

floral management



THE FLORAL BUSINESS AUTHORITY

Inside: Follow-Up Calls, p. 14
Untamed Roses, p. 20
Profitable Deliveries, p. 34

JUNE 2018 | VOLUME 35 | NUMBER 3

RANK & STYLE

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REFLECTING ON A FIRST LADY

> Given how highly regarded the Society of American Florists is in Washington, D.C., for many of us, our March 26, 1990, visit to the White House did not seem so extraordinary. Back then, I was the president of SAF and we were invited there to induct First Lady Barbara Bush into the American Academy of Floriculture. This was not the first time SAF had walked this path. Years before, we'd also inducted Rosalynn Carter and Nancy Reagan.

No, what gave this early spring day such special significance was the gracious way Mrs. Bush received us. The genuine warmth of her smile, the way she welcomed each of us in the receiving line, the refreshments she served in the Yellow Oval Room — a reception area just below the Oval Office — all of this helped us feel, as Americans, that the White House was our home, and it was her honor to be our host.

Her characteristic sincerity came to mind while reading newspaper accounts of her funeral service in April. Addressing the mourners, her pastor, the Rev. Russell J. Levenson Jr., remarked, "What an interesting thing to be a confidant to a woman who has no secrets. What you saw was what you got."

Later in the service, her son Jeb Bush said, "We learned to strive, to be genuine and authentic by the best role model in the world."

It was the quality of authenticity — what you saw was what you got — that made each of us feel special that day at the White House.

The magnetism that bonded us with Mrs. Bush was twofold: our shared love of flowers and our common interest in families. Her love of flowers was evident everywhere we looked. Beautiful bouquets were placed throughout the White House.

From her remarks and the way she lived, we also knew she valued strong families in the same way we did. Namely, that strong families comprise the underlying core of America's strength and character. And here she was surrounded by a roomful of family business owners, the manifestation of what she, and we, held dear.

The personal experience of one of our industry members underscores her sincerity. Three years after our visit, Charles Kremp, AAF, of Kremp Florist

in Philadelphia, was exploring an industry opportunity, but one filled with considerable challenges. Gina, Charles' wife, thought of the challenges and uncertainty Mrs. Bush must have experienced as her husband ran for president. So she wrote Mrs. Bush at their Walker's Point residence in Kennebunkport, Maine, seeking advice. Within a week, a thoughtful, handwritten note of encouragement arrived in the Kremps' mailbox from Mrs. Barbara Bush. The reply was so personal in nature, it remains one of the Kremps' most valued possessions today.

Impromptu events create humorous memories in most families. Such was the case during our White House visit. In the previous week, President Bush had made an offhand, disparaging remark about broccoli that the press picked up. Addressing us, Mrs. Bush let us know the morning of our visit, the broccoli growers had come to the White House with a truckload of broccoli. They wanted the president to know it was being donated to local food banks in his name. We all shared a good laugh over this.

Industry members should go online and search for the New York Times article on Mrs. Bush's funeral. The lead photo has three main components: the casket, the Bush grandsons walking beside the casket as pallbearers, and us, floral industry family members represented by a lovely, pastel casket piece. Thinking back on our 1990 visit, seeing those flowers felt like a warm goodbye hug to a dear family member. A family friend we will always love and cherish. 🌸



J. Sten Crissey, AAF, is a former SAF president. In 2006, he retired from Crissey's Flowers in Seattle, his family's 65-year-old business. He is a member of the Floriculture Hall of Fame. stencrissey@gmail.com

GO DEEPER

See a photo of Crissey's visit with Mrs. Bush at safnow.org/moreonline.

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What Inspires Us

> In a recent white paper from The Retail Performance Company, the following statistics caught my attention: “Over a third of the world’s population owns a smartphone and over half are online. In industrialized, Western countries these numbers are even higher.” The report authors go on to suggest that “when technology becomes this ubiquitous and important, it changes society, challenges business models and disrupts entire industries.”

Sound familiar? At the Society of American Florists, we hear from members all the time about how the Internet and social media have changed (and will continue to change) the industry and how business is done. That’s a big part of the reason we asked contributing writer Tom Gresham to reach out to almost a dozen sources for our cover story (p. 22) this month on best practices in online commerce — how you attract people to your site and, more important, how you convince them to buy. To call this a major conversation would be the understatement of the year, and that’s why you’ll also find plenty of programming on social media management, SEO, and (so, so, so) much more at SAF Palm Springs 2018, the Society of American Florists’ 134th annual convention, Sept. 12-15 in

Rancho Mirage, California. (Head to **safnow.org** for a convention programming preview and to register.)

Elsewhere in this issue, you’ll find design room inspiration in the form of unruly roses (p. 20) — varieties that brides swoon over now, even if just a few years ago some florists wondered about their “messy” centers. Another evolution? For our Field Trip column (p. 40), contributing writer Julie Martens Forney talked with the team at FernTrust Inc. in Seville, Florida, a co-op of farms that was devastated in recent years by the one-two punch of Hurricanes Matthew and Irma. The last time we checked in with the farms, supplies were tight and the recovery work was slow going. This month, Forney shares a more upbeat outlook, with insight from FernTrust on how their forced infrastructure improvements could be a very good thing in the long run.

Finally, I hope you’ll take time to read this month’s Viewpoint column (p. 2), in which former SAF President J. Sten Crissey, AAF, reflects on a special trip to the White House in 1990, when SAF inducted then First Lady Barbara Bush into the American Academy of Floriculture. Mrs. Bush’s death this spring brought back happy memories for many SAF members who were in the Yellow Oval

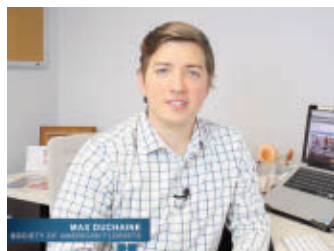


Room that day. (Read additional stories on p. 38.) For Crissey, who retired in 2006 from Crissey’s Flowers, his family’s 65-year-old business, the meeting with Mrs. Bush represented the coming together of mutual interests — flowers, plants and a deep love of family. “Whatever thoughts I had about being overwhelmed [in the White House] disappeared when I saw her smile,” Crissey said. “She was so gracious.”

See something in this issue that you want to comment on? Have a story idea that you want to share? We want to hear from you. Happy reading — and happy summer! 🌻

Mary Westbrook
mwestbrook@safnow.org

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Social media, SEO, video production and more! “Your Online Brand,” SAF’s new series of web-focused technology how-to videos, aims to educate with easy-to-follow content that gets right to the point on the hottest topics in digital technology. Videos are added monthly at safnow.org/TechTips. Got an idea for a tech segment? Email techtips@safnow.org.



BEAT THE HEAT

Don’t let the summer heat get to your flowers. You can build best practice precautions and processing steps into your routine to keep flowers turgid and hydrated from the shop to the recipient. Check out tips and advice at safnow.org/moreonline.



QUICKBOOKS TIPS

Your bookkeeper is already a QuickBooks expert — there’s no reason for you to know the nitty-gritty details of the accounting software, right? Think again, said Michael Pugh, AAF. The owner of Pugh’s Flowers in Memphis, Tennessee, shared his best QuickBooks tips in Detroit on May 20 during SAF’s 1-Day Profit Blast. Get the presentation handout at safnow.org/1-Day-Profit-Blast.



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"Relevant and Valuable"



> I find the April-May issue of Floral Management so darned relevant and valuable. I'm cutting out pages, re-referring team members

to specific articles, sending emails to contributors, and highlighting sentences to remember. Our team members are probably rolling their eyes behind my back: "Here she goes again!"

And I love the interview with J Schwanke ("Design Du Jour," p. 30)! We are inspired by trends and need to be constantly reminded, here in wholesale land, what's happening "out there" in [the worlds of] design creativity, consumer wants and needs, and color. Thanks for putting out a great magazine, as always. We are grateful to have an industry publication that helps us be successful.

Katy Miller, Dillon Floral,
Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania

Women's Day Woes

> In a recent survey, many SAF members said International Women's Day has been challenging to capitalize on. Read more on p. 38.

Most customers buying for Women's Day were of European origin. We think there's potential for the floral industry to promote this, but it will take time before it becomes an important holiday for U.S. professional florists.

Jim Phillip, Phillip's Flowers & Gifts,
Chicago, Illinois

We just can't get any traction. People that we mention it to see it as another "made-up holiday" that is trying to get them to spend their money.

Georgianne Vinicombe,
Monday Morning Flower and
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UP YOUR ONLINE GAME AT SAF PALM SPRINGS 2018

> A love of flowers or creative design likely led to your career in the floral industry, but passion and artistry alone won't keep you in business. These days, as the consumer culture embraces a more digital lifestyle, it's critical to stay abreast of technological tools, techniques and trends that will improve efficiency and increase visibility online.

SAF Palm Springs 2018, the Society of American Florists' 134th annual convention, Sept. 12-15 at the Westin Mission Hills in Rancho Mirage, California, offers an array of educational programs to advance your technology prowess.

The convention schedule includes advice from florists revealing their successful strategies, a social media consultant sharing pointers used by small business retailers, and a forum for users to talk directly with the industry's top tech vendors:

Sales Jolt! Photos That Sell — Reece Nakamoto Farinas of Beretania Florist shows how replacing stock photography with images exclusive to his shop dramatically increased customer satisfaction, web conversion rates and sales — and eliminated complaints.

One of a Kind: How to Stand Out on Social Media — Online marketing expert Crystal Vilkaitis shows how retailers can distinguish themselves by creating a consistent online brand with graphics, ads and local listings.



Reece Nakamoto Farinas



Crystal Vilkaitis

OUR BAGS ARE PACKED

INSPIRATION CENTRAL "I always come away from an SAF convention with tech innovations and ideas that change the direction in which I operate the business or communicate with my customers," said Joshua Glass, AAF, vice president of Peoples Flower Shop in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and a member of SAF's Convention Task Force.



Joshua Glass

ONLINE REACH "Crystal Vilkaitis has personally helped me increase my reach on social media and my sales as a result," said Heather Waits, owner of Bloomtastic Florist in Upper Arlington, Ohio, and a member of SAF's Convention Task Force. "She's all meat, no fluff and will give attendees actionable items they can do — right now — to improve their business."



Heather Waits



Michael Pugh



Max Duchaine



Joe Aldegue

IMPORTANT CONVENTION DATES

July 1: Supplier Expo Early Registration Deadline
Aug. 8: Sylvia Cup Design Competition Entry Deadline
Aug. 8: Premier Products Showcase Exhibitor Deadline
Aug. 17: Outstanding Varieties Competition Entry Deadline
Aug. 17: Convention Registration Early-Bird Deadline
Aug. 23: Deadline for SAF rate at Convention Hotel
safnow.org/annual-convention



Oh, Shoot: Using Video to Boost Engagement — Vilkaitis offers tips for identifying video-worthy content, filming, editing and promoting footage to increase your organic reach on social media.

Hands-On Workshop: QuickBooks — Michael Pugh, AAF, of Pugh's Flowers offers advice based on 30-plus years of using QuickBooks to make the most of the accounting software.

Tech SOS: Ask the Pros — Think of this as SAF's own version of Apple's "Genius Bar." SAF IT Director Joe Aldegue, Digital Strategy Manager Max Duchaine and some of the industry's top technology vendors will be on hand to answer your questions one on one.

Along with these sessions, the convention's educational lineup covers a variety of other hot topics, including attracting and retaining talented employees, purchasing and pricing best practices, profitable design and customer service. For information and to register, go to safnow.org/annual-convention.

“The Petal It Forward concept is simple and easy to do, yet is one of the most engaging floral promotions in the industry’s history,” said SAF Vice President of Marketing Jennifer Sparks. “The results are phenomenal for industry participants, as the program’s random-acts-of-kindness premise builds interest in the news and on social media.”

That makes consumers feel good about you, which goes a long way in establishing customer loyalty. And you give a morale boost to employees.”

“It’s not too early to start laying the groundwork for your Petal It Forward event,” Sparks said. SAF provides members with advice on program logistics, as well as easy-to-implement

Dr. Shikha Chaturvedi is a senior research scientist at the Center for Global Health and Infectious Diseases, National Institute of Health, New Delhi, India. She has a PhD in Microbiology from the University of Delhi, India. She has been working in the field of infectious diseases for over 15 years. She has published over 50 research papers in peer-reviewed journals. She is currently working on the development of new vaccines and diagnostic tools for infectious diseases.

➤ The Society of American Florists welcomed a new member to its team this spring. Hina Ahmed joined SAF as its membership specialist.

COO Drew Gruenburg. "We expect her to apply those skills to the team atmosphere we have here at SAF."

Ahmed played a central role in improving the group's membership efforts. "Hina received a blank slate to do 'whatever she thought best,' and, by implementing her strategies and expertise, the Society's ranks grew by 30 percent within four years," Gruenburg said.

Ahmed received her bachelor's degree from Meredith College in Raleigh, North Carolina, and her master's in health administration from the University of North Carolina in Charlotte. 

The magazine of the Society of American Florists (SAF) 11

snapshot

Bitterroot Flower Shop MISSOULA, MONTANA

CHALK IT UP Whimsical chalk art displays throughout the store keep customers engaged and informed about prices and plant care. They also provide Irwin with an opportunity to show off “hidden talents” of her staff, including Katie Cathersal, a former employee.

POPS OF COLOR AND WHIMSY

> When Lindsay Irwin of Bitterroot Flower Shop in Missoula, Montana, bought her 11,000-square-foot flower shop 10 years ago, she wanted to swap its “subdued pastel” shades for a “lush, vibrant” look. Her goal? Counter customers’ preconceived ideas of what a flower shop looks like (“soft and faded, with a film over it”) with a showroom that truly pops. Inside, customers can scoop up on-trend plants in Bitterroot’s 2,000-square-foot “European Gardens” section — a welcome respite year round, but especially during the harsh Montana winter.



LUSH WALKWAYS Irwin makes her 5,500-square-foot showroom feel intimate, welcoming and bright with lots of fresh product on the floor, including plants displayed at alternating levels, to keep customers’ eyes moving around the room.



ON DISPLAY A rule at Bitterroot: Rotate merchandise around the showroom until it finds a permanent home with a customer. To entice and attract busy customers, Irwin also often organizes by color.

Throughout the rest of the space, Irwin merchandises her products for a “flower market feel,” with plants galore and friendly, themed areas. 🌿

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



No. 5

This is the fifth 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.

SUMMER SCHOOL FOR FLORISTS

> Many shops slow down after Mother's Day as they head into summer, but I want to ensure that you are working to keep your service and enthusiasm levels high, so that your sales figures continue to rise. A few questions to get you started:

- Did you have a post-Mother's Day sales meeting with staff to discuss bullet points for next year, including what worked and what didn't work this year? If not, schedule a meeting this week, while the memories are still fresh!
- Are you holding regular staff meetings?

In January, I covered how important staff meetings are and outlined a simple plan for how every shop, regardless of staff size, can hold them on a regular basis. I will cut you a tiny bit of slack if you dragged your feet on those meetings until now, but no more procrastination. You must hold a formal meeting (before or after work — not during work hours).

At your meeting this month, you can discuss the two critically important outbound calling programs: reminder and follow-up calls.



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You may get some pushback from staff who see these programs as a form of cold calls or telemarketing. They're not. Reminder and follow-up calls are powerful, well-received forms of customer service for existing customers and recipients.

Reminder Calls

The current standard is for shops to email customers reminders about birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays. Bear in mind that we all get too much email; your emails may be landing in

the customer's spam folder — in which case, no sale for you! Also, you don't have an email address for every customer. There is a better way: Apply the human touch and call customers. The process is simple:

- Run a report from your point-of-sale system showing all deliveries for the next eight to 10 days from this time period last year.
- Reach out with a simple, gentle call reminding them of what they sent last year and new choices for this year.

How to start the conversation: Frame reminders as courtesy calls, not a sales pitch. "Hi, Mr. Customer, this is Tim calling from ABC Flower Shop. Last year you sent birthday flowers to [recipient here] on [date here]. As a courtesy, I'm calling to remind you about that special date and to tell you about the new designers we're offering this year."

Follow-Up Calls

The second calling program for your staff involves reaching out to recipients (not the customers) the day after delivery to ensure that they received their flowers and tell them how to care for them. (Remember, most customers don't complain about poor service; they just don't come back.) Obviously, there is a big group that you won't call: funerals, anyone in a hospital, hotel or school. All other recipients are fair game. Follow-ups help convert recipients into customers and can help you discover another opportunity to perform some additional customer service.

How to start the conversation: Keep calls quick, easy and fun. "Hello Ms. Recipient, my name is Tim and I'm calling from ABC Flower Shop to confirm you received the flowers we delivered to your address yesterday." 🌻

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:

Real-world tips from florists who have made changes this year to their selling tactics — and how you can follow their lead.



Smart Selling

"Reminder and follow-up calls are powerful, well-received forms of customer service for existing customers and recipients."



Now Head Online!

Not sure what else to say during reminder and follow-up calls? Get full scripts, advice on how to handle common customer responses and back issues of this column at **FloralStrategies.com/SAF**.

Speaking of back issues, we're at the half-year mark with this column. I want to hear your feedback on how you have adopted and integrated these concepts. I'll give the first five shops that email their update to tim@floralstrategies.com a free copy of my latest sales training recorded webinar (\$79 value).



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- Supplier Expo
- Outstanding Varieties
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“There is an energy at [SAF’s convention] that will charge you and your business! You will learn, connect with others and have fun in the process! In the end, you will take that positive energy and new knowledge back to your business — priceless.”

Nancy Godbout, Jacques Flowers, Manchester, New Hampshire

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EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

SYDNEY LEWIS

**Marketing & Communications Manager
Ashland Addison Florist Co.
Chicago**



➤ Sydney Lewis came onboard Ashland Addison Florist Co. in 2016 — a month before she herself got married. She returned to Chicago after working in digital marketing in Florida for two years and found the position via Twitter. “I searched a hashtag for jobs in Chicago,” she said, with a laugh. The rest is a match made in marketing heaven. “Creative expression is a passion of mine,” she said. “Having the freedom to design, take pictures and create weekly emails that inspire customers to see the power and beauty of flowers is so fun.”

What attracted you to your job?

“It was colorful, fun, and I remember seeing a lot of different responsibilities associated with the job. That attracted me. My degree is in mass communications, so I’d learned how to do a little bit of everything.”

What’s the best part?

“How different my responsibilities are. I need variety to not get bored. One minute I’m posting to Instagram on behalf of our events team, the next I’m editing our website, and another minute I’m responding to customer questions. The list goes on. Sometimes staying on top of it all can be challenging. I keep a weekly to-do list and set goals to stay on target.”

What keeps you motivated?

“Getting reviews from customers about how our flowers brightened their day or seeing the smiling faces of people when we do random flower giveaways outside makes my day! I’m also motivated when I see growth on our digital platforms or more customer interactions online. It’s really about our customers. We work hard to make an impact.” 🌸



PRACTICAL HR

The Downside of Constant Contact

A New York City councilman recently proposed a bill to prohibit private-sector employers from requiring employees to access work-related electronic communications outside of work hours. That law may sound excessive, but electronic communications (text, email, etc.) have blurred boundaries between work and home. That has real implications for you and your employees.

When managers reach out to “off the clock” employees, they send a message that team members must always be available. Employees feel resentful or burn out. For non-exempt employees, after-hours communication also has pay considerations, including unreported time or overtime wages.

A better approach: In most cases, wait to communicate with staff until their next workday or shift. Will critical issues arise that necessitate after-hours communication? Yes — however, they shouldn’t occur every day.

When you hire a new employee, communicate that “critical” topics may necessitate working or connecting after hours. Then ask about the employee’s availability and/or commitments. Boundaries between work and home life and clear communication will help ensure employees come to work relaxed, recharged and more productive. They’ll help you create an environment that encourages focus, productivity and achievement of goals.

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

OUR VARIETIES HAVE...



ALMA



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IT'S NOT ROCKET SCIENCE

➤ First things first: I'm not a tech guy. You say, tech. I say, blech.

When my wife, Clara, and I bought our business 22 years ago, we signed up for the floral business, not the tech business. But it didn't take long to realize the floral industry is high tech and, in many ways, always has been. (I remember being a newbie in 1996 and trying to figure out how wire orders worked: Would a Western Union guy rush in with a teletype order?)

Technology, though, is a fast-moving train — in our world and in our industry. Just five years ago, we created a series of behind-the-scenes videos documenting our shop at Mother's Day and posted them to YouTube. We paid a film student \$300 to create and edit the videos, and they were posted to the Internet in a matter of weeks. That was awesome! Today, thanks to advances in camera and smartphone technology, we can shoot, edit and post similar projects in hours — something we never dreamed of when we started out.

Staying on that train is part of our job. Still, every day as floral professionals, we are pulled into digital algorithms and away from beautiful designs — not to mention all of the other items on our to-do list.

For those of us who don't live and breathe tech, it can be frustrating. Here are some words of encouragement:

You're already tech savvy. The floral industry has been leading the retail tech curve for more than 100 years. Amazon offers same-day nationwide delivery? Please. Florists have wired orders since 1910 — without drones! Florists were the first small businesses with websites, the first with interactive online product catalogs, the first with 24/7 ordering. That's pretty cool. When I speak with my "sophisticated" lawyer, doctor and executive friends, they think "SEO" is a new

kind of sandwich and that "bounce rate" is a basketball statistic. Many government websites look like a third-grader designed them.

"There's a saying in the surfing world about shark attacks. You don't have to be the fastest swimmer, just be faster than the guy next to you. The same is true about our tech knowledge."

You don't have to be the best. There's a saying in the surfing world about shark attacks: You don't have to be the fastest swimmer, just be faster than the guy next to you. The same is true about our tech knowledge. Utilize even some of the many tools available to retail florists — through the Society of American Florists, wire services, wholesalers and online workshops, etc. — and you'll be a leader in your market. What about competition from national brands? If they're beating you in your own town, it's your fault. Brick-and-mortars have many organic advantages they don't have, such as real locations on Google Maps, local social media opportunities, and inside knowledge of the community. National companies can outspend us for digital advertising, but as online searchers get

more savvy, they're looking for "real" shops, not misleading order-gatherers.

You can find your own path. It's easy to be the "blind dog in the meat market" when it comes to chasing the latest and greatest tech thingy. Don't. Find what you like and do best, and work it a little each week. Whether it's Facebook posts, Google AdWords tweaking, or website tinkering, do it, and don't worry too much about not doing everything perfectly.

You can get help. The tech landscape continues to evolve at warp speed. You're busy. Maybe it's time to hire a pro. Thankfully, even that process has evolved into cheaper and more efficient models. Several industry companies now have AdWords teams that offer different levels of support. Maybe their biggest perk is explaining to us what's important and what's not. Chances are, you'll save time, money and increase results by hiring a pro to efficiently use your budget.

You're real. The online universe is full of virtual, fake, trolling Putins. You're the unicorn everyone is searching for: a local artisan small business. What a great match! Show your personality, show your flaws and successes. Be real. Our flowers look fantastic online. Our staff looks even better. Big business spends millions trying to fake "authentic" moments and create credibility. As local retailers, we have that already. Use technology your way to share your story and to invite customers to be part of that story.

Finally, don't let technology intimidate you. Find the resources that help your business and focus on those. Remember: You're never going to be tech perfect, but you must be tech active. 🌿



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

GO DEEPER

Get advice and perspective on how some local florists manage the many tasks associated with digital marketing at safnow.org/moreonline.

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Order Form

NAME	PHONE	E-MAIL ADDRESS	HOST
	()		
ADDRESS	CITY	STATE	ZIP CODE
			SHOW DATE

ITEM #	DESCRIPTION	PRICE EA.	TOTAL PRICE

TOTAL PURCHASE
SHIPPING & HANDLING
Subtotal
TAX %
TOTAL DUE

METHOD OF PAYMENT
CARD NUMBER
CARD EXP. DATE
CARDHOLDER'S SIGNATURE
ADDRESS
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LOVELY LOOKALIKES

> There's no denying the popularity of garden roses, particularly when it comes to weddings. Their softly curled petals open big and full, evoking femininity, luxury and romance — qualities that speak to many clients planning their nuptials. "Trends change over the years, but I haven't met a bride yet who doesn't love a garden rose," said Renee Tucci, AIFD, PFCI, owner of Valley Forge Flowers in Wayne, Pennsylvania, and Boca Blooms in Boca Grande, Florida. Florists across the country have echoed this observation, as well as the fact that many people cannot afford the premium flowers.

Fortunately, breeders have created some pretty decent doppelgängers: standard roses with wild, untamed shapes. (Some have a faint fragrance too.) At Proflora in Bogotá, Colombia, last fall, hundreds of visitors flocked to the Dümme Orange booth, where they admired the garden rose lookalikes. Philippe Veys, the company's rose

manager, recalled growers' initial disdain for the roses' "imperfect" centers. "When we started showing products that looked like this five or six years ago, people told us they were ugly! Can you believe that?" he said. "Now, everyone's crazy about the garden style."

Thomas Sebenius, a freelance designer in Los Angeles, is delighted with these new varieties — and not just because they satisfy so many brides' tastes. "Since roses are so readily available at places other than a flower shop, it's important that professional florists differentiate themselves by choosing roses that deliver the 'wow factor,' whether that's through shape, color or scent," he said. "Plus, their mass and shape helps ground an arrangement, which designers will surely appreciate!"

Here are a few varieties to help elevate your designs. 🌹

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



'PLAYA BLANCA'
Connectaflor



'CLASSIC SENSATION'
Dümme Orange



'ALL 4 LOVE'
Dümme Orange



'CARALINDA'
Dümmen Orange



'CRÈME DE LA CRÈME'
Rosaprima



'CATALINA'
Royal Flowers



'WEDDING SPIRIT'
Rosaprima



'LOVELY HEARTS'
Royal Flowers



'CARALUNA'
Royal Flowers

Rank & Style

BY TOM GRESHAM



**It's no longer just about
being found online — it's
about being found worth
customers' time and money.**

These days, it seems like everyone is in the personalized delivery game. Clothes curated just for you show up on your doorstep. Meals you've carefully selected to fit your very specific diet arrive, after you've filled your cart from beautiful virtual shelves. You can find a partner and be on a date within minutes, just with a swipe of your finger.

This is the climate customers shop in, and flowers are no different. So, you have to work hard for customers' attention. Yes, your SEO (and digital marketing efforts) must ensure your shop shows up when someone starts looking — but what customers find when they click is even more important than getting that click. After all, just because you show up in online searches doesn't mean customers like what they see. If online shopping and dating have taught retailers, marketers and consumers anything, it's that there's always something (or someone) else out there vying for your attention. Why settle for the first thing you find?

While florists increasingly understand the significance of the website experience to their customers and have sought to improve their online offerings, many misconceptions remain. That's why this month, we're turning to local florists and some of the thought leaders in the industry — the people at major national brands tasked with ensuring florists' websites are delivering on all fronts — to find out how florists can capture more sales online.

Get the Google-y Eyes

When people search online for florists in an area, the simple order of how shops appear in the results has a major effect on revenue. For that reason, Farbod Shoraka, cofounder and CEO of BloomNation, said "Google rules the world" of local online shopping, making optimization "in the eyes of Google" critical.

"The difference between the No. 1 spot on Google and the No. 2 spot is huge," Shoraka said. "The No. 1 spot gets 50 percent more traffic than position No. 2. In fact, if you are not in the top three positions, you are getting very little organic traffic."

That reality can be intimidating for florists who are juggling an ever-in-

creasing number of job responsibilities, acknowledged Timm McIntyre, ecommerce product manager for FTD.

"There is still a lot of uncertainty and even fear among small retailers and large ones when it comes to ecommerce," he said.

Landing in one of those top three coveted search positions often requires florists to work closely with their website providers. At Currans Flowers in Danvers, Massachusetts, for example, Paul Danehy said his business has tackled strengthening its search results in a variety of ways, including pay-per-click advertising and improvements in its use of SEO.

"We follow the best practices, which include using relevant naming conventions, quality images and relevant product descriptions," said Danehy, who partners with GravityFree for his site.

Picking the right partners for your shop is critical — because florists often need outside support to manage the technical components of search optimization.

"We code and develop the back and front ends of [our clients'] sites to support the organic ranking on search engine result pages such as Google and Bing," said Katie Kerr, CFO and head of EFlorist for Teleflora. "We also research keywords that are driving engaged customers to the site, and we work to optimize sites for those search terms."

Earning a top spot on Google requires savvy, and so does keeping that spot. Sundaram Natarajan, CEO of GotFlowers, notes Google and other search engines are constantly refining the algorithms that govern search — a

point Shoraka also emphasized. If you are not "continually optimizing" your website — for example, updating images to reflect the current season and upcoming holidays, blogging and responding to online reviews — "your competitors will be," Shoraka said.

"And you will lose your ranking, which means you lose your traffic and ultimately lose your revenue," he added.

Secure the Sale

Of course, attracting people to your website is only part of the challenge. Once shoppers arrive, you need to make it easy, compelling and — did we mention easy? — to buy.

"Traffic, per se, isn't the goal of optimization," said Jamie Jamison Adams, director of SEO for the Flower Shop Network. "Creating a user experience that captures customers at every part of the buying cycle and leading them to conversion should be the goal."

According to Ken Sons, director of operations for GravityFree, the most common and consequential mistakes that florists make online often can be traced to one overarching oversight: failing to put themselves in their customers' shoes.

"Many florists don't consider how a customer behaves online," Sons said.

One example: Customers' expectations have grown high, and many anticipate the online shopping experience to be a simple one, free of unnecessary clicks and hassles. Consumers across demographics are accustomed to the smooth purchasing process on sites such as Amazon.

"Customers no longer put up with a bad ecommerce experience, especially



—BrightLocal

if another website provides a better experience,” Shoraka said. “Nine out of 10 times they will use the better website.”

A disorganized site that does not update product availability or one that presents arrangements in a haphazard way burdens customers with longer searches, prompting them to look elsewhere. (According to the Nielsen Norman Group, which specializes in user experience, consumers stay on a web page for an average of less than one minute; users often leave pages within 10 to 20 seconds.)

Another faux pas? Requiring too many clicks for customers to complete a purchase.

“Without an effective checkout process that removes as many barriers as possible, you will lose sales,” said Michael Delgorio, director of corporate development for Lovingly.

Danehy said his business emphasizes product placement on its site. That means positioning products online with purpose, for example, ensuring the first products a customer sees are the most relevant for the season. In addition, he said offering Paypal and ApplePay makes it easy for customers to use their preferred payment methods, and the Currans site employs stored address settings to speed the checkout process.

“Customers want a hassle-free shopping experience that lets them choose a gift and check out quickly so that they may go on with their busy lives,” Danehy said.

Search engines, too, pay attention to how fast people go from browsing to shopping, Shoraka said: Google has its eye on a site’s conversion rate to gauge how well a website ushers customers from arrival to purchase.



10 seconds

That's how long you have to grab a customer's attention before she navigates away from a page.

—The Nielsen Norman Group

“Google actually gives you negative points if someone clicks on your website and leaves without making a purchase,” Shoraka added.

Looks Can Kill

This is 2018, a time when everyone seems to have their own personal brand on Instagram, chefs remake dishes just to make them look more appetizing on Snapchat, and city neighborhoods have been known to commission selfie-friendly murals to attract Millennial visitors. In other words: Consumers are now swimming in beautiful images. Florists, who sell themselves as creative, inspired designers, need to have sites that look good.

“Florists need to remember that, according to [our company’s] research, more than 10 times as many people will see the website as will visit the store,” said Ryan Freeman, president of Strider Search Marketing. “Ignoring the presentation and maintenance of the website drives away customers and often contributes to people thinking poorly of the business.”

McIntyre said 20 years ago “online retailers could get away with difficult-to-use websites because online shoppers were early adopters who loved technology and relished the challenge of

placing an online order.” Today, shoppers are online “not for entertainment but because of price, selection and convenience,” he explained. “A bad website has the same effect as a dirty, disorganized shop. It affects your credibility, turns off shoppers and costs you sales.”

Kerr said a website’s design and appearance provide a telling showcase to customers of the shop’s brand and products.

“Customers will remember how the site made them feel more than what they ordered,” Kerr said. (Consider the difference between “That was easy! I found exactly what I wanted. She’s going to love it!” and “That took forever. I really hope the flowers look okay.”)

Great photos are more important than ever (and easier than ever to take thanks to advances in smartphone and

“Customers want a hassle-free shopping experience that lets them choose a gift and check out quickly so that they may go on with their busy lives.”

—Paul Danehy, Currans Flowers



camera technology). To set himself apart from competitors, Danehy takes most photos for his site himself and updates the images seasonally. Rather than relying on stock images, shooting exclusive photos allows the shop to present “images that [customers] see nowhere else” — and customers, Danehy said, notice the difference.

“We hear it on the phones all the time: ‘I chose you because your flowers look amazing,’” Danehy said. “Customers want their gift to be received as pictured so it’s been important to make sure we are representing our work online appropriately by utilizing beautiful but accurate images and honest descriptions of our products.”

Additionally, the images should be arranged as “a curated catalog that can help customers feel like you are making recommendations for them rather than showing them limitless, confusing choices,” said Sons. “Ideally a florist should have photos for products in all variations so potential customers can easily visualize what they are buying and understand the value of upgrading.”

Freeman added that, without a product catalog that’s personalized for your

business, you’re giving customers a reason to simply price-shop online.

“Unique-to-you products with great descriptions let the customer create a scenario in their minds involving your product and service,” he said. “Tell them how it will make the recipient feel, push the benefits not the stem count.”

Fresh Content Is Key

One of the most common website mistakes Kerr sees is an insufficient attention to content.

“Google interprets written content to confirm a site’s relevancy to a user’s search,” she said. “Without it, a site can appear less relevant to a search engine and therefore lose ranking.”

An easy way to add enriching content? Highlight the shop’s story in your “About Us” page, Kerr said.

“Is the business owner a third-generation florist? How long has the shop been serving the local community? Adding unique details about the retail shop and staff can build trust and encourage new visitors to place an order,” she explained.

McIntyre said personalization is key.

“Your shop, your products and your personality make your brick-and-mortar

business unique,” he said. “Make sure your website reflects that.”

Freeman said a frequently updated blog is a strategic way to draw more people to your site.

“Customers might only need to purchase two or three times per year, but if you’re giving them something interesting to read or learn more frequently you can not only cement the customer loyalty aspect of the relationship, but also expand their awareness of your product and service mix, while also proving yourself to be a subject matter expert,” he said. “Blogging gives people an opportunity to increase their desire to do business with you.”

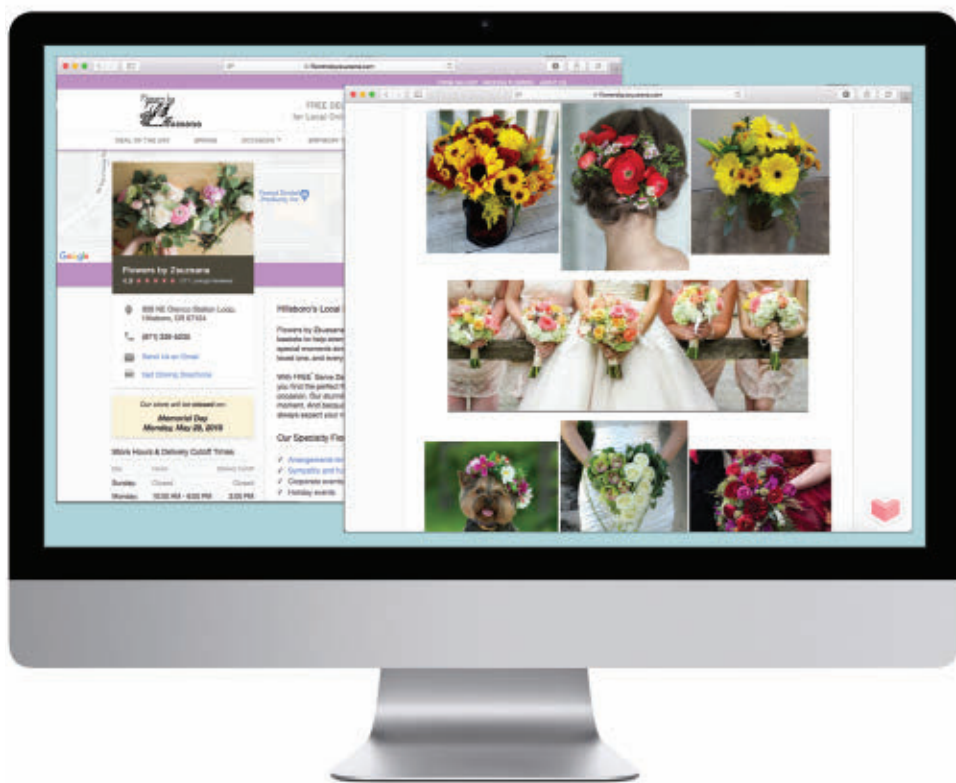
Ensuring a site is relevant means creating each page with a purpose so that it answers a question or solves a common customer’s problem, Adams added. For instance, including a page that focuses specifically on wedding work or birthday designs helps prospective clients.

That’s advice that Zsuzsana Hutchinson, owner of Flowers by Zsuzsana in Hillsboro, Oregon, has put into practice. Her site, hosted by Lovingly, provides a clear view of what makes both her shop and her offerings distinctive.

“My website shows pictures of my shop, has custom arrangements available, has a prom page and wedding page,” she said. “There also is a video on the ‘About Us’ page that features me talking about key issues,” including her connection to her local town and her reasons for becoming a florist.

Remember, too, that the demand for content is never-ending, meaning the managing and updating of a website must be treated as an ongoing operation. Websites that stay static will lose ground in searches and seem less compelling to customers, said Renato Sogueco, PFCI, vice president of digital strategy and education for BloomNet.

“The biggest mistake is to do nothing,” Sogueco said. “Google and other search engines want to see regular changes made to websites, not only to what is presented on the page for consumers, but also in the html code, such as the ‘Title’ and ‘Description’ tags for every page. SEO changes should be applied monthly.”



AUTHENTICALLY YOU Zsuzsana Hutchinson of Flowers by Zsuzsana personalizes her About Us page with a video that highlights her hometown roots and deep love of floral design.

Mobile Matters

If a florist only worries about the way their website works on a laptop or desktop screen, then they are ignoring a critical component of their online audience. According to eMarketer, mobile sales comprised 34.5 percent of retail ecommerce sales in 2017 — a percentage that's expected to rise to 53.9 percent by 2021.

A takeaway? "Florists' sites should function seamlessly no matter how they are accessed — by phone, tablet or desktop," Kerr said.

Sogueco also said florists need to keep mobile shoppers top of mind in web design and management.

"We continue to see big growth in mobile commerce with more and more consumers utilizing smartphones for shopping and/or inquiring about brands and products," he said. "All businesses should ensure they are spending the appropriate time ensuring the mobile experience is a good one for their customers."

Kerr said customers not only expect "a device-agnostic experience" — so does Google.

"Google now factors mobile performance into rankings, so older sites that are not optimized for viewing on mobile — by layouts and load times — are losing out," Kerr said.

Working with GravityFree, Danehy said he's made his site more responsive for mobile visitors in recent years, ensuring top products appear in prominent spots, images are resized properly, and inconvenient scrolling is minimized. The payoff is real.

"We have seen an increase in mobile orders year-over-year of about 60 percent, and a 275 percent increase from 2016," Danehy said.



34.5%

Mobile sales in 2017 as a percentage of overall retail ecommerce. That figure is expected to rise to 53.9 percent by 2021.

—eMarketer

Assist, Remind, Suggest

Most people expect their phones to tell them things: reminders, dates, appointments. And florists are used to reminding their customers of important flower-buying events and suggesting add-ons. Your shop must also extend that customer service to its digital interactions.

Danehy's online customers, for instance, can create personal accounts and customize their experience. The accounts enable customers to record into their settings special dates when they will likely want to send flowers, such as a loved one's birthday, and to request email reminders from Currans as the date approaches.

Delgorio said building relationships through a website is "vital."

"It can start with basic respect, like not allowing automated point-of-sale gift add-on suggestions for sympathy purchases or offering helpful card message suggestions," Delgorio said. "Add these elements to a super simple ordering process and the consumer's experience becomes fast, easy and efficient."

Sons said too often florists offer an unwieldy, frustrating process for finding arrangements on their site.

"They put up products and never touch them again, assuming that the customer will go through four or five pages of products to find out what they want. They won't," Sons said. "Move your bestsellers to the top. Filter out products that are unavailable or take down products that aren't selling."

In that vein, Natarajan said websites can be automated with schedule-driven content so that occasion-specific products can be hidden when appropriate. (For instance, all Valentine's Day designs disappear on Feb. 15.)

Shoraka said florists also tend to overlook the management of their pricing online.

"I see it all the time on websites where two arrangements can be priced drastically different even though the consumer might consider them similar in value," Shoraka said. "Florists need to think like a consumer and make arrangements that consumers find valuable. More importantly, they need to price everything based on a model, where the costs are marked up properly and consistently and the labor is accounted for."

Similarly, the delivery experience can play a major role in a customer's experience ordering online — especially

"I can't tell you how many times people have told me that they picked me because I have such good reviews and pictures online."

—Zsuzsana Hutchinson, *Flowers by Zsuzsana*

in a world where “free” delivery through Amazon often feels like the norm.

“Same-day delivery is no longer enough — now florists must make it easy to select delivery by a certain time,” Sons said. “Additionally, once flowers are ordered, giving a customer updates on delivery helps keep him or her from becoming anxious.”

As an added touch of customer service, Hutchinson takes a photograph of each arrangement after it is complete and sends it to the person who ordered it.

“They will get a picture from the recipient at some point,” Hutchinson said. “Most of the time, not a very good one [with bad lighting or awkward composition]. I’d rather send them one that I took.”

Is This Thing Working?

One of the advantages of having a robust online presence is the information it provides. A website produces steady streams of data that offer insight into the preferences and habits of customers.

Florists should strive to “understand a few key metrics about your website and take action,” McIntyre said.

“What should you be charging? Where should you be marketing? What

UP YOUR ONLINE GAME

SEO, digital marketing and social media strategies will be key topics this year during SAF Palm Springs 2018, the Society of American Florists’ 134th annual convention, Sept. 12-15 in Rancho Mirage, California. You’ll enjoy programs such as:

- Defending Your Brand Online
- How to Stand Out on Social Media
- Sales Jolt: Photos that Sell
- Oh Shoot: Using Video to Boost Engagement

Make plans now to attend and soak up the education and networking opportunities. Find out more at safnow.org/events.



should you be offering?” he said. “Use what you learned from your web metrics in your brick-and-mortar business. This is especially true when it comes to product selection, pricing and delivery areas.”

Danehy said data helps him determine effective pay-per-click advertising and SEO strategies, efforts GravityFree manages through its 360 service.

“A couple of words makes a big difference,” he said. (For example, “florist in Danvers” vs. “flower delivery in Danvers”.)

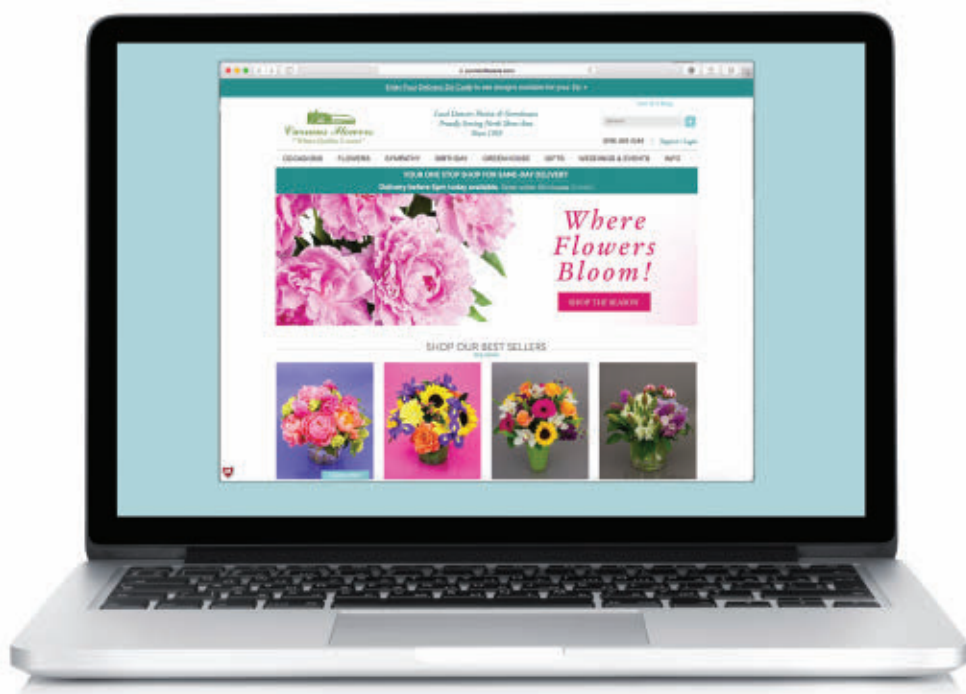
In addition, Danehy said sales reports help determine product placement.

“Top sellers or top-selling styles get moved to the front of the line,” he said. “We reworked our Mother’s Day items to be visually similar to our Valentine’s Day items because they were so successful.”

A Strategic Approach

A well-designed website does not equal an effective online presence on its own. Florists should integrate elements such as social media, advertising and reviews into their online plans — creating what Sogueco calls “a complete strategy.”

“When a consumer sees a florist’s advertisement at the top of the search results page, confirms they have a business listing with Google, and sees their website at the top of the organic listings, this all confirms in the customer’s mind that this is a legitimate local busi-



EASY DOES IT Paul Danehy of Currans Flowers said his business emphasizes product placement on its site. That means positioning products online with purpose, ensuring the first products a customer sees are the most relevant for the season.

ness from which to make a purchase,” Sogueco said.

To convey professionalism and competence, Natarajan said businesses cannot overlook the details of their entire online presence, such as failing to use the same business name on their website and social media accounts or by providing an email address not associated with their web domain. Customers notice these apparently minor miscues. (Another “minor” miscue that can turn off customers? Unbranded emails. Read more on p. 42.)

Delgorio recommends using Google AdWords as “low-risk advertising with no contracts and the power of Google to help make you competitive against the big players.” That’s a strategy Hutchinson has adopted. In the past year, in addition to regular posts on Instagram and Facebook, she’s increased her advertising budget with Google AdWords from \$250 to \$500 and also advertises on Yelp for \$300 a month.

“Plain and simple, if you want to attract more business you need to play the ‘Google game,’” she said. “Advertise on AdWords, set a realistic budget and watch the business grow.”

Also, make it part of your policy to respond promptly to negative reviews online and to use positive reviews to drive business, Delgorio said. Those online voices add up: 85 percent of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations, according to a BrightLocal survey.

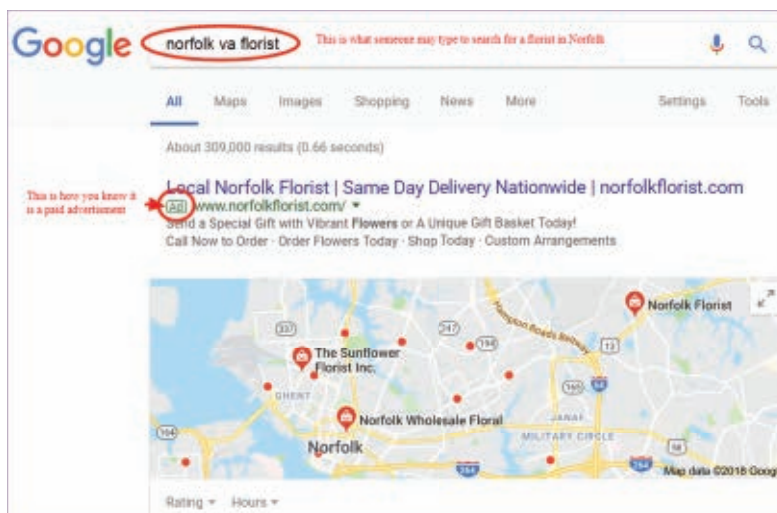
“Good reviews are the key to getting new customers,” said Hutchinson, who monitors her reviews daily. “I can’t tell you how many times people have told me that they picked me because I have such good reviews and pictures online.”

Danehy said “a complete strategy” also includes managing a cohesive experience between a shop’s physical and online locations. His shop uses some of the same marketing and branding design elements in the brick-and-mortar and cyber worlds.

“That way our brand is consistent no matter where our customers are finding us,” he explained. 🌸

Tom Gresham is a contributing writer for *Floral Management*. He has written on the role of technology in fields such as stadiums and arenas, health clubs, and supply chain logistics. fmeditor@safnow.org

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NO MORE | Copper Wires!

By Katie Hendrick

Florists discuss the advantages of a cloud-based phone system.



➤ On the evening of October 29, 2012, Superstorm Sandy struck the New Jersey coast near Atlantic City. The 820-mile, category 1 hurricane killed more than 100 people, flooded thousands of homes in the region (as well as low-lying streets and subway stations in Manhattan), and knocked out power for more than 8 million households. According to financial analysis firm IHS Global Insight, Sandy caused a \$25 billion loss in business activity.

For nearly two weeks, Rutland Beard Floral Group had no power at its three Garden State locations; yet the company still managed to communicate with customers by routing their calls to salespeople at one of its many Maryland branches. "There weren't a ton of callers for the New Jersey shops, obviously, since most locals were without power and inundated with cleanup efforts," said President Skip Paal, AAF. "But those who wanted to could place a future order or schedule a bridal consultation."

That's because a year or two prior Paal had swapped out his traditional,

copper wire analog phone system for a cloud-based, Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) service that operates similarly to Skype or FaceTime video sessions. Doing so slashed Paal's monthly phone bill by about \$1,000, a metric that doesn't fully capture the success of the change. "It's tough to truly quantify how a cloud-based phone has paid off, because it's helped us tweak so many things that ultimately affect our bottom line, from staffing appropriately to training our sales team," Paal said. "Most people don't get excited talking about their phone system, but this technology is pretty incredible."

Paal is hardly an anomaly. Floral Management spoke with several shop owners who gushed about how VoIP has enhanced their businesses. Here are just a few reasons they advocate embracing the cloud.

1. Affordability

The traditional system — known as plain old phone service (POTS) — requires the business owner to pay per phone

extension. "In the old days, there were only a certain number of copper analog phone lines, and florists felt compelled to get a lot of them so they could handle the volume during holidays," said Chris Drummond, AAF, PFCI, of Plaza Flowers in Norristown, Pennsylvania. "It was cumbersome and expensive."

VoIP drastically cuts costs by replacing fancy (and finicky) hardware with a simple phone and headset. This eliminates the need for in-house servers, along with their pricy equipment and maintenance fees.

"Theoretically, you don't even have to buy a phone because VoIP systems all have apps that work on cellphones, tablets and laptops," Drummond said. (Those who choose to use one of their existing devices need to make sure they connect to a Wi-Fi source to avoid affecting their personal data plan.)

POTS also charges a few cents per local call — "which sounds like nothing, but it really adds up," Paal said — and a hefty fee for international calls. Additionally, setting up features



A cloud-based phone has helped us tweak so many things that ultimately affect our bottom line, from staffing appropriately to training our sales team."

—Skip Paal, AAF

"It's a very intuitive system," said Drummond, who makes the changes himself through a web browser. "It's really gratifying to not have to pay the phone company or a consultant anymore."

Last summer, Howard Hurst of Tipton & Hurst, which has six locations in Arkansas, purchased a shop in Pine Bluff that had a traditional, multiline phone system. He immediately switched over to VoIP, buying five phones for the shop. "In one month, our phone bill went from \$850 to \$150," he said.

2. Flexibility

Because VoIP allows users to answer from anywhere they have Internet or cell service — be it a car, a living room, a beach or a second shop location — florists don't have to keep their shops fully staffed nine or 10 hours every day.

"Few shops are constantly busy," said Hurst. "And no one wants to pay a bunch of people to stand around doing nothing." Before adopting a VoIP system five years ago, Hurst had to choose between hiring a robust roster for each shop, just in case they got a rush of

shoppers, or paying a handful of people in a call center to answer phones if employees at one of his locations got tied up. (He chose the latter.)

"Now, if someone calls one shop and employees are busy, they click a button and the call automatically goes to one of our other locations. The caller has no idea," he said. "It's really made us more efficient in terms of labor, which, for many florists, is an Achilles heel." (Hurst makes sure all locations receive the same products so a salesperson in Little Rock won't pitch an arrangement to a Conway customer with flowers unavailable at the sister shop.)

Like Hurst, Paal, whose company has 16 locations, insists that VoIP is "a no-brainer" for multishop floral businesses that can leverage their existing workforce, but he believes the system would benefit smaller businesses too.

It's really gratifying to not have to pay the phone company or a consultant anymore."

—Chris Drummond, AAF, PFCI



such as call waiting, call forwarding, call transferring and remote extensions typically incurs additional charges, and upgrades are a major undertaking. In contrast, VoIP includes unlimited toll-free, inbound, outbound calls anywhere in the world for a flat monthly fee, which ranges between \$20 and \$30, depending on the provider.

VoIP includes a slew of features (more on a few later), which users can add or drop monthly, as well as the number of phones used — so February's business does not dictate the bill year round.

"You can forward it to your cellphone with a click of a button, so you're not tethered to your desk," Paal said. For owners who have to wear a lot of hats, this technology frees them up to take calls while making an arrangement, going on a delivery run or traveling to their wholesaler, a networking event, conference or any errand, really. "To me, that flexibility is even more rewarding than the cost savings," said Paal, who has used VoIP in South American hotel rooms on numerous occasions "with perfect clarity and volume."

The call forwarding function is a godsend during inclement weather, said Drummond, who relieves employees when a snowstorm is in the forecast. "We lock up the shop and they get home safely before the roads get bad," he said. "Meanwhile, we're still able to take orders to fill as soon as we reopen."

3. Training Tool

VoIP has a lot of bells and whistles available, but one capability especially advantageous for retail florists is call recording. Being able to review exactly what was said and how provides valuable insight for customer service and sales training. Each week, the salespeople at Plaza Flowers hone their skills by listening to their recent calls, analyzing the good, the bad and the ugly. "I pay an extra \$10 a month for this service, but it's totally worth it," Drummond said.

Additionally, for the aforementioned shop owners taking an order on the go, call recording lets them replay the conversation and enter the information as soon as their hands are free.

4. Special Treatment

Have an (ahem) "discerning" customer who only wants to talk to a specific em-

ployee? You can program certain incoming calls to only ring on certain phones. Drummond, for instance, assigns his top five salespeople's numbers to his VIP corporate clients to make sure those conversations run as smoothly as possible. "You can customize it in all kinds of ways, such as designating certain people to handle calls about weddings or sympathy work or an ad campaign," he said. "Or you could set it to round robin, sending it to the person who's been idle the longest." 📞



VOIP 101

There are several VoIP programs available. Drummond uses 8x8 (8x8.com), Paal uses RingCentral (ringcentral.com) and Hurst uses 3CX (3cx.com). Additionally, several Internet and cable companies are now offering VoIP services in their bundles. For a rundown on different providers and packages, visit getvoip.com.

A dependable Internet connection is a must for this service. Drummond recommends having two different Internet lines and hiring a technician to install a managed router at the shop. This way, if one Internet line goes down, the alternate one kicks in.

It's really made us more efficient in terms of labor, which, for many florists, is an Achilles heel."

—Howard Hurst



EDITORS' NOTE Paul Goodman, MBA, 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.



Deliver the Profits

**Now is a good time to review
your costs and delivery charges
to make sure you are making a profit.**

PAUL GOODMAN, MBA, CPA, PFCI



SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/WAVEBREAKMEDIA

> **Newsflash:** Delivery is expensive. Showing a solid profit on the bottom line is a challenge for most retail florists. One area that can hurt is not charging enough for making deliveries.

Although there was a time when delivery was given away free, that is no longer the case. Delivery is a valuable service, and customers are perfectly willing to pay for it. FedEx, UPS and the Internet have made delivery charges an everyday occurrence. (Remember: The “free” delivery Amazon offers often depends on higher prices or an annual membership in its Prime services.) So, a charge is expected by most customers.

To know if your charge is adequate, you need to know the cost of making a delivery. Instead of looking at the “average cost” of making a delivery, I’ve broken the expenses down by category, so you can more closely approximate what your costs actually are.

Elements of Delivery

First, consider **vehicle cost**. Generally, florists either use a minivan or a full-size van. However, there is a growing trend to buy specialty vehicles, such as the Ford Transit or Honda Element, to make deliveries because of their fuel efficiency.

Whether you buy a minivan or a full-size van, the costs of the van itself

are about the same. The difference comes in hauling capacity and fuel efficiency. The average lifetime costs of a minivan or full-size van, including repairs and maintenance, is about \$37,500.

The Transit or Element will cost about \$5,000 less. So, you save some money up front and then save on gasoline as well.

Second, look at **gasoline cost**. I’ve assumed that with city driving, a minivan will average about 16 miles per gallon and a full-size van will average about 9 miles per gallon. The Transit or Element will average about 25. When making a decision, factor in your own routes and average mileage to get a good estimate for these costs.

Third, think about **average miles per delivery**. To determine this number for your shop, you need to track the number of deliveries you make each day and the number of miles driven to make those deliveries. By keeping this data for a couple of weeks you will be able to know fairly accurately how far you drive for your average delivery.

I’ve combined these first three items into the table “**Vehicle/Gasoline Cost for Delivery**.” Go down the left-hand column to find the average miles you drive per delivery. Next, there are

VEHICLE/GASOLINE COST FOR DELIVERY

Average Miles Per Delivery	Vehicle Lifetime Deliveries	Minivan		Full-Sized Van		Scion/Element	
		Vehicle Cost Per Delivery	Gasoline* Cost Per Delivery	Vehicle Cost Per Delivery	Gasoline* Cost Per Delivery	Vehicle Cost Per Delivery	Gasoline* Cost Per Delivery
1	150,000	0.25	0.07	0.25	0.11	0.20	0.04
1.5	100,000	0.37	0.10	0.37	0.17	0.30	0.06
2	75,000	0.50	0.13	0.50	0.22	0.40	0.08
2.5	60,000	0.62	0.16	0.62	0.28	0.50	0.10
3	50,000	0.74	0.19	0.74	0.34	0.60	0.12
3.5	42,857	0.87	0.22	0.87	0.39	0.70	0.14
4	37,500	0.99	0.25	0.99	0.45	0.80	0.16
4.5	33,333	1.12	0.28	1.12	0.50	0.90	0.18
5	30,000	1.24	0.32	1.24	0.56	1.00	0.20
5.5	27,273	1.36	0.35	1.36	0.61	1.10	0.22

* Gasoline cost is based on \$1.00 per gallon. To calculate your actual cost, you need to multiply the cost per delivery by your current cost of gasoline.

SOURCE: ANALYSIS FROM FLORAL FINANCE BUSINESS SERVICES, INC.

three sets of columns, one for each type of vehicle. The first column under each vehicle type shows how much the vehicle will cost per delivery. The second column shows the cost of gasoline per delivery. Since the price of gasoline fluctuates all the time, I've based the cost per delivery as if gasoline is only \$1 per gallon. To get your actual cost, multiply the number in this column by your actual cost per gallon. If the table says the cost of gasoline is \$0.25 (25 cents) to make that delivery and your current gasoline price is \$2.40, multiply \$0.25 x \$2.40 and you get \$0.60 or 60 cents for gasoline to make that delivery. Easy.

The fourth item in delivery cost is **labor** — the most expensive part of the delivery — and the fifth component is the **average number of deliveries** your driver makes **per hour**.

The "**Labor Cost for Delivery**" table combines those variables to come up with a Cost Per Delivery. Go down the left-hand column to find your hourly wage rate and then go across to the average number of deliveries you expect per hour to see how much your labor cost is per delivery.

Calculate Total Cost

You'll add three numbers to get your cost per delivery: Cost per delivery from labor (from the "Labor Cost for Delivery" table) and vehicle cost per delivery for your type of vehicle and gasoline cost per delivery (from the "Vehicle/Gasoline Cost for Delivery" table). The total is your total cost per delivery.

Suppose, for example, you drive a full-size van, you pay your drivers \$10 per hour, your drivers average three deliveries per hour, your average miles per delivery is 4, and your cost of gasoline is \$2.20 per gallon. Here are the steps.

1. Go to the first column of the "Labor Cost for Delivery" table and go down to the \$10 pay rate. Your taxes and benefits will add \$1.50 for a total labor cost of \$11.50 per hour. Continuing over to the three deliveries per hour column, you see that it costs you \$3.83 per delivery for labor.
2. Go to the first column of the "Vehicle/Gasoline Cost for Delivery" table and go down to four miles per delivery. The next column shows that with a four-mile average, you

EFFICIENT MEASUREMENT

Access an Excel spreadsheet that helps calculate the cost per delivery for each of your drivers at safnow.org/moreonline.

will get 37,500 deliveries before your vehicle needs to be replaced. Under the Full-Sized Van columns, the first one says each delivery will cost \$0.99 per delivery for the van.

3. For gasoline cost, go to the second column under Full-Sized Van and you get a gasoline cost of \$0.45. Now multiply that gasoline cost by \$2.20 and your cost of gasoline in your market is \$0.99 per delivery.
4. Finally, add them all together. Labor (\$3.83); Vehicle (\$0.99); and Gasoline (\$0.99) for a total cost per delivery of \$5.81.

What About Longer Distances?

\$1 per mile. That's the magic number. If you look at the combined cost of a mini- or full-sized van per mile driven including gasoline, it's about \$0.50 per mile. If you pay your driver \$12.50 per hour and add 15 percent for payroll taxes and the driver averages 30 miles per hour, you also get about \$0.50 per mile.

So, your total cost per mile driven is about \$1. If you pay a higher wage, it will be more. If you pay less, it will be less. Remember to multiply \$1 times the total miles driven, round trip, to get total estimated cost of the delivery. If you go out 10 miles to make a delivery, your total mileage is 20 and your cost will be about \$20 based on today's gasoline prices.

What Should You Charge?

That part is relatively simple: At least double your cost. It's like anything else in your shop. You must cover your cost, some overhead, and make a profit. 🌿

Paul Goodman, MBA, 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*.
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LABOR COST FOR DELIVERY

Wage Rate Per Hour	Taxes + Benefits	Total Wage Per Hour	Number of Deliveries Per Hour							
			2	2.5	3	3.5	4	4.5	5	5.5
			Cost Per Delivery							
7.00	1.05	8.05	4.03	3.22	2.68	2.30	2.01	1.79	1.61	1.46
7.50	1.13	8.63	4.31	3.45	2.88	2.46	2.16	1.92	1.73	1.57
8.00	1.20	9.20	4.60	3.68	3.07	2.63	2.30	2.04	1.84	1.67
8.50	1.28	9.78	4.89	3.91	3.26	2.79	2.44	2.17	1.96	1.78
9.00	1.35	10.35	5.18	4.14	3.45	2.96	2.59	2.30	2.07	1.88
9.50	1.43	10.93	5.46	4.37	3.64	3.12	2.73	2.43	2.19	1.99
10.00	1.50	11.50	5.75	4.60	3.83	3.29	2.88	2.56	2.30	2.09
10.50	1.58	12.08	6.04	4.83	4.03	3.45	3.02	2.68	2.42	2.20
11.00	1.65	12.65	6.33	5.06	4.22	3.61	3.16	2.81	2.53	2.30
11.50	1.73	13.23	6.61	5.29	4.41	3.78	3.31	2.94	2.65	2.40
12.00	1.80	13.80	6.90	5.52	4.60	3.94	3.45	3.07	2.76	2.51
12.50	1.88	14.38	7.19	5.75	4.79	4.11	3.59	3.19	2.88	2.61
13.00	1.95	14.95	7.48	5.98	4.98	4.27	3.74	3.32	2.99	2.72

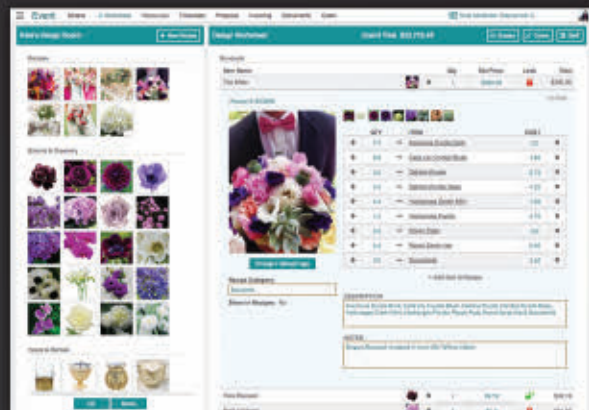


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EASTER AND PASSOVER DELIVER MIXED RESULTS

> Easter and Passover sales were a mixed bag this year. About **a third** of retailer members responding to the Society of American Florists' postholiday survey said sales for those holidays increased; **a third** saw a decrease. The rest said sales tracked with returns in 2017.

Timing of the holidays played a factor among both florists who saw an uptick and those who saw a dip. Easter Sunday was April 1 and Passover was March 30 to April 7.

"Easter performs better when it's in April, not March," wrote one respondent in Colorado.

"I think Passover being the same weekend as Easter, and falling on a Friday, folks were more likely to want to send flowers to family," wrote a retailer in New Jersey.

On the other hand, "Our sales were disappointing, and we think it was due to numerous school breaks occurring that week, as well as being earlier than last year with cooler weather," wrote a retailer in Illinois. (Last year Easter fell on April 16; Passover was from April 10-18).

Nearly **80 percent** of respondents said they promoted Easter/Passover at about the same level this year, as compared to 2017.

Among those florists who saw an increase this year, about **a quarter** said the uptick was between 1 and 5 percent. Among those who saw a decrease,

about **21 percent** said the decline was between 1 and 5 percent.

Top factors behind increased sales, according to respondents, included: regional economy (**26 percent**), the weather (**21 percent**) and increased shop advertising (**16 percent**).

"Outside displays on the sidewalk helped to bring in walk-in sales, and reminder postcards went out two weeks before the holiday to help phone sales," wrote a florist in Connecticut, who suggested local florists need to "get involved with your local places of worship and promote flowers and plants for decorations."

Top factors behind decreased sales included: the weather (**26 percent**), competition from mass marketers/supermarkets (**23 percent**), and the regional economy (**14 percent**).

"When I first started in business Easter was pretty big," wrote a florist in Pennsylvania. "Every year, it gets smaller. Big box stores right down the street sell cheaper than I can buy."

Many florists noted that Easter in particular has become a less formal holiday.

"Women don't wear dresses so no need for corsages," wrote a Connecticut florist. "No one eats at the dining room table, no need for centerpiece. The younger generation don't appreciate Easter lilies." 🌸

FLORISTS STRUGGLE WITH WOMEN'S DAY

> International Women's Day sounds like the ideal holiday for the U.S. floral industry: The March 8 event encourages people to celebrate all of the women in their lives, not "just" mothers and romantic partners, and it's already a popular observance in parts of the world — and some regions of the United States.

And yet, according to a recent Society of American Florists' survey, only about **38 percent** of retailer members promoted Women's Day this year — a 10 percentage point drop from 2016, the last time SAF surveyed retailers on the subject. Among those who promoted the day, only **12 percent** said their efforts resulted in sales.

About **77 percent** of respondents this year said they knew about the day before March 8. In 2016, about 68 percent of surveyed florists knew of the holiday.

Overall, **72 percent** of respondents either weren't sure of how their Women's Day sales compared to those in 2017, or they didn't promote the event this year or last year. About **13 percent** said sales were the same, compared to last year; **9 percent** saw an increase and **6 percent** saw a decrease.

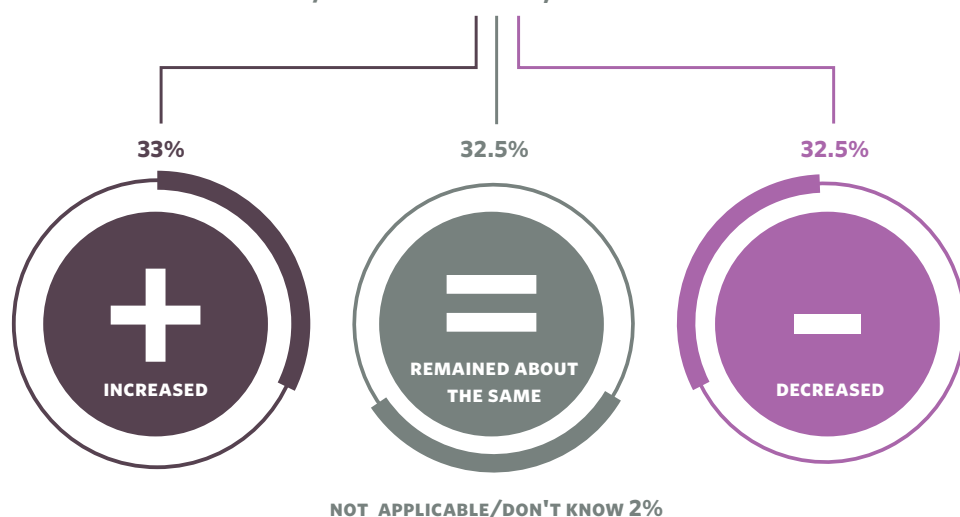
One challenge, according to respondents: How to position Women's Day?

The event began in 1909 as part of the movement for women's rights and has remained a day of activism for some, while morphing into a general celebration of womanhood for others. That history, coupled with this year's #MeToo and #TimesUp movements, left some respondents feeling uncertain: **40 percent** of respondents to the SAF survey did not promote the holiday because they believe the day is about "activism, women's issues and achievements," not commerce.

"I did not feel comfortable advertising and pushing a marketing plan for it," wrote a respondent in Arizona. "I stay apolitical in my shop. I did not want to encourage any animosity or women's activist discussion."

In Colorado, another respondent said current social movements buoyed efforts at her business: "The timing of

Easter/Passover Sales, 2018 vs. 2017



SAF 2018 WOMEN'S DAY & EASTER/PASSOVER SURVEY APRIL 8 TO 2,939 RETAILERS. 5.9 PERCENT RESPONSE RATE.



SAF 2018 WOMEN'S DAY & EASTER/PASSOVER SURVEY
APRIL 8 TO 2,939 RETAILERS. 5.9 PERCENT RESPONSE RATE.

the event seemed to correspond with what is happening in America with the 'MeToo' and 'Time'sUp' visibility. We had multiple exposures with neighborhood magazine ads, outdoor marquee sign, Facebook posts and an email blast. The email blast got immediate attention with orders coming in for the holiday."

The timing of Women's Day, three weeks after Valentine's Day, gave some respondents pause, too: **31 percent** of respondents said Women's Day falls "too close to Valentine's Day for consumers," while **29 percent** said "Industry members don't have enough time, energy or budget so soon after Valentine's Day."

"We promoted Women's Day extensively for two years, which yielded a zero return," wrote another respondent in Arizona. "I sometimes feel people are overwhelmed with floral holidays."

A retailer in Pennsylvania agreed: "It's too close to Valentine's Day and Mother's Day. I just don't think it's a good flower-buying day."

In addition, about **35 percent** of respondents did not promote the event because the "holiday requires too much effort and too little return"; **8 percent** abstained because they believe Women's Day "benefits supermarkets more than florists." 🌸

FLORAL INDUSTRY REMEMBERS FIRST LADY BARBARA BUSH

➤ Terril Nell, Ph.D., AAF, first attended the Society of American Florists' Congressional Action Days in Washington, D.C., in 1990 — which happened to be the year that a group of SAF members traveled to the White House to bestow an industry honor on a special honoree. (Read more on p. 2.)

Standing in the Yellow Oval Room, once used as John Adams' drawing room, the SAF group was greeted by First Lady Barbara Bush, who was being inducted that day into the American

Academy of Floriculture, in recognition of her lifelong love of flowers and gardening.

"She greeted everyone personally and was very gracious talking about her love of gardening," said Nell, a professor emeritus at the University of Florida, former SAF president and the current research coordinator for the American Floral Endowment. "When she got to me and saw 'University of Florida' on my name tag, her whole demeanor changed. She said, 'Do you know my Jeb?' I had

to tell her that no, I didn't know her son, and then she immediately said, 'Well, I really hope you get to meet him someday.' I'll never forget how genuine she was, how her whole face lit up when she talked about her family."

Red Kennicott, AAF, another former SAF president, shared a similar memory. Kennicott traveled from Chicago for the event, bringing along his youngest daughter, Sarah, a high schooler at the time, to meet the First Lady.

"Mrs. Bush was extremely generous and kind to all of our group and especially to the younger people, both with her time and interest, and in allowing photos," he said.

SAF coordinated the floral decorations for the public events of the inaugurations of Presidents George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.

After Mrs. Bush died in April at the age of 92, mourners at St. Martin's Episcopal Church in Houston gathered to celebrate her long life, and flowers played a central role in the services. Pictures of the First Lady's casket, adorned with an elegant spray of roses and other cut flowers in springtime hues, ran on news shows and in publications around the globe. 🌸



FARE THEE WELL Barbara Bush's eight grandsons carry her casket out of St. Martin's Episcopal Church in Houston. In 1990, the former First Lady was inducted into SAF's American Academy of Floriculture.

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

CALM AFTER THE STORM FernTrust Inc. weathered back-to-back storms in 2016 and 2017. Today, the co-op of 11 farms has invested heavily in new infrastructure.

WEATHERING FUTURE STORMS

➤ Forecasters predict above-normal activity for the 2018 hurricane season, which officially kicks off June 1. Jana Register, director of sales and marketing at FernTrust Inc. in Seville, Florida, heard the predictions about the 2018 hurricane season on a day when she was “feeling upbeat about just getting past the critical shortages” in foliage supplies. A native Floridian, she and her family rode out Hurricane Matthew in 2016. Eleven months later, Hurricane Irma hit.

For the Florida foliage industry, those back-to-back hurricanes brought 60 to 70 percent loss, and industry shortages on leatherleaf for Valentine’s Day and Mother’s Day. Shade structures blew to pieces, oak hammocks that shelter shade-loving foliage toppled, and many crops collapsed into short supply.

“Mother Nature can be such a wonderful partner, but when there’s cruelty, there’s often vicious cruelty,” said Register, a third-generation fern grower. “But foliage farmers are resilient.”

Storm Impacts Multiply

One of the main reasons the foliage industry took such a strong hit from recent hurricanes is old shade structures.

“A lot of the production areas were 15 to 20 years old when hurricanes struck in 2004,” Register said. “The old saran tore, and growers patched it. When Matthew and Irma hit, that patched saran suffered substantial — or even total — damage.”

Saran structures are basically big tents. New saran moves with the wind, raising and lowering, while sun-damaged saran becomes brittle and tends to tear. Torn saran bunches and lands on foliage. If it’s removed quickly, damage to prod-

uct can be reduced. If high temperatures hit on the heels of a hurricane, bunched saran lying on plants quickly bakes them.

“An original foliage industry practice is planting under Florida’s beautiful oak hammocks,” Register said. “Sustained winds break branches, blow down entire trees, or loosen roots so that trees fall at a later date. In any scenario, the foliage plants beneath are damaged.”

When storms move through, cleanup requires big equipment, which destroys more product. It’s a one-two punch that, on average, wipes out multiple crops of affected plants.

“After the hurricanes, we took many foliage crops back to rootstock. With leatherleaf, it takes a minimum of 28 days for fiddleheads to develop a marketable frond, and it takes three to four successive crops to get the desirable frond size,” Register said.

The Next Big One

FernTrust growers have recovered nearly all of their production acreage (more than 350 acres total production with 150 under saran) with new saran.

“That new saran should see less damage barring a Category 3, 4 or 5 storm,” Register said. Many of the new shade houses also feature a design that weathered the hurricanes better: large 6-by-8 posts tied together with cables.

Hurricane Matthew showed the importance of keeping a stockpile of saran to replace damaged structures.

“It also taught us to have backup generator power,” Register said. “After Irma, we were without power at FernTrust for eight days. With the generator, we were back at work the day after

the storm, taking orders and shipping ferns.” Customers appreciated the effort, and so did co-op members who had crops ready for harvest.

At FernTrust, optimism for the future rules: “One of our growers has planted 5 new acres in production for Mother’s Day 2019,” Register said.

An Industry Revived

Destruction from the storms may actually have helped save the industry, Register said. That’s because Florida cut foliage dropped in value nearly 45 percent in 20 years, from \$110 million in 1996 to \$61 million in 2016.

“We were on a quick path to be out of production because of low prices and neglected infrastructure,” Register explained.

Post-hurricanes, with wholesale customers and designers clamoring for scarce foliage, the value of Florida foliage rocketed — and growers made investments in infrastructure.

“There’s always a good note that comes out of crisis,” Register said. 🌿

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



QUICK TAKE

The company: FernTrust, Incorporated, a co-op of 11 family farms in Seville, Florida (ferntrust.com)

Annual product total: 6 to 8 million foliage bunches with 20 to 25 stems per bunch (4 million bunches in 2017, post-hurricane production)



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IS YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS HURTING BUSINESS?

> Not long ago, I was at a Society of American Florists educational event, looking through the roster of attendees, which included contact information. Something immediately struck me: it was full of unbranded email addresses — mark1967@gmail.com, ABCFlowers99@outlook.com. Some fast math revealed that 85 percent of the retail florists on that roster were using a free or non-branded email.

thrive in this competitive time are the shops that get everything right. They know they can't alienate 70 percent of the public by taking shortcuts with their email addresses.

Fortunately, there's a simple solution. The same survey showed that more than 90 percent of respondents considered branded email, such as mark@ABCFlowerShop.com, to be the most professional option.

emails, you have more control over your customers' experience with everyone on staff. By instituting standard email protocols (mark.anderson@ABCFlowerShop.com or manderson@ABCFlowerShop.com), you also make your team more accessible and further underscore your professionalism. Plus, when you require employees to communicate via branded emails, you maintain control over that account even after that employee moves on.

"The flower shops that will survive and thrive in this competitive time are the shops that get everything right. They know they can't alienate 70 percent of the public."

That's a problem. Why? Because according to a recent Visible Logic survey, 70 percent of the buying public considers this practice unprofessional. A lot of the people who responded to that story think that practice is *really* unprofessional. Here are some of their comments:

"I am leery of email addresses that are free account services such as yahoo, Gmail or hotmail. It would make me suspect that the company could be a fly-by-night operation or possibly a scam."

"There's absolutely no reason, other than ignorance, for someone to use anything other than their domain name for their email if promoting a business."

"Using a non-domain-level address is just the height of laziness (or cheapness) and shows a lack of commitment to your business."

Credibility Enhanced

Notice a theme? Unbranded emails send a message that you aren't a professional. In today's crowded market — when consumers have so many options and so many flower-buying consumers have been burned by order-gatherers and misleading ads — that's the last message you want to send. The trend is toward fewer but bigger and more successful flower shops. Those that will survive and

Reasons to Switch

Still not convinced that branded emails enhance your credibility? Here are other reasons:

1. You may already be paying for it.

If you've purchased a domain name for your shop (ABCFlowerShop.com), you already have the right to use that domain in your email address. You just need an email service provider to make it work. In some cases website providers (such as Flower Shop Network or Florist 2.0) include these services for their clients, so the best first step is to contact your website provider and ask for help. (What if your provider can't help you? Keep reading.)

2. A branded email is a marketing tool.

Every time you send a message to someone using a branded email, you're sharing your URL with them. Anyone who has your email address knows exactly where to buy from you online. (Consider: Mark@ABCFlowerShop.com versus MarkFlowerGuy@gmail.com.)

3. A branded email gets better open rates.

In a crowded inbox an email address with a recognized name is more likely to get opened and less likely to be dismissed as spam.

4. You can standardize email addresses for your entire business.

When you use branded

Technical Difficulties?

Website providers that are committed to the success of their clients offer branded email services for sites they host. If your website provider is not able to provide branded email, you still have options, but things do get more complicated.

Properly configuring branded email services through another provider (such as Gmail or FastMail) will involve changes to the domain name system (DNS) entries for your website. Be prepared for some back and forth with your website provider as you pass along DNS information from your new email provider. You can also find provider-specific tutorials online to help you navigate this process.

You also may encounter some deliverability issues (emails you send not reaching the recipient) that can only be solved with more back and forth and additional DNS entries. This process can be frustrating, but persevere. The end result — increased credibility among the majority of the buying public — is worth it.

Finally, remember that accessing the new accounts can almost always be accomplished with whatever interface you know and love. Regardless of who is providing your new email services, you'll be able to access the account through Gmail, Outlook, the Apple Mail app, etc. 📧

Mark Anderson is the founder and senior developer of FloristWare. His email is definitely branded: mark@floristware.com.

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CLASSIC CROWD FAVORITES

> Asked to name her customers' favorite flower, Carly Anechiarico needed only a second to answer. "Roses, without a doubt," said the marketing manager and designer at Blossom Flower Shop in White Plains, New York. "At least 80 percent of our arrangements include a rose in some form or another. Everybody asks for them." Here, she shares two of the shop's most popular (and profitable) designs. 🌹

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

Find complete recipes at safnow.org/moreonline.



PRETTY PASTELS A customer favorite for anniversaries and birthdays, this arrangement is full of flowers with a high perceived value that also take up a lot of space. "There are five blooms per stem on the spray roses and the garden roses open big and fat," Anechiarico said. "Both give us a real bang for our buck." Design time: 10 minutes. Wholesale costs: \$30. Suggested retail price: \$165.



PETITE POWERHOUSE Arranged in a rectangular vase, this design fits nicely on a desk or nightstand. "Sometimes less is more," Anechiarico said. "Our customers prefer small arrangements with high-end blooms, rather than large pieces filled with flowers they see at the grocery store." (In the summer, she replaces the hyacinth with stock and the ranunculus with garden roses.) Design time: 10 minutes. Wholesale costs: \$17.50. Suggested retail price: \$100.



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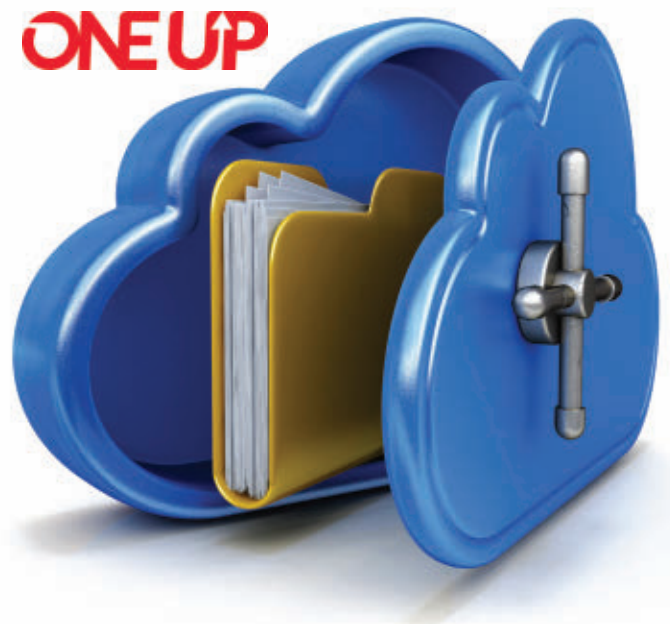
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Mackenzie Nichols is a contributing writer. fmeditor@safnow.org

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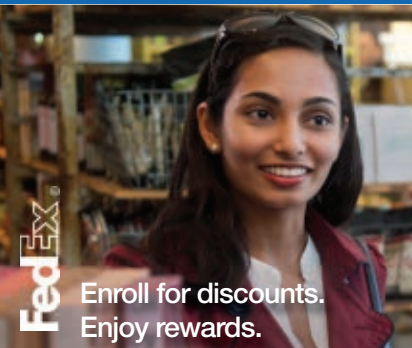
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Flower School:

This is the third in a five-part series on extending flower life and maintaining flower quality.

PROPER FLOWER CARE FROM BEGINNING TO END

➤ How flowers are handled as they move from farm to consumer largely determines whether your customers get a good return on their investment in fresh flowers. Flower care protocols assure water absorption, which is necessary for both bud opening and flower longevity.

Get Everything Ready

Clean and sanitize buckets and clippers. Fill buckets with 4 to 5 inches of the proper solution (more about this soon). Some companies perform this step the night before processing and place prepared buckets in the cooler overnight. Although warm water has been recommended in the past, recent research has shown that cold water is best for water absorption when using commercial hydration and flower foods. The primary exceptions are (1) if you want flowers to open rapidly and (2) you are working with woody stems, which hydrate best in warm water.

Inspect Flowers

Inspect for insects and diseases on flowers, leaves and foliage. Generally, if insects are present, they will be on the underside of leaves or on the petals. Diseases most often appear on the petals or leaves as a discoloration or blackening that will generally become worse after processing. In severe cases, some diseases will exhibit white blemishes. If you see this, you should report the problem

to your supplier immediately because the damage will likely reduce the vase life or result in flowers that are not marketable. Also, look for leaves that are yellow or beginning to yellow. Color will not be restored to yellow leaves once processed.

Hydration and Food

Flowers lose 4 to 8 percent or more of the water in the stem, leaves and petals as they are transported from farms to their final destination. Since water is critical to flower life and opening, the lost water must be restored.

Commercial hydration solutions and flower foods are designed to extend flower longevity and to promote flower opening. And they work! So, what is the difference in these solutions and when should they be used?

Hydration solutions and flower foods contain many of the same ingredients (possibly at different ratios and concentrations). The difference is that flower foods contain sugar and hydration solutions do not. Hydration solutions are used generally by wholesale florists to provide quick absorption of water. Once hydrated for two to four hours (according to label directions), flowers can be moved to a solution with flower food to provide energy needed to move water up the stem and to expand petals as the flower opens.

Each solution lowers the water pH, which reduces growth of microbes that may block the flow of water up the stem.

The pH of the final solution should be 3.5 to 5. Suppliers of hydration and flower foods can analyze your water and assist in getting the optimum pH.

Some consider these professional products to be too expensive, despite the fact that the price breaks down to less than a penny per stem. We do not hesitate to spend a dollar or more to buy a soda or bottled water to quench our thirst. Shouldn't the costs to rehydrate flowers be equally important?

Finally, remove the leaves that will be below the solution when cut and remove 1 to 1.5 inches from the stems with a sharp, clean knife or cutter, unless you are using one of the newest hydration and flower food solutions, which do not require stem cutting.

Keep Flowers Cold

Cold temperatures reduce respiration (use of stored sugars), minimize the sensitivity of flowers to ethylene and lower the internal production of ethylene. Storing flowers in a cooler maintained at 34 to 36 F will extend flower life. Once flowers have been placed in a properly mixed solution, move them to the cooler, unless flowers need to be opened promptly.

Terril A. 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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