



*lust
gluttony
greed*

THE DEADLY SINS OF website design

Don't let these common mistakes kill your conversion rates.

BY: BRANDON KIRKLAND AND RENATO SOGUECO

*wrath
sloth, envy
pride*



Right after Mother's Day 2013, when most of the industry was still in the post-holiday fog of orders delivered, crises averted and coolers cleaned out, Nikki Lemler of Welke's House of Roses in Milwaukee went online to find out everything she could about her e-commerce holiday sales. One number immediately popped: For Mother's Day week, her conversion rate for online sales (the percentage of customers who went from browsers to purchasers) was nearly 10 percent. The number dwarfed her average non-holiday rate (4 or 5 percent) and it presented a signal of good news to come. Lemler soon realized that her online sales for the week of Mother's Day 2013 were higher than her online sales for the entire month of May in 2012. That's when Lemler knew, without a doubt, that her decision in 2012 to invest in her online presence — giving it better mobile device compatibility, more streamlined checkout processes, enhanced organization of products and a host of other perks — had paid off. More customers were getting to her site, finding what they wanted and (glory, hallelujah!) placing an order.

"It's all about convenience these days," said Lemler, who launched Welke's new site in December 2012. "With our new site, the flow is better, transactions are faster and we have more customer loyalty."

Lemler, a fifth-generation florist, enjoys tinkering with new technology, but she's had to train herself to be vigilant about tracking, checking and tweaking her family business' online presence. She now spends time every week thinking about how to get customers to the site — and even more time working to seal the deal once they've arrived. That's not something her family was doing a generation ago — or even several years ago.

Lemler's story may sound a little like yours. As a florist, your biggest challenge when it comes to e-commerce is to stop thinking like a florist. Running a successful website requires a different mindset than running a successful brick and mortar business. Customer expectations are different online, and the entire transaction process has to be tailored to meet and exceed those expectations. You must look at your website as a unique, distinct, money-making entity.

Once you accept this, the next step is to focus on what is undoubtedly a website's sole objective — and the number that had Lemler so excited in May: converting visits into sales. Conversion rate is the most important measurement to consider when running your online business. The retail industry average is 3 percent, meaning three of every 100 visitors to your site buys something.

So what affects conversion online? Two variables: user experience (UX) and user interface (UI). Unfortunately, florists are guilty of committing a variety of website sins that greatly erode both UX and UI, thus killing the sale. With the incredible opportunity e-commerce has to offer, the first step is acknowledging that you may be committing one or more of the following deadly sins of website design. The second step is taking the right steps to absolve them.



ON MESSAGE. The double banners at Richardson's Flowers in Medford, N.J. speak to the shop's high number of birthday orders. Remember, you're catering to the laziness of human nature; online, you don't want people to think. You want them to react. Underlining a key message can help you in your conversion efforts.

for pink roses, we can put up a banner — we can make them ourselves — send out an email and voila," she said, "250 stems have moved."

The technologies used to create animation and movement are also problematic. Javascript and Adobe's Flash have been mainstays for Web developers for years. They provide an easy way to add these cool tricks that standard HTML code couldn't deliver; however, with the advent of smartphones and tablets, these technologies pose a challenge. Apple iOS, the operating system that powers the iPod Touch, iPhone and iPad, as well as newer Google Android devices, doesn't run Flash.

In other words, if you are using Flash on your website, mobile clients can't see all of your images. That's a big deal because mobile devices are due to overtake traditional desktops in Web browsing by this year, according to Gartner Research. (Read more on how to make a website more responsive, in the February 2013 Plugged In, safnow.org/floralmanagement).

So how to do you get "sexy" back in your online efforts, without losing customers in the process? Consider using HTML5 — the latest generation of Web code that allows animation and video — in a sexy blog portfolio website that touts your artistry to wedding or event customers.

Small text is another conversion killer. When a customer comes to the site and she needs to squint just to see the "anniversary flowers" menu item, or when a customer can't read your website on his phone, you may as well have shut the door on a customer with money in hand, ready to spend.

Finally, black is definitely sexy — but not for e-commerce. How many of the top 100 e-commerce websites in the world have a black background? Zero. There's a reason and it's because those 100 sites think profit over pretty. White (or light) is right.

Lust

GUILTY Moving banners with little purpose, artsy photos, small fonts, animation, black backgrounds.

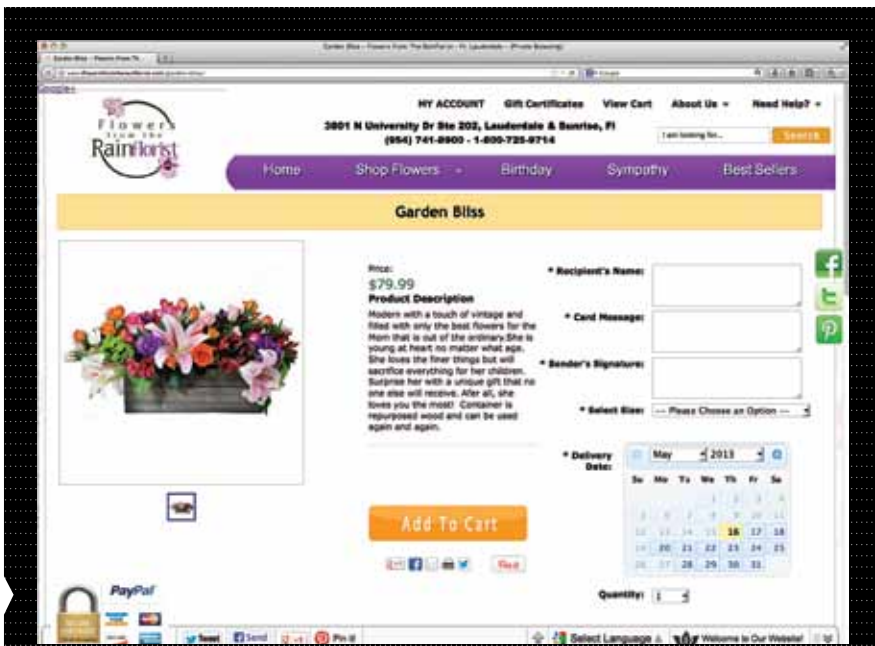
ABSOLVE YOURSELF
Use one banner, and update it monthly. Include a call to action. Make the background light and clean.

> We are an industry that produces stunningly sexy and gorgeous products that trigger intense, emotional responses from our customers. Many floral websites are designed to reflect this ideology. If two-dozen lush roses make a girlfriend swoon, won't tons of photos and dynamic banners make her boyfriend buy? Sexy may sell in real life, but trying too hard on your website can make you look desperate.

The most common mistake florists make when they try to sexy-up a website is employing movement or animation (think: a sliding banner at the top of a page or a featured call to action). You may think the movement is catchy and cool but it's actually distracting customers and potentially disrupting sales.

Usability tests from the Nielsen Norman Group earlier this year confirmed moving banners and similar features are actually tuned out by users; the Group went so far as to call them "user repelling." When you deploy all of that movement, you risk putting clients through stimulus overload, and users will probably grow impatient as they wait for the next banner to slide over. If the next slide disappoints (e.g. a customer came to your site for a July 4 special but the next banner is all about your wedding work), you can almost guarantee the customer will hit the back button. You only have about 8 seconds to capture those eyeballs, according to Statistic Brain. It's better to have one, static banner with a direct call to action that you update monthly.

Even during slow months, such as August, you can test out new ideas (20 percent discounts or free delivery offers) and drive sales during non-holiday times. That's part of Sher Tannozzini's strategy at Flowers from the Rainforest in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. Tannozzini said the ability to update banners monthly has been a boon to business. "If we (want to run) a special



WORD PLAY. Sher Tannozzini of Flowers From The Rainforest in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. spends a great deal of time on her product descriptions, so that she can steer online customers to the right choice, just as surely as a “live” salesperson could.

“I look at the image, try to think about what would make me want to buy it and go from there,” she said. “If the design is fragrant, I describe the fragrance. If it is a trendy arrangement, we try to suggest it for specific age groups. This part takes a little time, because you want to make sense.”

Greed

GUILTY Offering only high-priced designs. Asking for too much information. Holding customers captive too long.

ABSOLVE YOURSELF Offer budget options and couponing; get email addresses only.

➤ Of course you want every penny you can get from the online customer. Greed is good in that sense, but it leads some florists to use only high- to mid-priced products on their site. Reconsider this position, as lots of customers are interested in under \$40 or under \$30 options *today* — a birthday present for a sister, for example — who will readily spend more for Mother’s Day. Unless you lure these customers in when they’re on your site, you’ll never have their email address to reach them for those higher-spending times. Florists need to think about the customer lifetime value — all the potential dollars from an existing customer over his or her lifetime — and strive to grow it in any way they can.

Also, stick with tried and true methods: Specials and coupons work for most brick and mortars, so don’t be afraid to try out the same devices with the virtual crowd (buy one get one free, use this coupon and take 10 percent off, etc.).

We also want to avoid being too greedy about the information we gather. One example of this is forcing customers to create an account before they order. Would you rather have the sale or the information? At checkout, you’ll be capturing the most vital piece of information anyway: an email address. Requiring customers

Gluttony

GUILTY Too many product categories, superfluous content.

ABSOLVE YOURSELF Simplify.

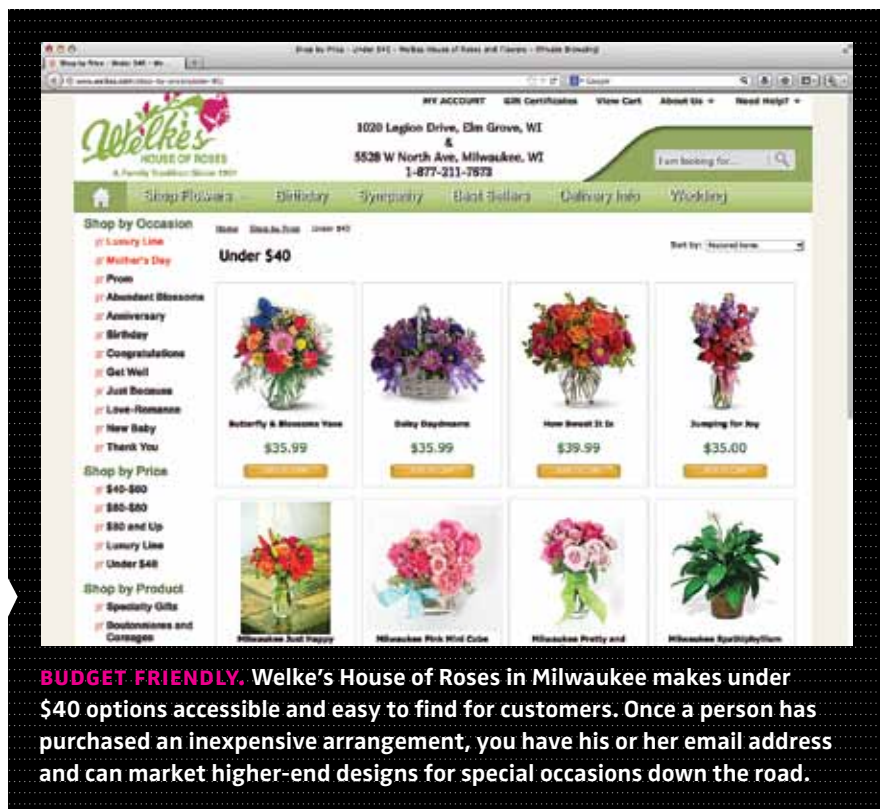
➤ More is not better with e-commerce. Over the years, you may have expanded your business to satisfy every human emotional state with every complementary floral product category: birthday, anniversary, get well, graduation, sympathy, prom and so on. The result: category sprawl.

Google Analytics or another Web tracking program will tell you that people spend only about 60 seconds on a site before they leave or convert their browsing time into a sale. Time is of the essence for the typical online shopper, so if you force visitors to find the perfect floral gift buried in a submenu, you’re killing your sales.

Consider simplifying the product mix. More products do not equal more sales. Online customers would rather look through, say, 100 nice product images than 500. In addition, consider eliminating any “fluff” catalog

pages (videos and personal photos). Customers are at your site for one reason: to buy, not look at the shop cat’s photos. So leave out the extra fat cat and be lean on your focus to drive the customer down the sales funnel. At Flowers from the Rainforest, Tannozzini separates categories neatly, with an eye toward consumer-browsing habits. “We want to make it easier for the consumer to make the proper decision,” she said. For that reason, the shop has straightforward categories (sorted by occasion and product, with a special category for sympathy) and detailed descriptions that help customers pinpoint their needs.

If you’re going to be gluttonous about anything, it should be those product descriptions. Remember, online customers don’t have the luxury to see, touch or smell the actual bouquet. Be very descriptive: Tell them what’s in that centerpiece and recommend ideal settings and occasions where that novelty vase design would be the perfect gift. Provide as much information as you can, and customers will click to buy because they are more confident in the purchase. Tannozzini has spent a great deal of time in this area, she said.



BUDGET FRIENDLY. Welke's House of Roses in Milwaukee makes under \$40 options accessible and easy to find for customers. Once a person has purchased an inexpensive arrangement, you have his or her email address and can market higher-end designs for special occasions down the road.

on a serious time crunch (or worse, on a mobile phone) to create an account is an obstacle and a conversion killer.

Related to this is having a long checkout process. A good way to test if your checkout process is effective is to review your analytics to see how many people abandon the purchase at checkout. You want to make it easy for customers to input the credit card and be done with the order. Any step in between selection and that goal are potential killers of conversion.

At Welke's House of Roses, Lemler makes use of her site's abandoned cart function almost every week. When a customer stops short of completing a sale, Lemler receives a notification; from there, she takes the transaction offline and personally follows up with a phone call to see why the customer changed his or her mind. Many times, it was simply a case of the customer becoming distracted, and Lemler can often close the sale on the phone. Happy customer. Happy florist.

Remember, keep the checkout to one page where customers can review the order and enter billing and shipping. Another page confirms the order before they click the submit button.

Wrath

GUILTY Underserving online customers. Making customers have to ask whether you are local and if the flowers got delivered.

ABSOLVE YOURSELF Treat online customers as you would in-store ones. Bend over backwards to earn their trust.

> An online customer's wrath can be more potent than that of the local customer, a fact that's given birth to one of the most important best practices in e-commerce: Treat your online customer as you would treat your local one. Treating online customers with less TLC is a natural impulse — out of sight, out of mind — so a florist may be more likely to give a local customer a refund or replacement than they would an online customer.

But think of the consequences. When customers come into your shop and don't like what they see (or the service they get), they know it's going to take 30 minutes to find and drive to the other shop to place the order. Online, a competitor is a few keystrokes away. In addition, a dissatisfied online customer

may feel the only recourse is to pen a scathing review of your business. Of course, any customer can do that — but your online buyers, already online in the heat of the moment, are primed to do it.

And don't forget to think in terms of the customer's lifetime value — you have to work harder to earn the trust of the online buyer. Local customers are easier to connect with, because you have the advantage of the face-to-face interaction. Online, it's not so easy, so you have to bend over backwards (virtually) to win them over. And that applies not only to how you resolve a problem with them but also how you communicate with them in general. Too many websites provide just a generic email — info@someretailer.com — as the lone way to contact the business. Because they can't just walk back into the shop, you need to make it easy for them to contact you and clearly segment the types of requests for them with dedicated emails for sales and delivery. Post a FAQ page that addresses typical concerns, including exchange policies. And by all means, have the phone number — and the fact that you are a local, hometown florist — at the top of every page.

Finally, be mindful of the online customer's time — and do what you can to save it. Tannozzini offers delivery confirmation with every order, so the customer doesn't have to call and ask about it. "Delivery confirmations are a necessity in this day and age," she said, "especially with corporate accounts."

Resources in Absolution

Ready to absolve yourself of the sloth, greed, pride or other "sins" you may be committing online? SAF can guide you along that path. Visit safnow.org/moreonline for a list of online resources for everything from taking photos online, to making your site responsive and much more.



ABANDON CART! An automated email sent to customers who abandon their shopping cart helped recapture \$900 in otherwise lost business for one florist, as shown in this report. Nikki Lemler of Welke's House of Roses in Milwaukee receives notifications when a customer abandons a purchase. She (or a staff member) will then follow-up with a phone call and usually close the sale.

In addition, a robust search feature at the top of each page, including mobile versions, makes it easy for the customer to find a product by simply typing in a few keywords, rather than having to sift through menus or scroll down pages. Good search functionality should allow users to sort results based on price, new items or the most popular.



Sloth

GUILTY Underestimating importance of mobile commerce.

ABSOLVE YOURSELF Catch up and adapt.

> The iPad is three years old. The iPhone is six years old. In this relatively short time frame, these devices and the subsequent deluge of mobile devices based on Android have changed how people engage through the Web and, more and more, how they purchase online.

On Black Friday of 2012, online purchases surpassed in-store sales for the first time. A recent study by eMarketer predicts mobile sales will represent a quarter of online retail transactions in the U.S. by 2017. The study also reveals that mobile commerce sales are expected to increase

by 82 percent over last year. Yet, despite this overwhelming evidence, many florists are slow to adapt to this booming technology trend and are only taking action now to provide customers with mobile Web friendly or responsive websites.

Mobile is just the latest technology florists have been slow to adopt; consider other technologies customers expect with other online retailers and where you stand with your website: order tracking, delivery confirmation, featuring related items, saving to wish lists, and accessing order history are just a few quick functions that come to mind.

A final sign of sloth: Being too lazy to add PayPal as a payment option on your site. "Our clients love PayPal — the security of it makes them happy," Tannozzini said. Plus it's a great service to her international clients — her shop, in Ft. Lauderdale, has some customers in the Caribbean. In addition, "having images or buttons that show we are 'safe and secure' to order from" also helps allay security concerns, she said. "We offer a 100 percent guarantee (clearly on the checkout page). It's like a seal of approval and it makes some folks feel safer using the site."

The takeaway here: Don't risk obsolescence and the disdain of customers, who expect the whiz bang features common on other gift websites, by not adopting them as your own. Sloth kills conversions.



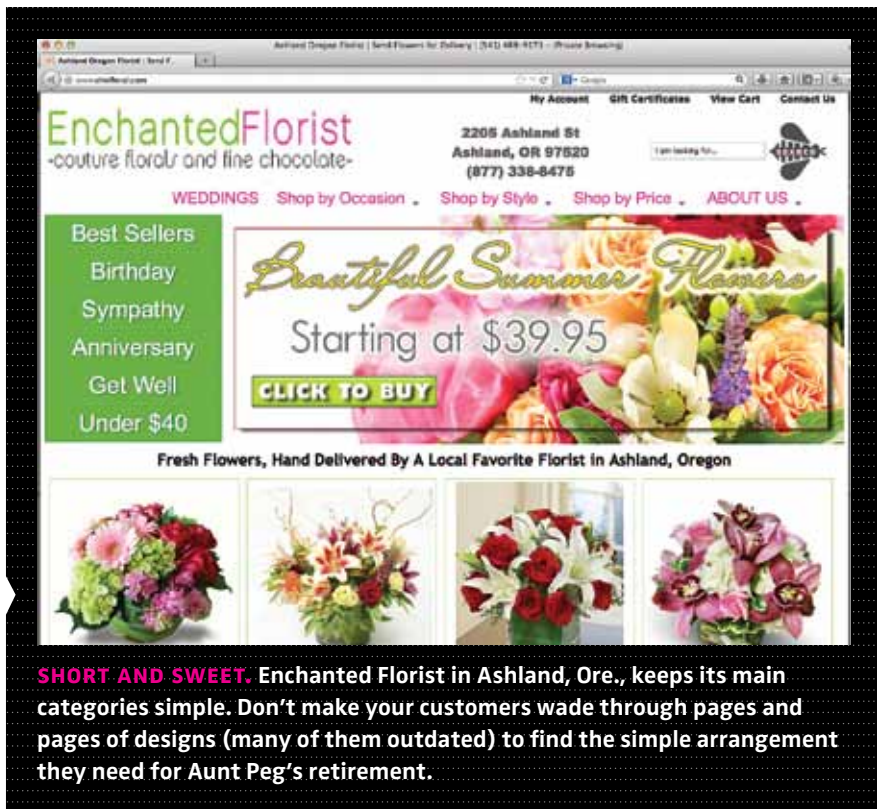
Envy

GUILTY Falling headfirst for the trendy new tech, mimicking high-end photos, loading up on badges.

ABSOLVE YOURSELF Prioritize professional-quality photos. Stay educated about new ideas and innovations, but invest in them strategically.

> A common "oh heck" reflex once florists realize they are behind in the times is to rush to install features even when they don't understand the value the technology should deliver. They may visit Amazon, Zappos or Best Buy and envy every feature that millions in development money could buy, and then review other florists' websites to determine what they like.

The problem with this approach is that it can set unreachable and, sometimes, undesirable expectations. Technology first-adopters usually pay the



highest price when implementing new features, so leave this to the Amazons of the world. That said, be aware of the trend that may impact e-commerce in the not-too-distant future. Then, you'll be armed with the knowledge to make the right technology decisions when the technology matures, rather than coming on board too late and missing opportunities.

It's easy to stay informed about new Web and mobile technologies. A prime directive of SAF's Technology Committee is to review the latest technology, then determine whether industry businesses need to pay particular attention to the technology when it matures. Their work reliably ends up in the monthly Plugged In column and other places.

Another item of envy specific to florists is when they see beautiful floral photography on other websites, especially from companies with the resources to deliver perfect images using professional photographers in dedicated studios. The problem is many florists try to match this quality with little know-how, which results in blurred photos with incorrect color balance and bad lighting. The bad photos kill potential for any conversion. Bite the bullet and leave this up to professionals as well, unless you can build a dedicated

studio complete with lights and get a high quality DSLR camera (look for "Photo Guidance" at safnow.org/moreonline).

Social media badges are another item that trigger strong envy among florists. Spotting myriad badges on a competing florist's site (enough to make a Boy Scout proud) trigger some to follow in that competitor's footsteps by loading up on badges themselves, without understanding the true value — or work required — to deliver a strong social media presence. The first question with any marketing effort — including social media — must be, "What's my ROI?"

Pride

GUILTY Acting like a know-it-all; resting on your laurels.

ABSOLVE YOURSELF Engage help from a trusted expert. Never stop learning or making adjustments.

> Many florists have been in business for years and absolutely know what they are doing when it comes to running their brick and mortar flower shop. Unfortunately, this know-it-all attitude

spills over into technology and website best practices. What is your reaction as a florist when a bride tells you, "I think sweet pea bouts in an outside August wedding will be fine."?

Florists work best when a bride listens to their expertise, and when it comes to Web design, you need to swallow your pride and trust your Web developer. In fact, the trust relationship is important to build because as new technology emerges, and customers begin demanding new functionality, your website will need to evolve and a trusted technologist is welcomed counsel.

Also, don't let pride prevent you from questioning your own website. Audit your website; talk to other florists who share the same web developer and find out if they are happy. With resources such as SurveyMonkey, you can also ask clients what they think about your site directly.

As you have discovered, you may be found guilty of many sins but all can easily be absolved — provided that you first take off your florist hat, because the e-commerce business is different than the business that occurs at the counter. And it evolves even more quickly, so get off of cruise control and stay aware of new technologies. Adopting the right technologies at the right time will allow you to stay competitive and, most importantly, be profitable now and into the future. 🌸

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