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THE FLORAL BUSINESS AUTHORITY

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Win Over More Brides, p. 20
Wedding Flower Care, p. 58

MARCH 2020 | VOLUME 37 | NUMBER 1



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A PUBLICATION OF THE SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FLORISTS

floral management

THE FLORAL BUSINESS AUTHORITY
MARCH 2020 | VOLUME 37 | NUMBER 1

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

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ON LIVING YOUR BEST LIFE NOW

> Late last year, my life came to a standstill when I received an unbelievable diagnosis: I had a brain tumor.

Hours earlier, I'd signed a contract to partner with Accent Decor, a company I'd dreamed of working with since I started Details Flowers Software five years ago. That's right: My biggest professional win coincided exactly with the most devastating personal news.

When I heard the diagnosis, I fell to my knees. When your health and life are at risk, you find yourself in a virtual tailspin, not really able to find balance. And you, your loved ones and team members have so many questions.

In retrospect, it's wild how quickly things change. Before my diagnosis, I was living a healthy life. I'd lost 50 pounds through diet and exercise. In September 2019, during SAF's annual convention, people complimented me on how fit I looked and how bright I appeared. I was relishing the experience and making new industry friends.

Then, on the final day of the convention, I slipped away from meetings to enjoy some downtime with my husband, Gregory. That's when it happened: an uncontrollable seizure. One moment, I was sitting on a lounge chair, watching floral friends walk along the beach. The next moment, I was fighting for consciousness. Something was majorly wrong with me. I needed answers — and fast!

But when I got the diagnosis three days later, I was not expecting to hear the words "brain tumor." I didn't feel prepared. Then again, how do you prepare for that news?

My doctors at the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville estimated that the fist-sized tumor had been growing for at least 20 years; it was pressing on important areas of my brain that controlled motor-speech and the ability to walk. They thought it was benign, but they couldn't be sure until pathology was performed. The tumor had to come out.

The surgeons wanted to get me into the operating room immediately, but I had a packed calendar of industry events that I couldn't (or didn't want) to miss. I asked to postpone the big day — my brain surgery. The surgeons agreed, and off I went with anti-seizure medication in

hand and 10 days of pondering the inevitable.

My life moved at an extra fast speed. My days were filled with MRIs, EKGs, and doctor's appointments. I finally took up hard tasks so many of us put off: writing a final will and trust with my attorney, making sure my business and my family were protected.

My own mortality is something I never gave much thought before my tumor. I realized how ill prepared I was to face something of this magnitude. Fortunately, with the help of Gregory, my community and my team, I got it all done, but spending hours poring over documents — during what might be one's final days — is something that I wouldn't wish on anyone.

The week preceding the surgery, while in Las Vegas for an industry event, Gregory and I made the best of every moment. I treasured everything. There wasn't time to be unhappy or impatient. I had already changed — for the better.

My family and I documented everything in those final days. We didn't know if I would be the same person after the surgery or remember any of my prior life. As the big day neared, I made peace with the outcome, whatever it was. I said everything that I felt needed to be said to everyone who is important to me.

After eight hours on the operating table, I woke up. And guess what? I knew exactly who I was, where I was and everything that had happened. Less than 24 hours later, I was walking. Two days later I was home. A week later I was back at work doing what I love, with the people I love, for an industry I love.

And that's the lesson I want to share. This is your life. Don't waste another minute on something that doesn't bring you absolute joy or serve a higher mission. You owe it to yourself to follow your passion, to live each new day as if it were your last — and to enjoy more flowers! 🌸

Corrine Heck is the founder of Details Flowers Software. corrine@detailsflowers.com



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SHARING, COLLABORATING — AND GROWING



> I'm not exactly sure when I first met Ian Prosser, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, but I think it was about 15 years ago, when I was a new staff member at the Society of American Florists. President George W. Bush had recently been re-elected and SAF was tapped to coordinate floral designs for the many parties and receptions surrounding the inauguration. Ian led that effort. And what a leader he was! In the midst of thousands of flowers and décor items, he coordinated dozens of volunteers, helping them create jaw-droppingly beautiful work for high-profile stages and VIP guests. Through it

all, he was incredibly calm — and kind. He took time to laugh with people. He paid compliments. He remembered personal details. "That's Ian Prosser," I remember someone whispering in my newbie ear. "He's a big deal." I had to laugh. Ian may have been a big deal, but he was also first in line to clean buckets or haul flowers through tiny back corridors.

In the intervening years, I've been delighted to watch Ian's business and reputation only grow bigger and brighter. Ian's artistry is second to none — and SAF has continued to benefit from it each fall as Ian leads our convention floral design team. But his business acumen and his willingness to try new things, to adapt to new challenges and markets, is something that also sets him apart from competitors. Even more delightful? Watching as Ian's adult children, Jordan and Zoë, have added their (many) talents and expertise to Botanica, complementing their father, challenging him in the best possible ways, and, together, building a business that so many in the industry look to as a modern icon. Jordan and Zoë inherited other admirable professional traits from their dad: humility and a willingness to share. I remember talking with Zoë in September after she had presented some of her excellent event revenue-building ideas during an educational session at SAF Amelia Island 2019. It was the end of convention, and plenty of people were heading to the pool, but Zoë was happy to stay and patiently answer extra questions, from me and other attendees, her colleagues. She encouraged others. She talked candidly about lessons she's learned. She shared generously.

Our senior contributing writer and editor Katie Hendrick Vincent did a terrific job capturing Botanica's spirit of collaboration and teamwork in this month's cover story on **p. 24**. Those are characteristics that I think connect many of the best minds in this industry, which is why I'm really excited about this story — and for a new webinar series that's free to SAF members. In our "How I Did It" series, SAF volunteer leaders share insight into how they've tackled some of their biggest challenges — how they reached new levels of success (and sanity) around the holidays, how they transitioned from one generation to the next, how they optimized and improved processes and customer service. These fast-paced, inspirational sessions are free for SAF members, and if you're looking for a shot of inspiration to get you moving into the spring, they're just the ticket. You can find them all at safnow.org/webinars.

Don't forget, too, that you can stay connected with all of the latest industry news through SAF's weekly newsletter, SAF Now, and via our website safnow.org and social media platforms. If you aren't receiving the newsletter, which relaunched in January and takes the place of our former publication, SAF's Wednesday E-Brief, email Sheila Santiago at ssantiago@safnow.org.

Mary Westbrook, Editor in Chief
mwestbrook@safnow.org

More Online



SHUTTERSTOCK/AGNES KANTARIUK

COUNTDOWN TO PROM

Ready for a four-letter word? P-r-o-m. If prom work is more burden than boon, you and your team may be missing some of the key "do's and don'ts" of selling prom work profitably. The time to start planning for a lucrative and smooth prom season is now. Help is a click away. safnow.org/prom



SPRING FORWARD

Why not use the before spring holidays to pre-plan some spring and summer promotions? Check out SAF's collection of beautiful, four-color artwork with slogans promoting whatever suits you: "Married to Perfection" for pushing bridal work, "Express Yourself" for targeting hipsters (and prom-goers), "Shop Locally, Live Colorfully" for reinforcing your value to the local community and much more. Enjoy easy online ordering and SAF member discounts. safnow.org/shop



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Access Floral Management's updated three-part financial series "Floral Accounting: Back to Basics." Our goal? Ensure SAF members have the best financial advice to move their businesses forward. safnow.org/moreonline

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| DESIGN MASTER color tool inc. 800-525-2644, DMcolor.com | 3 |
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Presenter:

*Tim Huckabee, FSC,
FloralStrategies LLC*

- Wed., March 18
- Thur., April 16
- Wed., May 13

How I Did It: Turn Delivery into a Profit Center

Presenter:

*SAF Board Member,
Michael Pugh, AAF,
Pugh's Flowers,
Memphis, TN*

- Thur., March 19

Last Minute Mother's Day Prep

Presenter:

*SAF President Chris
Drummond, AAF,
PFCI, Penny's by Plaza
Flowers*

- Thur., April 2

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PROACTIVE RESPONSE

> SAF led the industry response to unwanted third-party links that appeared on members' Google pages before Valentine's Day. (Read more on p. 10 and 49.) At press time, following reporting on the issue in SAF's member newsletter, some florists already were expressing their relief for the assistance:

When I saw your news article about Postmates, I immediately looked at our Google business listing. There it was: the link to Postmates... during our industry's most challenging holiday.

Our SEO person contacted our Google AdWords representative. They in turn sent us to the department in Google where we asked to remove this third-party link. Google told her that she had to contact Postmates to remove or inactivate the listing from Postmates. We had to fill a form out to take our listing out of Postmates. Postmates told our SEO person that only Google could remove the link. They gave us the runaround.

After the holiday, I noticed that they did remove the "order tab" and put in "product and services" tab with our website address, instead of Postmates...I am now happy that it has our website linked, instead of Postmates' site.

I do not understand how Google allows third-party links on our business listings. I guess they are using these links for an extra revenue stream, [but it's off] our backs.... In the end, we had a successful Valentine's Day holiday, a little better than most that land on a Friday. Thank you for all your help in protecting our industry. 🌸

Liz Seiji, AIFD

**Edelweiss Flower Boutique
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SAF ASKS GOOGLE, POSTMATES TO DELETE UNWANTED LINKS

> The Society of American Florists reached out in February to Postmates and Google, asking the companies to remove the courier service's links from florists' local Google Listing pages and prevent those links from automatically populating in the future.

SAF also discussed the practice with outside legal experts, reviewed similar complaints from small businesses in the restaurant industry and coordinated the sharing of best practices on how flo-

rists were able to successfully have the links removed.

"In most cases we heard about, the Postmates links appeared ahead of Valentine's Day without florists' knowledge or agreements with the courier service," said SAF's CEO Kate Penn. "The links redirected consumers to the Postmates' website, where consumers could input a customized order and were promised timed delivery — e.g. flowers in 45 minutes."

In an email to Postmates and Google My Business executives, Penn stressed that, while some florists may want to supplement their existing delivery infrastructure with a courier service, "That should and must be the florist's choice ... Anything short of first getting express permission from the florist to have a presence on its local Google listings page is in essence hijacking what would have and should have been a direct order from the consumer to the florist and their offerings."

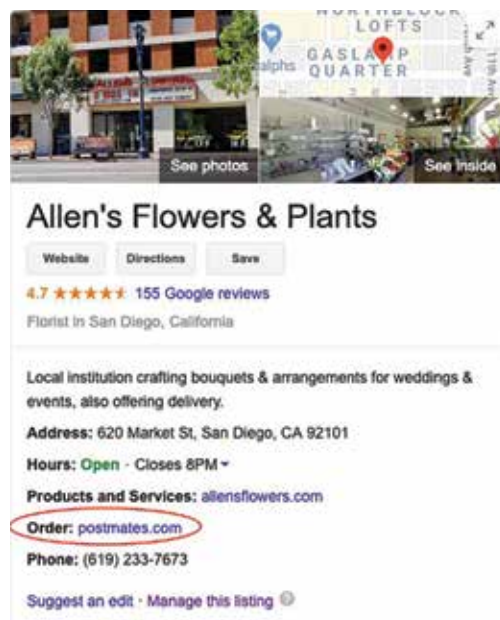
Worse yet, Penn noted, "Because the consumer is redirected from the florist's local Google listing to the postmates.com site, the florist has no control over the pricing or the online experience and offerings."

In addition, SAF reached out to government agencies, including the Federal Trade Commission, on the legality of such listings.

The process to remove the links proved cumbersome and frustrating to

HOW TO REMOVE UNAUTHORIZED LINKS

SAF has step-by-step instructions on how to begin the process of removing unwanted third-party links from your Google Listing, along with more advice from other member florists, at safnow.org/moreonline.



LINK REMOVAL SAF members, including Allen's Flowers & Plants in San Diego, reported the appearance of unwanted third-party links to Postmates.com ahead of Valentine's Day. At press time, many of those links, including the one posted to Allen's Google Listing, had been removed.

florists; however, most of the links SAF had heard of were gone by the end of Valentine's Day. (Read more on p. 49).

At press time, SAF was in communication with an attorney at the FTC who deals with advertising and marketing issues. Penn said the timing of the links' appearance, so close to the industry's biggest holiday, and the convoluted process required to request their removal remain a concern for SAF — and a priority, especially ahead of other major holidays, such as Mother's Day.

"We are continuing to work with the FTC as well as our channels at Google to get this issue resolved, and we will keep our members posted," she said.

In the meantime, SAF members can report any unwanted third-party links to Kimberly Hay, SAF's member specialist, at khay@safnow.org.

AS NEGATIVE ADS APPEAR, SAF LEADS INDUSTRY RESPONSE

> In the run-up to Valentine's Day, news publications and companies used negative ads and references to disparage floral gifts — and the Society of American Florists once again stepped in to ask the groups to take a more positive approach.

As the voice of the floral industry, SAF responds to these negative references, which cast flowers in a negative light during one of the industry's busiest seasons.

"SAF asks companies to promote products on their own merits," said Jennifer McNally, SAF's director of

marketing and communications. "As the industry's national trade association, SAF contacts companies making disparaging comments about flowers, and explains that their gift suggestions should stand on their own merits without the unnecessary and unfair remarks about flowers."

Among the companies contacted:

- **CNN** used a headline that read "Ditch the flowers and gift your Valentine one of these creative bouquets instead." The story encouraged readers to choose

bouquets of breadsticks, bacon and doughnuts rather than flowers.

- **Country Living** magazine classified a Tennessee animal shelter's plan to deliver "puppergrams" — puppies delivered to offices for a quick cuddle — as "SO much better than roses."
- In an interview that also was picked up by local TV outlets, the CEO of Boston-based **Grillo's Pickles** told the magazine Taste of Home, "Not only is a pickle bouquet more beautiful than a dozen red roses, and healthier



POSITIVITY, PLEASE SAF again took the lead this year on responding to companies that had disparaged flowers in Valentine's Day news stories and ads.

- **CNET** encouraged readers to "pass on the rose" in a story highlighting the Bronx Zoo's campaign to encourage people to adopt unusual animals (including hissing cockroaches) for the holiday.
- **Say It With Beef**, promoted its "100 percent beef jerky BROquet" by asking, "Is he tired of receiving lame floral arrangements?"
- **Express Clothing** ran an email campaign saying they offered "something better than roses."
- **Lunya**, a sleepwear company, ran an ad on social media saying "Roses die. Sleepwear is forever."



- **BandsInTown.com**, a platform promoting live music, sent an email to subscribers with upcoming event dates titled "Roses won't last, but your concert memories will."

In addition, SAF heard from some floral professionals who were disappointed in a **Real Simple** article that dished advice to consumers about ordering Valentine's Day flowers but highlighted only national and web-based companies, rather than local florists. While the article didn't include negative references, SAF took the opportunity to reach out to the popular magazine and encourage its editors and writers to include local florists in future coverage.

LOCAL RESPONSE

Members of the floral community can also make a big difference on negative ads in their local communities, said Jennifer McNally, SAF's director of marketing and communications.

"As much as SAF can provide support on a national level, local business can also make a difference," she explained. "If you wish to respond, please remember two things that enhance your credibility: your affiliation with the Society of American Florists, the national association representing the floral industry; and your identity as a local business."

Find detailed response tips at safnow.org/moreonline.

Spot a harmful ad or article about flowers? Forward them to jmcnally@safnow.org. 🌿

THREE NEW TEAM MEMBERS JOIN SAF

➤ The Society of American Florists has added three team members to its staff — including a longtime florist with deep experience in the industry and the association.



Kate Delaney, AAF, joins SAF as the group's new director of career development. Delaney worked for more than two decades at Matlack Florist, a top flower shop outside of Philadelphia. She was general manager of that business for 12 years.

Delaney also has been a volunteer leader within SAF for many years, serving on the group's Retailers Council, Government Joint Council, Convention Task Force and SAFFAC Board of Trustees, among other roles. She's been a featured speaker at SAF events and widely quoted in SAF publications. Delaney is currently enrolled in Immaculata University's bachelor of science in business management program.

As director of career development, Delaney will play a central role in developing SAF's online training platform, a new tool that the industry can turn to for employee training and development, set to launch in late summer. Delaney is the first SAF staff member to have such direct experience working in an industry business, a background that set her apart from the competition, said Kate Penn, SAF's CEO.

"I can think of nothing better for SAF than to have someone like Kate Delaney leading this important new initiative and weighing in on our ever-expanding efforts to connect and cultivate a thriving floral community," Penn said.



Stephanie Brady joined SAF as the group's project coordinator, supporting meetings and communications. She is the staff liaison

to SAF's Professional Floral Communicators – International, Next-Gen Facebook group, and the association's Awards Committee. Stephanie came to SAF with experience in the nonprofit world for causes including arthritis, multiple sclerosis and lung cancer. She earned a bachelor's degree in communication studies from Monmouth University in New Jersey.



Katie Savage, SAF's finance assistant, assists with the financial responsibilities of the organization. Prior to SAF, Savage worked for a

local public school system as a finance assistant and for a major accounting and consulting firm as a tax accountant. She holds an undergraduate degree in accounting and a master's degree in education from the College of William & Mary. 🌿

FLORAL COMMUNITY ADVANCES FOUR ISSUES AT CAD

➤ At press time, dozens of floral professionals from around the country and representing all segments were prepping to gather March 9-10 in Washington, D.C., for the Society of American Florists' 40th annual Congressional Action Days (CAD). During the event, the floral community will come together to advocate for four issues critical to a healthy industry.

"Each year, we look at which issues make the most sense to focus on during CAD," explained Katie Butler, SAF's senior vice president. "We want to direct our unified voice toward the challenges where we can make the most progress — timely issues that affect our diverse membership base."

This year, the growers, wholesalers, retailers and suppliers participating in CAD are educating Congress and key staff on:

Generalized System of Preferences: Established in 1974, GSP is a U.S. trade program designed to provide economic opportunity to the world's poorest communities by eliminating duties for specific products from least developed countries. U.S. businesses that rely on imported goods from GSP-approved countries — including the floral industry — benefit from a stable GSP. The U.S. floral industry imports 77 percent of cut flowers sold, of which nearly 95 percent

comes in duty free. Without a stable GSP, costs for imported flowers would go up.

What we're asking for: SAF is asking that Congress support reauthorization of the GSP, which expires at the end of 2020.

Agricultural Labor: Meaningful reforms are needed to the immigration system so that American businesses across the floral supply chain have a legal, stable supply of workers, both in the short- and long-term.

What we're asking for: SAF supported House passage of H.R. 5038, the Farm Workforce Modernization Act of 2019. Now, SAF is asking the Senate to follow suit and pass an agriculture immigration bill to move this issue forward.

Tax Treatment of a "Qualified Improvement Property": Businesses of all sorts typically deduct their operating expenses against income tax in the year for which those expenses are incurred. However, some types of expenses like long-term investments in capital assets are sometimes depreciated (and the costs deducted or "recovered") over a longer period of time than one year, such as improvements on a retail building. Due to a technical error in the recent tax law, QIPs don't qualify for the tax benefit that was intended. For example, if a retailer invested \$20,000 in a renovation, without a correction in the law the

retailer might only be able to deduct as little as \$512 of the \$20,000 investment in a given year.

What we're asking for: SAF wants to make sure that retailers making improvements to their properties receive the maximum tax benefit and is asking Congress to correct the error by qualifying QIPs as 15-year property (rather than a 39-year property).

Floriculture & Nursery Research Initiative: Building on the success of previous years, SAF members will share how FNRI research has positively affected the industry — leading to innovations in pest and disease management and advances in breeding technology — and make the case for continued government support at 2020 levels. This year, the conversation is especially important, said Butler, noting that President Trump's proposed new budget includes a decrease in Agricultural Research Funding, which could affect FNRI. (That budget is considered a preliminary starting point for negotiations with Congress.)

What we're asking for: Continued government support of FNRI at existing levels. 🌱

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



STAND AND DELIVER SAF members gather in front of the U.S. Capitol in 2019 ahead of CAD. Dozens of floral professionals are expected in Washington again this year.

What I'm Hearing: Insights from SAF's CEO

THE GOOD FIGHT

> Here at the Society of American Florists, we've been in "watch-dog" mode since January 1: Responding to advertisers who take potshots at flowers, working through all available channels at the Federal Trade Commission to eliminate unwanted third-party links on florists' Google local listings, and reaching out to floral industry marketers using deceptive marketing tactics.

Why are we doing this? Is it to "out" the companies running these negative advertising campaigns and employing these third-party links? Or publicly shame entities that are deceiving consumers? There might be a short-term "gotcha" sense of satisfaction with that, but that's not why SAF is doing this work. Our objective is bigger than that.

It's about showing companies that promoting a product or brand on its own merits — on what that product does for the consumer — is always more effective than maligning a competing product. It's about persuading deceptive marketers — one at a time — that misleading a consumer about where they are shopping and how much they are spending will ultimately make that consumer not want to buy flowers again. When that happens, everyone loses: the deceptive marketer, the florist and, worst of all, the consumer.

And this work is ongoing. We've successfully convinced several advertisers to rethink their "don't buy flowers, buy X" tune, and we're encouraged that, each year, there appear to be fewer

instances of this kind of advertising than in the past. But we won't do a victory lap until there's a big floral holiday where we don't see any of these negative ads.

Likewise, we might feel a sigh of relieve that, from what we can tell, the unwanted third-party links that were auto-populating Google local listings pre-Valentine's Day appear to have been removed. (Read more on p. 10 and 49.) But that doesn't mean we won't see this approach resurface prior to Mother's Day. And that's why I'm making "Danielle," an attorney at the FTC who focuses on online marketing and advertising practices, my new best friend. We've given her a play-by-play of what occurred — the unwanted links, the convoluted and confusing processes florists were asked to go through to have the links removed — and she is exploring the issue more to determine whether and how the FTC can help prevent this from happening in the future.

And we hope that, by reporting on these deceptive practices and emphasizing that everyone loses when deception is used to win over a customer, more businesses will embrace ethical marketing practices. Pollyanna-ish? Perhaps. But we — your SAF team, board and volunteer leaders — have a profound sense of optimism about our industry's future, and we will work tirelessly to do whatever we can to ensure outstanding flower buying experiences — every time — so we achieve our vision: the power of flowers in every life. 🌸



Kate F. Penn, SAF CEO



"We took our entire staff. Why? It is important that everyone is on the same page, and everyone is impacted by different presentations."

— Marsha Jones, Littleton's Woodlawn Floral Inc., Littleton, CO



Coming to a city near you...

San Antonio, TX

Tuesday, March 31

Embassy Suites San Marcos

Sponsor: Bill Doran Company

Albany, NY

Tuesday, July 14

Albany Capital Center

Sponsor: Bill Doran Company

Pittsburgh, PA

Sunday, June 7

Sheraton Station Square

Sponsor: DV Flora

Cedar Rapids, IA

Tuesday, October 20

Cedar Rapids Marriott

Sponsor: Bill Doran Company

safnow.org/1-day-profit-blast



snapshot

HotHouse Design Studio BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA



TAKE COMFORT "I love that the welcome area allows us to not only show off some of our new lounge products (sofas/chairs/rugs, etc.) from PropHouse, but it also allows us to give our client something to do while they are waiting on our receptionist to walk them to our consultation space," Majerik said.

COME ON IN

> "First looks" are big in wedding photography right now but first impressions also matter for event pros looking to land lucrative contracts. The team at HotHouse Design Studio understands that reality. That's why they created a 25-foot by 25-foot welcome area, a place they can highlight new inventory — the business specializes in flowers and also boutique rental items through its PropHouse division — and play up their brand. "Clients walk in and immediately find themselves attracted to the display and then proceed to get a keepsake branded bottle with flavored water, which they refill when they begin to leave and walk out with our branding in their hands," said owner Mandy Majerik, AIFD, PFCI. 🍷

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

DRINK UP "We just recently added the addition of the branded bottles and flavored water," Majerik said. "We are planning on having a warm drink option/branded cup later in the appropriate season. We rotate out the flavor of the water by simply buying a bulk crate of fruit at the beginning of the week to use, and our staff has built in healthy snack options for the taking."

WAREHOUSE DREAMS The welcome area serves as a gateway to Majerik's 30,000-square-foot rental area, home to more than 100 sofas and hundreds of pillows, all of which complement floral sales. (Read more about Majerik at safnow.org/moreonline.)



FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT!

> In keeping with this month's wedding theme, I called a store in Denver offering a unique situation: the need to impress my future mother-in-law with flowers.

I intentionally reached out to a shop where I trained the staff so I could check on their progress and hopefully inspire you to rethink how you handle customers. Flower sales won't increase until we get over the insane habit of only offering what we think customers want to spend, or worse, what we can personally afford. Listen to the recording of this month's call to hear what a difference some training and a little new thinking makes.

The Opportunity: The Chance to Wow with Flowers

I laid it on thick, telling the clerk that I was coming all the way across the country to meet my future mother-in-law for the first time and I needed to impress her. She knew I was calling from New York City (where we are used to paying too much for everything!) and maybe that factored in to what she offered me. Do you think your staff would have picked up on these cues or still headed into the call asking, "How much do you want to spend?" or diving to the bottom with the tired phrase, "Our arrangements start at ..."



SHUTTERSTOCK/STOCKFOUR

Thumbs Up: Listening Pays Off

The woman helping me asked if I knew the recipient's favorite color or flower. I demurred, leaving it up to them, but insisting that I did not want the arrangement to have a romantic feeling. She responded confidently, assuring

me that it would have more of a spring feeling. While she did not use the most precise language to communicate size (just say "large"!), she did tell me roughly how tall it would be, helping me to justify spending more money. Finally, for the first time in months, someone started me OVER \$100 for a non-funeral order!

Thumbs Down: Hurry Up and Slow Down

I am always concerned about the energy level of the person answering the phone. I like to hear someone upbeat and engaging because that sends a positive message to customers (and makes for an easier sale). But too much energy isn't good, either.

Flower sales won't increase until we get over the insane habit of only offering what we think customers want to spend, or worse, what we can personally afford.

At some point I wanted to tell this young lady to just lay off the Red Bull! Seriously though, when you listen to the call you will hear that she kept using the same phrase over and over, and it became quite annoying. My advice is to shake it up and have a rolling list of comments to reassure customers such as: Of course/ Gladly/My pleasure/Easily / Absolutely/Definitely, etc. Also, I had to chase her for the add-on; she did not naturally segue into offering me some creative way to personalize this important order. Why are we so bad at remembering this important element of the order? Interestingly, while your staff may not sell lots of add-ons, your website does. What does that tell you about your customers' needs and wants?

The Takeaway: Stop Fearing Customers

What you and your team will hear in action, while not perfect, is the smarter, better way of dealing with customers: listening to their needs and making an appropriate suggestion, not fearing rejection but firmly understanding that if the customer does not want to spend as much as you suggest, they'll tell you. 🌸



The Recording

You're only half-done learning from this column. Next step, gather your staff 'round a store computer, read this column to them and then play the recording of my call to this shop by visiting safnow.org/timscalling.

Turn it into a group discussion: Ask your team for feedback on what they heard and have them talk about how they can make better sales moving forward. And join us each month for **Tim's Calling... Live**, a regular webinar available free to SAF members. The next session is March 18 at 4 p.m. EST. Visit safnow.org/webinars.



Tim Huckabee, FSC, is the president of FloralStrategies.com, which teaches ultimate customer care to retail and wholesale florists. tim@floralstrategies.com

It's OK. We know how much you love *almost* everything about your wire service POS system.

You know that there are less expensive independent (non-wire service) POS systems that would save you a ton of money...
but you're worried you'd be making major sacrifices.

In most cases you'd be right. You'd have to settle for slow, inexperienced support. Amateurish, outdated design and limited features – most independent POS systems don't automate printing, allow multiple orders in one sale or accept split tender payments.

Not FloristWare.

We are the POS system for serious, successful shops that won't pay wire service prices but are not willing to compromise on features, quality or service.

***You don't just save money,
you also get better software.***

We build software to help you succeed, not just be a better member of a wire service.

Give us just **fifteen minutes** to show you not just how much you can save, but how much you can gain.



EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Teresa Schafer

Communications Manager
Alexandra Farms
Bogotá, Colombia

➤ Can childhood gardening experiences bloom into a career in flowers? Teresa Schafer proves the answer is yes. Her first forays into the garden came in the early 1980s with her Great-Grandma Nellie. “All of that color and the wonder of nature, as a child that really struck me,” Schafer said. “I’ve always been drawn to botanical gardens and conservatories. Now I work with flowers every day in my job.”

With a dual degree in journalism and photojournalism and 15 years working in communications, Schafer admitted she knew “nothing” about roses or the floral industry two years ago when she joined Alexandra Farms, a boutique garden rose grower based in Bogotá, Colombia, but she has learned along the way. “I feel really fortunate to be part of such a great company,” she said. “We have a strong group of talented people that work well together and help each other out. Our goal is to make the world more beautiful with flowers. It’s an honor to be part of that.”

Best part of my job:

“I get to meet people from all around the world and see the different kinds of work they’re doing. How people bring their personality and life experiences to their design work is so interesting to see. I can’t design a bouquet — it’s just not what I’m good at. I

find their creativity inspiring and get a lot of creative energy from it.”

Favorite online tools:

“My most indispensable tool is CoSchedule, an online content planner. It’s the center of my work setup, acting as a one-stop shop to organize and schedule content. I also use Podio, a task management platform that keeps me on track and hitting deadlines when I have 20-something jobs going at once.”

On using social media:

“With my posts, I try to do more than just show a pretty photo. I also try to educate. Education is such a big piece of the puzzle for us; it provides a way to connect with readers a little bit more. For instance, I may post a bouquet featuring ‘Princess Miyuki’ garden roses and mention that they smell like licorice. You never know when a designer has a bride or customer who wants fragrance and loves the smell of licorice.”

Gardening obsession:

“For the past 15 years, I’ve been collecting tropical houseplants. I’m based in Minneapolis/St. Paul, and when you live in the Great White North like I do, you have to have greenery around to get through five months of winter. I have lots of big floor plants and hanging plants.” 🌿

Julie Martens Forney is a contributing writer for *Floral Management*. fmcommentator@safnow.org

HR CORNER

Take Care of You

Wellness and self-care are two big concepts in the United States right now — and the trend is backed by science: A 2014 Harvard University study found that regular exercise can lead to improved creative thinking skills, faster learning, clarified thinking and enhanced memory and better concentration. Want to do more to help yourself and your team feel better? Consider:

Taking a hike. In January, *Bon Appetit* reported that some restaurants are ditching unhealthy staff outings (think: late-night drinking) for group exercise. Bettina Stern of Chaia, a vegetarian taco restaurant in Washington, D.C., partnered with a nearby running store to help her team launch a voluntary staff running club. “[The workout] gets you pushing your body to move in a way that you don’t necessarily do in the confines of a 2,000-square-foot space,” she explained.

Creating a calm space. A quiet area for people — particularly introverted employees — to recharge can do wonders. “There are now large companies offering napping rooms or meditation rooms for their workers, and I’m a big proponent. Taking a 30-minute break absolutely makes sense,” Ron Goetzel, Ph.D., director of the Institute for Health and Productivity Studies at Johns Hopkins, told *Entrepreneur*. “A half hour break is probably going to boost your productivity.”

Starting at the top. When it comes to workplace wellness, remember: Leading by example is key. “If the leader is sending emails at 4:00 in the morning, saying, ‘I need you to do this by 6 a.m.,’ that’s not good,” Goetzel explained. 🌿

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

The Bride refuses to pay!



What should YOU do?

**Need to have a fast chat with an attorney?
Give SAF's legal eagle a call. It's free!**

SAF partners with Paley Rothman, a Bethesda, Maryland law firm so members can get quick answers to business legal questions — without running up a huge bill.

What kinds of questions? Here's a sample of what floral business owners want to know:

- "Do I have to pay my salespeople overtime?"
- "What do I have to tell my employees about healthcare?"
- "My lease says I am the mall's only florist, can I stop other stores from selling bouquets?"
- "Is it possible to copyright a floral design?"
- "We did our job, but the bride wants half her money back... can you look at the contract?"
- "Do we have the right retirement plan?"
- "We want to sell the business to the kids but I'm worried about taxes. Where do we start?"

Through the partnership, SAF members can contact attorney Jessica Summers for a free 15-minute legal consultation at 301-968-3402. Be sure to mention your SAF membership.

Get fast, free legal advice from the experts at Paley Rothman!

- Benefit Plans
- Contracts
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- Financial Services
- Healthcare
- Leases & Real Estate
- Retirement Plans
- Selling or Buying a Business
- Tax Concerns

For more programs and services available through SAF membership, visit safnow.org/business-service-discounts.



BOOK A WEDDING ON THE SPOT

> Let's discuss your closing technique. Don't have one? Well, then that's why you are not booking as many weddings as you want — or think you should!

Oh, and you hate selling? Lucky for you, this article is going to give a cut-and-paste solution for booking every bride/couple on the spot, when you meet. Are you ready?

First, understand this: People don't like to be sold; they like to buy. So as much as you hate "selling," they hate to be "sold." You can take that verb, selling, out of your vocabulary now.

Let them buy. With this approach, the client gets to participate in the consultation. This is all about them anyway, right? Ask them open-ended questions. Make it a conversation rather than just giving a pitch. Let them feel your passion for your craft and for being a part of their special day through the process! One quick example of how to do that: Give them the proposal, with pricing, on the spot. Go over it with them and ask them how they feel about it. If they are uneasy, you have the opportunity to change up the proposal, so they leave happy!

Realize, also: People buy from those they like and trust. If they don't like you, it's game over. If they don't trust you, they'll spend their dollars with someone else. Now don't get me wrong — I don't click with every bride who walks through my door. You will not be a match for everyone. But you need to make them like and trust you.

Now, here's how to do just that:

Give Them Value

The couple sitting in front of you has a set of expectations. Meet those expectations by proving you are an expert and



SHUTTERSTOCK/WAVEBREAKMEDIA

can answer any question they have to eliminate worries or concerns.

- **Educate them about their flowers:** how they are grown and get to your shop, pricing information and how they'll be designed.
- **Make it interactive.** At Bloomtastic, we have silk bouquets in four sizes. The bride can "try them on" to see what size is right for her.
- **Show them fresh flowers.** Have a sample centerpiece (or two) on the table. Even if they don't include the flowers they choose, clients still love to see the real thing (and this builds trust).
- **Consider a price reduction.** I'm not a huge fan of discounting weddings, but if I *really* want a wedding and can tell they're fishing, I may be inclined to offer a discount on the delivery and setup fee as "my wedding gift" to the couple. Now, it's not perceived as a coupon or sales technique; it's a gift.

Use an Assumptive Close

This philosophy is simple. You assume that the client is going to buy from you. You believe it in your core, before the consultation even begins. You use language that suggests it's a foregone conclusion.

Here are some assumptive closes you can use to seal the deal:

- "Let's move forward."
- "Since your wedding date is almost full ..."
- "Will you be paying the retainer today by cash, check or credit card?"
- "Let's go ahead and schedule your next consult while you are here."
- "Is there any additional info you need today before you secure the date?" 🌿

Heather Waits owns Bloomtastic Flowers & Events in Columbus, Ohio, servicing as many as 400 weddings a year. She also coaches wedding pros to have profitable and rewarding businesses. heather.waits1@bloomtastic.com

CLOSING LINES

Join Heather Waits on March 11 at 3 p.m. EST for an SAF webinar that's free for association members. Waits will share more of her (top secret!) detailed tricks that get couples to hire her on the spot — a technique that delivers a 90 percent success rate! safnow.org/webinars



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PRETTY PLAN B'S

> If you've done many weddings in the past five or 10 years, you can probably accurately predict the bride's request at your next consultation. Peonies, garden roses, dahlias, French tulips or ranunculus. (Or, more likely, all of the above.) These exquisite, multipetalled blooms practically scream "romance," so it's no wonder they consistently top so many wedding wish lists. Unfortunately, they are not always an option, be it the couple's budget, seasonality or something completely unexpected (say, a volcanic eruption grounds all U.S.-bound flights from Europe the week of your event).

It's wise to have some backups in mind, so you can deliver a similar look if the client's first choice isn't available or affordable. Veteran florists who've experienced this scenario many times shared with Floral Management some of their savviest substitutes. Karen Fountain, AAF, of Flowers 'n Ferns in Burke,

Virginia, reaches for 'Esperance', a wide-opening, bubble-gum-colored standard rose as a stand-in for pink peonies. Sandy Schroeck, AIFD, PFCI, of Trend on Design in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, has found a number of chrysanthemums and gerrondo gerberas bear a striking resemblance to dahlias. For freelance designer Sue Weisser, AIFD, of Flying Hills, Pennsylvania, zinnias are great dahlia doppelgängers. Rakini Chinery, AAF, AzMF, of Allan's Flowers in Prescott, Arizona, and Lori Kunian, AIFD, of Affairs to Remember in Melrose, Massachusetts, have both "made" their share of anemones, attaching eryngium to the center of lisianthus blooms. Elizabeth Borchers, floral manager for the Biltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina, recommends purple limonium in place of lavender — unless the customer's request is because of fragrance. "Those two are *totally* different!" she said.



'ELARA' GERRONDO GERBERA
Green Valley Floral



'ELEGANCE QUEENY-LIME ORANGE' ZINNIA
Ball SB



'SININSUS PURPLE' LIMONIUM
Royal Flowers



'ARAGON' CHRYSANTHEMUM
Deliflor



**'VOGUE' SPRAY
ALSTROEMERIA**
Hilverda Kooij

'CARALINDA' STANDARD ROSE
Dümmen Orange

While many of these alternatives look very much like the real thing, the pros advise being up front with your client and getting permission before swapping them in for premium flowers. "Brides are more educated than ever," said Ian Prosser, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, owner of Botanica International Design & Decor Studio in Tampa, Florida, and the subject of this month's cover story (see p. 24). "They are online and they have researched the different varieties. If you have a bride who's fallen head over heels for 'Juliet' or 'Constance' or 'Patience', then she is going to be extremely disappointed to see anything other than a David Austin garden rose in her bouquet."

Here is some inspiration to help you when you're in a bind. 🌸

Katie Hendrick Vincent is the senior writer and contributing editor for *Floral Management*. kvincent@safnow.org



'ABC-DEEP ROSE' LISIANTHUS
PanAmerican Seed



'CHARMELIA' ALSTROEMERIA
Gardens America



'ESPERANCE' STANDARD ROSE
Royal Flowers



'MONDIAL' STANDARD ROSE
Royal Flowers



'CREOLA' CARNATION
Mayesh Wholesale Florist

RAZZLE Dazzle THEM

BY KATIE HENDRICK VINCENT

How Botanica became the events experts — and why their secrets to delivering a phenomenal experience, start to finish, apply to your business, too.

JUSTIN DEMUTIS COURTESY OF THE SCOUT GUIDE TAMPA



TIFFANI JONES PHOTOGRAPHY



When you're an internationally known florist who's done countless high-profile events, including two presidential inaugurations, the 2012 Republican National Convention, celebrity functions, six-figure weddings and Society of American Florists "Stars of the Industry" galas, you don't mark major milestones with cake or a staff lunch and call it a day. You do what you do best: throw an elaborate, jaw-dropping party.

That's exactly what Botanica International Design & Decor Studio in Tampa, Florida, did for its 30th anniversary in January 2019. On an exceptionally blustery Sunday night, dozens of wedding vendors, longtime friends and a few past clients trekked to The Orlo, a historic home, to celebrate and marvel at the décor. Bistro lights and hundreds of votive candles led them down a custom carpet, printed with excerpts from client testimonials. Curtains of delphinium dripped down railings, setting a fairytale-like scene. Inside, a cascade of roses, hydrangeas, Phalaenopsis orchids and greenery tumbled down a staircase. In a corner, a woman dressed like a cross between Marie Antoinette and Princess Barbie sat perched on a platform, playing an electric violin. Bartenders mixed up signature cocktails, servers circulated with trays laden with hors d'oeuvres and special lighting gave the whole space a warm, rosy glow.

FAMILY CONNECTIONS Botanica International Design & Decor Studio, run by Ian Prosser, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, and his children, Jordan, and Zoë Gallina, AAF, has cornered the niche on high-end weddings in central and southwest Florida, thanks to their big-picture thinking, extensive inventory of furniture and accessories and top-notch communication skills.



TIFFANI JONES PHOTOGRAPHY

MARVELOUS NIGHT Botanica's comprehensive offerings allow the company to create memorable spaces of all kinds for event clients.

Shortly into the affair, Botanica founder Ian Prosser, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, surprised the crowd with his announcement that the cocktail hour was merely the preamble — the real party was just getting started. He guided them around back to a ballroom, where a live band waited on stage. The room was done up in Botanica's signature style, with massive displays of tropical and traditional flowers and greenery and designated lounge areas for guests to rest their feet.

Before the music started, Prosser and his children, Jordan, Botanica's flower buyer, and Zoë Gallina, AAF,

creative director, took a few minutes to share some memories — from those "sick days" that coincidentally *always* fell on February 14 so they could skip school and help with Valentine's Day orders, to the "enormous leap of faith" they took in 2007, when they eliminated their retail business. That crucial pivot helped Botanica find its true identity as a high-end, full-service event design company that offers customers a comprehensive and exceptional experience. "We have had quite the journey," Prosser said.

Here is their story.

Assessing the Situation

In the early 2000s, after nearly two decades in business in Tampa, Botanica enjoyed good name recognition, but the pains of running a brick-and-mortar shop were becoming stronger and harder to ignore. Accessories and household items, longtime cash cows, leveled off as customers flocked to discount chain stores, like TJ Maxx or HomeGoods. Deliveries ate into profit margins and preoccupied Prosser and his team.

"We had four or five drivers, and they were not efficient *at all*," Prosser remi-

nised, shaking his head. "They'd take an hour and a half for a trip two miles away!" He spent an inordinate amount of time in those pre-GPS days printing out directions on MapQuest and mapping out routes for drivers. Rising gas prices only heightened his frustration.

Around 2006, a young, ambitious architect built some condominiums across the street from Botanica. He approached the Prosser family about buying the building because he wanted to own and transform the entire block. "I initially turned him down but changed my mind when he offered to pay the full appraised value," Prosser said. However, the economy turned south before they had a written contract and the deal fell apart.

Nonetheless, it turned out to be a watershed moment because it set in motion plans to upend Botanica's business model. When talking with the architect, Prosser came to the conclusion that event work was his future. "I saw the scales shift," he said. "Weddings and events had become about 60 percent of our business." If he narrowed his focus and ditched retail, he wouldn't need his 7,200-square-foot building with its

BOTANICA INTERNATIONAL DESIGN & DECOR

Tampa, Fla.

Founded: 1989

No. of events in 2019: 108

Price per event: \$10,000– 250,000

No. of employees: 9 full-time, 6 part-time

Career highlights: Presidential inaugurations of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, 2012 Republican National Convention, Donna Summer's daughter's wedding, events for the British royal family

spacious showroom, nor would he have to keep delivery drivers and a string of salespeople on his payroll.

"I had the bug. I wanted a change," Prosser said. "So I put the building on the market and prayed someone would bite." In November 2007, he sold to a popular restaurateur and rented a 3,500-square-foot space across town. Prosser sent letters to longtime clients, put an ad in the local paper and threw a moving party to announce his rebranding as an event florist.

Putting in Face Time

The fresh start was exhilarating — and equally terrifying. "We knew, off the bat, we'd lose 40 percent of our income without retail sales," Prosser said.

To offset the loss, Gallina, a recent college graduate and addition to the staff, put her marketing degree to the test. With her weekly stipend, Gallina devoted every Wednesday to meeting with wedding vendors. In the morning, she treated old friends to coffee; unacquainted vendors she took to lunch.

"Word of mouth was everything back then," she said. "Facebook was still primarily a site for college kids — not a marketing tool for businesses. You had to do most things in person."

At the same time, there was a changing of the guard among local wedding planners, with several familiar faces retiring and a wave of women in their 20s and 30s joining the field. Gallina befriended these rookies early in their careers; now, a few of them specialize in six- and seven-figure events and routinely refer Botanica for décor.

"I cannot overstate the impact of Zoë's networking," Prosser said. "Within a year, she replaced 98 percent of the business we'd lost. And she continues to nurture relationships — with clients, with planners, with venue managers, with photographers, you name it — and that effort keeps the business coming."

PRECISION AND PERSONALITY Botanica designers (below) follow detailed recipes Ian Prosser (above right) created with his son and flower buyer, Jordan (above left) and daughter and creative director, Zoë Gallina (above center). The company goes the extra mile by preparing a show table weeks in advance and welcoming frequent communication throughout the planning process.



PHOTOS BY JUSTIN DEMUTHIS

Going Beyond the Blooms

As Prosser and Gallina sat in consultations, they quickly picked up on a common refrain. Brides were repeatedly asking for add-ons, such as linens, chargers, drapery and lounge furniture. Could they help? (Their answer: "Of course!")

Subcontracting from other companies was easy enough, but they saw potential for a lucrative new revenue stream. "We did the math and realized, we only had to sell most items twice to cover our costs, and then it would be pure profit," Gallina said. "It was a no-brainer to invest in pieces that people requested all the time."

Gradually, Botanica acquired furniture and accessories (which required four storage units) and began positioning the business as full-service event specialists.

Many clients appreciate the one-stop-shop option because it streamlines the number of invoices and emails they receive, plus it greatly reduces the chance for miscommunication, Gallina explained. "There's a lot less for them to keep track of, and they can trust they'll get a cohesive look because there aren't too many cooks in the kitchen," she said. "That's good for us too, because we have more control shaping the overall look and can make sure it's up to our standard." (It also helps with efficiency; Botanica workers don't have to wait around for another vendor to put out tables, chairs and linens before setting up.)

A typical Botanica bride spends between \$18,000 and \$25,000 for her big day, which includes a few pieces of furniture (almost always a bar and often sofas, end chairs and a coffee table) and at least one statement piece, such as a floral chandelier, wall or "table skirt" around the wedding cake. That said, each year, the company has a few clients who go "all out" on flowers and décor. "Our biggest wedding was \$240,000," Prosser said.

In a few short years, those four storage units were filled to the brim with sofas, tables, linens and various accessories. It was time to move again.



VISUAL MERCHANDISING Brides who want to browse before they buy are welcome to walk through Botanica and StyleHouse's warehouse, which is neatly organized by category and style.

PHOTOS BY JUSTIN DEMUTIS

Dotanica and StyleHouse's vast inventory includes chargers, linens, candelabras, votives, pillows, drapes, rugs, sofas and chairs, tables, bars and vases galore. Most items fall under the following aesthetics: traditional (antique-like pieces, such as Oriental rugs and chinoiserie containers), Boho (pieces in bright, bold colors and patterns or eclectic shapes) and Old Florida/beachy (wicker furniture, coral-like vases, citrus-colored pieces).

Most pieces only need to be sold twice to cover their costs (for custom-made furniture, it's four times); items that don't pull their weight get sold through Facebook's Marketplace. In recent years, here's what have been the biggest moneymakers, said creative director Zoë Gallina, AAF.

Boxwood walls. Clients love adding a neon sign with their wedding hashtag and using these for photo stations. Others set up a "bubbly station," with servers inserting their arms through the greenery to offer glasses of champagne. The greenery also provides a clean backdrop behind the bar.

Bars. In particular, customers clamor for a 17-foot, custom-designed white bar with panels that can be easily personalized with the couple's monogram or logo of their choosing. "We actually had four clients choose this before it was even finished," Gallina said.

"Black Noir" sofas. This velvet seating option, with tufted cushions and pleated arms, "is a good transitional piece that works with a lot of aesthetics," Gallina said.

BEST Buys

Fortunately, the team has very seldom experienced buyer's remorse. The biggest flub has been the "Rodeo Chair," a leather and cowhide armchair. "It's cool-looking, but way too trendy," Gallina said. "We should have just rented that style." The other regret — white linen sofas — are actually in very high demand. "But they're the bane of our existence because they require constant cleaning," Gallina said. Flower buyer Jordan Prosser laughed remembering a distinctive mark they once got. "A woman who sat on one went a little heavy on the bronzer, and it rubbed off on the sofa," he said. "You could tell exactly where her dress or skirt ended, and exposed skin started."

—K.H.V.



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DIAMIEL PHOTOGRAPHY

SPECIAL TOUCHES Prosser and Gallina have an encyclopedic knowledge of flowers, venues and their own vast inventory, which allows them to customize events.

Setting the Mood

In 2012, Botanica resettled in an 8,000-square-foot warehouse, which holds a majority of its inventory (duplicate pieces of furniture stay off campus in a 1,000-square-foot storage unit) and provides ample space for design, offices and dedicated client area (this includes a comfy waiting room, two consultation rooms and a back room to stage show tables).

Having two separate consultation rooms helps Botanica appeal to brides' different personalities. The first room has aubergine walls, a chocolate-colored sofa, white leather chair, mercury glass sideboard and photos of timeless, monobotanical bouquets; it's for traditional and businesslike brides. More eclectic brides go in the second room, painted teal, outfitted with an Oriental rug, a Lucite coffee table, modern gold shelving unit, tribal chandelier, white sofa and bright, geometric throw pillows.

"Meeting in a room they relate to immediately puts clients at ease," Prosser said. He and Gallina look for cues, such as the bride's attire, to decide where to hold a consultation. "If she arrives

wearing a pencil skirt, kitten heels and pearls, she's probably more comfortable in a more classic space," he said. "If she's wearing raw hem jeans and trendy accessories, we're more likely to wow her in the Boho room."

Additionally, Prosser and Gallina dress to impress. Prosser typically wears a dress shirt, sport coat and tailored jeans or slacks, while Gallina dons maxi dresses or cigarette pants with flowy blouses and, always, statement earrings. "You want to present the best version of yourself," Gallina said. "Clients want to see that you have style."

Selling the Fantasy

Clients considering Botanica for their weddings come to the consultation with some specific ideas of what they like (colors, flowers, themes); they leave with a concrete, big-picture vision that makes the big day feel oh so real.

Equipped with an encyclopedic knowledge of flowers, venues and their expansive inventory of hardgoods, Prosser and Gallina can conceptualize, describe and sketch a prospective event

on the spot. They walk the client through the whole experience, depicting sights, textures and smells. Their suggestions, offered without hesitation, convey enthusiasm and expertise, which relaxes clients and makes upselling a breeze.

Many brides are familiar with décor trends, such as floral chandeliers and flower walls, "but most don't think about things like having stage décor to cover up ugly cords, or putting decorations on the bar," Gallina explained. "The bar," Prosser added, "is where a lot of guests camp out. So, we tell them, it's really a smart place to invest in flowers, lighting and custom details."

Likewise, the duo makes a very convincing argument for including some plush seating with sofas or settees. "Lounge areas make such a difference," Gallina said. "Guests who want to take a break from dancing love them, as do the people who don't like to dance, but want to be close to the action. People want their events to feel like intimate gatherings and furniture helps achieve that." Having samples of said furniture on site allows clients to look up close and touch

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WELCOMING ARRANGEMENT Botanica has two different consultation rooms to cater to brides' different personalities and styles.

various options — a definite advantage in closing the deal.

Botanica's success hinges on Prosser's and Gallina's ability to take a bride's loose ideas (accessed through an online questionnaire), amplify them with unique details and translate what they have in mind. "You can be the most talented, most creative florist in the world, but if you can't sell your vision to your client, it doesn't matter," Prosser said.

Botanica has a booking rate of 90 percent and, on average, clients spend about \$20,000 (though they've had many top \$100,000), with most exceeding their initial budget when they see the advantage of finishing touches.

Providing Peace of Mind

Catering to a high-end clientele requires a remarkable level of service.

"Brides expect to receive a proposal promptly and to see lots of details, including images, recipes and variety names with a breakdown of the prices," Gallina said. "It's a lot of work, but we make sure they get all this info within a week of the consultation."

Following the consultation, Botanica brides also return to see an example of their reception centerpieces and table setting. This service can cost hundreds of dollars, which Botanica eats, said Jordan Prosser, who joined the family business in late 2011. "An arrangement might only call for five or 10 'Romantic Antike' garden roses, but no one's going to sell them to me in that quantity, and we can't just sell the leftovers in a shop special," he said. "Plus, we have a lot of brides who love the 'everything but the kitchen sink' type designs with lots of different varieties, most of them premium flowers."

"Worth every penny," Ian replied. "It eliminates any questions or concerns so we're more likely to have a satisfied bride." Botanica uses the extra flowers in arrangements for bridal boutiques and hair salons to market the business.

Another expectation? Frequent communication. While the show table does reduce a lot of the back and forth, "We still have plenty of brides who reach out all the time with questions or changes up until the deadline," Gallina said. (Botanica's contract prohibits decreasing

items from the proposal within 21 days of the wedding; increases can be made up to five days ahead.)

There's no limit or additional fee for these exchanges. "We have clients spending anywhere from \$10,000 to \$100,000," Gallina said. "They deserve a little extra hand holding."

To make sure every client feels cared for, Gallina established a rule that no one goes home before answering any email that arrives during business hours, even if it is simply to say, "I have received your message and will give you a thorough answer soon!"

Thinking Outside the Box

In January 2017, Gallina had a 2 a.m. epiphany. Botanica could get even more mileage out of its hardgoods by marketing them as a standalone service.

"I figured, there are probably people who don't want or need our floral styling, but they have an event and might want some sofas or chaises or bars," she said.

The next day, she discussed the idea with her dad and brother, who enthusiastically agreed.



PHOTOS BY JUSTIN DEMUTIS

During Botanica's 30th anniversary bash, founder Ian Prosser, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, surprised his children, Zoë Gallina, AAF, creative director, and Jordan Prosser, flower buyer, by naming them as business partners.

"They had been with the company a considerable length of time and had been steadily taking on more responsibility," he said. "As I started thinking about my succession plan, I realized it was very important to get them listed as partners. Should I die unexpectedly, it would make things so much easier." He's trying to gradually step back and let them do more. "Baby steps," he said.

Gallina earned her father's trust and respect by consistently being present and offering opinions. "Older generations take you seriously when they realize you know what you're talking about," she said. "That's not necessarily something that happens overnight, and I think that's ok. Once you have the opportunity to prove yourself, your relationship becomes collaborative — you bring new ideas to the table, they bring

experience, and those two things come together beautifully."

She and Jordan have also had to combat the perception of nepotism. "A lot of people don't understand how hard it is to run a business — all the things that go on behind the scenes beyond what you do day-to-day," Gallina said. "Some people might assume being a family member in a family business means you get a ton of perks and lax schedule. In reality, it comes with a ton of responsibility and no real downtime. You're constantly thinking about work." The solution, she said, is to avoid thinking about naysayers and to just do your job. "When people see how hard you work and how committed you are, no one will ever question why you're in a position of authority."

—K.H.V.

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"There weren't many companies doing this, and their aesthetic was primarily 'clubby' or corporate," Prosser said. "We could give them so many more options. There was definitely an opportunity to carve out a niche." Plus, he added, an industry friend, Mandy Majerik, AIFD, PFCI, of HotHouse Design Studio in Birmingham, Alabama (see p. 14), had done something similar and could offer pointers.

Inspired, Gallina spent the next several months developing the idea, which launched as a sister brand, "StyleHouse," in October 2017. The concept is simple:

Anyone — wedding planners, corporations, other florists, someone throwing a blowout birthday party — can rent décor to enhance their celebrations. Customers can pick up themselves (provided they have a fully enclosed vehicle and blankets or cushions to protect items) or pay StyleHouse to deliver and set up.

Prospective customers can peruse the StyleHouse inventory online, where it's organized by categories including backdrops, stage fronts and partitions; bars; sofas; chairs; coffee tables; end tables; lamps; mirrors; ottomans, poufs and benches; pillows; rugs; shelves and

CUTTING EDGE DESIGN For Botanica's more bold and daring clients, founder Ian Prosser, a former winner of the Sylvia Cup Design Competition, recommends something architectural and unexpected, like this hanging bouquet.

back bars; and tables. They can also view curated collections and past clients' photos — and even select items and play with different layouts on a style board.

In 2019, StyleHouse doubled its sales. (This does not account for the many times Botanica used its inventory. "That would get us an inflated sense of its success," Gallina said.) Within the first five days of 2020, it had already booked six events.

"It's grown much faster than we anticipated," Gallina said, adding that the business operates much differently than Botanica. "The requests are very last minute," she said. "Clients aren't coming to us nine or 10 months in advance like brides do."

Those eleventh-hour tendencies made it hard for Gallina to juggle her Botanica and StyleHouse duties, prompting her to hire a dedicated StyleHouse salesperson. "It was tough to hand over the reins," she said, "but I simply didn't have the time to give it my full attention to help it reach its potential."

Looking Ahead

It's been a running joke among the Botanica staff that the company's unofficial motto is "Here we grow again!" "There's no telling what else we'll be doing in five years," Prosser said.

One idea on the horizon, though: interior design. A watch company that previously hired Botanica to create some temporary displays recently asked Prosser to completely style its showroom.

Beyond that, the goal is to work smarter, not harder. "Ideally, we would have one large wedding a weekend rather than several smaller ones," Gallina said. "Each event has so many moving pieces to coordinate, which takes up a lot of time." And, as the company definitely learned over the past few years, a narrowed focus can have a big payoff. 🌿

Katie Hendrick Vincent is the senior writer and contributing editor for *Floral Management*. kvincent@safnow.org



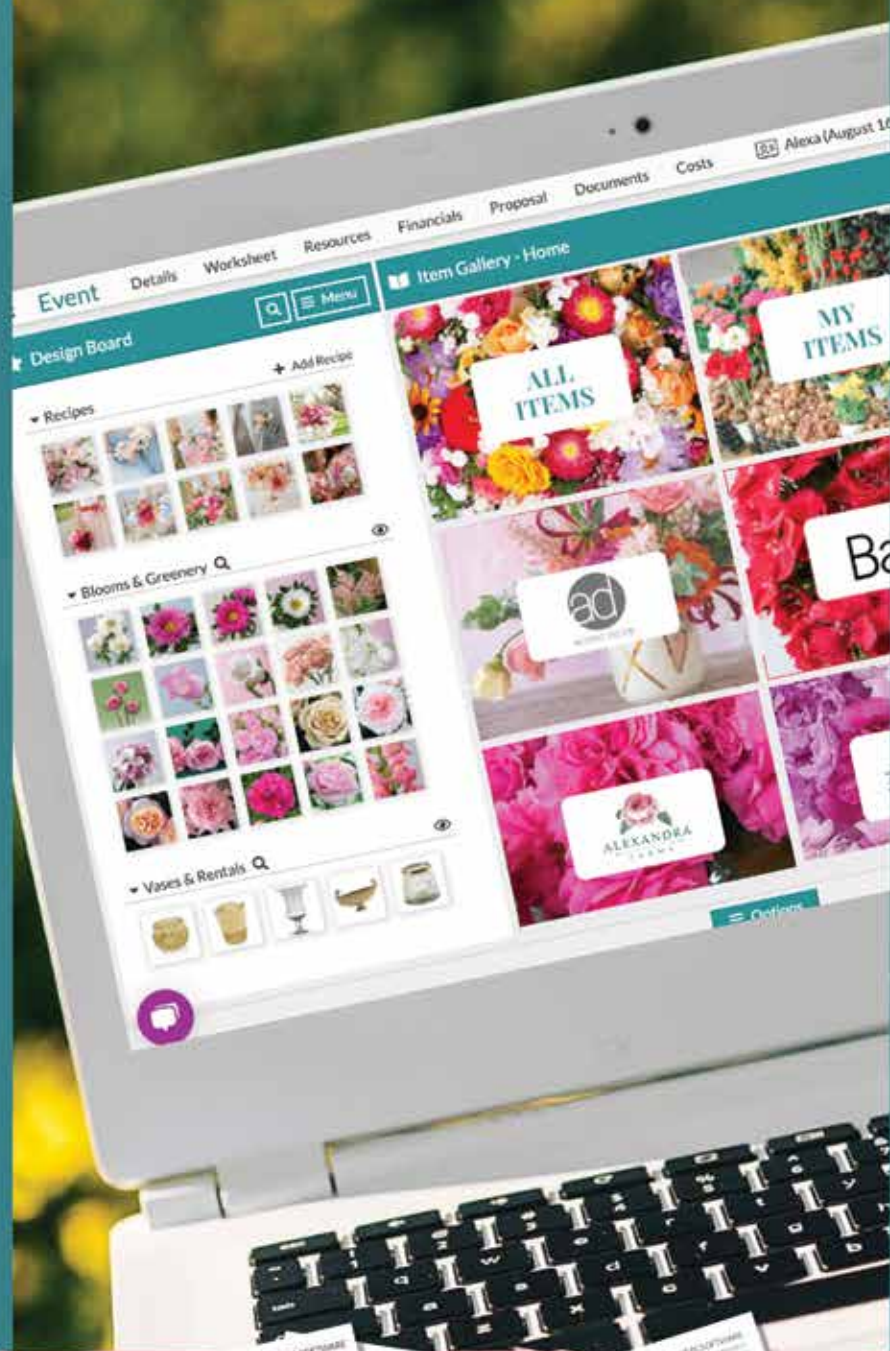
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Trends Brides Love

10 must-have decorative wedding products for spring and summer



CEREMONY STAND

More than ever, engaged couples are on a quest to plan a one-of-a-kind wedding. By the time they set foot in your store or studio, they've already scoured the internet and found endless inspiration on Pinterest and Instagram. They turn to floral professionals and event specialists to transform all of that research, aspiration and longing into an actual aesthetic, one that's truly customized for the couple — representative of their love, evocative of the life they plan to build together and — importantly — practical to pull together in the real, offline world. Enter Accent Decor.

For over 20 years, Accent Decor has been traveling the globe to identify new trends and stay ahead of the looks that brides and grooms crave for their wedding. The company's newest line of event products reflects that fresh inspiration. Designed with high-quality materials to appeal to discerning, modern couples, yet versatile enough to provide myriad solutions to savvy event designers, these 10 on-trend products will help you stand out with couples and create countless statements to remember this year.

BOLD LINES. Available in black or gold finish, the Ceremony Stand is an iron geometric grid, perfect for designing a live wall of florals as a stunning ceremony backdrop. (23.75" x 18" x 77.5")

Visit Accent Decor's award-winning showrooms in Atlanta, Dallas and Las Vegas and shop their entire collection at accentdecor.com.



FORMAL STAND

VIP TREATMENT. The Formal Stand in gold metal offers elegance and dramatic style, making it the perfect choice for your next black- or white-tie affair. Available in two sizes and "twist" or "geo" patterns.



SUPERIOR HANGER

HIGH LIFE. The matte black iron Superior Hanger includes chains for hanging and fits standard floral foam blocks. Available in two lengths, 31.5" and 46".



BRENTMORE STAND

STATEMENT PIECE. Gorgeously simple, these gold-finished metal stands provide flexible options for all aspects of event décor — and are sure to be noticed by brides with an eye for modern craftsmanship. Available in two heights, 24" and 31.5".



INCANDESCENT INSPIRATION. To craft this elegant footed bowl, foil is burned on blown glass and then coated with antique champagne-colored finish, resulting in a piece with timeless style. Available in three sizes.



MODERN CLASSIC. Sometimes, you need a classic vase that looks anything like a generic vessel. Say hello to the Bespoke Vase — designed to show off your best work with elegance to spare and not a touch of fuss. (10.5" x 32.25")



MOOD LIGHTING. Simple, sophisticated, chic. These gold-plated metal candlesticks, available in six sizes, will help create the perfect intimate ambiance no matter the scale of the event.



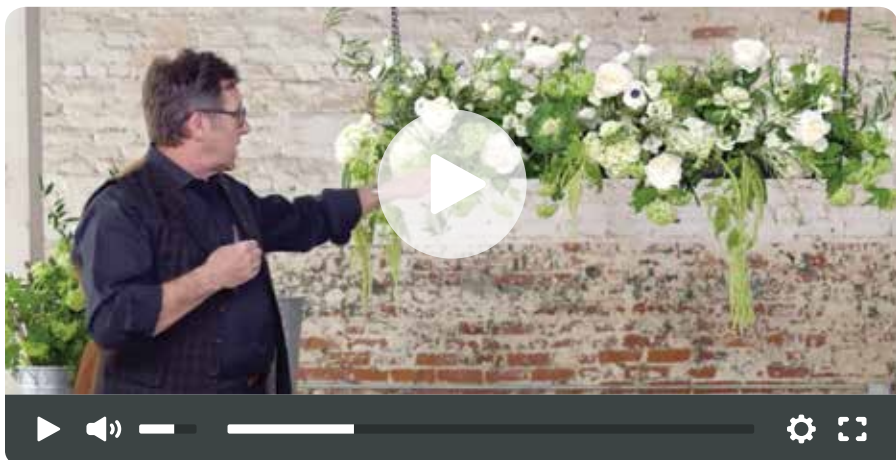
WARM GLOW. Handmade from a combination of bamboo, plywood and glass, the Canal Lantern is a fresh and unique choice for event or home. Available in two sizes.



NATURAL BEAUTY. The Rye Lantern is woven from natural seagrass and great for home or event. Available in five sizes.



HANDCRAFTED APPEAL. The Orsen Candleholder features a handwoven rattan webbing piece with a glass insert designed to hold a candle or flowers, perfect for event and everyday décor. Available in two sizes.



SHOW AND LEARN

Watch some of the new event products featured in this spread in action with Accent Decor's new line of instructional videos — perfect for experienced floral designers and newer professionals in the field. Each video features Ian Prosser, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, of Botanica International Design & Decor Studio. Available now at youtube.com/accentdecor.



STEPHEN KARLISCH

OTHERWORLDLY EVENTS

In his new book, acclaimed event producer Bronson van Wyck details his career crafting over-the-top affairs.



THE BIG SHOW

**A world-renowned event
producer dishes on how to
create the perfect gathering.**

BY MARY WESTBROOK

Ever fantasize about landing a big event for an A-list celebrity — Beyoncé, Gwyneth Paltrow or the Obamas? Or maybe about planning a launch party for a luxury brand — Hermès or Chanel — while pairing with some of the hottest influencers on Instagram?

Bronson van Wyck, of the New York-based design and event production company Van Wyck & Van Wyck, has exactly that kind of client list — and has been featured himself in publications such as Food & Wine, Town & Country, Elle Décor, Vogue and Architectural Digest. But growing up in Tuckerman, Arkansas, the now world-famous event producer never dreamed of being a party planner.

"I never knew that what I do — producing parties — was actually a way to make a living, much less a way to make a life," he explained. "I got here after an extended process of elimination during which I learned I had no other marketable skills. One Sunday morning, talking to my mother, I admitted that I had no idea what to do with my life. 'If you could've done anything in the world this weekend, what would it have been?' Mom asked. I answered immediately: 'I would have given a party,' so she said 'Well, then, let's go figure out how to get paid for that.'"

In his new book (“Born to Party. Forced to Work.”), van Wyck charts his own career, including his early days as a protocol aide to Ambassador Pamela Harriman in Paris and the founding of Van Wyck & Van Wyck in 1999, along with some of his biggest and most successful events. He also talks candidly about what clients *really* want to take away from gatherings of all sizes.

Floral Management: What are the biggest influences on your own style?

Bronson van Wyck: I’m constantly inspired by great parties of the

past, so when I was writing my book, I knew that I wanted to highlight social moments from years gone by that continue to influence me — and entertaining in general — to this day. Consequently, the book is filled with historical references, from the Sun King Louis XIV’s court at Versailles, to Cleopatra’s famous banquet at Tarsus, and from Martha Washington’s bipartisan suppers at the dawn of the Republic, to Studio 54, to Queen Victoria’s wedding, which started the trend of the white wedding dress.



AFFAIRS TO REMEMBER Bronson van Wyck, right, said he often looks to history for event inspiration.



BILLY FARRELL/BFA

MELANIE ACEVEDO





PERSONAL TOUCHES Asking key questions about family traditions and preferred vacation spots can help you clarify a client's event vision, according to Bronson van Wyck.

FM: What do the best events and weddings have in common, in your opinion?

BVW: Every party should be a reflection of the host, not the person planning it, so it's best to keep history and heritage at the heart of the production process no matter the event. We're always asking questions — "What are your most treasured family traditions?" "Who are your favorite authors and artists?" "What's your favorite place to travel?" — so that we can weave clients' personalities

into each and every design detail. The most successful celebrations are the ones where guests walk away knowing something that they didn't know before about their hosts.

FM: What are the biggest mistakes people make with events?

BVW: People have a tendency to get too caught up in the minutiae. There's always going to be an eleventh-hour crisis or two, but it's best not to sweat the small stuff.



JOE SCHILDORN/BFA

"We're living in the age of Instagram, so the bigger, the brighter, the better. More than ever you need to be thinking about what pops in pictures."

— Bronson van Wyck

FM: Do you have a favorite flower or floral design element?

BVW: Nothing's better than the element of surprise, so I love creating towers of greenery in unexpected places. It's like entering Narnia through the coat closet. At the Creative Time gala in New York City this winter we brought the outdoors indoors and had 20-foot trees create a woodland canopy over a downtown dining room. At a wedding at Badminton House in England last summer we used local blooms to create secret secluded gardens throughout the reception tent.

FM: Can you talk about the kinds of floral décor and designs your clients seem to be craving now?

BVW: The day of the Brooklyn faux-hipster "shove a bunch of things in a mason jar" has passed. I'm so much more inspired by 16th and 17th century Dutch still lifes, where each exquisite blossom is carefully chosen in order to create a true composition.

This is not the time for conspicuous consumption for its own sake so there has rightly been a broadened focus on sustainability. This might mean donating flowers after an event to an organization like Repeat Roses, decorating with trees that can ultimately be replanted, or using faux flowers.

For weddings, we've moved on from flower walls to full vertical gardens. No one wants just a step-and-repeat backdrop for their ceremony and reception. Instead clients are craving immersive worlds with vines crawling up the walls and flowers cascading from the ceiling.

FM: Do you have any advice to florists in general about how to build a stronger events business?

BVW: We're living in the age of Instagram, so the bigger, the brighter, the better. More than ever you need to be thinking about what pops in pictures. They're truly worth more



HANNAH THOMSON

STARRY NIGHTS Bronson van Wyck's celebrity clients include Gwyneth Paltrow and Martha Stewart.



CHRISTIAN OTH

WISH YOU WERE HERE In the age of Instagram, Bronson van Wyck encourages florists to think about what will “pop” in photos when planning event décor.

“The most successful celebrations are the ones where guests walk away knowing something that they didn’t know before about their hosts.”

— Bronson van Wyck

than a thousand words. An image that racks up likes on Instagram or Pinterest is definitely your best-selling tool. Think unusual blooms and using out-of-the-box vessels as vases. We do our own flowers in-house, but when sourcing other new vendors my team is constantly scouring social media. They’re more likely to stop and screenshot when they see something new and unexpected.

FM: Where do you look for inspiration?

BVW: Anything and everything. Museum exhibitions. The theater. Biographies. History. I think hotel lobbies are some of the most inspiring places on the planet since they’re filled with so much action. I’m really inspired by artist monographs and interior design books so it’s my hope that my own book provides inspiration to others.

FM: If you could plan your dream event, what would it be and who would be there — and why?

BVW: At the end of the day we’re a family business and family is always going to come before business. Planning my sister Mimi’s wedding in the South Carolina Lowcountry was the perfect pairing of the professional with the personal. My dream event is always one where I have the opportunity to make new memories with old friends. We’re lucky in that so many of our clients have become like family. I’m always excited to design bar and bat mitzvahs for children of parents whose wedding we have planned or work with brides and grooms who are the siblings of past clients. 🌿

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



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EDITORS' NOTE *Paul Goodman, MBA, PFCI, and Derrick Myers, CPA, CFP, PFCI, 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.*



Keep Up Your Momentum

Adding profitable volume can help you build on a strong foundation as you grow your business.

BY PAUL GOODMAN, MBA, PFCI

Hopefully, your goal in 2020 is to become profitable and grow your business — that's been the focus so far this year of this column.

In January, we looked at the most critical part of accomplishing your goal. You must "make a decision to be profitable" and then follow through by doing what is necessary to make that happen.

That approach basically means you are going to operate your shop properly. First, you are going to control your perishable costs (flowers and greens) by making sure your design staff follows your pricing formulas. They must charge for every item in an arrangement. No extra flowers. Everything is counted and doublechecked.

Then, you are going to keep payroll low by making sure your employees are productive. Designers and sales associates need to hit volume targets. Part of that is on your shoulders by not overstaffing.

Basically, you are going to manage for profitability. After you get your shop operating profitably at your present level of sales, you need to turn your attention to growing your sales.

We started that process in February by taking a close look at exactly what your business looks like. Who are your customers and your competition? Who do you want to target for future growth? What are your strengths and weaknesses?

Now, it's time to look at marketing for growth. You want to add profitable volume. Profitable volume consists of items that are priced properly and produced efficiently.

Increase the Top Line

The big challenge any retail florist faces is getting added volume. Basically, there are only three ways to increase your top line:

Increase the number of customers.

This is the option to which most people give the most attention. You know how much your average customer spends. Adding new customers will increase your sales accordingly. Add 10 percent more customers and you should increase volume by about 10 percent.

Increase the average order size.

Instead of adding new customers, you get more per sale. Get your present customers to spend 10 percent more on average per order, and you will also get about a 10 percent increase in sales. It is often easier for florists to increase the average order size, rather than trying to add new customers.

Increase present customers' purchasing frequency. Finally, if your average customer buys twice per year, you could increase your business by 10 percent by getting one out of every five customers to make just one more purchase per year.

Typically, retail florists spend 3 percent to 4 percent of sales [on marketing]. That is modest by most retail standards. If your campaign is going to be aggressive, you will need to increase that number to at least 5 percent.

Your first step: Determine which of these approaches — or which combination of approaches — fits your situation best. That will help guide the methodology you employ to add sales.

Craft a Compelling Message

Given the profile of your customer and your growth goals, it's important to step back and ask, "What will my message be?" Are you going to focus on unique or high-quality products and designs? Will you emphasize service or value?

You can also choose to focus on product features — for example, color range or product origin — or benefits — such as the reason behind a purchase ("I love you." "I'm sorry.") and the response the flowers can help promote ("I love you, too." "I forgive you.").

Marketing the benefits is a much more appealing message than marketing the features. You should focus primarily on why the customer is buying in the first place.

A holiday message can be specific, such as, "Flowers are the best way to tell mom you love her!" at Mother's Day. A more general benefit theme for all your advertising might be, "Flowers are the best way to send your love."

Dig into Your Budget

How much are you going to spend on marketing? Typically, retail florists spend 3 percent to 4 percent of sales. That is modest by most retail standards. If your campaign is going to be aggressive, you will need to increase that number to at least 5 percent.

If you are starting a new business, your marketing budget will have no correlation to sales. You must determine how much you are going to spend to get your new business off the ground. Divide the money over each month of the year based on what you want to promote when.

Manage Your Marketing Money

What media channels are you going to use to get your message out? Traditional choices range from putting a sign in your window to advertising on television. Of course, the bigger the reach of the media, the higher the cost. Television is too expensive for most florists.

Historically, florists spent a lot of their advertising budget on the Yellow Pages. Today's world with the internet and Google is completely different.

So where should you spend your money now? Most of your marketing dollars need to be spent on your website and social media. Primarily what this means in most shops is that only some of the money actually goes to the internet media itself.

UP YOUR ACCOUNTING GAME

This month's column completed a three-part series we're calling "Floral Accounting: Back to Basics." Our goal? Ensure SAF members have the best financial advice to move their businesses forward. You can access the previous two columns at safnow.org/moreonline.

Most of the budget will be needed to hire the right person to manage your website and social media. Content takes time, and you need to be placing new things on social media each week.

You also need to be sourcing reviews about your shop. And don't forget the need to always respond to negative reviews. All this takes time, and that means money to pay someone to focus on it.

Don't Skimp on Training

If your choice is to increase the average order size or add additional orders from your present customers, your best money will be spent training your staff.

It's a fact that customers generally spend more money per order when they buy on your website than when they buy in the shop. That means your sales staff is actually hindering the customer from spending what they otherwise would choose to spend.

Good training for taking telephone orders or waiting on customers in the shop will pay off handsomely. For example: What's the first question you should ask your customer? It shouldn't have anything to do with selecting a specific product or determining how much they want to spend. Instead, that first critical question should be all about the card message. What does the customer want to say on the card? That message will give you a large clue as to the importance of the occasion and potentially how much the customer is willing to spend.

That's what proper training will do. First get the right information and then know how to sell the customer exactly what they want and allow them to spend as much as they want. 🌸

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

60 PERCENT OF FLORISTS SAW DECEMBER HOLIDAY SALES RISE

> A strong economy, good weather and healthy consumer spending on events and parties led to a positive December holiday season for florists. Sixty percent of retailers responding to a Society of American Florists' postholiday survey saw sales rise this year.

The percentage is on track with returns from the 2018 season — also a strong holiday showing. Nearly a quarter of this year's respondents said their sales dropped this year; the rest said returns were on track with 2018.

Among those who saw a sales increase, about 39 percent said the increase ranged from 6 to 10 percent. Meanwhile, most of the respondents who saw a decrease (60 percent) said they weren't sure by how much sales fell this year. (About 35 percent said the dip was between 1 and 10 percent.)

About a quarter of respondents said that 21 percent or more of their holiday orders came through their website.

The average transaction for the 2019 December holiday season was \$75. In 2018, it was \$71.

The SAF survey was emailed to 2,652 SAF retailer members and had a response rate of 6 percent.

Reasons for Sales Increases

What's behind the healthy holiday? About 36 percent of respondents credited their regional economies with

their positive returns. Other popular factors included:

- Increased shop advertising, 26 percent
- Higher price points, 25 percent
- More events and parties, 25 percent
- Weather, 24 percent

Overall, those responses track closely with last year's answers — although in 2018, only 16 percent of respondents credited more events and parties with their increased sales.

In addition, 68 percent of respondents saw an increase in website sales; last year 55 percent of respondents saw those web order sales rise. This year, 53 percent of respondents also reported an uptick in phone sales, and 42 percent said walk-in sales were higher than 2018. (Both phone sale and walk-in sales trends are in line with returns from last year.)

Reasons for Sales Decreases

Among those respondents who saw sales decrease, roughly a quarter said their corporate business dropped off this year, and 24 percent said they actually had fewer events and less party work. At the same time, 19 percent blamed competition from order-gatherers and 18 percent pointed to competition from mass merchandisers, among other factors.

Poinsettia Sales Trends

This year's survey underscored a long-time trend of decreasing poinsettia sales among retail florists. Forty-three percent of respondents said poinsettia sales were about the same this year as they were last year, and 40 percent said they were down. Forty-one percent said the trend in poinsettia sales over the past five years has been decreased sales.

The majority of respondents (more than 90 percent) said red poinsettias, the traditional Christmas plant, composed 21 percent or more of their poinsettia plant sales.

Popular Promotions

Among the most popular promotional vehicles for the holidays this year:

- Social media, 83 percent

BREAKING NEWS

Read results of SAF's post-Valentine's Day survey at safnow.org/moreonline.

- Store signage and in-store materials, 64 percent
- Email promotions, 64 percent
- Online advertising, 52 percent

Sixty percent of respondents called social media one of their most effective promotional vehicles; 39 percent said the same about email promotions and 20 percent said it of online advertising. These numbers all align fairly closely with last year's sentiments.

About 60 percent of respondents said they promoted the holidays at about the same level in 2019 as they did in 2018. Roughly 60 percent offered décor services — among those who did, about 47 percent said sales were about the same in that segment, while 36 percent experienced an increase.

Holiday Events and Logistics

Two-thirds of respondents did not have a holiday-themed open house—a decrease from last year when 58 percent of respondents said they did host such an event.

About 73 percent of respondents were open part of the day on Christmas Eve Day; 98 percent of respondents were closed all day on Christmas Day; about 60 percent were open part of the day on New Year's Eve Day; 93 percent were closed all day on New Year's Day.

In terms of labor, 45 percent of respondents said they did not hire additional staff for the holiday — last year, 41 percent said the same thing. About 37 percent hired up to 3 additional people for the 2019 season.

About 52 percent of respondents ran an after-holiday sale. 🌸

SHUTTERSTOCK/ARTNIS

68%
of respondents saw an
increase in
website sales

HOUSE COMMITTEE TAKES UP INFRASTRUCTURE BILL

> The House Ways and Means Committee met in February to revive dialogue on how to pay for the long-awaited federal infrastructure bill. The Society of American Florists is working to ensure the industry is engaged in that conversation to address infrastructure issues critical to maintaining a healthy supply chain.

A long-standing debate: whether to raise the gas tax, introduce a new tax system based on the number of miles a driver travels, or develop an entirely different approach.

"The question of how to pay for an infrastructure bill is complicated," said Joe Bischoff, Ph.D., SAF's senior

lobbyist. "Our goal in advocating for the industry is to be sure that lawmakers and their staff understand the reality of getting cut flowers and other perishable product from importers or farmers — and the potential economic impact any suggested solution would have on our industry's transportation providers, and ultimately, all of our floral community."

What's not in question, Bischoff added, is that the nation's infrastructure is badly in need of repair and modernization, and the current system of paying for those upgrades is not sustainable.

Since 1956 the Highway Trust Fund, paid for mostly by the federal

gas tax, has supported highway maintenance and upgrades; however, that fund can no longer pay for these costs, in part due to the growing popularity of electric cars but also because the tax itself has not been raised since the early 1990s. Since 2008, the federal government has transferred more than \$140 billion to cover the shortfall.

SAF will continue to monitor the issue and "find ways to represent and advocate for the industry's perspective and specific concerns," said Bischoff, noting that the association's response is guided by direct feedback from SAF members. 🌱

AFTER VALENTINE'S DAY, FLORISTS SEE UNWANTED THIRD-PARTY LINKS DISAPPEAR

> A number of Society of American Florists retailer members have reported that links to Postmates.com that appeared on their Google Listings ahead of Valentine's Day had disappeared by Feb. 15.

The unauthorized links to the third-party courier caused concern for many florists during one of their busiest weeks — and led SAF to reach out directly to Google, Postmates and the Federal Trade Commission, and to help florists navigate the opaque process for successfully removing the links from their pages. (Read more, p. 10.)

Sam Bowles, general manager and creative director at Allen's Flowers & Plants in San Diego, was among the retail florists who initially brought the issue to SAF's attention. He and his team spent more than an hour on the phone with Google support personnel in the days before Valentine's Day, trying to remove the Postmates link, in addition to submitting requests electronically.

At that time, the Google representative advised Bowles it could take two weeks to remove the link — but it was no longer present on the business listing days after the holiday.

"It is gone, but...I received no message from Google letting me know they'd removed it, even though I am in an active



BE GONE Unwanted third-party links that appeared on florists' Google listings before Valentine's Day have largely disappeared.

support ticket," Bowles said. "I just kept asking for it to be escalated to someone who could actually help."

Nic Faitos, senior partner at Starbright Floral Design in New York City, also reported the Postmates link had been removed — and had not reappeared. Faitos reached out to Postmates through a number of channels on the week of Valentine's Day, including via email and some strongly worded complaints on Twitter, and shared his approach with other SAF members.

"The link is completely gone," he confirmed after the holiday. "[Postmates] did come true to their word on all fronts."

But frustrations remain. Like Bowles, Faitos was initially told that removing the

link could take a long time — in Faitos' case, "months" — but then it disappeared within days.

"I think that either [Postmates] had more control over the link than they led us to believe or they took my tone on Twitter seriously. Who knows?"

SAF CEO Kate Penn said the association will continue to investigate the matter to ensure members aren't faced with a similar issue during future holidays.

SAF members should report any unwanted third-party links to Kimberly Hay, SAF's member specialist, at khay@safnow.org. 🌱

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



LOVESTRUCK

With pleated petals held within a deep cup, and distinctive peach tones blending toward warm apricot in the center, 'Juliet' has become one of the best-known varieties in the David Austin Wedding & Event Roses collection.

A WEDDING CLASSIC, REIMAGINED

➤ How often do customers know and insist upon a particular flower by variety name? Hardly ever. And yet, for many years now, brides have been coming into consultations (especially in the most fashion-sensitive markets) saying, "I must have David Austin roses."

This unprecedented branding achievement isn't due only, or mainly, to savvy marketing. These are highly recognizable roses that revolutionized the market the moment they were introduced, about 16 years ago. They represent the drive and the passion of a horticultural genius who managed to fuse the past with the future, and of the three-generation family business that still bears his name.

Today, thanks to his influence, florists and their customers have many choices when it comes to cut roses "in the garden style": with a high petal count that is on full display in an open flower and at least some degree of fragrance. But David Austin roses remain distinctive in their character and quality: the definitive English Rose.

Old Made New

It all began in the 1940s: That's when David C.H. Austin began a personal quest to create shrub roses that would combine the romantic qualities of so-called Old Roses, including fragrance, with the repeat flowering and wider color range of the hybrid teas and floribundas that by then had come to dominate nurseries and garden centers worldwide. In 1969 he launched David Austin Roses and began to introduce into commerce the varieties that very quickly established his name and reputation.

From there it might seem a logical step to consider the possibility of transferring these qualities to roses that could also perform well as cut flowers.

Nonetheless, it wasn't until the early 1990s that David Austin Sr., with encouragement from his eldest son, David J.C. Austin, began the project in earnest. And it took more than 15 years of patient labor before David Austin Roses began to create a splash in the world of weddings and special events.

Today, there are 17 varieties within the David Austin Wedding & Event Roses collection, which have been created over a period of 27 years. Work on new additions to the collection is ongoing. The process begins each year with around 15,000 cross-pollinations, each performed by hand. In the second year, approximately 40,000 seedlings will flower, of which perhaps 500 will be selected for further trials at the David Austin nursery in Shropshire, England.

Eventually, a small collection of potential varieties will be chosen and sent to appointed growers for further assessment over several more years. The entire process takes about nine years.

What does it take for a new variety to enter the collection? Aside from the obvious — disease resistance, the ability



STUDY ABROAD

As the ultimate guardians of the brand, florists are welcome visitors at the David Austin Roses nursery in Shropshire, where staff — including the in-house florist, Jo Knight — are always available to share their passion and their expertise. Short of a personal visit, florists are invited to make inquiries via email at cutroses@davidaustin.com, or to visit the David Austin cut rose website at www.davidaustin.com, where they can join the company's e-newsletter. Finally, of course, it can be helpful to follow David Austin Roses on social media (@davidaustinweddingroses) — a good way to stay a step ahead of trend-savvy customers, who may well be doing the same.

FUTURE FOCUS Second-generation leader David J.C. Austin upholds the family tradition.

—B.W.



QUICK TAKE

The company: David Austin Roses

Location: Shropshire, England

Known for: Pioneering branded high-end roses, including 17 varieties within the David Austin Wedding & Event Roses collection

davidaustinroses.com

to withstand the rigors of packing and shipping, and reliable performance as a cut rose — David Austin roses share an indefinable quality originating in the vision of David Austin Sr. Although he passed away in December 2018, his successors in the family-owned firm fortunately have inherited his philosophy and his discriminating eye. The vision has to do with fragrance and form, but also with a delicate sense of color, in natural tones that evolve as the petals unfurl.

Nature and Nurture

While pedigree is paramount, the quality of a David Austin rose equally depends on specialized, superlative growing techniques — which is why David Austin Roses, the breeder, maintains an unusually close collaboration with a mere handful of select producers licensed to grow David Austin varieties.

Currently, five major growers are based across three continents: one in North America, three in South America, and one in Africa. Four smaller growers are located in Korea, Japan and New Zealand.

From these relatively few farms, David Austin roses are distributed via traditional premium wholesale channels exclusively to floral designers and event planners (never to mass marketers). Just as it takes a special grower to bring a David Austin rose to the point of harvest, the specialized expertise of a professional florist is required to bring that bloom into perfection as a fully open flower. 🌹

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TESTING PHASE New additions enter the wedding-rose collection only after many years of rigorous trials at the David Austin nursery in Shropshire, England.

3 STEPS TO EFFECTIVE EVENT 'SMARKETING'

> You just spent \$5,000 on a vendor listing site and never got a single consultation booked. You almost renewed your listing because "it's what you're supposed to do when you're doing wedding flowers." But if the marketing channel fails to perform, why should you keep investing in it?

Like many florists, you're not sure how your next clients will find you because you are doing so many things for the sake of "branding" and lack a solid strategy behind your "smarketing" (sales and marketing) efforts.

Here are three keys to get a good return on investment from your smarketing efforts:

1. Identify your ideal customer.

Who are you trying to attract? Are they looking for a particular design style? Are they planning to spend a certain amount on their floral décor? What do they like to do? Where do they shop? What are their personality quirks?

When you define who you want to work with, you will no longer need to worry about a client being less than a great fit because you will only be attracting the type of customer you want.

2. Define your customer journey.

The customer journey is made up of four steps. At each one, you should be very intentional about how you engage with the client and how you encourage them to the next step of the journey.

Attract. All your marketing efforts at this point are about getting your ideal client to take notice of your work. Present them with visual examples that match what they like and present messaging that resonates with them (think: adjectives like "timeless," "elegant," "avant garde" or "distinctive").

Convert. Getting them in a consultation is critical to making them your customer. Presenting an opportunity to schedule a consultation on your website is the best way to get them in the door. Once they schedule, call them *immediately* (within 5 min-

utes) to tell them how excited you are about the consultation and answer any questions they may have. This is also a qualifying call where you can check to make sure that they really are a good fit for you or if you'd be better off referring them to a floral friend.

Close. Once they're in a consultation, a client needs three things to book: they need to like, trust and afford you. To help meet these needs, remember to be friendly and give a client welcome pack that outlines what they should expect from working with you, including your cost on the proposal you've generated in the consultation.

Delight. Deliver excellence at every step of the execution to leave a positive impression so that your clients will leave you a rave review after the event.

3. Focus on your Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC).

Figure out your current customer acquisition cost (CAC). Add up *all* the costs associated with closing a client over the past year, then divide it by the number of clients you won during that time frame. That's your current CAC.

Now look at how much revenue you generated during that time. Divide that number by your CAC and what do you get? The actual return ratio on your smarketing investment.

A healthy return ratio is at least 3:1.

If your efforts are failing to produce at least \$3 for every \$1 you spend, something needs to change. Take time to look at all the data you have and figure out what is working and what is lacking in performance. Keep what's working and let go of the rest.

Next time you consider investing in a vendor listing site or paying money to get your brand out there, make sure you look at what goals you want to accomplish and have a plan in mind for tracking back to those investments.

Branding is great, but at the end of the day, you should be able to look at your entire funnel, know where your customers are coming from and dive deeper into successful channels. 📊

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CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

> During her consultation at Lake Forest Flowers in Lake Forest, Illinois, the bride (pictured below) shared her Pinterest board with Eileen Looby Weber, AAF, vice president and director of special events. “She liked dahlias, peonies, ranunculus and garden roses,” Weber said, adding, with a laugh, “what bride doesn’t?” Like many before her, this bride learned that she gravitated to premium blooms, even if her budget didn’t fully support the look she so admired.

While discussing the bride’s overall vision, Weber got her to articulate why she pinned those specific flowers. Her response: their impressive sizes, round shapes and distinctive textures. Weber then suggested options that had similar qualities, such as cremon chrysanthemums (to mimic dahlias’ firework-like shape and nubby petals), ‘Mondial’ standard roses (a plump variety, available in

white and pink, that opens to reveal an “imperfect” swirled center like you’d see in an English garden) and burgundy carnations in lieu of ranunculus for a pop of crimson ruffles. “Incorporating light blue, the shade of her bridesmaids’ gowns, was also very important,” Weber said. “Delphinium and nigella were within her price range, but if they hadn’t been, tinting white flowers would have been another option.”

In the end, the bride was thrilled to get a bouquet that captured the lush, romantic style she had in mind for a fraction of the cost. Meanwhile, Weber delighted in selling an affordable yet high-end look that fit the Lake Forest Flowers brand. 🌿

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Find complete recipes at safnow.org/moreonline.

LUSH FOR LESS The combination of full, lush blooms and petite seasonal flowers yields a romantic aesthetic. “It also has lots of texture and movement, which increases its perceived value,” Weber said. Design time: 10 minutes. Wholesale costs: \$17. Suggested retail price: \$150.





HERE COME THE ACCOUTREMENTS



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TO HAVE AND TO HOLD

Designed with classic bridal aesthetics and bold modern colors, the True Love Bound wedding photo album is a fun spin on the traditional guest book. Couples can read their loved ones' comments as they flip through their favorite images. CRGibsonWholesale.com



MILESTONE MEMENTO

Weddings aren't the only occasions that deserve special flatware. Help young ladies treasure their quinceañera with this special serving set that includes a stainless-steel knife with a faux crystal handle and a special message, "Mis 15 Anos," engraved on it. CBFlowersCrafts.com



BRIDAL BLING

A bridesmaid gift favorite, the cushion cut pendant and earring set sparkles like diamonds. It comes packaged ready to give with special messages, such as "Bridesmaid," "Maid of Honor" or "Matron of Honor", printed in metallic letters on matte white card stock, nestled in a luxurious pink suede bag. Available finishes include classic silver, light gold and rose gold. USABride.com



ALL THAT GLITTERS IS GOLD

Like icing on a wedding cake, ribbon provides a finishing touch for corsages. This sheer wired variety (product number 217001) is 0.5-inch wide and comes in a 25-yard spool. The metallic-polyester-nylon blend will be a staple throughout prom and wedding season. BurtonandBurton.com

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Natural Beauty



Peace of Mind Nursery, Inc.

offers fresh rare cut conifer foliage to enhance wedding arrangements, bouquets, boutonnieres, table center pieces and floral arrangements bringing smiles to brides and wedding parties. Cutting from over 120 selections the foliage covers a wide spectrum of colors, varieties, textures and fragrance. Taking the lead with the Retailer's Choice Award, operations have expanded nationwide, as floral designers and garden centers delightfully discover this incredible venue of creativity. Available only at Peace of Mind Nursery, Inc. all year round, the beauty of the product line is the ever changing colors and types of foliage evolving on a seasonal basis.

Brides are radiant with pride with Wedding bouquets incorporating the Japanese cedar known as *Cryptomeria japonica* 'Cristata' and the crowd pleasing Wow factor is a joy to watch unfold. 'Cristata' is often used as the centerpiece in bouquets, on wedding tables, and even in boutonnieres.

To accelerate your exposure to the vast assortment of new foliage we assemble sample cases called "The WildBunch". Each case delivers inspiration and artistic opportunity with 20 different varieties of blue, green, gold, white, bronze, variegated, and more, to jumpstart your creative juices. Four cases of The WildBunch & voila - 80 different varieties! How cool is that? Cases of individual varieties are also readily available as listed on the Foliage Order Form. All foliage is selected for vibrance and longevity.

Contact Peace of Mind Nursery, Inc at :

dave@peaceofmindnursery.com or **503.949.4944**

to get your Foliage Order Form Today and place your order for the next wedding event or special occasion you are working on.



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SPECIAL CARE FOR THAT SPECIAL DAY

> How often have you heard someone say, about the flowers in a wedding design, "They only need to last for the day"?

That may or may not be true — but it's no excuse for cutting corners on care and handling. Wedding designs fall broadly into two categories. One is centerpieces and other vase arrangements. More often than not, these go home with guests — a prime opportunity to impress potential new customers with the quality of your flowers.

The other category comprises flowers to wear and carry, along with arches, chuppahs, and other temporary installations. In designs like these, flowers may be without a water source, subjected to hot, dry air, and vulnerable to mechanical damage. All the more reason to give them care and handling that will fortify your flowers for the best possible performance.

Custom Solutions

Wedding customers often request special varieties, with special needs. Garden roses, peonies, dahlias — these and other wedding favorites profit from treatment tailored to their idiosyncrasies.

Timing is critical, since wedding flowers must be at the perfect stage of openness when they are used in design. The most common problem is ordering with insufficient lead time. It's generally easier, by controlling light and temperature, to slow opening down than to speed it up. Lilies are a case in point: They typically require five days or more to develop from closed buds to open flowers.

As with all your flowers, attention to the "three C's" pays off: Cooling (including cold water for processing; prepare buckets in advance and give solutions time to chill); Cleanliness (buckets, tools, work surfaces); and Care (using appropriate hydration and flower-food solutions, carefully mixed to get the right proportions).

NOVIA; CONTINENTAL FARMS; PHOTO BY BETSY HANSEN

For wedding flowers, use of an anti-transpirant spray offers an additional layer of protection and resilience. Always give the spray time to dry, however, before placing designs in the cooler, so as to avoid encouraging the growth of botrytis mold.

Here are some further tips on special treatment for popular wedding flowers:

Garden roses. Special solutions for hydrating and feeding all roses are well worth the little bit more they may cost — but especially where premium garden roses are concerned. Roses are among those flowers that derive special benefit from initial processing in hydration solution. After hydration, specialty rose food contains extra surfactants to keep the water and flower food flowing up the stem.

Allow foliage above the water line to remain on the stem right up to the moment when you may have to remove it for design: The leaves help to pump

water and nutrients up the stem. Keep petals dry. Leave room around the flower heads for air circulation and so they can open fully. Leave the guard petals on the rose: Removing them causes trauma to the flower that triggers the release of ethylene. When the flower is fully open, as it should be for maximum value, the guard petals will not be visible.

Peonies. Peonies should arrive in the shop as slightly soft buds showing the variety's true color. They typically require four to six days in a full-load vase solution, in a place with bright light (not direct sunlight), to open completely. Some peonies in a bunch may open faster than others. You can always remove the speediest ones to a dark corner of the cooler to slow them down.

Dahlias. Dahlias tend to release effluents that can encourage the growth of bacteria. They are, therefore, among those flowers that profit from initial processing using a solution with extra

antibacterial action. After the stems and blooms have been allowed to hydrate for at least four hours (up to two days) and are fully turgid, they can be transferred to a holding or vase solution, which has horticultural sugars in it to keep the colors vibrant.

Hydrangeas. Be sure to re-cut the stems above any old, dead wood at the base. Many florists swear by the practice of dipping cut stems in alum powder to facilitate hydration. If the florets are wilting, some will submerge the heads in water to revive them. Both of these strategies run risks: The alum powder can get dirty; wet hydrangea florets, if not allowed to dry completely before they are placed in the cooler, become sites for the growth of botrytis. As an alternative to alum, use a hydration solution that contains aluminum sulfate. 🌿

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