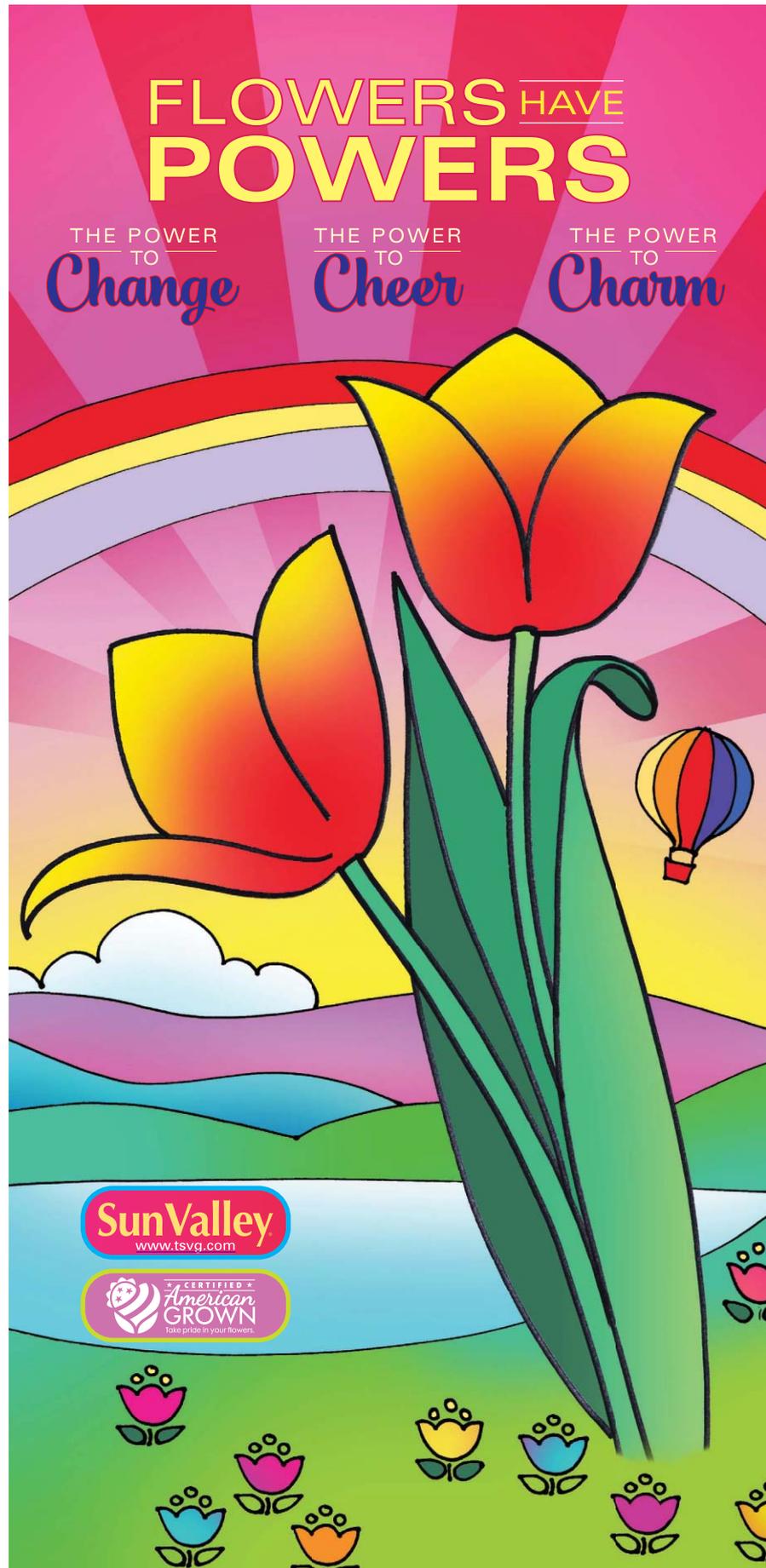
Year-End Team Building

In addition to finding out about past sales, the survey also asked respondents about their future plans, including staffing during the busy winter holiday season.

When asked about hiring plans for the next six months, 63 percent of respondents said they have **no plans to hire regular staff** (the question excluded seasonal and holiday help). Twenty-two percent said they're likely to add part-time workers only, and 10 percent said they expect to bring in new part- and full-time employees. Five percent were unsure of hiring plans, and 3 percent said they are hoping to bring in new full-time employees only.

In related results, 26 percent of respondents said they plan to **give pay raises/salary increases** in the next six months; 21 percent said they would likely **reduce hours** — but another 17 percent said they plan to add hours; 13 percent said they would not replace employees who leave; 5 percent said they would have **salary freezes**; about 6 percent said they would **add benefits** — while less than 1 percent said they would reduce them; and about 2 percent anticipate **layoffs** in the remainder of the year. 🌸

Katie Hendrick is a contributing writer and editor for the Society of American Florists. khendrick@safnow.org



Budgeting: Don't Sweat the Small Stuff

BY PAUL GOODMAN, CPA, PFCI

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.*



Q: I will admit it, I've never really done a formal budget for my business. It all seems so tedious. And futile. And where do I even begin?

> The word "budget" makes many people cringe, so you are not alone. But it is not pointless: A budget gives you a tangible reminder of what you're trying to accomplish, so you don't overspend. It can be tedious and complicated — but it doesn't have to be. In fact, it can be easy.

Most people envision a budget as being a large spreadsheet of numbers: You start with projected revenue, and then you look at every expense item to figure out how much you're going to spend for each month of the year. Now that IS a big task. But you can chip it down to something manageable by asking two questions: What's important? And what can I control?

Three numbers represent about 75 percent of expenses at a retail flower shop: payroll, cost of goods sold and facility expenses. Ideally, payroll will be 30 percent of sales for a single location shop and 35 percent for those with multiple locations. Depending on your product mix, COGS will run from 30 to 38 percent of sales. Facility expenses should be no more than 10 percent of sales.

All of your remaining expenses — advertising, computer maintenance, credit card fees, vehicle expenses, office supplies, telephone system, etc. — should only total 17 to 22 percent of sales.

So you don't have to do a full-blown budget that includes every paper clip and pencil you purchase. By focusing on only the large items, and those that you can control, you will have achieved 95 percent of the value of budgeting with a lot less work.

Let's look at what you can control. Once you've signed a lease, your rent and utility fees are pretty much fixed. Until you change locations or renegotiate your lease, facility expenses won't change much. Similarly, your computer (POS) costs and telephone expenses are set when you select your provider and options. Remember the warning the Grail Knight issued Indiana Jones in "The

Last Crusade": "He chose ... poorly." Picking an expensive provider won't literally turn you to dust (as in the movie), but it will erode your profit margin.

What you can manipulate: payroll and COGS. This is where creating a budget and sticking to it can have a significant impact on your bottom line. So stop worrying about all those other items.

Q: I'm ready to budget for those key, most critical items. Where do I begin?

Let's start with COGS. Unless you buy a lot of items that don't sell and just end up in inventory, the only purchases you have to monitor on a daily basis are fresh flowers and greens. This cost should not exceed 25 percent of sales.

If you've been in business a while, you can look back at your weekly fresh sales for the same month for past years, adjust for any sales increase or decrease you have experienced recently, and multiply by .25. That's your "do not exceed" budget for fresh purchases each week. Don't include weddings or events, since you plan them in advance and purchase separately for them. As long as your designers follow your pricing formulas and don't stuff extra flowers and greens, budgeting 25 percent of sales for fresh product will be adequate.

As for other goods: Don't overbuy for gifts or containers. Identify anything that is not moving — put it on sale, move it out and don't buy it again.

Payroll is a tougher one to budget for, because you don't buy employee time in small bunches like you do your fresh product. The trick is to realize that your sales will be very level for 10 to 11 months out of the year. The exceptions are holiday weeks. Set your permanent staff to handle your normal non-holiday levels of sales, and no more. Use part-time employees as much as you can. Your target is to keep your total payroll expenses, including payroll taxes and employee benefits, at 30 percent of total sales. This includes a salary for the owner/manager. If the owner/manager is not on the payroll, your budget target is 20 percent. (For larger shops over \$500,000 in sales, the

target is 23 percent if the owner/manager is not on the payroll.)

Advertising is a relatively small part of the budget, but I'll mention it here because it's one that can get out of hand quickly. The normal budget for advertising is 3 to 4 percent of total sales. If you want to be more aggressive, you can go to 5 percent, but remember that extra advertising will generally lower your profit. However, more-aggressive advertising could lead to faster sales growth. Allocate the amount you want to spend on advertising each month, and stick to it. Some florists save the bulk of their advertising for the holidays. Others spread it out evenly through the year. Experiment to see what is most effective for you.

Another often-ignored area in the budget: donations. As most florists know, it's easy to get swamped with requests for flower donations. Set a budget at the beginning of the year by month. Give donations only to good customers. Once you've reached your budget, use that as your excuse to turn down additional requests. Remember that most donations should be a part of your advertising and expensed appropriately.

That's it! Just set your budget on the most important and controllable items. A little work there will have a big impact on your bottom line. 🌿

Paul Goodman, CPA, PFCI, is founder of Floral Finance Business Services, based in Tulsa, Oklahoma; editor of Floral Finance and author of *The Profit-Minded Florist*.
plgoodman@aol.com



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Industry News

SAF ELECTS NEW LEADERS

> SAF members have elected nine members to positions on its Retailers, Wholesalers and Growers councils. New council members begin their terms at the close of SAF Amelia Island 2015, SAF's 131st Annual Convention, Sept. 9-12 in Amelia Island, Florida. SAF board elections will take place during the annual convention and via absentee ballot, and results will be announced on Sept. 12 at the association's annual business meeting during SAF Amelia Island 2015.

The newly elected SAF council members are as follows:

RETAILERS COUNCIL

Chair: Charles Ingram of Dr. Delphinium Designs & Events in Dallas

Robert Aykens, AAF, of Memorial Florists & Greenhouses, Inc., in Appleton, Wisconsin

Vince Butera, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, of Butera The Florist in York, Pennsylvania

Bridget Carlson, AAF, of Ashland Addison Florist Company in Chicago

Dana Cook, AAF, of Julia's Florist in Wilmington, North Carolina

Jessica Cosentino, AAF, of Cosentino's Florist in Auburn, New York

Cheryl Denham of Arizona Family Florist in Phoenix, Arizona

Chad Freytag of Freytag's Florist in Austin, Texas

Kristen Gainan-Graves of Gainan's Floral & Greenhouses in Billings, Montana

Tim Galea of Norton's Flowers & Gifts in Ypsilanti, Michigan

Manny Gonzales of Tiger Lily Florist in Charleston, South Carolina

Skip Paal, AAF, of the Rutland Beard Floral Group in Catonsville, Maryland

Brian Wheat, AAF, PFCI, of Lafayette Florist, Gift Shop & Garden Center in Lafayette, Colorado

WHOLESALE COUNCIL

Chair: Paul Fowle of Transflora/DV Flora in Doral, Florida

Bradley Beck, AAF, of Design Master color tool Inc. in Boulder, Colorado

Nick Fronduto of Jacobson Floral Supply Inc. in Boston

David Gaul, AAF, of DWF Wholesale Florist in Denver

Gustavo Gilchrist of Kennicott Brothers in Chicago

Bob Hamacher of Roses & More, Inc., in Spokane Valley, Washington

Bill LaFever, PFCI, of the Bill Doran Company in Rockford, Illinois

Dave Legge of DWF Wholesale Florist in Denver

Robert Otsuka of the San Francisco Flower Mart in San Francisco

Ben Powell of Mayesh Wholesale Florist in Doral, Florida

Laura D. Shinall of Syndicate Sales Inc. in Charleston, South Carolina

Jacque Sir Louis of Smithers-Oasis - North American Operations in Kent, Ohio

Gayle Smith of Chrysal USA in Portland, Oregon

Ken Wilkins of Delaware Valley Floral Group in Sewell, New Jersey

GROWERS COUNCIL

Chair: Ben Dobbe of Holland America Flowers LLC in Arroyo Grande, California

Andrew Bishop, Ph.D., of Green Leaf Plants (Aris Horticulture, Inc.) in Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Patrick Busch of Len Busch Roses in Plymouth, Minnesota

Doug Cole of D.S. Cole Growers Inc. in Loudon, New Hampshire

Ray Greenstreet of Greenstreet Growers in Tracys Landing, Maryland

Stephen Kennicott of Kennicott Kuts LLC in Waterford, Wisconsin

Michael Klopmeier of Darwin Perennials in West Chicago, Illinois

Janet Louie of Green Valley Floral in Salinas, California

Jeff Mast of Banner Greenhouses in Nebo, North Carolina

Michael Mooney of Dramm & Echter in Encinitas, California

Steve Register of Flores Ixtapan S de RL de CV, Tenango-Ixtapan de la Sal, in Villa Guerrero, Mexico

Dave Self of Wyld West Annuals Inc. in Loxahatchee, Florida

Carlos Manuel Uribe, AAF, of Flores El Capiro S.A., in Medellin, Colombia S.A.

— **Jenny Scala**

Retailers Council



Kaitlin Radebaugh
Radebaugh Florist & Greenhouses
Towson, Maryland



Michael Pugh
Pugh's Flowers
Memphis, Tennessee



Rachael Martin
Ballard Blossom Inc.
Seattle



Oscar Fernandez
Equiflor/Rio Roses
Miami



Lee Sorensen
Design Master color tool Inc.
Boulder, Colorado



Mark Yelanich
Metrolina Greenhouses
Huntersville, North Carolina



Jamie Kitz
Sakata Seed Salinas,
California



Robert Kitayama
Kitayama Brothers Inc.
Watsonville, California



Diana Roy
Resendiz Brothers Protea Growers LLC
Fallbrook, California

Wholesalers Council

Growers Council

Industry News

CALIFORNIA GROWERS, SHIPPERS HOST BUYERS AT FUN 'N SUN

> Leaders of CalFlowers (the California Association of Flower Growers and Shippers) attribute a 10 percent increase in attendance at the Fun 'N Sun convention, held July 29- Aug. 1, 2015, in Monterey, California, to an improved economy and a growing appreciation for the state's product. This year's event had 510 attendees from 35 different states, plus Holland and Canada.

"We believe the general uptick in the economy and growth of the floral business in general have created additional interest in our event and in the business" since the previous Fun 'N Sun event in 2013, said Michael LoBue, CEO, CalFlowers.



UPTICK The CalFlowers trade fair enjoyed a 10 percent increase in booths; exhibitors included growers, greenhouse suppliers, logistics and other services

LoBue, who was hired by the CalFlowers board in the fall of 2015, said one of the highlights of the event that got "very high marks" from attendees was a full-day tour to five different farms in the region: California Pajarosa, CallaCo, CamFlor Inc., Green Valley Floral and Kitayama Brothers. The event also featured a dinner party at the Monterey Bay Aquarium, five different educational sessions, and an all-day Flower Fair, featuring California-grown flowers and greens as well as logistics, technology and greenhouse suppliers.

About 15 percent of attendees were from the retail segment — the highest number from the retail segment to attend to date. "Our members have actively welcomed more and more kinds of attendees, and we are encouraging membership in categories beyond our more traditional growers and shippers — retail included," Lobue said. "Our mantra is more flowers for all, and the more people get to see them, experience them and learn about them, the better!" 🌿

ECUADOREAN FLOWER FARMERS EYE VOLCANO

> A volcano that last erupted in 1877 has the attention of Ecuadorean flower growers.

Cotopaxi, located about 30 miles southeast of Quito, "initiated an eruptive process" in mid-August, said Alejandro Martinez, executive president of Expoflores, the nation's association of flower growers. The association is concerned, but emphasized that Cotopaxi's history suggests the volcano won't have the same catastrophic effects as Mount Vesuvius, Mount St. Helen's or anything depicted "in Hollywood."

"Tungurahua Volcano, located south of Cotopaxi, has similar characteristics and has been erupting for the last nine years," Martinez said. "There are a few farms close to Tungurahua that have operated continuously throughout the eruptive process."

Nonetheless, as a precautionary measure Expoflores issued an evacuation order Friday, Aug. 14, for farms located southwest of the volcano. Employees were allowed to return Saturday afternoon, said Dean Rule of International Rose Breeders in Quito.

For the vast majority of farms, "the only direct effect would be from ash," Rule said. The few farms located near rivers southwest of Cotopaxi could experience mudslides as the result of melting glaciers, he added.

Expoflores is keeping growers informed with emails, a live chat line through [WhatsApp.com](https://www.whatsapp.com) and mass text messages. The association website also includes a detailed contingency plan farmers can download at expoflores.com.

As of press time, the Quito airport was functionally normally and farms were going about "business as usual," Rule said. 🌿

— Katie Hendrick



GLAM CRED Julee Ireland, host of a segment called "It's a Glam Thing" on Sonoran Living, a lifestyle show on Phoenix's ABC affiliate, featured designs by Lux, the bridal brand of Arizona Family Florist, calling the shop the state's "premier wedding florist."

SAF MEMBERS SNAG PRIME PRESS

> LUX, the bridal branch of Phoenix's **Arizona Family Florist**, which won Floral Management's Marketer of the Year Award in 2012, received a big nod in the local media in August.

Julee Ireland, host of a segment called "It's a Glam Thing" on "Sonoran Living," a lifestyle show on Phoenix's ABC affiliate, featured a few wedding pieces by LUX and called the company "the premier wedding florist in Arizona." Ireland told viewers that Arizona brides who want their weddings to have "chic, celebrity style" should incorporate rich colors (specifically, "Marsala," the Pantone 2015 Color of the Year), and interesting textures (succulents, dahlias, etc.) — and they better go to LUX to get it.

Farbod Shoraka, David Daneshgar and Gregg Weisstein, three best friends behind the floral industry's latest floral network startup, **BloomNation**, got an opportunity to share their origin story and discuss their business plan recently with Kai Ryssdal, host of Marketplace. Broadcast on nearly 800 public radio stations nationwide, with an estimated 12 million listeners, it is the most widely broadcast program on business and the economy in the country.

BloomNation, founded in 2011, bills itself as an online platform in the model of Etsy, connecting florists and consumers without traditional gatekeepers, including wire services. It's been profiled in Fast Company, Time magazine and Floral Management. 🌿

Plugged In BY RENATO CRUZ SOGUECO

WHY ADWORDS ADDS UP

Part one in a two-part series

> Google AdWords and similar programs from other search engines have become a critical method of advertising. But many florists find it mysterious and intimidating and never give it a try.

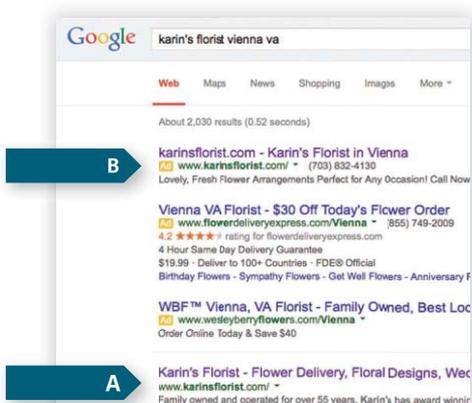
Consequently, competitors can pay as little as a dollar per click for your shop name, so their ads appear above and to the right of your organic listing, siphoning off orders that should be yours.

At SAF Amelia Island 2015, Ben Polk, a new business account executive at Google, will demystify AdWords and detail how to get it up and running at your shop. Copanelist Maris Angolia, of Karin's Florist in Vienna, Virginia, will offer anecdotes about how she is using AdWords to grow and protect her business.

For this month's column, we asked Angolia to share a few thoughts about the importance of AdWords.

Renato Sogueco: You tried AdWords in 2012. What motivated you then to start a campaign, and why did you end the effort?

Maris Angolia: Yellow pages were dying off, and we noticed the growing numbers of visitors (and orders) being taken on our website. We felt compelled to give AdWords a try to capture more online sales. However, we stopped because we didn't know how to track and attach the campaigns we were running to website sales.



BACK ON TOP Good SEO practices have placed Karin's florist at the top of organic searches (A), but it wasn't until the shop invested in AdWords that it landed the very top search result (B).

RS: What was the spark to give AdWords a second try? And why do you think it will work this time?

MA: I did a search for my business and saw ads from competitors right above my own organic listing. Even though I had the top organic listing, I wanted to be the top florist on that entire page.

I also discovered Google now supports your campaign by helping you set up the account, as well as the codes on your website, to be sure you can track any campaign and check in to see whether it's working. This is what was missing the first time. You actually speak with real people who guide you step by step.

This time around we scrutinized all the possible keywords customers would use, which are now strategically placed in our ads and throughout our website. Now that we're familiar with the AdWords tools, we can see what works and what doesn't and spend our dollars wisely.

RS: What are some actions you need to take prior to launching an AdWords campaign?

MA: Get your website programmer or vendor involved from the very beginning. Make sure all your pages have the right title and meta description tags that clearly define and describe what you're selling on those pages.

Consider your product names and descriptions. Although "lavender parfait" means something to us, customers would probably never type these terms as keywords to look for an arrangement. So now we've been changing our descriptions to include flower names and colors — keywords customers actually use.

RS: Did you have to develop new content on your website for your AdWords campaign?

MA: We categorized our business into three main parts: everyday, which includes get well, birthday, anniversary and new baby; wedding and events; and our funeral business. For each category, we built special landing pages that we place in our AdWords ads. Google advised us that



when an ad directs users to pages with relevant information, the ad is more likely to be shown. So if you say you do funeral work, that landing page needs to talk about all your sympathy arrangements and services. We took the extra step of mentioning all the funeral homes in our city.

RS: Outside the website work, what else did you do to optimize your search rankings?

MA: We made sure all our content is linked to our social media, and vice versa. We created a new video and also started a blog. We read in Floral Management that Google indexes your website more if you change it often. A blog is a great way to add content on a regular basis.

We also read that if your website is not mobile responsive, (ours was not at the time) Google will stop listing you in mobile searches. Since we couldn't switch to a mobile-responsive website overnight, we decided to create a mobile-ready version with a service called bMobilized. Our long-term strategy is to still develop a mobile-responsive website, but at least Google will recognize we are mobile friendly and include us in those mobile search results.

Check out next month's Plugged In for Google exec Ben Polk's best practices in launching and running an AdWords campaign.

Renato Sogueco is SAF's chief information officer, the liaison to the SAF Technology Committee and a regular contributor to Floral Management.



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Business of Design

SOOTHING SELECTIONS

> With hard goods, versatility means everything to your bottom line. A container that plays well with many types and colors of flowers won't end up collecting dust in your storage room. Smart shoppers have turned to "greige," the most popular color of 2015 weddings (see p. 18).

"It is the perfect neutral that provides endless combinations for virtually any theme or style," said Callie DeWolf, AIFD, an instructor with the Floral Design Institute in Portland, Oregon. Unlike pure white or black, which can be a little "harsh," greige has a soft, calming effect, she said. To play up this quality, DeWolf likes to pair greige with other neutral colors, such as white and cream. Here she shares four simple designs sure to help your customers find their inner Zen. 🌿

Find complete recipes at safnow.org/moreonline.

Katie Hendrick
katiehendrick@gmail.com



ON THE BALL Corporate clients will appreciate this contemporary design. "It's perfect for a desk or conference table," DeWolf said. "The clean lines and colors have a meditative quality, sure to sooth the soul." Also consider piece this for a recipient recovering in the hospital. Labor time: 10 minutes. Wholesale costs: \$15. Retail price: \$48.



RUSTIC ELEGANCE "The tension between textures gives 'greige' an interesting twist," DeWolf said, adding that the style has a place both in the office and a beachside wedding. Labor time: 10 minutes. Wholesale costs: \$15. Retail price: \$48.



UNDERSTATED SOPHISTICATION "Customers today, particularly brides, seem to want it all," DeWolf said. "This is a simple and beautiful answer to nearly any request." The cement block and garden roses balance out each other, for a design that is neither too rustic nor too feminine. Crystals add subtle bling for a modern touch. Labor time: 10-15 minutes. Wholesale costs: \$25. Retail price: \$80.



OLD WORLD OPULENCE Luxurious flowers (garden roses, hydrangeas, phalaenopsis orchids) turn this urn into a show stopping centerpiece, perfect for a wedding, gala, or any client eager to make a grand gesture, DeWolf said. Labor time: 20 minutes. Wholesale costs: \$100. Retail price: \$400.

PHOTOS BY JEFF DAY OF OLD TOWN FLORIST IN PORTLAND, OREGON



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CHIC SCENTS OF THE SEASON



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STICK IT TO 'EM

Square, apothecary matches featuring a strike-on-the bottle design makes even the act of lighting a candle feel luxurious. Each bottle contains wooden matchsticks with colorful tips. These matches are safe from water splashes and pretty enough to showcase on a table. (215) 978-6240 > SkeemDesign.com



ALLURING ALE

Forget that stale smell you've experienced in dive bars and frat house basements. Swag Brewery's craft beer-inspired candles deliver a rich aroma to any dwelling. These 8-ounce candles are made with hand-poured soy wax and come in three scents: Vanilla Porter, Apricot Wheat and Hoppy IPA. Light one in your store and see how many customers you'll intoxicate. (844) 355-SWAG > swagbrewery.com



GREAT GLASS

Swan Creek Candle Co.'s new collection features chic gilded glass, available in a variety of rich harvest and holiday colors, as well as soft pastels (pictured). The clean burning, lead-free, fragrant soybean wax candles come in 14-ounce and 24-ounce sizes. > SwanCreekWholesale.com



HEAVENLY HOSTESS GIFT

What better way to thank a friend for having you over for dinner or the weekend than with a fragrant bouquet of flowers — with a perfumed candle to match? This candle from Voluspa, a coconut wax concoction of amaranth and jasmine, is the ultimate in olfactory indulgence. > VoluSpa.com



SIMPLY SCENT-SATIONAL

Lavender essential oils dance with a Fir needle soy base for a pleasantly surprising scent to usher in the holiday season. Encased in a galvanized pail and accented with a wooden wick, the candle has a rustic aesthetic, perfect for those customers who don't want an extra dose of glitter in their Yuletide décor. (401) 789-0645 > BedRockTreeFarm.com



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14. 1-Day Profit Blast
15. Retail Growth Solutions
16. Annual Convention

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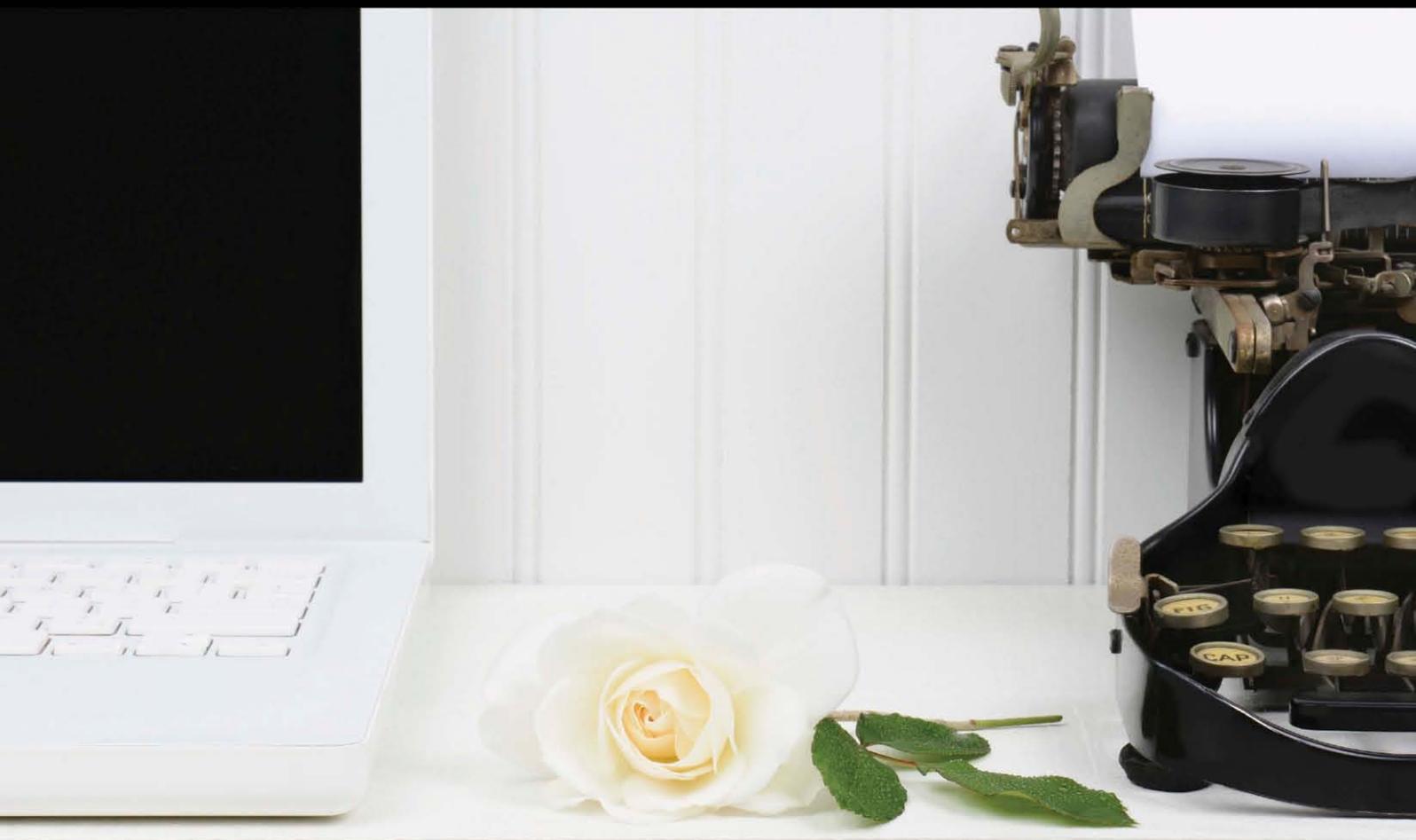
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Care and Handling



THAT'S A LOTTA FLOWERS A small but mighty team of volunteers has only a few days to stage more than two hundred entries for SAF's Outstanding Varieties competition.

HOW THE SHOW GOES ON

> There are many great reasons to attend the annual SAF convention, but my favorite reason is the Outstanding Varieties competition. Where else can you attend the equivalent of the Academy Awards for flowers?

Since the early '90s, I've participated in the competition by heading up the processing, helping to ensure each variety looks its best during an action-packed three-day prep period and then throughout the competition itself.

How do the 200-plus entries get hydrated, processed, vased and arranged for judging? I'm glad you asked. Because the "secrets" to a successful Outstanding Varieties competition — one with knock-your-socks-off flowers and plants — are also secrets you can apply right away in your shop.

Prep the Space

Before the two- to three-person volunteer crew arrives, SAF staff starts the room prep (remember, we're guests at a high-end hotel). They set up water, connect the injector and position the flower food jug so we don't have to tromp through the busy hotel kitchen. They set the thermostat as low as the hotel will allow (about 60 F).

Take-home tip: A clean, organized workspace sets the tone in your shop and helps keep flowers and plants healthy. Task junior staff members with setup jobs each morning to get your design room off to a good start.

Create a System

Because Outstanding Varieties is a competition event, we use standard-size vases filled with one of three Chrysal solutions allowed: Chrysal Bulb T-bags for lily, alstroemeria, iris and tulip vases; Professional Gerbera pills for gerbera; and Professional 2 holding solution for everything else. (Comparable products: Floralife's Bulb 100 and, for gerbera, PRG 100; holding solutions include Floralife 200 and Syndicate Sales' AquaHold.)

As we prep the flowers, we fill five-gallon processing buckets with Professional 2 so growers can hydrate dry-packed products a few hours (or overnight) before setting up vases. When I arrive on Sunday (T-minus two days before the competition begins), I start filling vases and checking pH levels to ensure all systems are a go, and usually I bump into growers opening their boxes to hydrate their entries.

Take-home tip: Keep a clearly labeled checklist of solutions and a dosage chart in the design room. Remember that even your most seasoned team members can benefit from a regular refresher on updates in care and handling best practices.

Adapt and Share Methods

Things start rocking on the Monday of convention week. The volunteers kick into action early, unloading carts of flower boxes, checking in entries and unpacking boxes. For the past 10 years or so, the core processing team has consisted of the same five people, and we've

developed efficient methods to speed up the setup process — an important detail, considering growers often send in as many as 200 stems of each entry so we can cherry-pick the best 24 for judging.

Take-home tip: Take advantage of the strengths of your team members and work within the constraints of your space. For example, our volunteer team flattens and stacks boxes as we go. By doing so, we avoid a huge cardboard mess that blocks access to buckets and requires time to clear out and crush at the end of the day when everyone is tired and ready to quit.

Use the Right Tools

Box cutters are more efficient than knives or scissors when cutting plastic packing straps: You can dig into the side of the box at a 45 degree angle and cut straps with a firm upward hand jerk rather than sawing straps open with a knife or cutting them apart with scissors. The same action cuts open inner straps too.

Take-home tip: Make sure your design team is using the proper tools and is cleaning and storing those tools correctly each and every day.

Handling the smorgasbord of gorgeous blooms during OV setup is a lot of work, but it is also a treat as we ooh and ahhh over the entries and try to guess which ones will earn blue ribbons. 🌸

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

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