

floral management

THE FLORAL BUSINESS AUTHORITY

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APRIL-MAY 2018 | VOLUME 35 | NUMBER 2

YOU'RE GONNA *Love* ME

Florists talk customer
service in an age of
sky-high expectations





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PR TAKES TIME — AND THAT'S OK

> Last October, my company, FiftyFlowers.com, participated in the Society of American Florists' Petal It Forward event — a pay-it-forward initiative that surprises random recipients with a bouquet for themselves, then encourages them to pass a second flower along to someone else.

In a span of two hours in the downtown Boise, Idaho, area, the FiftyFlowers team, along with local law enforcement, handed out approximately 6,000 roses that were donated by our partner Colombian and Ecuadorian farms. Everyone involved had a great experience spreading happiness as a team.

This day has particular significance to me as an industry veteran of more than 20 years. Petal It Forward is a day on which we unite for the common good of the floral industry. Everyone in the industry — from growers to importers/wholesalers, retail florists, transportation companies and supply vendors — collaborates to spread the joy of both receiving and giving flowers, which ultimately does have a positive impact on our bottom line sales.

Little did we know that four months later that goodwill effort would still be generating connections!

In February, one of our sales reps in Boise received an email from a woman named Melanie who had received flowers from us during the 2017 Petal It Forward event.

"I was walking down Main Street and a police officer handed me a grip of roses. It put a huge smile on my face in the midst of an otherwise normal day," Melanie wrote. "Where my mind had been racing through the to-do list of my life, this moment just zapped me into the present and made me realize I was here, now, and connected to all these strangers."

Melanie read the bouquet's tag explaining the SAF Petal It Forward concept, then passed the flowers on to someone in the Computer Science Department at Boise State University. She also noticed the FiftyFlowers.com logo on the bouquet's tag — a memory that surfaced months down the road when she passed by our headquarters.

"Today I was downtown and saw the FiftyFlowers.com sign," Melanie continued, saying the sighting was a funny coincidence because she had been

brainstorming ideas for a teacher appreciation event and "had flowers on the brain."

"I remembered how wonderful it felt to get those unexpected flowers during Petal It Forward," she wrote, leading to a request for flowers that students could give to their teachers — "a meaningful gesture [...] that truly conveys how much they are valued."

Of course, we happily agreed to donate flowers to the teacher appreciation event. Why wouldn't we? We deeply value teachers, and this is yet another opportunity to change people's lives with flowers. It's also a testament that Petal It Forward and PR work. The effort helped us make a positive impression in our local community. When Melanie was looking for a way to express gratitude and share joy, she naturally thought of flowers! That's a win for the flower industry.

Public relations efforts take time, money and effort. Sometimes the payoff doesn't appear for months, even years. Floral business owners are busy, and we like to see results. Sometimes PR returns can't fit neatly in a timeline, but that doesn't mean we should abandon them.

In my own business, I've seen the value of PR a number of times, far beyond Petal It Forward. For example, we were recently featured in Destination I Do's Fall/Winter 2017 issue, where our flowers were included as part of a professionally styled photo shoot titled Midnight Garden. PR partnerships like this have allowed us to spread brand awareness and ultimately drive sales growth.

Being featured in a magazine is exciting and drives team morale, but it may not manifest in sales until months down the road. Creating engaging content can be a challenge, so seize PR opportunities within your local and state media, magazines, blogs, Instagram and other social media platforms to help. Utilizing the power of PR opportunities will ultimately create brand awareness, interest and more flower sales. 🌹

Liza Roeser Atwood is the CEO of FiftyFlowers.com. liza@fiftyflowers.com



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What Inspires Us

➤ I first heard about Anthony Baradhi, one of the florists featured in this month's cover story (p. 22), from Nicole Palazzo of City Line Florist in Trumbull, Connecticut. "You need to meet Tony," Nicole emailed me, in late February. "He has an AMAZING story." Turns out, he did: On Feb. 5, Baradhi and his team at Flower Station received an inquiry for 9,999 white roses incorporated into sympathy designs for a funeral service and viewing starting at 9 a.m. on Feb. 8. "I wasn't sure if it was a joke," Tony admitted. He took on the request himself and quickly realized the customer wasn't kidding: It was a mega order, less than two weeks before Valentine's Day and on an unimaginably tight deadline. He dove in, sourcing flowers from four vendors, arranging expedited delivery (and still had to wait "on pins and needles" for the final 6,000 roses), hiring a carpenter and calling in extra staff members to flood the design room. The Flower Station team worked through the night and got the job done, including a custom floral arch with more than 3,500 roses, a casket spray with 500, a cross, heart, pomanders, a flower bowl and 12 vase arrangements. Whew.

The crazy part? When I called Tony to hear more, this impressive story wasn't the most memorable part

of our conversation. As Tony and I talked, I realized he is a guy who lives and breathes customer service. His philosophy is "Make people happy," and he posts that three-word mantra all over the store. Staff members are sometimes surprised to open a supply drawer and see a Post-it note with the words — an unexpected, lighthearted reminder of why the Flower Station is in business, and what Tony aims to deliver to each and every customer: a smile, a shot of joy, an experience they can't find in a supermarket or online. This month, we talked to florists like Tony (in shops large and small) who have this drive in common: They want to make their customers happy, and they're doing just that every day.

Someone else who made people happy every day: Gay Smith, the longtime technical manager for Chrystal Americas, who passed away in March after a long battle with cancer. I met Gay when I was a 20-something recent college grad, newly hired as a writer by the Society of American Florists, with no background in the floral industry. I don't remember our first conversation, but I know it was during SAF's Outstanding Varieties Competition, and I'm pretty sure there was laughter and education involved. Over the



years, I had the true joy of being one of the editors for Gay's columns in *Floral Management* — funny, info-packed and always super-practical takes on how to best care for flowers. She made daunting, technical topics easy to understand. In those spaces, Gay always taught us something, and she always made me laugh. We're lucky to have had her voice in the magazine all these years, and we'll miss her insight, intellect, humor and friendship. You can read more about Gay's life and career and donate to the American Floral Endowment's Gay Smith Memorial Tribute at safnow.org/moreonline. 🌿

Mary Westbrook
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More Online ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON WWW.SAFNOW.ORG



NEXT BEST THING

Couldn't make SAF's Congressional Action Days? Check out all of the action that took place during the two-day event in the full online photo gallery. And, if you did attend, look for photos of yourself and share them with friends. [flickr.com/photos/societyofamericanflorists/albums](https://www.flickr.com/photos/societyofamericanflorists/albums)



NEXT GEN FLORIST

SAF recently launched a Facebook page for the brightest up-and-comers to the floral industry. Our vision is for this space to be a digital networking playground, where industry members 40 and under can share business, design, marketing and strategy tips. Want to join? Email mduchaine@safnow.org.



SPRING HOLIDAY RESOURCES

Make sure customers visiting your website this month are reminded that you are the go-to source for all of their spring holiday gift needs. Encourage early ordering by posting a beautiful floral banner on your website — sometimes that's all it takes to spur an early order. safnow.org/banner-ad-library



ARE YOU THE NEXT MARKETER OF THE YEAR?

Join the ranks of those who have won \$5,000 and throw your hat in the ring for Floral Management's Marketer of the Year Contest. If your marketing efforts (large or small) during the last few years have been successful, you're a candidate! Entry deadline is June 2. safnow.org/marketeroftheyear

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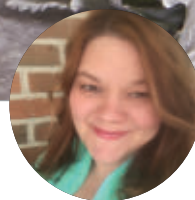


Mother's Day flowers are a celebration of the relationship between mother and child, and I strive to convey that through the floral arrangement itself — with each piece I design being unique to its client. For people who want their mothers to feel like queens, this design allows them to gift a lush arrangement without spending a fortune.

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JESSICA MAAG

DEW DROP FLOWER SHOPPE
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What makes a winner? Judges look for unique, innovative and successful marketing efforts. It can be a single campaign, or a series of promotional and advertising efforts over the course of a year or more.

Get your entry form today!

Call (800) 336-4743 to request an entry form or get it online at safnow.org/marketeroftheyear.

News You Can Use

> Recent stories in Floral Management — including Manny Gonzales' Growth column — have hit a sweet spot with readers, inside and outside of the industry.

Want to share a compliment? A critique? We want to hear it. Email fmeditor@safnow.org.

> "I ended my job with another flower shop in October 2016, moved back to my hometown and opened a shop and started from scratch. It's been a great first year! For a small town, I was terrified, nervous, anxious, excited, you name it when I made the decision, but couldn't be happier with the progress in only a year's time! I love the new online version of Floral Management magazine, but also can't get enough of a good old paper copy!"

Sara Meadows, Stock and Petal, Lamesa, Texas

> "I'm a high school teacher in California. I went with my friend to a buying event at the L.A. Convention Center last weekend [and] was handed was a copy of Floral Management. I flipped through the magazine and stumbled across "Resetting a Workplace Culture" (p. 18, February 2018). It was powerful. I'm not in the floral business, but your words and wisdom rang true in my education field...I'm trying to think of a way to get this article in front of my principal."

Bridgétte Clyne 🌿

Editor's Note: Gonzales suggested that Clyne could give flowers to her principal, along with the column.

Entry deadline: June 2, 2018



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— Carolyn Minutillo, AIFD, EMC, Lavender Hill, Jeffersonville, Indiana



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SAF MEMBERS HEAD TO CONGRESS – AND THE WHITE HOUSE



WHITE HOUSE MOMENT Seven senior-level administration officials briefed SAF members in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building in the White House complex during a lively session that lasted more than two hours and featured frequent Q&A sessions. Members heard directly from White House officials on immigration, drug enforcement, health care, tax reform, trade and labor.

➤ Rep. Bob Goodlatte (R-Virginia-6) does not represent Mike Mooney. In fact, Goodlatte, the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, represents a district some 2,500 miles from Mooney's home in Southern California.

But in March, when Mooney, of Damm & Echter in Encinitas, was on Capitol Hill, he paused outside Goodlatte's office door. From a Society of American Florists briefing the day before, Mooney recognized the influential lawmaker's name. He knew that Goodlatte was the author of key pieces of immigration-related legislation — a central issue for Mooney and the dozens of other growers, wholesalers, retailers and suppliers in town for SAF's Congressional Action Days.

Mooney couldn't resist the opportunity to get in front of someone so central to immigration reform. He turned to CalFlowers President Ben Dobbe of Holland America Flowers in Arroyo Grande, California, and said, "We're going in."

Nearly two hours later, Mooney and Dobbe emerged from the same office, having forged meaningful connections with Goodlatte's senior staff. Far from questioning why two Californians wanted to meet a Virginia lawmaker, the staff members eagerly listened to their stories about the floral industry's need for a steady, reliable and legal workforce.

"About an hour into our visit, I realized they had no idea floriculture was this big or this impactful [to the U.S. economy]," said Mooney, noting that, in addition to discussing immigration, he was able to pitch the staff members on other industry needs. "Thanks to SAF and the education I received, I was also able to eloquently ask for more research funding."

An Industry Gathers

Mooney and Dobbe weren't alone. In March, 92 SAF members representing all industry segments, three countries, 25 states and the District of Columbia, traveled to Capitol Hill to meet with lawmakers and key congressional staff during CAD.

This year's event featured a direct address from a California congressman with personal ties to the floral industry, a spirited and bipartisan talk about high-profile issues, an address from a veteran network news anchor — and a nearly three-hour White House briefing created especially for SAF, featuring remarks from, and Q&A sessions with, seven top administration officials.

Before heading to Capitol Hill, attendees were briefed on the year's issues: key fixes to the country's immigration system and funding for



A REPORTER REFLECTS During the annual SAFAC Fundraising Dinner, CBS News' Chief White House Correspondent Major Garrett detailed his experience covering the 2016 presidential election, and the lessons he learned from that time. "I have learned more humility," said Garrett, who covered his first presidential campaign in 1992.



SUNSHINE CONTINGENCY David Armellini and the SAF delegation from Florida meet with staff members in the office of Sen. Ben Nelson (D).



CONGRESSIONAL ADDRESS Just before heading to Capitol Hill, SAF members heard from Rep. Jimmy Panetta (D-California-20) who spoke from his heart — calling out personal relationships with SAF members in the audience — about the “heart and soul” and “strength and success” of the Central Coast of California and its agriculture community.



D.C. REPRESENTED Stacie Lee Banks of Lee's Flower and Card Shop, Inc. in Washington, D.C., discusses industry issues with a member of the staff of Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton.

the Floriculture & Nursery Research Initiative and Floriculture Crops Report.

Commitment to Change

For many SAF members, the chance to be on the Hill with their industry peers, speaking to lawmakers, is an annual highlight. For others, this year's event represented a new opportunity to engage.

Hannah Crittenden, who graduates this spring from Michigan State University, attended this year as one

of 23 first-timers, alongside her father, Rod Crittenden, head of the Michigan Floral Association.

“I've always been interested in politics, and especially now that I can vote,” she explained. “I wanted to come to CAD because I want to be involved, and I've learned a lot here.”

Liza Roeser Atwood of FiftyFlowers in Boise, Idaho, was at CAD for her second time; she said she felt more in her comfort zone as she took to Congress.

“The data [SAF provides] helped build my confidence,” she said. “We had really good conversations throughout the day with lawmakers and staff.”

Longtime CAD attendee Dr. Marvin Miller, AAF, of Ball Horticultural Co. in West Chicago, was part of an ambitious Illinois delegation that tackled nearly 20 appointments in one day. He said this year's event left him feeling energized.

“For all the many years I've been coming to CAD, there were still a lot of people on Capitol Hill that had ‘aha’ moments on floriculture,” he said. “So many young staffers have never thought about where or how flowers are grown, where product comes from. We made an impression.”

For another first-time attendee, Irving Casiano Flores, of the Flower Shop Network in Paragould, Arkansas, this year's event was especially timely. Casiano Flores is a DACA recipient — and in talking about important industry issues, including immigration, he was also able to share his own story. “It's important, I think, for all of us to come to Washington, and make our voices heard,” he said.

For Paul Fowle of DV Flora in Doral, Florida, the choice to come to CAD was clear: “[Coming to CAD] isn't an interruption to my business,” he said. “It's an investment in my business.”

Mary Westbrook is the editor in chief of *Floral Management*. mwestbrook@safnow.org

GO DEEPER

Get extended CAD coverage and check out more photos and videos from the event at safnow.org/moreonline.



ILLINOIS IN THE HOUSE Gustavo Gilchrist of Kennicott Brothers in Chicago and Dave Mitchell of Mitchell's Flowers & Events in Orland Park, Illinois, talk with a congressional staff member. Gilchrist brought his 12-year-old son, Patricio, to CAD. “Patricio was our secret weapon,” Mitchell admitted. “He had all of the information memorized.”



ROCKY MOUNTAIN DELEGATION Sen. Corey Gardner (R) engaged in a lively discussion with members of SAF's Colorado delegation.



UNITED UTAH Sen. James Risch (R) met with SAF's Utah delegation, including Liza Roeser Atwood of FiftyFlowers.com in Boise, Idaho. Risch is a former governor of the state.



CAROLINA ON THEIR MINDS Art Van Wingerden of Metrolina Greenhouses in Huntersville, North Carolina, leads the discussion during a meeting in a Capitol hallway — a not-uncommon occurrence for busy congressional staffers.

snapshot

BellaDonna Florist EDEN PRAIRIE, MINNESOTA

Gifts
oons

EYE-CATCHING STOREFRONT When it comes to designing the doorstep outside BellaDonna, Cannon Trembl says that she puts containers in the customers' way, urging them to stop and shop even before entering. She places weather-resistant, colorful pots with just a few blooming plants and foregoes the price tag, a decision that requires customers to stop in and ask questions.

STYLED WITH INTENTION

> When Regina Cannon Trembl moved BellaDonna Florist in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, three years ago, she had plans to merchandize the new location with more intention. Previously, the shop was slightly “haphazard” in terms of display design. She wanted to have more control. At the new venue, she sets up sections grouped thematically: a “food table” features local goods (honey, cookbooks) and a “man table” has gifts geared toward the fellas (tools, grooming products). To keep her shop fresh and efficient, she constantly moves merchandise and furniture around. Flexibility, she said, is key. For Valentine’s Day, she even moved the cash register to discourage customers from venturing into the back production room, a shift that kept visitors up front, happily shopping while her team buzzed in the back. 🌿

Mackenzie Nichols is a contributing writer. fmeditor@safnow.org



HOMEGROWN HEROES

Cannon Trembl says that she works to “entice her customers to purchase” her local and sustainably produced merchandise, including local honey. Visitors are often interested in the story behind the product, getting drawn to the idea that artisans crafted the gifts in their own community using natural and recycled materials.



WAIT AND SEE

Cannon Trembl and her staff let walk-in customers browse for a bit before checking in. Employees at BellaDonna pride themselves on their ability to develop lasting relationships with clients, but only after they see a visitor stopping, smelling and lingering around a product do they decide to interject, sharing a story about the product they picked up.



No. 4

This is the fourth in a 10-part series aimed at empowering Floral Management readers to build a foundation month by month, sale by sale, for higher sales, more confident employees and happier customers.

SPRING TUNEUP

> Four months into this new column, let's review the foundation we've been building and map out your plan for the spring. I've spent the past 20 years teaching and preaching about selling bigger every day; however, I know the typical flower shop owner/manager needs more than a list of sales tips. You need to change your thinking, language and approach to engaging customers. Starting in January, we discussed the importance of holding regular meetings with your staff and then moved into how you can teach your team new sales strategies for floor and phone sales. You can read those back issues and download the accompanying tools at floralstrategies.com/SAF. Catch up with us, because the spring holidays ahead hold ample opportunity to earn considerably more!

Look at the Numbers

Are you running reports on a regular basis and using that data to manage your staff? I find florists to be generally "number-phobic," but your sales statistics are proof-positive of how well your efforts to change the sales culture in your shop are working.

Shop owners may disagree on how much information to divulge to their employees, but whether you share actual sales figures or just percentages, your staff needs to hear how their actions are impacting the health of the business. It's the only way for them to start taking ownership of their job.

You should share these numbers at your next staff meeting. Let your employees know how well, or poorly, they're doing and share your goals for the coming months and holidays.

Have a Plan for Mother's Day

Don't just let the holiday happen; plan for it, starting with a meeting with your staff to discuss your strategy. Many flower shops have a

quick "tactical huddle" a few days before a holiday, but that's not planning. Meet early to talk about what you're going to be selling online, in the store and on the phone. Make sure to have a range of choices, with at least a few designs 25 percent above your typical top-end price.

Remember, you have to manage your staff so they can sell at those higher prices. Have samples of your Mother's Day collection at your next sales meeting and challenge your team to sell them to you like you're a customer on the phone. Coach them on how to best describe the container, the palette and the size. This is your optimal chance to start changing the thinking in your store, moving away from the old concept of merely offering choices to holiday shoppers to enticing them with new, different, higher-priced options. As I always say, "The worst that a customer can say is no. Just offer them another option. You won't lose the sale!"

Customer Service 101

I consider customer service and sales to be continuations of each other. Unfortunately, we tend to be melodramatic when problems arise. I regularly see 20-year floral industry veterans juggling the phone like a hot potato while telling an upset caller, "Hold on, I have to get my manager!" Why? If you can make a \$100 sale, why can't you handle a customer upset about how a \$100 arrangement looks?

Here's my final pearl of wisdom: Your store no longer has complaints — you only have incomplete orders. In other words, you can immediately change your staff's perspective if they are empowered to handle these calls themselves and settle the situation rather than passing them off. An "incomplete order" simply means that you did not meet the customer's expectations the first time and are being given a second chance to correct and complete it. 🌿

Tim Huckabee, FSC, is the president of FloralStrategies, which provides customer service, sales and POS system training to retail and wholesale florists. tim@floralstrategies.com



COMING NEXT ISSUE:

Summer sales activities, including launching follow-up and reminder calls



"Many flower shops have a quick 'tactical huddle' a few days before a holiday, but that's not planning. Meet early to talk about what you're going to be selling online, in the store and on the phone."



Now Head Online!

Visit floralstrategies.com/SAF to find more motivation and tools to turn you into a sales manager!





The Floral Greens Farmers of Florida want to thank you all for your
support and patience this Valentines Holiday!

We are so excited to see the fiddle-heads making their debut...

We are counting down the days until we can say to each of our valued customers -

Leatherleaf... No problem!

Thank you again and here is to a fantastic,

HURRICANE FREE 2018!

Anthony Adams Ferneries

Albin Hagstrom & Son Inc.

Alpha Fern Company

C.W. Peterson Ferneries

Ed Davis

Dean Hagstrom Ferneries

FernTrust, Inc.

Forest Groves

H & H Greens, LLC

H.G.O. Enterprises

Ronald Harris Fern Co Inc

Hopkins Quality Foliage, Inc.

Lynn Dale Ferneries

Malibu Greens

Mill Pond Greens, Inc.

Piney Island Ferns, Inc.

Raiford G. Hagstrom Ferneries

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Rusty Harper Ferneries

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United Foliage, Inc.



EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

LAUREN MARTIN
Customer Service Manager
Flower Station
Somerset, New Jersey

➤ For three years, Lauren Martin has been the customer service manager at Flower Station in Somerset, New Jersey. In that role, she works closely with her boss, Tony Baradhi, who has a deceptively simple mantra for the store — and the staff: “Make people happy.” At Flower Station, that means finding a way to say “yes” more often to customers and taking the time to send personal notes of apology when things go wrong. Martin, who worked in retail outside of the floral industry before coming to Flower Station, said it’s an environment made for thriving.

The best part of my job:

“The energy. We work hard on making personal connections with people, and I love those one-on-one interactions. We have what feels like an unparalleled connection with our customers.”

The biggest challenge:

“Finding part-time workers who really care about what we do and who are really ready to put in a hard day’s work. We’re not a huge corporation; we can’t afford to have lots of people as full-time staff, but the work we’re doing for clients is emotional and sensitive. It’s detail-oriented. So finding the right people can be hard.”

The best advice I’ve ever gotten:

“Don’t sell from your pocket! It’s a big mistake, and it’s a lesson I had to learn. When you sell from your own pocket, in terms of your own budget, you can end up disappointing the customer, who wanted to spend more and was ready to spend more. Don’t be afraid to suggest that \$150 arrangement. The worst thing that will happen is a customer says no, but nine times out of 10, they’ll say yes.” 🌸



PRACTICAL HR

No ‘Warm Bodies’

“When was the last time you bought or received flowers?”

Is that something you ask job candidates? If not — why not?

In a tough hiring environment like the one we’re in now, employers can get panicky. You have jobs to fill — and maybe, just maybe, any warm body will do. (Trust me: It won’t.)

The truth is, from the moment a job candidate walks through your door, you should be evaluating how that person will fit in with and add to your workplace culture. Asking creative, strategic questions can help you sort out the warm bodies from the next great hire.

Because, let’s be honest: If someone has never purchased flowers, or they can’t remember their last time doing so — if they can’t connect with the emotions of that experience — how effectively are they going to sell flowers to your customers?

Finally, when you’re formulating questions, think about your own pet peeves, as an owner or a manager. Does it drive you nuts when an employee fails to notice a dusty shelf? Craft a question that helps you see how proactive a prospective employee is. Ask: “Imagine you have the job and are working here right now. Look around. What tasks do you see that need to be done?” If the candidate looks around and can’t find a single speck of dust or smudged window, you should keep looking.

Glenna Hecht, SPHR, is a speaker, trainer, consultant and author. Follow her HR blog at glennahecht.com. Glenna@glennahecht.com

2018 PETAL IT FORWARD

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 24



Get ready
and join us at
safnow.org/pif



WANTED: CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS

➤ When a customer calls to tell us the arrangement was “too small,” I feel like giving him a high five. When a client walks in with a dead plant, it’s like she’s giving me a Christmas present. When someone emails me a photo of an arrangement with a disappointed, “This doesn’t look like the website photo,” I get giddy.

In short: I love when a customer complains.

I didn’t always feel this way. When a client critiqued our work, my blood pressure would rise, and sweat would form on my forehead. I could barely listen to complaints without exploding. We work so hard and care so much! We’re fanatical about our flowers, designs, care and handling and deliveries. How dare someone attack the quality of our work!

Then, a few years back, something changed. I realized that when customers complain, they’re giving me a treasure trove of information. Not in a theoretical, hypothetical, figurative way, but in an “I-bought-this-from-you-and-I’m-not-happy” way. That deserves my attention — ASAP.

The 80/20 Rule

Our job as retail florists is not to make and deliver floral arrangements. Our job is to satisfy our customers’ floral needs. It doesn’t really matter whether we liked the design, hit our cost margins and delivered on time. If the customer isn’t happy, we failed. Period.

It’s easy, as busy business owners, to get distracted by other things, and to lose sight of that basic truth. Over the years, I’ve developed an 80/20 rule: 80 percent of what we worry about is nonsense. We need to find the 20 percent that DOES matter, and we need to be fanatical about it. What the client cares about makes up most of that 20 percent.

Don’t get me wrong; I hate disappointing customers. But I love when they take the time and energy to tell me they’re upset. They don’t have to. They could just blow us up on social media with one- and two-star reviews. When they complain to us directly, they’re doing us a big favor. Here’s why:

We’re not mind-readers. Complaints provide critical information, in real time, from the people we’re trying to please. That’s better than a million-dollar focus group.

“I love when customers take the time and energy to tell me they’re upset. When they complain to us directly, they’re doing us a big favor.”

We can win them back. A complaining customer gives us an instant opportunity to win a lifelong client. All businesses talk about their excellent customer service. Give me a break. Most have terrible customer service, especially during a critique. We’ve all tried to complain to a big retailer: Talk to a robot, press buttons, then wait forever on hold. When someone calls to complain at Tiger Lily, our staff has one mission: Thrill that customer. Don’t put them on hold, don’t ask a manager, just thrill them! Most customers are shocked. They call or visit ready for an argument, not a red carpet. Once they realize we’re going to thrill them, their demeanor changes. Often, they’ll apologize for complaining. Most times, what they ask for in compensation is much less than what we expect.

They help me train my staff. My staff is tired of hearing me talk about

customer service. I’m tired of hearing myself talk about it. But when I can share a customer’s experience, in their words, referring to a particular order, that has a lot of power. My reaction to that complaint also sets the standard for the entire staff: We’re going to take it seriously, but not personally. We’re going to examine it, discuss it and make the changes we need to fix it. We’re not going to get angry. We’re not going to point fingers. We’re certainly not going to blame the customer.

Here’s how we handle complaints when they come into Tiger Lily:

1. **Apologize.**
2. **Thank the customer** for informing us that something went wrong.
3. **Ask for specifics.** Was the arrangement smaller than expected? Did it arrive late? Was quality sub-par? We want to know the details, so that we can improve.
4. **Repeat the information** to the customer; show them you’re **listening**.
5. Without sounding defensive, offer a **short explanation**. (The flowers weren’t “old,” but the water may have had too much bacteria in it; the address was wrong; traffic was backed up.) This helps underscore to the customer that our mistake isn’t “business as usual” to us. Be careful not to blame the customer. No one wins when that happens.
6. Say, **“How can we fix this?”** Don’t guess. Don’t argue. If they want a new arrangement, great. A refund? Absolutely. Both. Sure! Be gracious and generous. It’s your best shot for winning back their business for their next floral order, and all the orders after that. 🌸



Manny Gonzales owns Tiger Lily Florist in Charleston, S.C., with his wife, Clara. Among other honors, Tiger Lily has been voted

“Charleston’s Best Florist” for 18 consecutive years. Manny and Clara live in Mount Pleasant with their kids, Luke and Ruby. manny@tigerlilyflorist.com

1,964,270,721

AND COUNTING

More than 1.96 BILLION. That's how many consumer impressions have been generated by SAF's public relations and social media programs, such as the award-winning Petal It Forward program (safnow.org/pif) and the Two Minute Trends campaign (safnow.org/twominutetrends). These forward-thinking companies are the leaders in industry promotion. SAF's consumer programs would not happen without them.



IF YOUR SUPPLIER IS ON THIS LIST, THANK THEM!

PLATINUM: \$20,000 or More

Growers

Asocolflores

asocolflores

Association of Colombian Flower Exporters

Suppliers

Smithers-Oasis USA/
Floralife

OASIS
FLORAL PRODUCTS

GOLD: \$15,000 - \$19,999

Suppliers

Syndicate Sales, Inc.

SILVER: \$10,000 - \$14,999

Wholesalers

Delaware Valley Floral
Group
Kennicott/Vans/Nordlie

Suppliers

Accent Decor, Inc.

BRONZE: \$5,000 - \$9,999

Wholesalers

Pennock Co.

Growers

Equiflor/Rio Roses

COPPER: \$1,000 - \$4,999

Wholesalers

Amato Wholesale
Florist
Baisch and Skinner
Wholesale Florist, Inc.
Bay State Farm Direct
Flowers
Cleveland Plant &
Flower Co.
Dreisbach Wholesale
Florist
DWF Wholesale Florist
Co.
Flora Fresh, Inc.
Greenleaf Wholesale
Florist, Inc.
Hillcrest Garden, Inc.
Mayesh Wholesale
Florist, Inc.
Mueller Supply Inc.
Pikes Peak of Texas, Inc.
Sieck Floral Group
The Roy Houff
Company
Tommy's Wholesale
Florist, Inc.

Suppliers

Candle Artisans, Inc.
Design Master color
tool, inc.
Floral Resources
Sacramento

Growers

Holland America
Flowers, LLC
Ocean View Flowers
Oregon Flowers, Inc.
Pyramid Flowers, Inc.
Sun Valley Floral Group
Washington Bulb Co.,
Inc.

Importers/ Distributors

Fresca Farms
Liberty Blooms

FRIEND: \$100 - \$999

Wholesalers

Allied Growers, Inc.
Berkeley Florist Supply
Co. in Miami
Dillon Floral Corporation
Ensign Wholesale Floral
Frank Adams Wholesale
Florist Inc.
GM Floral Co.
Gassafy Wholesale
Florist, Inc.

Henry C. Alders
Wholesale Florist
Inland Wholesale
Flowers, Inc.
J.B. Parks Wholesale
Florist
Jacobson Floral
Louisiana Wholesale
Florists, Inc.
Mears Floral Products
Metro Floral Wholesale,
Inc.
Miller Sales Wholesale
Distributor
Reeves Floral Products
Inc.
Schaefer Wholesale
Florist, Inc.
Seagroatt Riccardi, Ltd

Suppliers

Berwick Offray LLC/
CSS Industries, Inc.
Chrysal Americas
FloraCraft

Garcia Group, Inc./
Floral Pak Co.
Garcia Group, Inc./Plus
One Imports
Lion Ribbon Co., Inc./
CSS Industries, Inc.
Reliant Ribbons, Bows
& Trims

Growers

Dramm & Echter
Green Point Nurseries,
Inc.

CONTRIBUTOR: \$50 - \$99

Wholesalers

Coward & Glisson
Wholesale Florists
LaSalle Wholesale
Florist, Inc.
Younger & Son Inc.

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**Want to help sell more flowers
(and see your name on this list)?
Support the SAF PR Fund!
safnow.org/prfund; jsparks@safnow.org**

We thank these companies who voluntarily contribute to the **SAF Fund for Nationwide Public Relations**, which promotes flowers to consumers through groundbreaking research and media outreach, as well as **Aboutflowers.com** and **Aboutflowersblog.com**. A special thanks to Asocolflores for contributing \$75,000 to fund the new Architectural Design of Flowers program and Two-Minute Trends campaign.

TROPIC LIKE IT'S HOT

> On a not-so-balmy weekend in late March, dozens of florists gathered in Edmonton, Alberta, to learn a hot new design technique inspired by the lush, vibrant landscape of Hawaii.

Termed "Tropical Nouveau," this style mixes flowers from different categories, such as carnations and chrysanthemums with birds of paradise and ginger. "Think of it as the floral take on fusion cuisine," said Neville MacKay, CAFA, PFCI, who presented the program, "Neotropica Hawaii," with Hitomi Gilliam, AIFD, EMC, and Heather de Kok, AAF, AIFD, PFCI. (See some of De Kok's work in *Business of Design*, p. 44.)

"Incorporating exotic flowers gives an arrangement dimension and interest, just like unexpected ingredients do for food," said MacKay, the owner of My Mother's Bloomers in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

For instance, a bridal bouquet with lilac, garden roses and stock may be pretty, "but add in phaelonopsis orchids and then it's delicious," he explained.

Why? Because the bold pelvis-shaped blooms command attention. "It's human nature to take a closer look when we encounter something unusual and stunning," he said. "Who among us on holiday hasn't stopped to take a photo of the flowers in the resort lobby on the way to the all-you-can-eat buffet?"

Here are a few stems sure to turn heads. 🌿

Katie Hendrick is senior contributing editor of *Floral Management*. khendrick@safnow.org



BIRD OF PARADISE
Designer Cut Flowers



'SILVER' CYMBIDIUM ORCHID
Designer Cut Flowers



LIPSTICK PODS
Green Point Nursery



'EMPRESS' PROTEA
Dramm and Echter



MONSTERA
FernTrust



'WAGNERIANA' HELICONIA
Fifty Flowers



'MAXIMA VIOLETTA' ANTHURIUM
Fifty Flowers



CIGAR CALATHEA
Green Point Nursery



RED GINGER
Fifty Flowers



'ALMOND BUFF' PROTEA
Resendiz Brothers



HAPPINESS DELIVERED
Martha Aaron, AIFD, recently
instituted a 100 percent
satisfaction guarantee at her
business in Sedona, Arizona.



YOU'RE GONNA *Love* ME

Florists talk customer service in an age of sky-high expectations

BY MARY WESTBROOK



REBEKAH HLASNY

FRIENDLY FACES Martha Aaron, AIFD (left), encourages active listening among her staff — something that customers take note of. A number of clients have booked with the Sedona, Arizona, florist even when the shop's prices aren't the lowest.

Crrrrrrrunch.

For a lot of retail florists, that was the word of the holiday on Valentine's Day 2018. Midweek holidays are usually good to florists: Sweethearts want to impress each other at the office. There isn't the same level of competition from weekend getaways or even romantic nights out. And this year's holiday, nestled on a Wednesday, gave consumers plenty of time to plan ahead.

And yet — many customers waited until the very last minute.

A Society of American Florists post-holiday member survey found that, on average, 56 percent of retail florists' holiday orders came in on Valentine's Day itself, and 80 percent of orders were delivered on Feb. 14. In 2017, when the holiday fell on a Tuesday, respondents said nearly 38 percent of orders came in on Valentine's Day, and 79 percent of holiday orders were delivered on Feb. 14.

"I attribute it to the Amazon Prime mentality," said Justin Sheffield of Ashland Addison Florist Co. in Chicago, who saw a rush of orders arrive on Feb. 13 and 14. "People now have the men-

talidity that they can get almost anything the same day or next day. Their expectations have been raised to the point that they think they can order whenever and get exactly what they want."

The challenge for florists, on holidays but also year-round? Rising to meet those expectations. That can require rethinking marketing, staffing, sourcing and production practices. Sheffield, who pulled in five wedding designers this year to augment his design staff on the holiday, said the shop received 500 calls just on Valentine's Day — with at least a few dozen customers hanging up before their order was taken.

"I had every possible person answering phones, and it still wasn't enough," he said. "I don't think customers will start planning ahead more, so that's something we're going to have to think about strategically, and come up with some solutions."

Martha Aaron, AIFD, of Mountain High Flowers in Sedona, Arizona, faced a similar challenge. "Last year, when Valentine's Day landed on a Tuesday, I saw more early deliveries on Monday

"I have customers who come in all the time now who say, 'I don't know what you're doing to your flowers, but they're lasting forever.'"

- AMY WYNN -



REBEKAH HLASNY

EXPERIENCE MATTERS When customers stop by to check out Mountain High Flowers in Sedona, Arizona, they get an immediate sense for the shop's youthful aesthetic. Owner Martha Aaron, AIFD, creates consistent branding across online platforms and at her brick-and-mortar store.

to clients' work, to start the week off right," she said. "This year, most wanted it on the day of."

During SAF's volunteer meetings this spring, members of the group's Retailers Council expressed similar experiences with Valentine's Day 2018, and many pegged the change to that so-called Amazon effect: consumers expecting more and more and more from companies (and expecting to get products or services faster and faster and faster).

In fact, according to a recent IBM Institute for Business Value report, 76 percent of consumers now expect a company to understand their individual needs; 81

percent are demanding improved response time; and 68 percent expect companies to "harmonize" their experiences. What's more, customers today aren't just comparing your business to other florists — they're comparing you to national retailers, theme parks, sports stadiums, five-star resorts, Michelin-star restaurants and more.

Feeling overwhelmed? Take a deep breath, suggests Dennis Snow, a customer service consultant and author who worked for more than 20 years for the Walt Disney World organization. Because while Amazon, Uber, Google, Facebook and all of the other retail-tech giants have changed the playing field, certain rules of service remain the same



FLOWER STATION

ANTHONY BARADHI

Somerset, New Jersey
FlowerStation.com

Years in business: 23

Employees: 11 full-time;
7 part-time

Locations: 1

Annual sales: \$2 million



AMY'S FLOWER STUDIO

AMY AND SHAWN WYNN

North Attleboro, Massachusetts
NorthBlooms.com

Years in business: 73

Employees: 2 full-time;
2 part-time

Locations: 1

Annual sales: \$225,000

— and they may even be more important than ever to local businesses.

“For all that’s changed in the world, when it comes to customer service, some things are really the same,” argued Snow, a past presenter at SAF’s annual convention. “Customers expect you to do the job right. They expect you to be efficient; it should be easy to do business with you. And they expect you to be nice.”

This month, we’re taking a look at how individual florists are taking that timeless advice and giving it new life in 2018.

Engage Staff

At Flower Station in Somerset, New Jersey, Anthony Baradhi takes staff communication seriously. In addition to daily check-ins, once a month he schedules an **after-hours all-staff** gathering (complete with pizza), where the group **focuses on one topic** — specials coming up, a holiday, or nitty-gritty details such as sales or cost targets.



MOUNTAIN HIGH FLOWERS

MARTHA AARON, AIFD

Sedona, Arizona

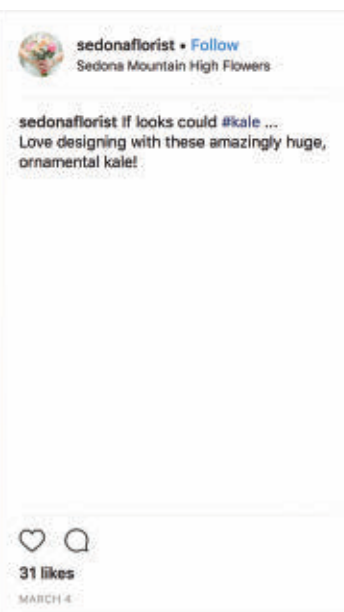
SedonaMountainHighFlowers.com

Years in business: 19

**Employees: 4 full-time;
3 part-time**

Locations: 1

Annual sales: \$500,000



SOCIAL SCIENCE “It’s really important to be where the customers are and to be able to connect with them when and how they want to connect,” said Martha Aaron, AIFD, who has been devoting more time to social media, not only Facebook and Instagram, but also Pinterest.

“We talk about processes, special requests, anything that’s new or different,” he said. “But everything, really, comes back to customer service, providing better service, managing expectations, thinking about how we present ourselves and talk to customers.”

Baradhi also encourages his staff to **put themselves in customers’ shoes**. For instance, he recently timed how long it took to pull up to his business, find a parking spot, walk into the showroom, be greeted and find flowers in the cooler: three-and-a-half minutes. “That’s pretty fast,” one employee said. Baradhi disagreed — and then engaged the staff in a discussion about why even a few extra seconds matter.

“That’s a long time for our customers — nobody feels like they have any free time anymore,” he argued. “Think how quickly they can navigate on their phones or on a website in that time, or how convenient a supermarket or club store is by comparison.”

One thing Baradhi doesn’t do: monopolize the conversation. “I know that after 15 to 20 minutes, people are going to stop listening to me — I’ll stop listening to myself,” he said. Instead, **staff members are encouraged to bring their ideas to the floor and ask questions**.

In that way, the monthly get-togethers are less meeting, more discussion. Even when the subject matter isn’t innately interactive (say, a Mother’s Day planning meeting where small details need to be reviewed and confirmed), Baradhi finds a way to encourage staff engagement.

“This year, before Valentine’s Day, I **had my staff take turns reading aloud through the binder**, as we reviewed things like delivery routing and wire-in/wire-out guidelines. I also had each of them pick their favorite arrangement from our specials and explain why they liked it. **Customers appreciate authenticity**. They know when you really love what you’re selling.”

Welcome Complaints

Last summer, Aaron was at an industry conference listening to Nic Faitos, a fellow florist and SAF member, as he talked about something no business owner really wants to deal with: customer complaints.

Aaron was about to take over her shop after almost three years as the shop’s manager, and she was ready to make some changes. Aaron’s ears perked up when Faitos mentioned complaints — namely, that his business, Starbright Floral Design in New York City, has a **100 percent satisfaction guarantee on every**

purchase, and it's the customer who decides what "satisfaction" means: **a new arrangement, a refund or both.**

Aaron felt incredulous. Wouldn't people take advantage of such a generous policy? But Faitos continued: Most customers aren't looking for a deal. They want to **feel truly heard.** They want a **real apology.** And ... if, in the end, they also want a new design and a refund, the cost of delivering on both counts is far less than losing that customer or risking an angry one- or two-star review online (for all future customers to read).

Aaron was convinced. She changed her policy and has met the (thankfully) small number of customers who have complained since with her "let me make this right, whatever it takes" attitude — to the customers' delight.

"It takes people by surprise," Aaron said. **"People are prepared to argue. Instead, they hear that apology and our guarantee. Suddenly, they're happy."**

Complaints? Bring 'em on, agrees Sheffield. Like Aaron and Faitos, Sheffield sees complaints as an opportunity to take a second chance at a customer before he or she heads to Yelp or to another floral provider.

"If you handle complaints correctly, you can turn a bad situation around, into a good experience," he said.

For Sheffield, that means making sure team members understand that **they're empowered to make things right.**

Otherwise, well-intentioned staff can thwart your best efforts. "When a complaint comes in, some employees can think they're actually protecting the company by disagreeing with the customer or not offering a refund or a replacement," he explained. "That's why owners and managers need to **explain the big picture — that we take care of customer complaints in this way because we want those customers to come back.**"

That's the same approach Chaim Casper of Surf Florist Inc. takes in South Florida.

"You have to **put yourself in customers' shoes and solve problems from their perspective,**" he said. "If they're happy, I have a chance for repeat business."

A personal touch never hurts. This year on Valentine's Day, Baradhi wrote

a personal letter to several customers for missed or delayed deliveries. In each letter, **he apologized, took responsibility for the mistake, refunded their money and sent a gift card for a future purchase.** "I think the 'I'm sorry' part may have been the most important part of each letter," he said. "People don't want to hear excuses. It's a turn-off." (Still not convinced? Check out an impassioned defense of complaints from Manny Gonzales of Tiger Lily Florist in Charleston, South Carolina, on p. 18, and read Tim Huckabee's take on seeing complaints as "incomplete orders" on p. 14.)

Live, Breathe and Talk Quality

Amy and Shawn Wynn have a guiding principle at Amy's Flower Studio in North Attleboro, Massachusetts: **"The longer our customers enjoy their flowers, the longer we'll enjoy them as customers,"** Shawn said.

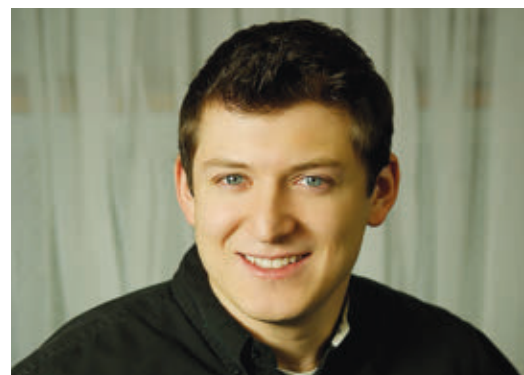
The couple, who purchased the business about 18 months ago after Amy had been a staff member for more than a decade, believe the quality of their product goes hand in hand with their high service level — and that those two qualities set them apart from local supermarkets and big box stores. So they talk directly to customers about **how the shop sources its flowers** (including direct purchases from select farms) and how **customers can best care for those buds** to get the most value for their purchase.

Amy has also **invested serious energy and time improving the shop's care and handling protocols** — formalizing processes such as flower food measurement and bucket cleaning, something the previous owner hadn't consistently trained staff to do correctly. Customers can see the difference, she said.

"I have customers who come in all the time now who say, 'I don't know what you're doing to your flowers, but they're lasting forever,'" she said.

Listen ... No, Really Listen

In Sedona, Aaron has seen her wedding sales increase by about 50 percent in the past three years, despite plenty of competition in town — and



ASHLAND ADDISON FLORIST CO.

JUSTIN SHEFFIELD

Chicago

AshAddFlorist.com

Years in business: 86

Employees: 42 full-time, 7 part-time

Locations: 5

Annual sales: Not disclosed

her refusal to compete only on price. Her "secret" weapon?

"We listen," she said with a laugh. "I know it sounds too simple, but **a lot of the feedback we get from brides is that other florists they talked to weren't listening, or didn't seem to appreciate their ideas.** I've had several brides book with me after calling around to other shops, and they'll tell me, 'You weren't the cheapest, but I really felt like you were the only one who understood what I want.'"

Aaron and her team make sure customers feel heard (truly heard) by watching **body language, paying attention to tone of voice and repeating key phrases**, so that it's clear to customers that the shop rep is engaged in that conversation.

Listening to customers can also mean **hearing what they aren't telling you directly.** Casper, for instance, has trained his staff to respond to customers using the platform the customer used.



SURF FLORIST INC.

CHAIM CASPER

South Florida

[MiamiBeachFlowers.com](#);

[MiamiBeachFlorist.com](#);

[BalHarbourFlowers.com](#);

[AventuraFlowers.com](#);

[SunnyIslesBeachFlowers.com](#)

Years in business: 80

**Employees: 1 full-time;
7 part-time**

Locations: 1

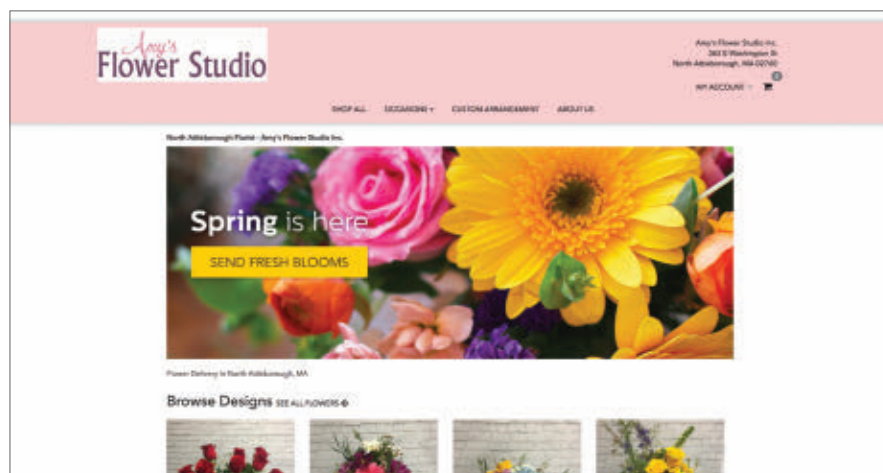
Annual sales: \$400,000

"If people call, I call back," he said. "If they email, I email back. If they text, I text. That's a preference they're indicating, and you don't want to ignore it, or try to make them interact in a way that's more convenient for you."

Be Consistent Across Channels

Beyond improving flower longevity, a key focus for the Wynns when they took over was creating a website for the business (the previous owner didn't have one) and then **streamlining their site and making it easier for customers to order online.**

"I've really been working to simplify our website and make it more and more like a virtual cooler," Shawn said. To that end, he's **whittled the number of designs** to about two dozen at any given



WEB MASTER When Amy and Shawn Wynn purchased Amy's Flower Studio about 18 months ago, the shop didn't even have a website. Today, Shawn focuses a great deal of energy on streamlining and improving the shop's online presence. Sales last year were up by 25 percent.

time and, in an effort to better set and meet customer expectations, he posts the shop's **own design photos** to the site. (The Wynns signed on with BloomNation about a year ago.) Last year, they saw their overall sales grow by 25 percent.

Indeed, in 2018, having a website that's easy to use and mobile-friendly, and having a presence across popular social media platforms is a given, said Aaron. The questions become: Where and how do I best spend my time, money and energy for the biggest ROI?

"It's really important to **be where the customers are and to be able to connect with them** when and how they want to connect," said Aaron, who has been devoting more time to social media, not only Facebook and Instagram, but also Pinterest. "I think a lot about that old saying about your website being your best employee. For us, that's really becoming true with social media. **We want to be consistent across all of these different platforms, in terms of our branding, our voice, our images, so that customers get the same level of service and impression of us, no matter how they find us.**"

Going where the customers are is also a mantra at Ashland Addison — and, increasingly, that means **educating yourself on the new pathways that exist for customers to find you.** For instance, just before Valentine's Day, Sheffield turned on a messaging function for the shop's Google Business Listing; he wasn't aware of that functionality before. Almost immediately,

Ashland Addison started receiving messages through that channel. The shop also received about 15 inquiries via Yelp in the days leading up to Valentine's Day — a significant uptick compared to years past.

"I can't explain it — something changed somewhere — but I'm glad that we were able to respond to those customers," Sheffield said. "It can be a challenge to keep on all these new channels for communication, but I think it's really important. We're **seeing more and more people, across generations, who don't want to**



BE HAPPY At Flower Station in Somerset, New Jersey, Tony Baradhi focuses on coaching his staff to connect with customers and play up the emotions of giving and receiving flowers — messages that are shared in person, over the phone and online.

"You have to put yourself in customers' shoes and solve problems from their perspective. If they're happy, I have a chance for repeat business."

- CHAIM CASPER -

pick up the phone and talk. They want to send a message and know that you've got it, and that the order's taken care of."

Ashland Addison is also one of a relatively small group of florists in about a dozen cities with a presence on the **Amazon Local platform** — which allows shops to post select designs directly to Amazon and receive a "payout [that is] is substantially better than the traditional wire service split," Sheffield said. Amazon approached the shop about the opportunity about eight months ago; so far, orders have been limited. But getting on the site was an easy decision, Sheffield said, and the placement has obvious potential.

"Amazon is now the foremost player in online shopping — so many consumers use it as their first choice because of convenience," he said. "If a consumer already has all their payment information saved, and possibly recipient information saved, it makes it an extremely convenient and quick transaction. If Amazon is going to spend their promotion budget to push our category and products, it seems like a no-brainer [to be on the site]."

Go for the FEELS

Snow's advice to "be nice" may sound simplistic, but in a time of nonstop negative headlines and constant critiquing, a big smile and can-do spirit can go a long way to winning over customers.

"We do a lot of small things when a customer walks in, but I think those small things add up to an overall positive impression," Baradhi said. **"We wear uniforms and greet every single person. We welcome them to our store. We offer assistance, but we don't hover. If we don't recognize someone as a repeat**

customer, we ask if it's their first time in. We thank them for visiting."

The team at Flower Station also offers to carry packages and flowers out to a customer's car, and they're trained to maintain eye contact during critical moments in the transaction process (saying thank you, giving a customer her receipt).

"We give kids free flowers while their mom is shopping, and make sure our packaging looks great, so that a customer can walk out of here and have a gift that's ready to go," he said. "These are things that set us apart, but they aren't things that happen without constant reinforcement; you have to remind your staff what you want your customer's experience to be."

In-store, that means creating an experience for customers, one that feels unique to your business, said Sheffield. "If we're going to charge more for roses than the grocery store charges, we have to provide a better experience, period," he said. **"We have to make personal connections with customers, and we have to educate them on all of the services we provide."**

After all, a customer who stops in for a birthday arrangement may not realize that your shop can also provide the reception flowers for her law firm.

Finally, when a customer asks you to go the extra mile (lightning-fast delivery, a special add-on), find a way to make it happen, Baradhi said. "We try hard to **never say no**," he said. "We charge appropriately for that extra service, of course — and the customer is grateful, and remembers the extra effort." 🌿

Mary Westbrook is editor in chief of *Floral Management*. mwestbrook@safnow.org

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Want to know more about how to defend your online brand, stand out on social media or create higher-quality photos and videos? Of course you do! Those topics — and so much more — are central to the educational programming at SAF Palm Springs 2018, the Society of American Florists' 134th annual convention, Sept. 12 to 15, where hundreds of top industry minds will gather to talk about shifting customer expectations, altered supply chains and solutions to some of the trickiest challenges in the age of Amazon. Make plans now to be part of that discussion. For more information, to reserve your spot and to check out a convention programming preview, visit safnow.org.

GO DEEPER

Feeling intimidated about how to manage all those **social media channels**? Want more tips on **best practices in digital marketing**, including insight on **online advertising** and the behind-the-scenes story on how one Connecticut shop created an **award-winning app**? Check out recent *Floral Management* stories on florists with a robust digital presence at safnow.org/moreonline. While you're there, read extended coverage of SAF's post-Valentine's Day survey.



about_flowers • Follow

about_flowers 77 percent of women remember the last time they received flowers. When was the last time you did? #petalforward #flowersofinstagram #flowerpower 🌸

rosecat.98 Probably June..🥰

d0pe.abbyy 5 grade when a boy asked me to a Valentine dance and gave me a blue flower

teresadelarosa315 🍷

shereem_marie This is beautiful. 🌸❤️

sfsateph So lovely!

intrigue_designs Absolutely awesome! Loving your work

intrigueexperience Loving what you do.

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ON TREND

J Schwanke, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, highlighted four main trends in this year's uBloom Trend Synthesis: (clockwise from animals) Crafted, Victory Garden, Social, as represented by an Instagram post during the Society of American Florists' Petal It Forward program last October, and Rainforest.

DESIGN

An esteemed floral educator shares four trends dominating the design world

DU JOUR

BY KATIE HENDRICK

➤ Fifth-generation florist J Schwanke, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, inherited an appreciation for all things floral at a very young age. In fact, his imminent birth forced his parents to leave a Nebraska flower convention prematurely, and his earliest memories were formed in the family flower shop and greenhouses. As the CEO of uBloom and host of the Internet-based TV show “Fun with Flowers and J,” Schwanke has devoted his life to learning everything he can about the products he loves and sharing his knowledge with others.

One way he educates his followers is through the annual uBloom Trend Synthesis, a free report highlighting the year’s prevailing trends and showing how florists can use them to advance their businesses. Schwanke spoke briefly with Floral Management editors about each trend, the work that went into creating his guide and the importance of staying abreast of what’s happening in the world, particularly in terms of consumers’ tastes.

FM: What kind of research went into this guide?

JS: My husband, Kelly Blank, and I do ongoing research for uBloom.com, Blank Art and Design (his business) and a variety of clients in all kinds of industries. What we learn about fashion, which is formulated for a future season, sets the stage for what may (or may not) happen with flowers, events or decorative accessories.

I’m also a design expert for the Dallas Market Center. When we’re there, we visit as many showrooms as possible and study all aspects of design — furniture,

accessories, fashion, events, holiday and, of course, flowers and foliage — to identify emerging and evolving trends. In addition, we read lots of magazines, watch TV and scour the Internet to determine what colors and concepts are getting attention and playing out in posts and publications, and what’s actually available as products consumers can buy.

Our approach is to observe, discuss, compile and watch for results. Many trends are simply evolutions of a previous trend; a certain aspect gains more momentum. It’s truly an interesting process, and you can’t rush it. It’s fun to observe, speculate and, when the results begin to form, report back.

FM: How does trend forecasting for the floral industry differ from, say, fashion?

JS: As much as we like to think that flowers and foliage lead the world, our industry is actually very reactionary. We don’t forecast trends so much as we identify and curate them. This is a very good thing! By the time a trend reaches our industry, it’s really stabilized and we can easily sell it. We’re also fortunate that industry leaders like DESIGN MASTER color tool Inc. and Reliant Ribbon, as well as many flower and foliage growers, stay up on what consumers like and use the information when planning for the future. (We feature their products in our guide.) Consequently, by the time trends hit our industry (at a retail level), there are trend-ready products available for florists to buy. We don’t have to wait for

people to come up with or manufacture something new.

FM: What drives trends?

JS: Trends evolve because of many factors — a need or desire, culture, causes, the entertainment world — but never from money exchanging hands. We all know about companies that pay money to have their new product promoted as a “trend,” but until you see a concept translate into fabric, upholstery, clothing, accessories, etc., you can’t legitimately call it a trend. A trend requires consumer acceptance. The trend process is organic. It happens in spite of what anyone may want. That’s why we don’t allow anyone to pay to be featured in the uBloom Trend Synthesis or to pay for our research. We pride ourselves on being objective.

FM: Why is it critical to stay on top of current trends?

JS: Our flower-buying consumers are smart and savvy. They know what the newest trends are. They shop online and in person. They watch TV and go to the movies. They travel and experience life. When floral professionals are on top of the trends they see and translate them into flowers, the industry is able to cash in on consumers’ current needs and desires. This is how the flower professional continues to turn people’s feelings into flowers — and, ultimately, sell more flowers to more people more often!

Here is a short excerpt of the guide’s four trends.

SOCIAL



"Life is about special personal connections and shared experiences. Why not include flowers? There's no better in-person icebreaker!" Schwanke said. The Social trend also pertains to the digital world. "It's important that we like and share flower images on social media," he said.



Style

Hand-tied bouquets, perfect for gift giving.



Colors

Graphite 560, Wisteria 557, Chartreuse 534, Coral 777, Lemon 132, Champagne Gold 242, Platinum 232



Flowers

Parrot tulips, stock, leucodendron, alstroemeria, 'Kermit' spray chrysanthemums, 'Green Trick' dianthus



Foliage

Variegated pittosporum



Ribbons

Popular floral motifs, Day of the Dead, graffiti, peace signs and Pantone's Color of the Year, Ultra-Violet

Foliage entered the spotlight in 2017 with Pantone's choice of "Greenery" as Color of the Year. It continues to fascinate consumers, as evidenced by the popularity of foliage-heavy bouquets at weddings. Rainforest expands on this trend with flora that looks exotic, pulling in the tiki culture and all things tropical. Water is also an undercurrent of this style, tying into people's interest in the planet's well-being and conserving resources.



Style

A tropical look with a focus on foliage and natural accents, like driftwood, reclaimed or repurposed wood and stone. Tiki motifs have an influence here, as do other island elements.



Colors

Carnation Red 716, Basil 676, Olive Bright 790, Beach 559, Mist 555, Pacific Blue 690, Mossy 868



Flowers

Anthurium, heliconia, orchids, proteas, leucodendron, pepperberry, hypericum berries



Foliage

Monstera, monstera, monstera! These leaves, highlighted by heavy hitter publications including Vogue and Elle Décor, can be seen throughout the marketplace in wall coverings, upholstery, women's fashion, accessories and art. "Monstera is undeniably getting more attention than any other foliage has seen in decades, earning it 'Foliage of the Year' honors," Schwanke said.



Ribbons

Aspid ribbon — embroidery foliage patterns, dragonfly cutouts, jute, rope, vine and green accents

RAINFOREST



VICTORY GARDEN



Gardening is a favorite activity of many and continues to gain popularity. “We’re seeing more and more flower farms pop up, as consumers crave flowers grown locally or regionally,” Schwanke said. “The desire to know where one’s food comes from has spilled over to flowers too.”



Style

Garden-style groupings of flowers; flowers mixed alongside vegetables in beds, containers or arrangements



Colors

Sunflower 533, Tangerine 776, Radish 551, Violet 715, Blush 781, Sprout 554, October Brown



Flowers

Sunflowers, ranunculus, peonies, garden roses, Queen Anne’s lace, irises, tulips, nigella, pussy willow, forsythia, lilacs



Foliage

‘Bracken’s Brown Beauty’ magnolia



Ribbons

Lattice patterns, embroidery garden tools, ladybugs, flower and garden motifs

Personal experiences motivate the next generation of consumers, whether that’s learning to embroider from an aunt or gathering with friends to learn how to brew their own beer. This trend taps into the mindset of people who appreciate quality homemade goods, enjoy spending time with others and crave DIY advice.



Style

Wreaths, garlands and arrangements in vintage, reclaimed or repurposed containers



Colors

Light Ochre 533, Almond 794, Sepia 538, Fresh Green 133, überFrost 569, Grey Flannel 798, Cranberry 713



Flowers

Rose hips, scabiosa pods, millet, mint, rosemary, wax flower, leucodendron, dusty miller, rudbeckia



Foliage

‘Milky Way’ aspidistra, ornamental grasses



Ribbons

Lace, burlap, cork, embossed, embroidered or woven yarn, and chenille-based ribbons

CRAFTED



Katie Hendrick is the senior contributing editor of Floral Management. khendrick@safnow.org

GET THE REPORT

For a complete copy of the uBloom Trend Report, along with instructions on featured design trends and additional inspiration, head to uBloom.com/Trends2018.



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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.*



Spring Clean YOUR FINANCIALS

**Dust off your
standard operating
procedures to make
sure you're hitting
financial targets**

BY PAUL GOODMAN, CPA, PFCI

➤ How much should you be earning as an owner? How do you figure cost of goods sold (COGS) by product line? How do you keep labor and facilities expenses in check? What other cost areas can really sap your profits?

These are some questions I frequently field from florists, and they're questions that pop up even among longtime business owners. That's why I suggest all florists periodically review and refresh their operating procedures and targets to ensure maximum profitability. The closer you get to the industry standard targets below, the more likely you will be running a profitable operation.

Three Critical Areas

There are three critical expense items when it comes to making a reasonable profit. If a retail florist controls these

three items, they will be profitable. If they don't control these three, they won't be profitable. It's as simple (and complicated) as that.

1. COGS

COGS is defined as "product costs." For green plants COGS is the cost of the plant and the cost of any container or supplies that are used. For a plush animal it is the cost of the plush animal.

For arrangements COGS is the cost of the flowers, foliage, container and supplies. Assuming you use a 2x markup or more on the container and charge something for supplies, the only critical item to watch and control is the cost of flowers and foliage. Your flowers and foliage cost for arrangements should not exceed 25 percent of your arrangement sales. Period. Simple. Really profitable shops do even better.

Many florists only get their COGS as a single number. They don't get COGS broken down by product line. That's not ideal. Break down your COGS by product line. Put only flowers and foliage costs into COGS for Arrangements so you can track that critical number. Have a COGS Supplies line for the containers and other supplies.

Arrangements is the one COGS area that needs to be controlled properly for a retail florist to be profitable. All the others are not important compared to this one.

2. Payroll

The second major cost item to control is your labor costs. Like COGS they constitute a large portion of your expenses. First, put the owner/manager on the payroll. When the owner/manager is on the payroll, total income for the owner/manager, including payroll and net profit, is usually larger.

For a single location shop with the owner/manager on the payroll, your total payroll should not exceed 30 percent of sales. Payroll is defined as wages, payroll taxes and employee benefits.

Total payroll with the owner/manager on the payroll should not exceed 30 percent, no matter how large the shop. However, once a shop exceeds the \$500,000 sales mark and has to begin adding managers, employee payroll will climb as a percentage of the whole. (Multi-location shops or shops with garden centers have a payroll target of 35 percent and a net profit of only 5 percent.)

When payroll is too high in a flower shop, the problem is usually in the design room. Too many hours of design wages are paid for the amount of volume the shop is selling. In other words, productivity is too low.

3. Facilities Expenses

Facilities expenses include rent, utilities, maintenance and repairs, and facilities insurance.

The average facilities expenses for retail florists in North America is 8.5 percent. The do-not-exceed target is 10 percent of sales.

Most retail florists do not have a problem with facilities expenses.

However, when facilities expenses exceed the 10 percent level, profitability disappears. The shop is providing a profitable living for the landlord, but not the shop owners.

What Constitutes 'Sales'?

Since the targets (except for COGS) are figured as a percentage of sales, it is important to know exactly how sales are defined. How you treat wire orders can make a big difference in what you consider total sales to be.

Sales for financial purposes are defined as all sales plus wire-ins at 73 percent and wire-outs at 20 percent. This accurately reflects the amount of money you are going to receive.

I recommend that you divide sales into the major categories for Product Sales and Non-Product Sales for income statement purposes.

Major categories for Product Sales include arrangements, plants, silk and dried, gifts and any other product items you sell that comprise at least 5 percent of your sales. You shouldn't have separate categories for sales that don't represent that minimum amount of sales. Non-Product sales include any sale that is not a product: Wire-out service charges, wire-out commissions, rebates, delivery charges, labor charges, interest or rebilling charges and other miscellaneous non-product sales.

Wire-out commissions are the 20 percent of the wire out that you get to keep. The remaining 80 percent you owe to the wire service.

For incoming wires, I recommend that you enter them in the same sales category as a local order at 100 percent of their value. The only difference between a local order and a wire order is how it is paid for and the 27 percent commission on incoming wires.

To handle the 27 percent commission, I recommend that you set up a Wire-In Commission category under Non-Product Sales. This will end up being a negative sales number to take the 27 percent away from your sales.

I like to place it right under the Wire-Out commission sales category, which keeps your two wire commission accounts together on your income statement.

Other Targets

Although COGS for Arrangements, Payroll Expense and Facilities Expenses comprise the major expenses in a retail flower shop, the remainder account for 17 percent to 21 percent of sales. The really profitable shops manage these expenses as well.

The largest two expenses in this category are advertising and vehicle expense.

Advertising should run between 3 percent and 4 percent of sales. If you are aggressively growing your business you might increase this by a percent or two, but remember this will impact your bottom line by a similar amount.

Vehicle expense in most retail flower shops runs in the same 3 percent to 4 percent range. Occasionally it is higher when an owner/manager drives a vehicle that the business owns.

Nothing wrong with that except you need to remember that your higher vehicle expense is due to a perk for the owner and that amount should be considered as a part of the owner/manager compensation package.

The Most Important Target

The most important question: How much money should you make? Net profit before taxes should be 10 percent of total sales. Although a few very well-managed shops will produce 16 percent on the bottom line, for most shops a realistic target is 10 percent. 🌿

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

HOW MUCH CAN A FLORIST EARN?

This is the first question small business owners ask. "What will my paycheck look like?" Floral Finance Business Services says you should make 10 percent profit as well as paying yourself 10 percent of sales up to \$500,000 in total sales. (If your shop is larger than \$500,000 in sales you can add 5 percent of the sales above \$500,000 to your paycheck.) – **P.G.**

MOST FLORISTS SEE VALENTINE'S DAY SALES GROWTH

> A mid-week holiday, mild weather in much of the country, a strong economy — and a lot of blood, sweat and savvy marketing and promotion led to a strong Valentine's Day this year for many florists.

Sixty-eight percent of Society of American Florists retailer members responding to the organization's post-holiday survey said their Valentine's Day sales increased this year, compared to sales in 2017, when the holiday fell on a Tuesday. About **41 percent** said sales this year were higher than Valentine's Day 2007, when the holiday last fell on a Wednesday.

"This year we focused on preparation, setting goals, working more efficiently, and reducing stress," wrote one respondent in Oklahoma. "It was our best ever."

Among florists who experienced an increase, 91 percent attributed the positive result to the day of the week, a Wednesday.

The survey was emailed to SAF members on Feb. 19 and had an 11.7 percent response rate.

Not everyone saw those positive returns: About **17 percent** of respondents said sales remained on par with last year's returns and **14 percent** said they decreased.

Throughout the country, competition remained steep.

"Today, consumers think we are like Amazon," noted a florist in California. "'Take it off the shelf and send it out on the delivery truck.' We are not like that. We have to process, design, route and deliver."

According to the survey, the average overall transaction this year was down slightly, to **\$73**, compared to \$78 last year and \$84 in 2016. 🌿

INDUSTRY MOURNS BELOVED ICON

> Gay Smith, the longtime technical manager for Chrysal Americas and a popular speaker and writer for most industry groups, died March 1, after a long battle with cancer. She was 63.

"The Society of American Florists is but one of many organizations who will feel an enormous void with Gay's passing," said SAF CEO Kate Penn. "Gay was a prolific contributor of practical, easily relatable and accurate content about how to care for flowers, both in publications and in live education. In more than 20 years of working with Gay, she never said no to SAF, whether we were asking her to write an article for Floral Management magazine, present a program or provide quality control over SAF's Outstanding Varieties competition. Our industry's product — and its practitioners — benefited greatly from Gay's expertise."

"We lost a valued colleague and a dear friend," said Jim Kaplan, president of Chrysal Americas. "Gay meant the world to our international organization and will be missed greatly worldwide."

On behalf of Chrysal's staff, clients "and the entire industry," Kaplan established the Gay Smith Memorial Tribute with the American Floral Endowment. Find out more at endowment.org/donate. 🌿



LEGEND AND FRIEND Gay Smith, the longtime technical manager for Chrysal Americas, died March 1, after a long battle with cancer. In 2016, she received SAF's President's Award.

ARNE M. THIRUP, AAF: 1928-2018

> Arne M. Thirup, AAF, the former President of Pajaro Valley Greenhouses Inc. in Watsonville, California, died peacefully on Feb. 21. He was 90 years old.

"Arne was a true pioneer in American cut flower production," said former Society of American Florists president Red Kennicott, AAF, of Kennicott Brothers Wholesale in Chicago. "Arne's friendly personality and his willingness to share resulted in his becoming a mentor to many, as he established standards to which others aspired."

Thirup held many leadership positions within the floral industry throughout his life, and he played a key role in the creation of the California Cut Flower Commission. In 2001, he was inducted into SAF's Floriculture Hall of Fame, the industry's highest honor. In 1987, Thirup also became one of Greenhouse Grower magazine's earliest honorees as Grower of the Year for his activism supporting fair trade in cut flowers. 🌿



INDUSTRY INNOVATOR Arne M. Thirup, AAF, the former President of Pajaro Valley Greenhouses Inc. in Watsonville, California, died peacefully, surrounded by his family, on Feb. 21. In 2001, he was inducted into SAF's Floriculture Hall of Fame, the industry's highest honor.

GO DEEPER

Read more about the lives of Arne Thirup and Gay Smith, and get more information on the SAF survey at safnow.org/moreonline.

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GREAT EXPECTATIONS
Developing an app required Oregon Flowers to engage in some out-of-the-box thinking.

AN 'UBER-INSPIRED' MODEL FOR FLOWER SALES

> The motto at Oregon Flowers Inc. is “flowers grown with a Dutch touch.” Founded by Society of American Florists Chairman Martin Meskers, AAF, and his wife, Helene, in 1985, Oregon Flowers delivers top-quality soil-grown flowers to American and Canadian markets. Growing flowers with a Dutch touch refers to the obvious family heritage behind the business and also speaks to the technology behind the blooms.

State-of-the-art Dutch greenhouses, coolers and robotic equipment keep this West Coast flower-growing operation competitive in production and harvest techniques. “It’s no secret that over the last 30 years, we’ve focused very heavily on running an efficient business on the growing side,” said Tyler Meskers, vice president and fourth-generation flower grower. “In the last few years, we’ve realized that maybe we haven’t focused enough on the sales side.”

After all, selling flowers in 2018 is very different from selling in 1985. In the past, Oregon Flowers sold to wholesalers buying for florist shops. “Today our wholesale clients are dealing with a different work environment in terms of design customers. Our flowers wind up in many outlets, including grocery stores and independent design studios. In all of these places, working hours are no longer 8 to 5, which means our wholesalers need to know flower availability at all hours,” Tyler said.

Inspiration Strikes

As the Meskers pondered how to cater to their wholesale customers’ changing needs, they were also searching for a strategy to solidify their own business success — for another 30 years. Tyler said the answer

they found is in the hand of nearly everyone you see: a smartphone. “We wanted to make our product as available to customers as Uber or Amazon has,” he said.

Making the leap from growing flowers to developing an app is a big one. “It may seem like the next logical step for us, but it wasn’t easy to get here,” Tyler said. Giving customers a nontraditional buying experience required out-of-the-box thinking — and a few passport stamps. Tyler’s floral industry tours in China helped him see the potential of smartphone use in flower buying. “Even people with the simplest sales — a bucket of stems — had smartphones they used to purchase, deliver and coordinate flower sales,” he shared. That Chinese connection birthed the inspiration to marry technology with sales.

An App Takes Flight

Oregon Flowers worked with a local digital company to develop the app. The main function of the app focuses on two tabs: “Currently Available” (real-time inventory) and “Featured Flower” (showcases a highlighted variety, such as a new product). The beauty of the app is that it takes the clock out of inventory inquiries. Now wholesalers in any time zone can check flower availability any time of day with a simple swipe.

On the Oregon Flowers end, sales calls become more efficient because customers already know what they want. “There’s no more working through the entire product list with each customer,” Tyler said. “Now we wake to orders placed via email, and the sales call confirms and maybe showcases other product, perhaps a new variety.” The app bridges the gap between greenhouse and customer and takes the

guesswork out of crop readiness. Mother Nature can throw all the curveballs she wants, but buyers can know when a specific variety is actually ready.

Oregon Flowers rolled out the app to a few customers for Valentine’s Day. The response? Positive. “Not every customer will want to use it, but those who are keen on technology love it. It brought us a lot of last-minute orders,” Tyler said.

The goal of everything at Oregon Flowers? To sell flowers. “My parents, my sister, me and, one day, my children — growing flowers is in our blood,” Tyler said. “It’s what we like and what we live for. Our Dutch heritage brings us to live simply, work hard, stay disciplined and really succeed, all while having fun. That’s the real Dutch touch.” 🌸

Julie Martens Forney is a contributing writer. fmecitor@safnow.org

GO DEEPER

Read more about the Meskers family at safnow.org/moreonline.



QUICK TAKE

Company: Oregon Flowers Inc., Aurora, Oregon (oregonflowers.com)

The tech: An Apple and Android-compatible app that shows real-time flower inventory (available via the App Store and Google Play)

Benefits: Streamlines sales calls and gives wholesale customers 24/7 access to inventory

"Branding; make every opportunity count!"

- J Schwanke, AAF, AIFD, CFD, PFCI



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STAY ON TOP OF CHANGES IN SOCIAL

> Social media changes fast, and it's important for florists to stay aware of updates, tweaks and new platforms. The way you reached customers a month ago may be quite different from how you connect with them today. The only way to make these platforms work consistently for your business goals is to understand how the platforms themselves work. Here are some recent updates in the social space.

Vero Revs Up

One relatively recent change to consider? An entirely new social media platform.

The social media network **Vero** has been around since 2015, but it's garnered a massive increase in publicity lately, throwing its hat in as a challenger to Facebook and Instagram.

The site's design has a similar feel to Instagram (heavy on visuals, with a sleek design). When it launched, Vero had some problems, including crashes and log-in challenges. Most of those have been resolved, and many users, disenchanted with how changes to Facebook's and Instagram's algorithms have meant that information no longer appears strictly chronologically, are checking out the new site: Vero recently reported more than one million users in a 48-hour period. (Instagram has 500 million-plus daily users; Facebook has 1.57 billion.)

What's behind the rush to Vero? The site has promised that its feed will always be chronological, and the site doesn't use ads. Instead, Vero charges users a small annual fee. (The company offered the first 1 million users accounts "free for life," and because of "extraordinary demand," has since expanded that offer.) Companies on Vero can have dedicated "buy" or "purchase" buttons, with trans-

actions handled in-app via a Stripe account. (No word yet on whether Vero will eventually link up with PayPal, too.)

My advice, with any new platform: Try it, in moderation, and don't pull any resources from existing successful efforts. Keep your expectations in check. Vero (and other new platforms) could be the next big thing, but the space is competitive. It may never help you reach the audience you're targeting.

Other Updates on Existing Platforms

Here are some other changes I think every florist should be aware of:

Twitter. Twitter has been slowly rolling out more features to improve the user experience. While some digital marketing experts say the site is falling behind other platforms that are adding options such as stories, Twitter remains the go-to place for instant access to breaking news and customer service connections (including complaints).

In addition to bumping the **character limit** per tweet from 140 to 280, Twitter also added a **"save to bookmark"** functionality. This means users can more easily save tweets for later reading. The change also makes it easier to share tweets as a direct message with another user and on another platform, including Facebook, or via text.

Facebook. Over the past few months, Facebook had been testing its **"Explore Feed,"** a feature that segmented users' feeds, so that their main feed showed only posts from friends, and a second feed had a mix of posts from businesses and news publishers.

The goal was to help users connect more with their friends, but the experiment had an immediate, negative im-

pact on companies in test areas: Their organic post reach fell to almost nothing. Not surprisingly, those companies began looking for other advertising options outside of Facebook. That experiment has been curtailed.

Another change to the Facebook algorithm: The company is now demoting posts, giving them less reach when they use **"Engagement Bait"** phrases (e.g., "Share this post" or "Tag a friend"). This change is in line with the company's effort to reduce spam content. (Check out more about engagement bait and best practices for avoiding it at safnow.org/moreonline.)

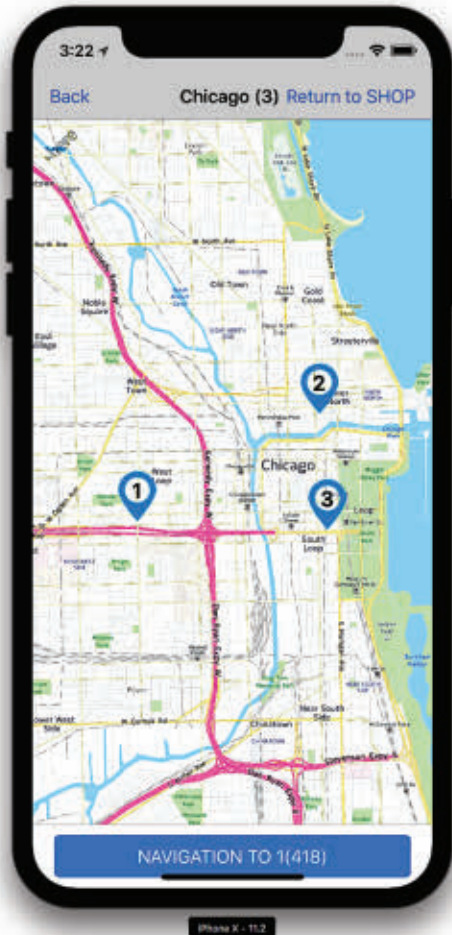
Instagram. Instagram has been trying to beat Snapchat at its own game. They started by using the idea of **"Stories,"** a concept first made popular by Snapchat, and have recently started testing an app called **Instagram Direct**, which is solely for messaging.

Instagram will also soon let you **share an Instagram post from anyone on your feed to your own stories.** This move will let companies utilize user-generated content. For example, if your shop uses a branded hashtag on your arrangement cards, you could find every photo posted to Instagram using that hashtag and add it to your own story to showcase your arrangements. 📸

Jeff Higgins is certified on multiple industry-leading platforms, a contributor to Social Media Today, Hacker Noon, Art + Marketing, top writer in Social Media on Medium, Sprout Social Elite All Star, and the social media director at Bloomerang Solutions. He enjoys fruity beach drinks with an umbrella. jeff@bloomerang.solutions

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SOPHISTICATED SELECTIONS

➤ In her 15-plus years as a floral designer, Heather de Kok, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, has discovered a few qualities that consistently “wow” customers. Among them: texture and surprise. Lately, the Edmonton, Alberta, florist has been flaunting both with “Tropical Nouveau” designs.

This style couples traditional, temperate flowers (roses, lilies, carnations, gerberas and the like) with more exotic blooms, such as anthurium, heliconia, ginger, proteas, orchids and tropical foliage. “It’s something unexpected that gets consumers looking at their professional florist in a new light,” she said. “Additionally, it has a ton of visual interest and flowers that people recognize as unique, which immediately elevate perceived value.”

Here are two of her best sellers. 🌿

Katie Hendrick is the senior contributing editor of *Floral Management*. khendrick@safnow.org

See safnow.org/moreonline for complete recipes.



LUXE AND LUSH Orchids and anthurium dance with roses, carnations, stock and a variety of temperate foliage, creating a jaw-dropping look for the bride who craves modern elegance. De Kok’s tip? “Use the words ‘Tropical Nouveau’ when describing this style to clients,” she said. “The name conveys being on the cutting edge.” Design time: 10-12 minutes. Wholesale costs: \$60. Suggested retail price: \$150.



SEMI-TROPICAL It only takes a few stems of high-impact anthuriums to transform a typical, everyday arrangement to something unexpected and upscale, De Kok said. Design time: 10-12 minutes. Wholesale costs: \$49. Suggested retail price: \$120.

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BUSY BEE

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GARDEN DELIGHT

Paper Pop Card’s “Flower Fence” pop-up card brings a spring garden plot into recipients’ hands. Complete with a charming Audrey Hepburn quote, this gift will brighten everyone’s day in a lovely, unexpected way. > PaperPopCards.com

Mackenzie Nichols is a contributing writer. fmecitor@safnow.org

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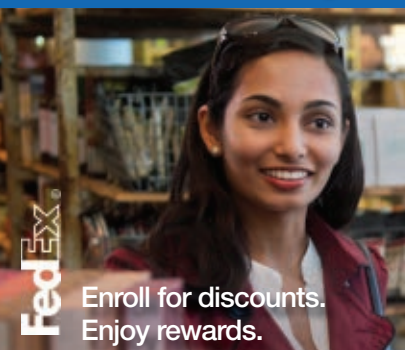
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Flower School: This is the second in a five-part series on extending flower life and maintaining flower quality.

KEEP IT CLEAN

➤ Cleanliness is a key component in flower care and handling. Flowers — and everything that touches them — should be as clean as possible for best performance. Dirty conditions in coolers, work/design rooms, buckets used for hydrating flowers and even delivery trucks translates to opportunities for disease and shorter vase life. Let's look at a cleanliness program that works for growers, wholesalers and retailers.

Clean Water, Buckets and Vases

As we discussed last month, water is essential for flower life and flower opening. Water is pulled up the stem by a pressure differential between the leaves and the base of the stem. Microbial growth occurs when there are dirty conditions in vases or hydration containers, or if vase solutions are reused. These microbes block the flow of water up the stem. Using clean buckets with properly mixed hydration and flower food solutions will minimize microbial growth and maintain a steady flow of water up the stem. Many discussions of cleanliness end with the discussion of clean buckets. But this is just the beginning.

Clippers, Cutters, Knives, Work Surfaces, Hands and Clothing

Microbes and disease spores collect on clippers, work surfaces and coolers. Aggressive and frequent cleaning is the

only approach that works to prevent contamination from spreading to petals, leaves and stems. Use an alcohol solution or disinfectant to clean clippers and knives and antibacterial solutions on cutting surfaces and design tables. As you'll recall from last month's column, cutting stems underwater leads to contamination quickly. When researchers cut 300 rose stems under water, vase life was reduced by 40 percent compared to stems cut dry and placed directly in properly mixed hydration solutions. And keep in mind that disease spores can reside on hands or on clothes too — so wash your hands and aprons frequently.

Disease Spores: They're Everywhere

Disease spores are not visible to the human eye except at very high infestation levels, but they are always present and are easily dispersed in the air. Picking up flowers in the cooler may release spores into the air, onto clothing, and onto cooler benches, the floor and the walls. These disease spores may remain for at least a year, unless you remove them by cleaning. At the present time, there is no scientific evidence that air-scrubbing devices are sufficient to solve the problem of airborne contamination of disease spores, so it's key that you deep-clean your shop regularly.

Cleanliness Checklist

Avoid flower loss and increase profits by following these recommended practices:

- Wash hands frequently.
- Sterilize cutting tools as often as you can.
- Clean and sterilize buckets between each use.
- Wash design tables with antibacterial solution several times daily.
- Remove flower waste remaining from designs and dead and diseased flowers from the processing and design area frequently.
- Cover garbage cans containing flower and plant debris.
- Sweep floors several times daily.
- Avoid underwater cutters.
- Wash walls, floors and tables/benches in coolers monthly.
- Clean the interior of delivery trucks at least weekly. 🌿

Terril Nell, Ph.D., AAF, is professor emeritus at the University of Florida, a consultant to the floral industry and the research coordinator for the American Floral Endowment. terrilnell@gmail.com.

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For additional information, read the American Floral Endowment's report "The Three C's of Success With Fresh Cut Flowers – Cleanliness," at safnow.org.moreonline.

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