

DON'T WORRY, BE APPY

> During prom season, Art Conforti, PFCI, president of Beneva Corporation in Sarasota, Fla., noticed a trend that went beyond corsage styles and ribbon colors. All the kids had smartphones. For Conforti, who is also the developer of floralapp®, a mobile app specially designed for retail flower shops, the popularity of smartphones should be a wake-up call to florists who haven't yet embraced mobile shoppers. Yet only about 400 or so florists have purchased his app — a number Conforti says isn't nearly as high as it should be. And when he got wind that the cover story of our annual technology issue is focused on websites, he fired off an email to me wondering why we aren't putting more emphasis on the need for florists to get an app. Granted, he has a vested interest in pushing apps, since he's marketing one. But I was curious to hear firsthand from him about why he thinks an app is something every florist should have — especially given the somewhat tepid reception they're getting in the market by some florists who've tried one. Here's an excerpt from our conversation.

RENATO SOGUECO: Here's what I'm hearing from florists who've had less than impressive results with an app: First, you have to convince people to download it *and* then actually use it more than the two to three times they would have shopped with you anyway. Some say it's an uphill battle.

ART CONFORTI: People misunderstand the purpose of apps. Apps don't work like a website. As a matter of fact, it takes fewer key strokes for a customer to order using the app, compared to the website. Once they register, they never log in again. Just open, click and order. Even better, they can use the addresses in their phones to fill in the fields and import birthdays from Facebook. An app doesn't simply facilitate ordering either; it can help drive business directly to a florist. Later this summer, floralapp will automatically notify users when they drive within a mile of your shop,

as long as you have a current, local special. The first rule of social marketing is to be where your customer is. The app engages your customer and creates a captive audience. Another great development brand new in June: floralapp will be integrated with Dove POS, so orders and product management will work together, just as florists have wanted.

RS: Your app is \$70 a month (for both iPhone and Android), plus the \$2,000 start-up fee. What if, out of 100 orders, only two come via mobile Web to a shop? Shouldn't people invest their money elsewhere, or wait until the app technology improves even more?

AC: It's true that the cost of tech decreases as more people use it, but while you're waiting for the price to drop, customers who want to use an app may move to your competition. I personally want to be there as tech grows to ensure my customers have the best possible shopping experiences with Beneva. That means getting on board with new technology. This is a tool that gives your customers more options and provides you the opportunity to push out sales

notifications. That's a great investment, and the cost may be lower than you think. For one thing, building a native and custom mobile app on your own is thousands of dollars. In addition, we offer special deals for shops that purchase two phones from us — iPhone or Android: \$995 for both devices and just \$35.00. That's it. No order fees or any extras and all updates have been included.

RS: Some florists are focused on making their websites responsive and mobile ready. So when they're given the option of investing in an app, those with limited budgets and time opt to continue investing in the mobile-ready, responsive web design. What's your response to this approach?



AC: Just because they both have the word mobile in the name doesn't mean the app and web experiences are the same. Mobile is quite expensive to add to your website. Teleflora is the only company I have ever seen give this option to members. Instead of building a costly mobile-ready version of your site, on your own, with limited results, invest in a mobile app so you have all platforms covered.

RS: What's the difference?

AC: Let's begin with the ability to push notifications instantly to phones. Here's how it works: You send the offer and everyone has it almost at the same time. Instant results. Research shows 97 percent of people who receive push notifications are likely to respond to it. You also have the total integration I've already mentioned, since the app can pull names, addresses and birthdays directly from address books and Facebook.

RS: Won't people forget about a florist's app against the backdrop of all the others crowding their phones and tablets?

AC: People have dozens of apps on their mobile device for a reason: It's how they shop and engage. Why shouldn't your shop have a place on that much-visited screen? People download apps from companies they already trust — when they download your app, they commit to staying your customer. The rest is up to us. It's our job to make it an experience they can't live without. 🌸

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