

floral management

THE FLORAL BUSINESS AUTHORITY

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Sanitation Help, p. 44

JUNE 2020 | VOLUME 37 | NUMBER 3



Back to Business

Industry leaders share lessons learned
from an extraordinary spring — and
how they're moving forward



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ON LEARNING TO ADAPT

> It's hard to find the words to describe the last several months. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed just about every aspect of our business. It can be overwhelming to get through a day sometimes, let alone think about how we're going to adapt to the future. But I think it's important, for the health of our individual businesses and the overall industry, to be thinking in that direction now — and I believe there are some important lessons to learn.

The first is: The pandemic has already changed consumer behavior. Before the pandemic, my parents, who are both in their 70s, rarely bought anything online. This spring, though, they bought almost everything they needed online because of their local stay-at-home orders. Online shopping became very normal for them, and guess what? Now, they like it! They overcame the mental and tech barriers, no longer fear using their credit card online, and they plan to continue this practice after things return to normal. They have learned new lessons they will continue to use.

I believe that their experience is not unique and that this pandemic will shift the mindset of shoppers. I think people will continue to want a convenient and reduced-contact way to buy and receive their purchases. This is a huge opportunity for florists: Our shop's ability to quickly implement and communicate our contact-free methods of shopping and delivery had a huge effect on both convincing our customers to continue to buy and in raising our sales back to near normal levels. We also obtained new customers.

Something else I'm taking away from this experience: Change is the new normal. We have endured some hard times at our business, but nothing like this. Even once we came up with a plan on how to move through the spring, we faced challenges. We still do! Government restrictions keep changing. We worry about customers' and employees' responses to policies and procedures.

As a result, we are keeping our plan fluid. Throughout this period, we've worked hard to be transparent with our

staff and keep them informed of our plans, even those we had to furlough. Letting our team know that we had a plan, what that plan was and when it changed, and also listening to their concerns, helped us lead our team through this time.

A third lesson I'm focusing on: financial planning. Unfortunately, many in our industry will not return to business or survive this pandemic. I think the most critical issue to survive is debt management. Debt is like an anchor around your leg that causes you to drown when the business seas get rough. Businesses that survive will likely be the ones that have learned to minimize debt and to have a good amount of operating capital in the bank.

It's also a critical time for all of us to review what and how we are selling. We need to make sure we are offering the products and services that consumers are looking for and developing new products as necessary — and that we are making it easy for customers to support our businesses by having great, mobile-friendly websites. My best marketing ideas have come from paying close attention. When I realized how stressed people were — and how much they missed things like a trip to the spa — we created spa-inspired designs. When customers needed a way to celebrate birthdays, we connected with a local bakery to deliver cakes and flowers.

These are unprecedented times, yes, but we can start drawing on these lessons and getting our notes together. If we commit to staying open-minded and flexible — if we're willing to learn and grow and try new things — we can come out of this hard time stronger, and ready for the next challenge, whatever it may be and whenever it may come. 🌸

Jennifer Barnard is a member of SAF's Retailers Council and the owner of Tillie's Flower Shop in Wichita, Kansas. jen@tilliesflowers.com





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- Tim's Calling ... Live for 2020/ The Complete Series
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[**safnow.org/webinars**](https://safnow.org/webinars)



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THE 'NEXT NORMAL'



> Here are some phrases that we've been using a lot around our (currently virtual) office at the Society of American Florists: Pivot. Unprecedented. New normal. Challenges. It may be the understatement of the year to say that the pandemic disrupted our industry. We're all entering some new phase of that disruption as we move into the summer and fall, but our experiences will continue to vary — sometimes, dramatically.

So how do we (wait for it) *pivot* during this (wait for it) *unprecedented* time and find our (you guessed it) *new normal*? One approach may be

that we look to each other — for commiseration, advice and, most important of all, inspiration. That's what I took away from a call in April with Dianna Nordman, AAF, of the Texas State Florists' Association. At the time, industry members in Texas were wrestling with a complex web of new local, state and federal guidelines and restrictions. Dianna was working hard to provide some clarity, and that meant long hours and plenty of frustration. "Part of the challenge is that we don't know when this will all end," I said. Dianna agreed, and then she said something that has stayed with me: "I'm not thinking about it as the 'new normal' on the other side anymore," she said. "I'm thinking about it as the 'next normal.'" Because no matter where you live, or how you've run your business in the past, things are going to be different for the foreseeable future. There's no going back to January 2020.

And that brings me to another word we're using a lot right now at SAF: opportunity. Specifically, we're talking among our staff and with our volunteer leaders about how we can help more business owners from every segment identify and leverage the opportunities that exist in every crisis to reimagine and reinvent their operations so that they are more resilient and even better equipped to face the future. We're working to do just that on myriad fronts, including an ongoing series of **"Reignite Your Business" webinars**, available now at safnow.org, and a multiday **virtual summit in July**. We're also dedicated to providing the most up-to-date information and advice possible to our SAF members via Floral Management, our SAF Now newsletter, our website, social media platforms and — coming soon — an **online learning platform**, developed by floral industry members for floral industry members.

In this issue of Floral Management, we hope you'll find both inspiration and practical guidance, including insight on how florists are using the success of Mother's Day to plan for the summer and fall (p. 24), targeted tips on how to keep your workplace sanitized and safe (p. 44), along with advice on how to maximize online sales (p. 32). The very best way to stay updated on the latest focused content we have to offer: Visit safnow.org. That's where you'll find information on our upcoming virtual events, including details of our July summit, and a host of constantly updated resources to help you market and grow your business, no matter where this next normal takes us.

Mary Westbrook, Editor in Chief
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More Online



SHUTTERSTOCK/AFRICA STUDIO

VIDEO TIPS FOR VIRTUAL CONNECTIONS

Selling flowers and staying top-of-mind with customers requires a full embrace of technology, techniques, tactics and tools for creating compelling content. SAF compiled tips from a recent webinar series for quick reference.

safnow.org/moreonline

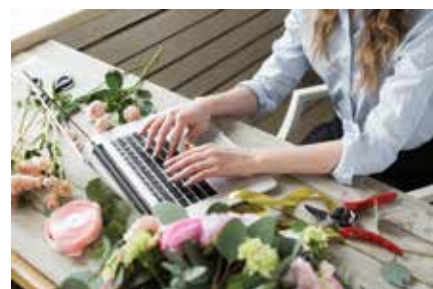


SHUTTERSTOCK/LUMIA STUDIO

SUMMERTIME SOCIAL GRAPHICS

Remind consumers to bring the sunshine indoors this summer with beautiful bouquets. SAF has banner ads and Facebook cover graphics that are perfect for the new season, including messages tailored for the new realities of physical distancing and contact-free delivery.

safnow.org/banner-ad-library



SHUTTERSTOCK/FUSIONSTUDIO

ISO: DIGITAL HELP

Bringing in the experts to help with website management, SEO, online advertising, or social media is one way to keep all of your digital strategy balls in the air. We've gathered names of companies used by Floral Management sources in a handy reference tool.

safnow.org/moreonline

Coming this July:

An Invitation to Reinvent Your Business

- What does the future hold for the industry and how can business owners adapt?
- How will consumer behavior evolve with continued physical distancing?
- What can you do to ramp up demand and your online presence?
- How will you lead your team?

This July SAF is bringing together some of the top minds from inside and outside the industry for a multiday virtual summit filled with forward-looking insights, opportunities to connect and engage with your peers, and the targeted tools you need to propel your business into the fall.



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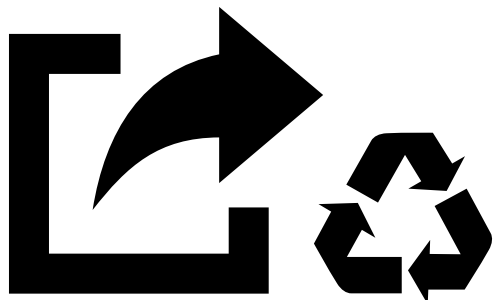
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More Reasons to Love SAF Membership

The Society of American Florists helps members overcome challenges in their business – especially during this time of COVID-19.

From labor resources to webinars to help you run your floral business, we have something for everyone. See our members-only benefits:



SUCCESS SERIES

SAF is leveraging its connection to industry leaders with a new webinar series where they share their best practices and answer questions from attendees.



VIRTUAL EDUCATIONAL EVENTS

During this time, SAF is adopting new ways to conduct business. We have pivoted to offer virtual-based education events.

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REFLECTIONS ON SPRING 2020

> In recent weeks, the Society of American Florists surveyed members about their spring holiday sales, thoughts on the association's COVID-19 webinar series and overall pandemic experience. Full results from Administrative Professionals Week and Easter/Passover can be found in our Industry News column (p. 36), but below are a few anecdotal responses too good not to share.

We did a free promotion for customers leading up to Easter. The days before Palm Sunday, we had a basket out in front of our store filled with palm leaves with red ribbon attached. People would drive up and get one, sign their name on a sheet (social distancing, no contact). We also had little purple ribbons for them to attach to their palm leaf on Easter morning. We had a tremendous amount of responses. People showed via social media where they placed the palms on their front doors or on their windshields when they went to drive in church services.

—**Shari McCallister**, D & L Florist,
Houston, Missouri

I hadn't seen an Easter like this since right after 9-11. We doubled our last year's Mother's Day orders with our suppliers in anticipation of a big Mother's Day week.

—**Dorothy Hope**, Hope Blooms Flowers
& Things, Eagle, Idaho

For Mother's Day, we reached capacity by Thursday, due to our short staff and supply. We offered a virtual Mother's Day bouquet to be delivered Sunday and let mom know her real flowers would be delivered the following week. That was successful for us.

—**Barbara Keller**, All A' Bloom, Lee's
Summit, Missouri 🌸

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SAF PUTS FLOWERS FRONT AND CENTER ON MOTHER'S DAY

> Mother's Day 2020 was a challenging holiday with COVID-19 changing both staffing in florist shops and ordering habits from consumers.

In the run-up to the holiday, SAF had a number of inquiries from media outlets to discuss what the industry was planning. Overall, we saw a lot of positive floral references. This year, Loft, the clothing company, reminded its customers, "You can still send flowers, even if you can't be there to deliver them." In addition, in its new At Home section, The New York Times encouraged readers to send flowers through local florists.

SAF was quoted in a number of publications on how flowers can boost moods. From national media including TV and radio spots to print media including the Los Angeles Daily News, ABC 7 and MarketWatch, SAF was called upon as the voice of the floriculture industry.

Despite the positive coverage, it can be discouraging when you see or hear a competitor or news outlet disparaging the gift of flowers. This year, SAF asked a number of groups to take a more positive approach.

Among the companies recently contacted by SAF:

- **Wayfair**, the online purveyor of home goods, games, accessories and furniture, suggested consumers "skip the flowers" and show mom love with gifts that last all year in a recent ad.
- **Basil Hayden's**, a small batch Jim Beam whiskey, ran ads in publications such as **Travel & Leisure** magazine stating, "Because I don't believe a houseplant warms a house."



442,453 views

foodnetwork Don't give mom roses this year, give her DOUGHNUT roses instead 🍩 (They're made with store-bought BISCUIT DOUGH!) Save the recipe

POSITIVITY, PLEASE SAF again reached out to companies around Mother's Day to promote the holiday and positive advertising.

- SAF received a response from the Travel & Leisure editor, noting that their publisher would pass along our concerns to Basil Hayden's, and that she personally supports florists and small businesses in her neighborhood whenever she can.
- **Food Network** suggested people skip the roses this year and instead give moms doughnut roses in a paid partnership social media post with **Edible Arrangements**.
- **FlasKap**, a company that sells drink containers, stated "Flowers rot. Our gift pours shots," in a Facebook video and ad. The company also included "Forget the flowers" and other more colorful phrasing on its website.



- **The Huffington Post** ran a story on flower safety ahead of the holiday, with some advice that encouraged readers to order confidently, but a negative comparison calling flowers an "autopilot, non-thinking" way to express affection for mom.
- SAF members also contacted the association about a Mother's Day story on **"Good Morning America"** that only highlighted a national floral company. In its outreach, SAF encouraged the morning news program to also consider directing viewers to retailers within their communities in future editorial coverage. 📺

SAF ADVOCATES FOR WHOLESALER TAX RELIEF ON CREDIT DEFAULTS

> As COVID-19 continues to affect the balance sheet of floral industry businesses, SAF reached out to Congressional leadership to highlight one more ripple effect: customer credit defaults.

A coalition of associations representing wholesalers across various industries joined forces to send a letter

to the Hill asking Congressional leaders to prioritize legislation that would take into account the suddenly high volume of customer defaults on credit sales. Many customers buy inventory or input materials on short-term credit terms, particularly businesses in the industries hit hardest by the COVID-19 crisis, such as restaurants, retailers, and venues

for sport, events, and entertainment. Current law does not contemplate the abrupt and unexpected halt in a high volume of payments for these credit sales all at once. For floral industry wholesalers, the impact is even more acute because the timing of COVID-19 coincided with payments for Valentine's Day orders coming due.

The letter reads in part:

Over a broader period of time, section 166 of the tax code addresses this situation by allowing a deduction for wholly worthless debts or “bad debts.” However, the terms and timing of this provision allow it to be used only under certain circumstances – businesses must meet a nuanced facts-and-circumstances test that may take many years, and in some cases, may not be satisfied until a customer in default has reached a bankruptcy settlement.

Given the current public health and economic crisis, the value of this provision is severely limited in the event of the sort of sudden shock businesses face right now. Businesses selling inventory goods and input materials on credit are experiencing mounting defaults, and they will continue to experience defaults for months to come.

The undersigned businesses respectfully request that Congress pass a temporary legislative modification to account for this unforeseen event by loosening the facts-and-circumstances test on bad debt

business deductions and accelerating these deductions into the present taxable year.

Thirty associations signed the letter, including the National Restaurant Association, National Association of Wholesaler-Distributors, National Beer Wholesalers Association, the Aluminum Association, the Produce Marketing Association and the Wholesale Florist & Florist Supplier Association.

Stay tuned for further updates as SAF continues to advocate on behalf of wholesalers on this issue. 🌿

‘REIGNITE YOUR BUSINESS’ WEBINAR SERIES PROVIDES SUMMER SALES BOOST

➤ As retail businesses continue to reopen around the country, make sure your operation is ready to hit the ground running or continues to build on your Mother’s Day sales momentum. Through the “Reignite Your Business” webinar series, SAF will help you navigate everything from keeping staff and customers safe to driving consumer demand online. Stay up to date on the latest offerings and go to safnow.org to register or watch sessions that have already aired:

PPP Forgiveness Procedures

Securing a Payment Protection Program loan was hard enough for small business



EXPERT ADVICE Industry leaders heading up SAF webinars include (clockwise) Paul Goodman, MBA, PFCI; Jackie Levine; Heather Waits; and Chris Norwood, AAF, AIFD, PFCI.

owners — now another series of challenges lies ahead: ensuring you understand and are following the rules correctly, to make certain your loan forgiveness comes through. This targeted session will cover the primary details and information you need to know as you continue to navigate the PPP process.

Keeping Staff and Customers Safe

As restrictions ease and retail florists enter a new phase of operations, what can you do to help keep your staff and customers safe? This session will cover key strategies for following social distancing guidelines, limiting exposure risks and maintaining confidence and trust, along with how to adapt your delivery and pickup practices for the best customer and staff experience.

Strategies for Lean Teams

Everyone’s team is smaller. So how do you make the most of your team while still keeping people on task — and safely distanced? And how do you cross-train your staff for maximum efficiency? Learn efficient training strategies for effective team management.

Building Virtual Events

With new operating and social distancing rules, crowd size restrictions and safety concerns among staff and customers, some retailers have pivoted to virtual events. How do you create online events

SAVE THE DATE

At press time, SAF was finalizing details for a virtual summit in late July focused on strategies to reinvent your business. Find out more and register today at safnow.org.

that draw a crowd and meet your revenue goals? This session will share insight on how to choose the best platform, generate excitement, manage logistics and leverage post-event enthusiasm.

Leveraging LinkedIn

Retail florists devote most of their social media time to Facebook and Instagram — but there’s another platform that deserves more of your attention: LinkedIn. Learn how to use LinkedIn to strategically forge sales leads, enhance your network and generate new business.

Marketing Messages that Sell

In today’s environment, telling your story as LOCAL small business owners right now and making personal connections makes all the difference. Mix in the message that flowers are important to people’s happiness, and you have a winning formula for sales success — learn how to leverage it in this session. 🌿

Jennifer McNally is director of marketing and communications for the Society of American Florists. jmcnally@safnow.org

snapshot



TRUE COLORS

> In late April, weeks into quarantine, when the world at large wrestled with feelings of angst and fatigue, Cara Lard had an idea to bring some happiness to her hometown, while simultaneously flaunting her creativity and artistry, and highlighting her identity as a proud businesswoman who appreciates her community.

Inspired by Luft Balloon, whose Instagram account has recently featured bright, elaborate balloon arches, Lard, the owner of Mum's Flowers in Whitefish, Montana, decided to construct her own — an enormous rainbow — in front of her shop's window. "To me, rainbows have always been a symbolism of hope and the promise of sunshine after a storm," she said. She dubbed the project, "Rainbows of Hope," shared a picture of the finished product on social media and invited the public to check it out.

Over the course of a week, scores of people visited the heartwarming display, where they took selfies, family and graduation portraits, and other whimsical photos, with many striking a "jump for joy" pose. Mum's Flowers was tagged dozens and dozens of times in Instagram stories and posts, and exposure flourished on Facebook as well, where Lard's photo received 213 likes, 24 shares and 33 positive comments, such as "This totally brightened my day," "You gave so many smiles during a weird time," and "What a wonderful statement of beauty!"



RAINBOW CONNECTION Cara Lard, the owner of Mum's Flowers in Whitefish, Montana, created a balloon arch outside her shop to help lift her community's spirit.

Among the people publicly gushing about the shop: Abby Doll, a local fashion influencer and blogger with more than 22,000 Instagram followers. "As Montana slowly started to open back up this week, @carasflowers, who owns one of my favorite businesses in town, @mumsflowersmt, created a giant #rainbowofhope on the side of store," Doll captioned a recent Instagram post, where she also noted that Lard had created similar balloon installations for other businesses, including a beauty store and a jeweler, as a "welcome back" surprise when they reopened to walk-in customers. "It makes me cry when I think about the happiness and joy she is spreading to local business owners and patrons, and what a uniting and positive impact her thoughtfulness and creativity are having on our community in such an uncertain time." 🌈

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

TECH-SAVVY SELLING

> In the spirit of this issue's technological theme, I am presenting my mystery shopper call a bit differently than usual. I am not going to review and critique the exchange; you and your team are going to do it! Visit safnow.org/timscalling to play the recording of the call I made posing as a customer from New York City who could not travel to celebrate his sister's 40th birthday.

Listen as a group and discuss what the saleswoman did well and where she missed opportunities. Talk about how that call would have been handled at your shop. How would I have been greeted? What price would I have been offered for which design? Also, pay attention to how well this shop integrates technology into the customer shopping experience.

I want to use my remaining space to discuss the importance of using technology while selling flowers. For many of you, the only way your customers have bought flowers over the past few months has been with a grab-and-go bunch at the grocery store. They are starved for diversity and elevated customer service. And the easiest way for a shop of any size to impress customers is to integrate 21st century technology into the shopping experience. Here are a few must-dos:

1. Actively use your POS system to see a customer's average sale (hint: pitch an arrangement above that number!) and access their shopping history to save time. It's not quaint or retro to record a flower order — an important business transaction — on paper. It's archaic, inefficient and just bad business. There is no point in having a POS system

and then writing your orders on paper to enter them later. Do you push your delivery van to each recipient's house? Make smart use of your technology!

2. Capture an email address from every caller, even on a pickup order. I take thousands of orders every year and know for a fact that the overwhelming majority of customers have and use email. Yes, you will occasionally hear that the caller does not want to share this information or does not use email. Gathering email addresses is the easiest and cheapest (aka free) way to build your database to reach out with marketing campaigns. If you are not comfortable creating an email campaign, get help! Reach out to your website provider and they'll walk you through the process — some may even send the campaigns for you as part of their contract. Now more than ever, you need to keep in touch with customers to get sales.

It's not quaint or retro to record a flower order — an important business transaction — on paper. It's archaic, inefficient and just bad business.

3. Use those email addresses to give extra service. Most POS systems I use allow you to perform two important functions that customers want and appreciate, and will save you time. The first is simply sending a copy of the order through email, either manually or automatically. I like to do this to give the customer a chance to review the order and contact us with any tweaks or changes before the design leaves the store. The other service is sending an email to confirm delivery. Think about how many hours a month you spend simply telling customers, "Yes, your sister got her flowers. They were delivered two hours ago." By making better use of technology, and configuring your POS to send delivery confirmations, you will save time and give your customers peace of mind, instantly elevating the shopping experience!

THE BOTTOM LINE: We're in a new retail era where customer shopping patterns and needs are changing. Don't get left behind because you're not embracing technology! 📞



The Recording

Take notes and write your review of this call. Email it to me at tim@floralstrategies.com. In addition to publishing the best review in next month's column, I will provide a pizza lunch to the first three shops to make their submission. And join me online for the next Tim's Calling... Live webinar on June 17 at 3:30 p.m. EDT. Head to safnow.org/timscalling for a list of upcoming sessions.



SHUTTERSTOCK/DRAGANA GORDIC



Tim Huckabee, FSC, is the president of [FloralStrategies.com](https://floralstrategies.com), which teaches ultimate customer care to retail and wholesale florists. tim@floralstrategies.com

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Your Growth is Our Business

LEADERSHIP IN TOUGH TIMES

> I'm sure you have heard the saying, "The only thing constant is change." It's true! Things are changing so rapidly that our new expression could be "What's next?" Don't you wish you knew? No one does.

Over the last months you as a businessowner may have assumed you knew the next fork in the road, the outcome of your loan application, the implications for your businesses and your life, and how others would respond. You used your intellect, resources, research, and advisers, but still the outcome was other than what you expected.

At times, you probably feel like a failure. At times, a winner. Other times, you don't feel anything. Over the course of a day, hour or minute, you may feel some or all these emotions. I'm here to tell you: You are not crazy, and you are not alone.

But as the leader of your business, you do have to find new tools and ways of thinking to move forward. Here are strategies that you can use to assess and communicate with credibility and compassion in these uncertain times.



SHUTTERSTOCK/PRESSMASTER

As the leader, your team believes you have all the answers. In the current situation, you don't. Be direct, honest and vulnerable about that reality.

Get help. Now is an ideal time to get out of your own head and gain insight and perspective from an objective third party. Discuss your situation and potential options with someone who is not emotionally involved or invested in the outcome. Consider the information and insight you receive. If you hear an "out of the box" idea, this is the time to be creative and receptive.

Embrace "intros" and "outros."

Communicating often with your team has never been so important. Help set expectations and remind them of the fluidity of situations by providing context at the beginning and end of conversations. For example, I recommend starting a conversation or email using an intro such as: "As of today (or this morning/this afternoon), this is how we are going

to approach the situation." Then, end conversations or emails using an outro: "If anything changes regarding the topics discussed, I will communicate those updates in our next meeting or discussion."

Be vulnerable. As the leader, your team believes you have all the answers. In the current situation, you don't. Be direct, honest and vulnerable about that reality. If you find you need to change your approach, own it, and explain the reasons and next steps. (One phrase to try: "I just learned xx so that means we need to change xx and do xx.")

Honor people's fear and trauma.

Fifteen years ago, my house burned down, and I lost almost everything. I lived with my best friends for nine months while I was rebuilding my home and my life. During that time, I experienced the

generosity of people that I had never even met and came to understand what was "really" important. The keys to my home were delivered on Christmas Day. When I walked in, I sat on the floor and cried in gratitude for the kindness, compassion, understanding, and support of others. The trauma occurred, and I was never the same. We've all experienced some type of trauma in our life: illness, the death of a loved one, losing a job, divorce, etc. This crisis has brought new traumas and new experiences into your life and your employees' lives (self-quarantine, illness, lack of freedom, being alone or with family, learning about your spouse or kids, home schooling, learning technology, working from home). Recognize and honor those experiences. You may be surprised by the generosity with which your team members and supporters rise to the occasion. 🌿


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COPING WITH CRISIS: IT HAPPENS, SO PLAN AHEAD

> You wake up to 12 inches of glistening snow from an overnight storm. Your lead designer's child has a temperature of 104.6. Your cooler dies and you now have 200 brown hydrangeas instead of white. Your building catches on fire. Two words: kidney stones. It was the last one that made my hair fall out, and it happened right before our biggest wedding weekend of 2017. And now we are *all* suffering some level of anguish as we navigate through the coronavirus pandemic.

No one wants to think about disasters and how they can affect our businesses, but sooner or later one will happen. Here are my tried and true tips for surviving unforeseen acts of God or plumb bad luck.

1. Have a backup plan. Have you documented procedures? If not, do it now. And be sure to write them step by step, so that anyone can follow them. Then make sure someone other than you knows where this procedure book is and how to use it.

As part of this backup plan, I recommend having one to three other people who can jump in at a moment's notice should someone not be able to perform their job. In my back pocket: freelance

designers and current/former employees who can work nights and weekends. Hey, life happens. But your client's wedding, bar mitzvah or gala is going to go on whether your regular team shows up or not.

No one wants to think about disasters and how they can affect our businesses, but sooner or later one will happen.

2. Have a future-thinking plan. You can't predict the future, but you can plan for foreseeable issues. Say, for instance, your weather forecast warns of a massive snowstorm arriving overnight, and you have a large event the next day. Could you deliver the flowers to the venue early and book a room at the nearest hotel so you can get to the venue in the morning to set up?

If your current clients haven't already asked about backup plans and "what-if" situations, they will soon. Grab a sheet of paper right now and write out five possible scenarios of things that could happen. Next, write a feasible plan for how you

would handle each one. Bonus: Sharing this information during the consultation will score you brownie points because, I bet you a bouquet of roses, your local competition doesn't have this.

3. Update your contract. Make certain you have an "Acts of God" policy that includes natural disasters and weather (hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, blizzards) as well as pandemics and medical emergencies to protect you. The term "force majeure" has been a hot topic lately. It's worth consulting with your attorney for more details, but my advice is to make sure this subject is covered in your contract for your protection and your client's.

4. Check your insurance policy coverage. Most policies do not include pandemics, but you need to know what will be covered in the event you get snowed in and cannot deliver a wedding to the church. Or if your building catches on fire the night before a huge gala. Or your delivery van is stolen. This will give you peace of mind that things will be all right ... eventually.

Imagining what can go wrong is no fun; but trust me, thinking ahead about them and having a plan in place to handle worst-case scenarios will save your reputation, your pride and your sanity. 🌸

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



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FEATURES TO HELP FLORISTS *grow*



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HERE COMES THE SUN

> For most of the world's population, an entire season has come and gone with hardly any activity outside of the house — minus masked trips to the grocery store or pharmacy, or long walks or runs for those living in favorable climates — and the isolation has taken a severe psychological toll. According to a new study from researchers at San Diego State University and Florida State University, more than one in four American adults met the criteria that psychologists use to diagnose serious mental distress and illness, which represents a roughly 700 percent increase from pre-pandemic data collected in 2018. While many states have recently begun loosening social restrictions, there remain many stressors, difficulty finding childcare (due to canceled summer camps and daycare centers' reduced capacities) and unease about another wave of COVID-19 outbreaks. Flowers can't remove these burdens, but as multiple university studies have proven, they increase feelings of well-being and instill a sense of calmness.

This month, we chose to highlight bright, vibrant colors, which psychologists, interior designers, personal shoppers, makeup artists and even chefs agree have a pick-me-up effect. "When we look at certain colors,

it triggers neurological responses in the brain. Warm, bright colors release dopamine — known as the 'feel-good hormone' — which can improve our mood, heighten the attention span and even boost our sex drive," said Jules Standish, a style consultant and author of "How Not to Wear Black."

Here are a few examples of the floral world's bright, beautiful blossoms. Out of courtesy to growers and wholesalers who are working hard to make sure florists receive as much product as they need, Floral Management editors recommend ordering by color rather than variety name for the time being — and experimenting with different flower combinations. 🌸

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



'QUINCY' MINI GERBERA
Green Valley Floral



'FUZZBALL' CHRYSANTHEMUM
Deliflor



'CHERRY O' ROSE
Equiflor



PINK ALSTROEMERIA
DVFlora



'PRAIANO' ORIENTAL LILY
Oregon Flowers



GIANT ALLIUM
Oregon Flowers



'MAMAMIA' GERBERA
Rosa Flora



ORANGE CARNATION
DVFlora



'KARMA VENTURA' DAHLIA
Camflor



'SELVA ROMANCE' HYPERICUM
Mayesh Wholesale



GREEN CYMBIDIUM ORCHID
Designer Cut Flowers



'YELLOW LIGHTHOUSE' ROSE
Jet Fresh Flowers

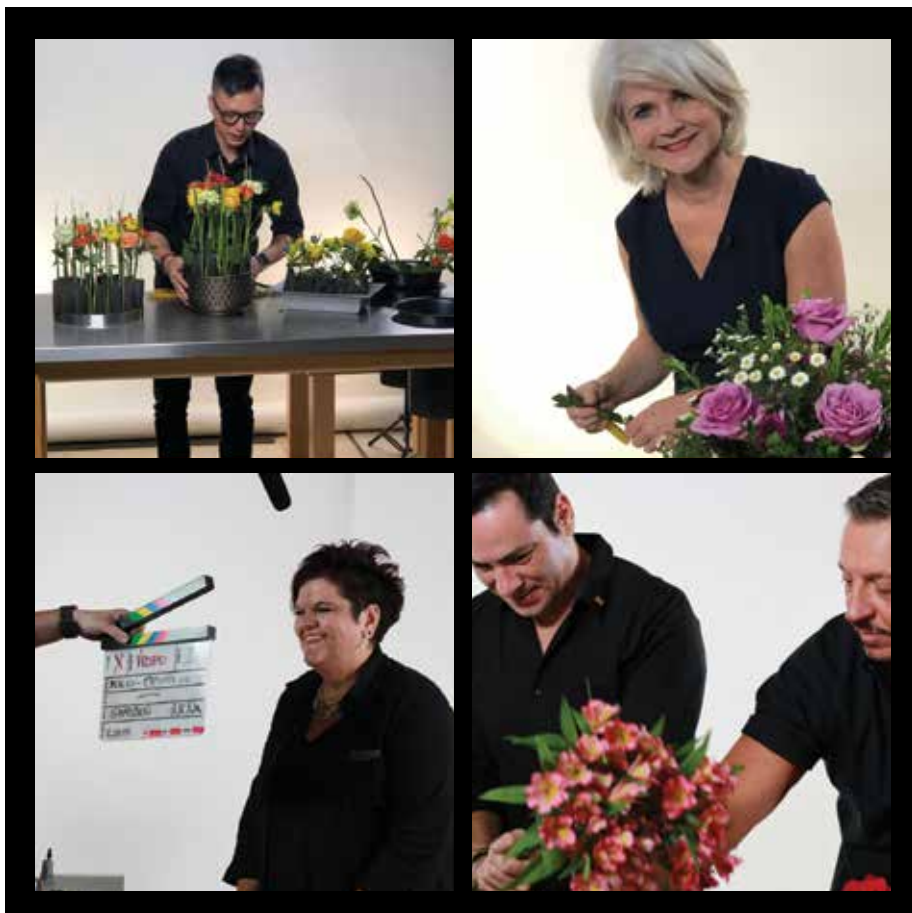


BIRD OF PARADISE
Designer Cut Flowers



'CAPTAIN CERES' CALLA
Oregon Flowers

EDUCATION: *The Pathway to Success*



KNOWLEDGE IS POWER. It's a familiar axiom, and it certainly holds true when it comes to being successful in today's floral marketplace. Whether you're a flower shop owner, a floral designer, someone who is looking for a career change or you just want to learn about one of your favorite things, flowers – the more you know, the more you can expand your opportunities to grow your business and fulfill your career goals.

INTRODUCING AN INNOVATIVE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Floriology Institute, powered by BloomNet, is one of the country's foremost centers for floral design and florist-related education. Hundreds of students at all design skill levels have attended classes at Floriology Institute, and many have gone on to achieve AIFD (American Institute of Floral Designers) National Certification.

Furthering its dedication to providing quality educational opportunities, Floriology Institute has launched Floriology NOW, a unique online learning resource. Floriology NOW brings professional floral instruction to you, on your time, in your own space. Here, you can access an unparalleled offering of video-based courses, resource materials, instructional demonstrations and participate in quarterly subscriber only webinars. The curriculum includes both design and business courses

Learn Anytime, From Anywhere

Online education is here and NOW. *"Through the versatility and convenience of the Floriology NOW digital platform, floral industry professionals — no matter where they are across America or all over the world — can attend courses on their favorite devices at a time that works best for their busy schedules,"* stated Dinesh Popat, BloomNet President.



covering more than 70 topics, and over 1,000 expert tips and techniques, encapsulated in more than 100 hours of learning.

"Through our new Floriology NOW online platform, combined with our hands-on Floriology Institute learning center in Jacksonville, Florida, we are committed to offering the best and most comprehensive educational experience," said Dinesh Popat, President of BloomNet. "Our goal is to continually increase and enhance the on-line course experience to support the ever-changing floral market by providing unmatched educational resources that can assist everyone in growing their businesses, advancing their careers or enjoying the beauty of flowers."

ENGAGING EDUCATIONAL CONTENT

The video based Floriology NOW course curriculum features world-renowned instructors demonstrating step-by-step techniques for those just starting out in the industry or for the seasoned designer. The curriculum includes: Foundational Floristry, Round Arrangements, Sympathy Flowers, Wedding Flowers, Wire

Work, and Digital Marketing. New courses and topics will be continually added to elevate your experience and increase your investment in YOU. Courses are available in English and Spanish with a goal of adding other options as we grow.

The Floriology NOW interactive platform also enables course attendees to participate in course projects, answer quiz questions to gauge retention, as well as communicate with instructors and fellow students. "The feedback and response from florists and floral designers across the globe, has been tremendous and overwhelmingly positive," stated Jackie Lacey, AAF, AIFD, CFD, PFCI, BloomNet Director of Education and Industry Relations.

WORLD-RENOVED INSTRUCTORS

The Floriology NOW team of instructors includes many of the world's most acclaimed floral designers, household names to anyone that has been in the industry. Committed to providing the highest quality education, and there to guide you on your floral journey, each instructor is certified by the American Institute of Floral Designers. The Floriology NOW team of instructors also features leading business experts in such fields as digital marketing, retail operations and overall best business practices.

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THE NEW RULES FOR SELLING FLOWERS

Floral industry members share insight from an unexpectedly strong — and anything but ordinary — Mother's Day and how those lessons could translate to a longer-term strategy.

BY AMANDA LONG AND MARY WESTBROOK

For years, the run-up to Mother's Day has proceeded like clockwork at Radebaugh Florist & Greenhouses in Towson, Maryland. Kaitlin Radebaugh, AAF, is a planner — so determining how much product to buy, how many people to staff, what to promote and when, etc., was a straightforward process: review previous years' sales, make plans for this year, repeat.

This year, that playbook was out the window. "The biggest challenge was uncertainty," Radebaugh said. "We had no idea what demand would look like. We weren't sure what product we'd have to sell." With their retail areas closed to the public and a reduced team practicing social distancing on site or working remotely, Radebaugh streamlined just about everything — production lines, website offerings, phone call routing — and charged forward into an anything but routine holiday. "I really had no idea what to expect, which was terrifying," she said.

The holiday week that followed was "excruciating" — 16-hour days, stress and anxiety about new COVID-related processes such as high-volume curbside pickup — but it ended with a big dose of (welcome) good news: Sales were "significantly higher" than 2019 returns. "If we had more staff and more product, we could have done even more," Radebaugh said.

Around the country, retail florists have been sharing similar stories. According to a post-holiday survey of Society of American Florists members, 70 percent of retail florists who could operate on Mother's Day reported an increase in

sales this year — with many, like Radebaugh, saying they could have sold more. The holiday was a bright spot in an extremely challenging spring — and an extraordinary event. With summer weddings on hold, corporate events canceled, and sympathy work dramatically different, florists face a summer and fall like no other.

But the holiday also offered some valuable lessons, and Floral Management writers and editors recently talked with industry members and dug into results from both SAF's member survey and a separate consumer poll (see below) to highlight some of the major takeaways from Mother's Day that could inform your future strategy as you move ahead and reimagine your operations.

Update your playbook.

Floral industry professionals faced myriad challenges ahead of Mother's Day week — including a patchwork of local, state and national regulations and labor and supply-side shortages.

SURVEY SAYS

In addition to SAF's member survey, the association commissioned an Ipsos consumer poll in May to help benchmark holiday returns. That poll found only a slight decrease in the number of American adults buying Mother's Day flowers and plants this year — and a slight increase in their median and average spending per gift.

"We're really encouraged to see that Mother's Day spending increased, despite the many potential obstacles — financial, logistical — that could have driven floral spending on gifts downward," said Kate Penn, SAF's CEO.

Read more about the poll and review full member survey results at safnow.org/moreonline.

-M.W.

In Chicago, Lenny Walker of Kennicott Brothers said that Mother's Day sales "exceeded expectations," in part because the longtime wholesaler saw a surge of late-in-the-week orders. And no wonder: Many florists in the Midwest weren't sure if they'd be able to operate even just 10 days before the holiday. Adapting to this new reality requires a significant shift in thinking — not to mention time and energy. "Our industry is based on patterns, and understanding those patterns helps guide us in making good decisions," Walker said. "Navigating the unknown is consuming."

But finding a new normal also means unearthing new opportunities.

Working with a third of her usual staff over Mother's Day, for example, Radebaugh saw how much her reduced team could accomplish. "We did more with less," she said. The pandemic has underscored the importance of cross training her team — a practice she was already prioritizing before the crisis began. "Everyone on my team can take a sales call, because everyone is trained to be a sales associate," she explained. Several members of her team now work remotely — the setup allowed the business to keep operating in compliance with COVID-related rules pertaining to crowd size — but now that the system and technology are in place, Radebaugh can see the utility of having remote workers manning the phones this winter, when snowstorms make commuting more hazardous.

Radebaugh's biggest holiday takeaway? The power of no. For years, the shop trained its staff to please customers with lots of options and a can-do attitude. (Sound familiar?) This year, they shifted their approach out of necessity on Mother's Day, turning down time-intensive custom work and limiting designs to the most profitable and efficient arrangements. They also made every single sale count with add-ons galore — chocolates, wine and gourmet goods customers were happy to include. The tactics worked and Radebaugh said she'll be carrying the approach forward, beyond the holiday.

"Mother's Day showed me that we have a much stronger ability to control the sale than I ever realized," she explained.

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



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EVERYONE ON MY TEAM CAN TAKE A SALES CALL, BECAUSE EVERYONE IS TRAINED TO BE A SALES ASSOCIATE.”

-KAITLIN RADEBAUGH, AAF

outside of Philadelphia, said the heady combination of a blockbuster sales event like Mother's Day 2020 in the middle of a pandemic also clarified for him how much his team can do when they come together. "Many members of our staff have learned that they can be super-productive when they are pushed," he said. "They have learned how to work smarter, be more efficient, and ramp up productivity."

Like Radebaugh, Drummond said the strategic use of tech is helping. As soon as stay-at-home orders began, five of Drummond's salespeople began working remotely via VoIP (voice over internet protocol), taking calls from the comfort and safety of their living rooms, kitchens and offices. "We've really leaned into technology to make this work," said Drummond. From home, sales staff can respond to web chats, transfer calls between stores, handle the phones and answer delivery inquiries. Because the

shop's point of sales system is integrated with the delivery, the sales associate can check whereabouts of the driver and tell the customer where he or she is on their route. (Read more about Drummond's system at safnow.org/moreonline.)

Rethink your space.

Based in part on their experiences on Mother's Day this year, some retailers also are reconsidering how much space they need — and even where they locate their businesses.

Rakini Chinery, AAF, AzMF, of Allan's Flowers in Prescott, Arizona, said she had planned for Mother's Day sales to be down by about 75 percent this year. Instead, they were up 46 percent. Like Radebaugh and Drummond, Chinery

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THOSE PATTERNS
HELPS GUIDE
US IN MAKING
GOOD DECISIONS.
NAVIGATING
THE UNKNOWN
IS CONSUMING.”**

-LENNY WALKER



70%

**of florists who were
open for Mother's
Day reported an
increase in sales.**

Source: SAF's 2020 Mother's Day Member Survey. Response rate: 7 percent.

was struck by how efficiently her business ran. "I was surprised by the incredible number of orders we were able to take and fill and the fact that we did it with about 35 percent less staff," she said. "We will continue to work lean."

Chinery is also considering moving her business to a more industrial area. "The sales floor doesn't seem to make a big difference in our sales, and we loved not dealing with a constant stream of walk-in clients [for Mother's Day]," she said. Not having customers in the store "freed us up to fill more delivery orders," Chinery added.

In addition, retailers have made changes to their spaces to accommodate COVID-related restrictions and ensure staff and customer safety. With the future still uncertain, and a second or third wave of infections possible, many of these changes are likely to stay in place for months to come, so taking time to think through the updates is important.

In April, Drummond converted unused retail space into more square footage for his designers. He dismantled retail displays and wheeled design stations into the showroom. The change means more physical distance between employees, with designers working at every other station. He's also implemented other policies to limit team members' physical interactions. For example, at the start of their shift, designers grab pre-made bunches and product, then wheel the supplies to their station. The change means less foot traffic throughout the space: Drummond estimates designers make about three trips while producing 60 to 80 arrangements daily.

At Lake Forest Flowers outside of Chicago, Eileen Weber, AAF, turned her family business' showroom into a design room this spring. With a smaller staff of just three, they've been able to stick to

one person at each 8-foot table (which used to accommodate four designers). To avoid cross-contamination of phones, one person is assigned to the shop phone and spillover calls come to Weber's cell phone. Although she appreciates larger retailers, including her local grocery stores, establishing one-way hallways to manage the flow, Weber said her three employees have been able to safely navigate her 1,200-square-foot shop without implementing such measures.

Get real in your messaging.

One unexpected outcome of the pandemic: It may have deepened consumers' appreciation of flowers and plants. SAF's member survey found that 86 percent of florists who experienced a Mother's Day sales increase this year credited the uptick at least in part to customers' desire to bridge physical distance with flowers. That stat is in line with broader consumer trends: Homebound Americans took up gardening in record numbers this spring. Online searches for advice on plant selection and care spiked as shelter-in-place orders went into effect and people grew hungry for comfort and connection.

"The past two months have proven to many consumers that flowers make a real difference in the lives of people suffering from stress, isolation and illness," said Drummond. "We hear it every day. We need to repeat that message in conversation, on our websites, in our advertising, on social media — everywhere."

Like Drummond, Patrick Busch of Len Busch Roses in Plymouth, Minnesota, said those are messages that industry members need to play up more often. Busch played a lead role in advocating for his customers early in the pandemic, helping to ensure they could offer

contact-free services and engage in online sales. Nonetheless, as consumer demand evaporated in early April, Busch had to throw out tens of thousands of unsold Easter lilies. Looking to blunt the pain of those losses, he and his team dropped off as many plants as they could to local retirement homes as a gift to elderly citizens who couldn't leave their communities or have visitors on site. Months later, Busch is still receiving heartfelt thank-you letters.

"People wrote to tell us this was the first plant they'd had since childhood or about how happy the plant made them," he said. "It really drove the point home for me — the emotional connection people feel with flowers, and I think the pandemic has only increased those feelings. Now the question moving forward is, how do we continue to tap into those feelings? How do we build on them?"

That's exactly what Jackie Levine is doing in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Throughout the pandemic, the fourth-generation manager of Central Square Florist has made it a point to stay in touch with reporters, resulting in substantial media coverage even while her business was temporarily closed. Her message no matter the platform: Flowers make people feel good.

"The advertising payoff you get from the media is priceless," said Levine, who was featured on the front page of the Boston Herald and in a post-Mother's Day interview on CNBC, among other high-profile news stories. Her proactive approach has increased Central Square's name recognition, bolstered its credibility as a local florist and helped drive

more customers to the shop's website and more engagement on their social media pages.

Streamline delivery.

Long before DoorDash or Instacart, florists had perfected the art of delivery — a skill that's been invaluable in the industry as contact-free product transfers became imperative. In this time of anxiety and social distancing, taking the extra step to confirm delivery with senders and recipients (via automated technology or personal outreach) is an important special touch.

In Little Rock, Arkansas, Tipton & Hurst has trained its drivers to call ahead to recipients, but they also call the senders. (After Mother's Day, they made at least 3,500 calls.) "I'm concerned that our society is so accustomed to Amazon deliveries they're not answering the door, and things just sit," said Christopher Norwood, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, adding that he worried as much about weather as porch theft. "We have to be better than that."

When drivers' calls go to voicemail at Penny's by Plaza Flowers, the customer gets an email confirmation and a call to inform them of their gifts' arrival and location. Thanks to a moderate spring in Pennsylvania, flowers on porches have fared well, but Drummond said that high summer temperatures could require moving to "Plan B — calling ahead and scheduling."

At J. Miller Flowers in Oakland, California, sales staff ask what day (not time) customers want their flowers to arrive, giving them more flexibility to manage their routes and team. Most



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WE'RE CONSTANTLY SHIFTING THROUGH THESE MURKY WATERS RIGHT NOW. BUT WE'RE FOCUSING ON HOPE.”

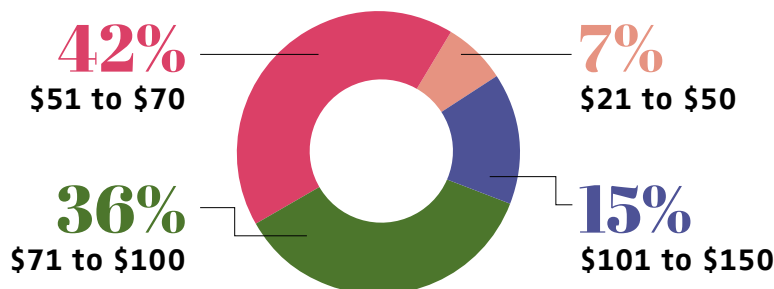
—LIZA ROESER

customers, particularly in hard-hit areas of the country, are understanding. To build on that goodwill, Valerie Ow added a flyer with each J. Miller delivery thanking customers for supporting a small local business and emphasizing the power of flowers to calm and connect.

Thanks to refrigerated buildings on the property at Penny's by Plaza Flowers, no driver entered the building for Mother's Day. Drummond has extended wireless service to buildings, so staff can scan packages as they go into vehicles. Inside, delivery packers know not to cross a bright yellow strip of duct tape on the floor that separates them from drivers' space. If drivers need to use the restroom inside, they have their own separate one. "It's strange, but it's working," Drummond said.

Many florists also turned their parking lots and sidewalks into floral pickup stations during the Mother's Day rush, blocking off six-foot spaces on the sidewalk in the lot to encourage customers to wait their turn to approach the product and/or pick up a pre-ordered package. And they got their first taste of their new role as hall monitor/high school dance chaperone, gently nudging customers to

AVERAGE TRANSACTION ON MOTHER'S DAY



Source: SAF's 2020 Mother's Day Member Survey. Response rate: 7 percent.

keep a safe distance. “I did have to tell some customers to put on their masks — and to go stand in their square,” Ow said. “It’s new for me, being this enforcer, but if you want to remain open and safe, we all need to follow the guidelines.”

Get serious about driving (and managing) sales.

The pandemic has shown how determined members of the industry’s floral supply chain are — and also just how complex the system is. Ahead of Mother’s Day, a steep dropoff in demand challenged growers, wholesalers and suppliers to keep flowers moving through the chain. Then it was impossible for companies to keep up with the late surge of orders for the holiday. (According to the SAF member survey, 60 percent of retailers suspended incoming Mother’s Day orders by Thursday, May 7, with an additional

“

IT’S NEW FOR ME, BEING THIS ENFORCER, BUT IF YOU WANT TO REMAIN OPEN AND SAFE, WE ALL NEED TO FOLLOW THE GUIDELINES.”

—VALERIE OW



30 percent suspending orders that Friday. About 32 percent cut off orders completely by Friday, May 8. Those numbers are higher than in years past.)

Tim Dewey of DVFlora in Sewell, New Jersey, recently shared that the challenge for floral distributors isn’t a lack of product, but that ongoing drop in demand (outside of Mother’s Day). “As we see social restrictions ease, I would really encourage florists to be aggressive about those opportunities to serve their communities” and sell more flowers, he said. “It’s really about opening up the pipeline.”

Drummond agrees, saying that now is the time “to market like you’ve never marketed before,” since many of the seasonal events florists would have depended on (weddings, corporate events, memorial celebrations and funerals) are canceled, postponed or dramatically different this year.

Your website should be a key area of focus as you work to drive sales. Radebaugh said the pandemic has emphasized the need to home in on best practices that might have previously been pushed down the to-do list. “On Mother’s Day, even though we streamlined products, we still had too many options turned on, too late in the week,” she said. A better approach: Highlight the products you want to sell and push customers toward designers’ choice or open-ended orders.

Drummond said now is also the time to experiment with website add-ons and special features you might have previously ignored — or those that companies have added in response to the pandemic. (Read more on p. 32.) Doing so has helped him improve customer service and manage volume and workflow.

“We utilized the custom pop-ups [on the] backend,” he said. “This helped us communicate to customers that mothers deserve to be celebrated all week. Early shoppers were encouraged to choose delivery Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday — successfully spreading out the volume.”

Another way to drive sales: Offer new products. Radebaugh has successfully created a series of themed crates for customers that have proven to be a hit. The series has allowed her to sell non-floral items such as bath bombs,

GO DEEPER

Get tips on reopening safely and advice and best practices on safety and sanitation measures from your peers at safnow.org/moreonline. Plus, find a host of targeted SAF virtual events dedicated to helping you drive business throughout the summer — including a Mother’s Day debrief among industry leaders and a look ahead at how the pandemic will reshape flower buying among consumers — available now at safnow.org.

candles and lotions that would have otherwise gone unsold in her retail showroom. (One top seller is the Home School Hero package, which includes a floral design and bottle of wine. The business had its liquor license even before the crisis began.) Florists also have been experimenting with virtual workshops and events. (Read more on p. 42.)

In Boise, Idaho, Liza Roeser of FiftyFlowers said she and her team are using lessons learned from their challenging spring to try and move forward and connect more deeply with customers. One insight: Customers seem to be responding more positively than ever to emails. To capitalize on that shift, the company has been experimenting with A/B testing, to see which emails and content resonate the most with their target audience — so that they can be more strategic about the new initiatives they plan.

“One thing this Mother’s Day taught is that you can’t use only data to plan for the future — we have to listen and adapt,” said Roeser, who has been meditating on a famous quote from Maya Angelou lately: “Hope and fear cannot occupy the same space. Invite one to stay.”

“We’re constantly shifting through these murky waters right now,” she added. “But we’re focusing on hope.” 🌿

Amanda Long is a freelance writer and editor and former managing editor of *Floral Management*. **Mary Westbrook** is the editor in chief. **Katie Hendrick Vincent** also contributed to the writing and reporting of this story. mwestbrook@safnow.org

7 Tips To Boost Your Online Sales!

"Covid-19 has had a massive impact on walk-in retail. More and more shoppers are turning to online shopping. That means your website is more important than ever."

Tip #1

Sell Your Designs

Be different! Instead of using the same cookie cutter images and products that everyone else does, sell YOUR unique arrangements!

Upload your own designs, pictures and provide "virtual tours" with video clips. Customers LOVE to see something new.



Tip #2

Make Sure Customers Can Find You Online.

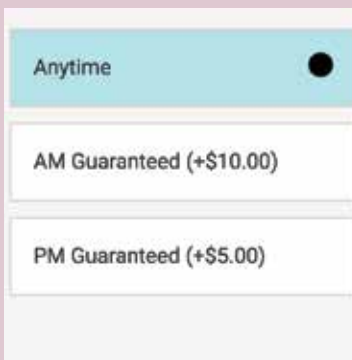
If your customers search for "flowers near me" or "flower delivery" do they find your shop or someone else's? Is your business found on maps and local listings? Search engine optimization is a necessary task. Your business should be displayed in the top few listings, not only for your location but in all the cities and zip codes you offer delivery to.



Tip #3

Expand Your Delivery Options

With limited walk-in business, deliveries are an increasingly popular option. Use distance based deliveries or map based zones to manage your fees. Offer your customer AM/PM options, after hours pickup and more.



"7 tips to make sure you are getting the absolute best out of your website"



Tip #4

Delight Your Customers

With Pre-Delivery Pictures your customers get a picture of their completed arrangement. What they see is what they ordered!

Tip #5

Make It Fun!

Keep your customers coming back by offering fun, unique add-ons such as "Selfies" and "Greeting Cards". Let the sentiments last longer. Customers love adding a personal touch to their orders.



Tip #6

Offer Subscriptions / Gift Cards

Make it easy for your customers to stay in touch with family and friends. Offer subscriptions and gift cards on your website.

Tip #7

Stay Competitive

Stay competitive, stay relevant. Influence web traffic with a digital marketing campaign. With over 70% of web traffic originating from mobile devices, secure your share of web orders with an ad campaign. Ensure a return on investment by tracking order conversions on your website. Also track your new customers.

New customers

978

Jan 2020

May 2020



For more information, visit www.gotflowers.com/7tips

www.gotflowers.com
info@gotflowers.com
 (408) 840-3514





Smooth OPERATORS

With more Americans shopping online, we've got digital strategies to help you adapt.

BY MARY WESTBROOK

The COVID-19 pandemic turned millions of consumers into more regular online shoppers almost overnight. Most experts say that, even as restrictions ease and retailers reopen physical spaces, the new habits shoppers have learned over the past few months (picking out groceries via an app, grabbing dinner curbside, ordering birthday gifts with a quick tap on their laptop or phone) likely are here to stay. What does that mean for florists looking to attract more people online, improve user experience and convert more sales? We asked some of the industry's top website providers to review lessons learned from the crisis to create a list of strategies florists can implement this summer.

Prioritize SEO.

To be successful online, first you have to be found.

"Search engine optimization has always been an important factor in helping florists market their websites," said Katherine Kerr, Teleflora's chief financial officer. "It drives [florists'] ranking in search and is a great way to acquire new customers." A factor that

affects search ranking: **florists' business listings**. "Providing consistent information in terms of **shop location, categories the business operates in**, and even **operating hours**, creates a positive signal for search engines," Kerr explained. "For both the customer experience reviewing these listings as well as search engines, it's important to make sure that information is accurate across the board."

Leverage higher traffic.

More customers finding your site is a good thing. The next task to tackle: What are your techniques for engaging people effectively once they are there?

"In looking at our florist website traffic and sales data over the last few months, it's obvious that **there is a large influx of online buyers**," said Heath Mielke, FTD's senior vice president of member solutions. "We're seeing **higher traffic and conversion** to our sites, and even **better open rates** in our florist email marketing campaigns. Florists need to **keep on top of their website to manage it appropriately** to take advantage of the increased traffic and ultimately convert as much as possible to sales. **Mobile-first sites are also more important than ever** as more consumers are shopping from their phones or tablets."



SHUTTERSTOCK/RAWPIXEL.COM

RESOURCES TO HELP YOU GROW

Read more about the new services the providers interviewed are offering in the wake of the pandemic at safnow.org/moreonline.

Try a new feature.

Florists almost never have a substantial amount of downtime, so it's easy to understand why taking time to experiment and play around with anything but nuts-and-bolts features is a job you've constantly pushed down your to-do list; however, there's never been a better time to expand your toolkit.

"It's a great time to use some of the features on florist websites that florists may not [have used in the past], like **photo galleries**," said Marc Grzeskowiak, BloomNet's vice president of technology. "We also suggest **starting a blog**. This doesn't have to be long but should include a photo of the cooler or special arrangement. Provide customers with a **brief two-three sentence description** of the flowers, colors, trends, occasion of the arrangements. **Google algorithms are placing more emphasis on this type of content** in ranks and it's a great strategy to **consistently add new keywords** to the site that are relevant with customers."

Stay nimble.

The standard operating procedures you embraced in January already feel like old news. Guess what? The approaches that worked in April and May could start to feel outdated in July and August. That's why it's important to be on top of analytics, receptive to changes in consumer behavior and ready to tweak your model.

Early in the pandemic, "less choice and limited service did not seem to upset customers, but this is likely to change," said Scott Heaps, the owner of GravityFree. "**The quickest adapters will win**. For example, when we realized how eager consumers were to send flowers as their preferred gift this Mother's Day, it became clear shops had an opportunity to **expand offerings and meet demand for customization and purchasing style**. We created the ability for consumers to purchase

multiple products for delivery to one location so that florists could sell more of their inventory to one customer versus checking out by setting up an order one product at a time. This level of **enhanced choice and customization will increase average order value** for shops who **carefully curate gifts and gourmet selections**."

Keep visuals on brand.

The name of the game online: Look good and be strategic. Make sure your site reflects your brand, the designs you want to (and can) sell, and sends a positive message to your customers. (After all, your site could be their first and only impression of your business.)

"**The shift to online ordering has been happening for years** — this crisis has just accelerated that movement," said Farbod Shoraka, BloomNation's co-founder and CEO. "Florists must realize that their **new storefront is their website**. **The biggest mistake is not putting enough energy and attention to your online brand**: [Customers often see a] mix of photos with different angles, different backgrounds, different lighting and inconsistent pricing. **Online, you are not selling flowers, you are selling an image**. Often, florists don't put enough love into the images they display."

Flaunt your expertise.

This summer is no time to be bashful about just how much your shop can offer, and how well equipped florists are to meet new safety and sanitation requirements. Instead, shout your qualifications from the rooftop (or at least Instagram and Facebook).

"**Florists are in a unique position, as they are the original 'no-contact delivery' business**," said Loranne Atwill, vice president and co-owner of The Flower Shop Network. "Florists can become the **go-to retailer for gifts in their local markets**. And offering a pickup-only option when delivery capacity is maxed out can allow a florist to keep their online storefront open throughout a holiday or busy time. Florists should focus on **email marketing and social media** to connect with customers and position themselves to be the best choice for **same-day delivery of gifts and flowers**."

Stand out from the crowd.

Revving up feels good after the standstill many experienced in the spring. Show how ready you are to serve existing customers and to earn the business of new people with offerings that are tailored to consumer needs.

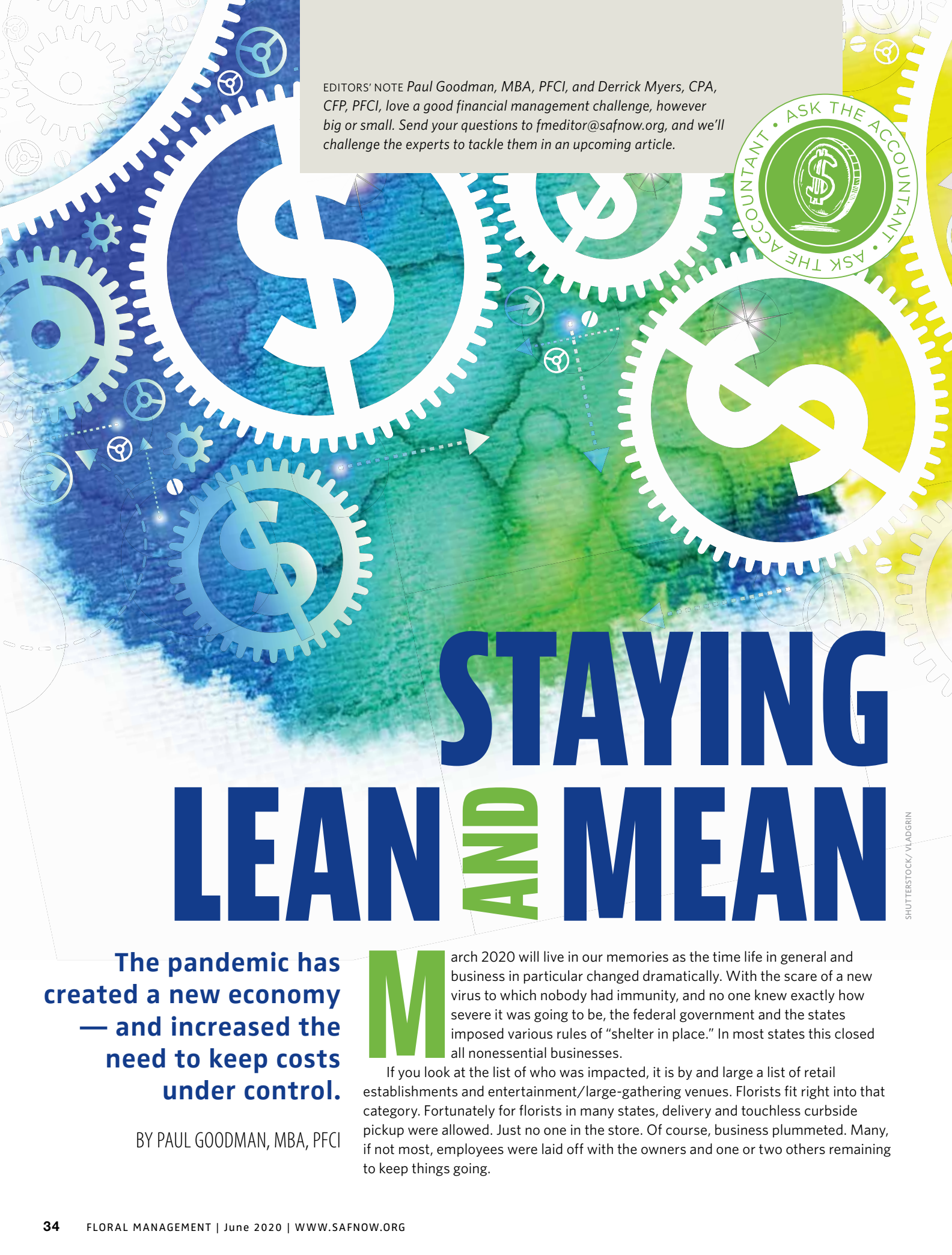
"**Showcase your design expertise**, stay away from cookie-cutter designs that are susceptible to price erosion and dilution of value by competitors that offer the same product," said Sundaram Natarajan, CEO of GotFlowers. "If the availability of fresh flowers is unpredictable, **promote a 'Designer's Choice' at multiple price levels** and suspend the sale of other designs/products. **Offer subscription services to generate repeat business** while making it convenient for the customer... The new normal for retail florists is to **focus more on their delivery business and less on retail and walk-in**. Customers are accustomed to the convenience of food delivery services and are receptive to fees for the right convenience. **Expand your delivery hours and stay in frequent communication with your customers**."

Fast-track checkout.

No matter how beautiful your work or friendly your staff, if a customer has a bad experience online or grows frustrated, they aren't likely to come back. So be on the lookout for pain points and stay open to processes that could be streamlined.

"Gifting someone flowers is an emotive experience, but **the actual process of purchasing an arrangement is typically twice as long as any other online purchase**," said Joe Vega, co-founder of Lovingly. "The user must know not only their own personal information, but also the recipient's information in order to complete the transaction. **A major headache in the checkout process is simply the amount of information required**. Most floral websites have over 40 points of decision making, like form fields, checkboxes, radio buttons, information tooltips, and CTA buttons for customers to complete. An efficient website provider will require only half of that." 🌸

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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.*


STAYING LEAN **AND** MEAN

The pandemic has created a new economy — and increased the need to keep costs under control.

BY PAUL GOODMAN, MBA, PFCI

March 2020 will live in our memories as the time life in general and business in particular changed dramatically. With the scare of a new virus to which nobody had immunity, and no one knew exactly how severe it was going to be, the federal government and the states imposed various rules of “shelter in place.” In most states this closed all nonessential businesses.

If you look at the list of who was impacted, it is by and large a list of retail establishments and entertainment/large-gathering venues. Florists fit right into that category. Fortunately for florists in many states, delivery and touchless curbside pickup were allowed. Just no one in the store. Of course, business plummeted. Many, if not most, employees were laid off with the owners and one or two others remaining to keep things going.



According to Floral Finance Business Service informal interviews, about one-third of all shops closed completely. The other two-thirds saw sales drop from 40 to 80 percent. It wasn't pretty. On the bright side, Easter was surprisingly strong under the circumstances and Mother's Day was amazingly robust. Many florists saw an actual sales increase over the Mother's Day of 2019. No one knows for certain how the summer months will turn out.

Your Major Challenge

Staying afloat will mean careful cash control as you move forward through the summer. As is normal, the two largest expenses to control are payroll and Cost of Goods Sold (COGS). What's not normal is your sales. Lower sales affect both staffing and COGS. In this article we will focus primarily on COGS; however, a quick word on payroll: Every florist has reduced staff since February. Most that went through Mother's Day did so with limited employees and worked long hours. Of course, it meant higher than normal productivity. You want to enter the summer months retaining some of that extra productivity, but with a reasonable staff level so you don't end up exhausted every week. The most important point on staffing is to only add more hours as sales increase. Continue to keep your staff as lean as possible.

Establishing Your New Normal

Hopefully, your sales will be a moving target as the economy opens up. The goal is for sales to increase. However, to start you need to know where you are right now. You most likely already have a good idea of what is and is not happening. Mother's Day was a roaring success for most florists. Sales since then have backed off compared to last year. How much will vary by location.

In normal times a florist's sales can be broken down into holiday and non-holiday sales. Generally, holiday sales make up about 23 percent of annual sales, and the non-holiday sales are the remaining 77 percent. Non-holiday sales are everyday items for the florist but special occasions for the consumer: birthday, anniversary, get well, sympa-

Staying afloat will mean careful cash control as you move forward through the summer. As is normal, the two largest expenses to control are payroll and Cost of Goods Sold. What's not normal is your sales.

thy, wedding and event flowers, to mention the most common.

When you analyze the numbers, the result for most florists is that non-holiday volume is surprisingly consistent week in and week out throughout all 52 weeks of the year. There is a small decrease in January because of all the spending that went on for Christmas and in July because of vacations and the availability of flowers from the garden. Every other week is about the same. You can look at weekly sales from March, and they will be about the same in June and October. So, once you know your weekly non-holiday numbers, it's fairly easy to establish a weekly buying schedule for most purchases.

The pandemic shutdown has changed that at least for the next few months. You are going to have to get new numbers to make sure you don't overbuy product and lose control of your COGS.

Remember, by definition COGS is strictly the cost of the products you sell. Of all those products — flowers, greens, plants, gifts, balloons, candy and other products you sell — the only category that is really important for controlling COGS is fresh purchases of flowers and greens. These are the items that go into the design of arrangements. All other products you sell are marked up by your pricing formulas, and you can't go too far afield with controlling those COGS. The problem with arrangements is that you can stuff and that can quickly get expensive.

Your goal should be to purchase flowers and greens that represent only 25 percent of your arrangement sales. If you hit that target or better, you will have controlled your fresh purchases correctly. The way this is done in the design room is to make sure every designer counts and charges for every stem. That's good control once the flowers are purchased. However, what we are looking at is setting a buying budget, adding control from the purchasing point of view.

Current Non-Holiday Arrangement Sales

You'll have to do a little homework. Don't worry, your POS has all the numbers you need. Starting with the first week after Mother's Day, May 11-17, and the following two weeks in May, get the total arrangement and loose flower sales for each week. Since the last week will include Memorial Day on Monday the 25th, you will need to add the average sales of the first two Mondays to that final week to get the normal weekly count.

Next, get the average sales for each week by adding all three weeks together and dividing by 3. Take that average fresh sales number and multiply it by 0.25 to get your flowers and greens buying budget per week. Example: Suppose your average arrangement and loose flower sales for the three weeks was \$10,000 per week. Your fresh buying budget for a week is \$2,500 ($\$10,000 \times 0.25 = \$2,500$). That's all you should spend per week in the month of June, unless you see your sales picking up.

As the economy opens up, you can expect your sales to pick up as well. To stay on top of this, you will want to keep tallying arrangement and loose flower sales by week going through the summer. As sales rise, increase your buying budget accordingly. Remember that normally July sales will fall somewhat from June and then come back in August. Keep that in mind as you track the numbers for July. You can expect a decrease unless that is offset by a general sales increase. 🌿

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SPRING HOLIDAYS PROVIDE SILVER LINING DURING CRISIS

> Easter, Passover and Administrative Professionals Week provided some relief to retail florists struggling through the COVID-19 pandemic this spring — in some cases providing an unexpected (and very welcome) sales bump. In Society of American Florists post-holiday member surveys, floral industry members weighed in on the holidays, including the challenges they faced in sourcing product and balancing staffing and safety needs. (Read more about SAF's findings for Mother's Day on p. 24.)

Easter/Passover Returns:

About 55 percent of respondents to the survey said Easter and Passover sales dropped this year, but in write-in responses, retailers also detailed positive results. "Easter was one of the strongest we have seen in many years in both retail and wholesale," wrote one respondent from the West. "I think people sent flowers because they could not do many other things."

Overall, three-quarters of the respondents to the survey said they were open for some kind of business on Easter/Passover this year — on average operating with about one-third of their normal workforce.

Among all respondents who saw a decrease in Easter/Passover sales this year, the majority (58 percent) saw a steep decline of 21 percent or more; however, about a quarter of those who saw an uptick classified their sales gains as 21 percent or more.

"Initially, I thought Passover, which is a big holiday for me, was going to be a disaster," wrote one retailer in the Southeast. "I canceled all the extra



SHUTTERSTOCK / FLORAL DECO

flowers I had ordered above and beyond my regular weekly order. But as we got closer to the holiday, I got signs that there would be some business, so I slowly added flowers to my order. We sold most of the flowers I ordered."

SAF's annual spring holiday surveys have for years charted stagnant or declining Easter and Passover sales. Last year, about 45 percent of retailer respondents said sales for the holiday were flat.

Other respondents shared stories in write-in response that helped paint a fuller picture of the challenges the industry faced this spring, including reduced staff, difficulty sourcing product, concerns over safety and sanitation, financial worries compounded by anxiety surrounding federal loan programs and restrictions placed upon industry businesses by state and local governments. Respondents shared stories of being

"lean and mean" and working nonstop to keep their businesses afloat in conditions that are far from business as usual.

"We have never run so efficiently," wrote a florist in the Northeast, noting that the business is operating with "no employees," reduced wire-in orders and fewer hours. "All of our efforts were toward building resources to keep operations funded to pay for rent, suppliers, utilities and health care. I have never worked harder, and for no pay, in the 35 years of my life that I have dedicated to this business."

A florist in the mid-Atlantic region explained, "We have shortened our hours and are only open four days. Basically, the owner has been running the shop. We were happy to have one designer needed for the Thursday and Friday for Easter and a driver on Friday. We had to close on Saturday as there was no more product available." Overall, about 20 percent of respondents said they had trouble sourcing product this year.

A florist and garden center in the Northeast commented that "our delivery sales were up, however, we did lose quite a bit on church orders as churches canceled their services."

Other highlights from this year's Easter/Passover holiday survey:

Reasons for sales increases. About 55 percent of those who saw sales increase credited increased demand

"Initially, I thought Passover, which is a big holiday for me, was going to be a disaster," wrote one retailer in the Southeast. "I canceled all the extra flowers I had ordered above and beyond my regular weekly order. But as we got closer to the holiday, I got signs that there would be some business, so I slowly added flowers to my order. We sold most of the flowers I ordered."

to social distancing and consumers' desire to use flowers and plants to erase the physical distance between loved ones. Meanwhile, 23 percent cited less competition from other floral industry businesses as a positive sales factor, and about 18 percent said they faced less competition from non-floral vendors this year.

Reasons for sales decreases. Among those who saw sales decrease, nearly 70 blamed COVID-19 related restrictions on their business as helping to diminish their returns, and 48 percent pointed to reduced demand because of social distancing (e.g., crowd size restrictions and cancellation of religious services).

Promotion efforts. The survey found that about 42 percent of respondents promoted the holidays at about the same level as last year; 26 percent decreased those efforts.

Product selection and pricing. On average, 68 percent of sales were cut flowers, 20 percent were flowering or green houseplants, and 5 percent were outdoor bedding plants. That breakdown is similar to 2019 returns. Retailers reported their average transaction amount to be \$36.50. In 2019, it was \$64.

"We had the strongest [APW] in a long time," wrote a retailer in Arizona. "I feel that people felt strongly about acknowledging their workers during this pandemic."

APW: Employers and Workers Look for Ways to Connect

Overall, about 75 percent of the retailers responding to the SAF survey said they were open this year for APW (April 20-24, 2020). On average, respondents had about 44 percent of their workforce available during the week.

Among those retailers who saw sales drop, the decrease was often significant: 64 percent of those respondents said sales dropped this year by 21 percent or more. The same respondents indicated the ripple effects of the crisis affected sales:

"We have never run so efficiently," wrote a florist in the Northeast. "All of our efforts were toward building resources to keep operations funded to pay for rent, suppliers, utilities and health care."

- 65 percent blamed reduced demand on social distancing measures (including closed offices and remote working);
- 64 percent pointed to restrictions related to COVID-19 at their own business (including confusion over state and municipal rules and regulations);
- 19 percent faulted shaky regional economies;
- 18 percent noted that reduced staff levels at their business contributed to the losses.

"We reside in a technological park and most employees were working from home," noted a Colorado retailer. "Therefore, the multiple arrangement [orders] to businesses were reduced. Also, other florists may have been selected based on the admin's home address."

The loss of office buzz about the holiday also affected a retailer in Wisconsin, who wrote, "Most people are working from home. At work, you would have seen other people receive things and remember to order. [This year, there were] no admins to remind the boss to send something. Also, [the] economy is in flux."

A California retailer classified APW as "a very slow period this week due to the pandemic... The community was so unsettled by the events. Everything was at a standstill."

In South Carolina, a retailer noted, "This was the first week that we opened back up and were not running an email campaigns the week before to encourage sales. I definitely think that staff working from home and a general slowed economy impacted companies sending [flowers] to their employees."

The average transaction for the holiday this year was \$57.

APW has been an inconsistent holiday in the floral industry dating back to its holiday name-change around 2000 when groups like the International Association of Administrative Professionals moved away from promoting Secretary's Day and Week last year. About 37 percent of retailers responding to an SAF spring holiday survey said APW sales dropped from 2018 and another 31 percent said they stayed the same. (Results were similar when SAF surveyed members in 2018.)

Still, despite those trend lines — and the tremendous challenges posed by the crisis this year — some respondents to this year's survey did note positive results.

"We had the strongest [APW] in a long time," wrote a retailer in Arizona. "I feel that people felt strongly about acknowledging their workers during this pandemic." 🌿

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GO DEEPER

Find out more about these surveys and get additional insight on other holiday trends at safnow.org/holidays.



NEW APPROACH

At all of its 19 locations, Mayesh Wholesale Florist has been known for lavish displays of fresh product. A weakened supply chain, however, means that for the foreseeable future, open inventory will likely be more limited, said Mayesh CEO Pat Dahlson (bottom left).

TALK AND LISTEN, THEN DO

➤ Like so many others in the past three months, Mayesh Wholesale Florist's CEO Pat Dahlson has had to make some difficult decisions about closing and reopening, keeping staff or letting them go, and how to plan for a future filled with unknowns.

At Mayesh, the decision-making process has involved active consultation and communication with customers, growers and other industry partners. "We needed to understand what they're going through," said Dahlson.

That takes some effort. It's even more complicated with branches in 10 states and a shipping operation that provides service to customers nationwide — not to mention suppliers from all over the world. It helps that Dahlson, an industry veteran of more than 40 years, has far-ranging, trusted connections — "people I can call up and talk turkey," as he describes it.

Building Community Online

It also helps that Mayesh had already initiated a robust program of online communication, with frequently updated educational programs and resources, including live programming responsive to customers' questions and concerns.

"We had all that in place before COVID," confirmed Yvonne Ashton, director of marketing at Mayesh. "When business came to a screeching halt, it made sense to focus on helping to share stories, Mayesh's and others, as best we could."

Mornings with Mayesh — a series of Facebook Live Chats and podcasts that launched in May of 2017 — was a vehicle ready to hand. Previously dedicated mainly to design, business, flower choices, and care and handling, the live chats quickly pivoted once the pandemic hit.

Temporary shutdown of Mayesh locations began in mid-March with the swift and sudden closure, by executive

order, of the San Francisco Flower Mart (where Mayesh had acquired the venerable Brannan Street Wholesale Florist, now Mayesh Brannan Street, in July 2019).

"By the third week in March, we were pretty much shut down everywhere," said Dahlson. It was painful. The temporary closures meant not only discarding hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of fresh-flower inventory, but sending 90 percent of employees home, right out of the gate.

On March 30, Dahlson appeared on Mornings with Mayesh to answer questions from customers about the supply chain and what might lie ahead. About the future, there were not many answers — but Dahlson could at least encourage retail customers from his broad perspective as a wholesaler. "We need to support each other," he noted. "We are an industry full of people who know that rolling up our sleeves is the only way to get it done."



MAYESH AND PARTNER FARM PHOTOS COURTESY OF MAYESH

The New Normal

By April 6, Mayesh had reopened its national shipping operation out of Los Angeles, drawing on fresh-flower inventory from growers on the West Coast, including Martin Meskers of Oregon Flowers, who appeared with Dahlson on Mornings with Mayesh that same day.

Temporary closure is not an option for growers, and it's important for people inside and outside the industry to understand that, said Dahlson. When sales and revenue go way down, a grower might be able to get by for a while with fewer workers. But most of the ongoing operational costs are nonnegotiable: "You turn off the water, there's no coming back from that."

Speaking before Mother's Day, Dahlson predicted that some growers might have trouble meeting orders for the holiday because of reduced staffing. Going forward, however, he believes there should be plenty of flowers to meet demand — even if some growers do go out of business.

What about price? While prices so far have not radically jumped, Dahlson now expects that over time we'll see a new normal with higher pricing, mainly due to higher transportation costs. "There's been some damage done to the distribution chain," he explained. "When delivery routes are not as efficient, you run trucks that are not close to full, you have to charge more."

The solution, he said, is closer cooperation between customers and suppliers: "We're all going to have to be more forward-thinking."

That advice applies double to the boutique flowers for weddings and events that have been a Mayesh specialty since the eighties. Prior to the pandemic, florists were often able to discover those flowers and make last-minute purchases at Mayesh branches with wide-open inventory on display.

That's less likely going forward, said Dahlson: "We're great inventory managers, great risk takers. But with the forced shutdowns, now we know what it's like to have to dump over half a million dollars' worth of fresh flowers. It was really painful." Then too, who knows? Customers may prefer to continue doing more business online, rather than flocking to the

market, where they are in physical contact with others, however distanced.

Speaking Up

The week before Mother's Day, all Mayesh locations were able to reopen — operating with skeleton crews, and of course, within the limitations imposed by CDC guidelines and other regulations.

Dahlson admits to having struggled with conflicting priorities when it came to closing and reopening: wanting to do the right thing, but chafing at executive orders that sometimes seemed unevenly applied.

"We pushed back," he said, arguing the case with authorities and winning some battles. At one point, Mayesh published a letter that was forwarded to decision makers and widely shared on social media, explaining how the floral industry works and why every link in the floral supply chain should be considered "essential."

Key to reviving the industry is the chicken-and-egg relationship between supply and demand. Just as Mayesh has fine-tuned and juiced up its online information campaign, Ashton has urged retailers to do the same with their own customers.

"Talk to your community," she advised during one of Mayesh's Live Chats. "Now is the time to do those things you've always wanted to do, building social media connections. It's OK if it feels awkward and new. Be comfortable being uncomfortable: Just do it!"

Following up on that advice, Mornings with Mayesh episodes have since focused on practical tips for social media strategies, including how to create videos (one of the trending formats today).

"We are all flower ambassadors," said Dahlson. "The more stories and images we put out there, the better positioned we are."

Here's an encouraging sign that those stories and images will be well received: "Retailers are telling us that when they started reopening their doors, this is what they heard from customers: 'We love you and missed you.' We knew that, but it's nice to hear it." 🌸

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QUICK TAKE

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TIME TO CHECK YOUR GOOGLE LISTING?

> Ahead of Mother's Day, some businessowners who used Google to search for florist listings in their city, or Google Maps to get directions or a phone number for their shop, were surprised to discover that Google indicated their shop was "temporarily closed" — even if it wasn't. In most cases, correcting the listing proved quick, but the issue is one that florists should pay attention to this summer and fall, especially if the pandemic continues to cause changes to rules, regulations and business operating hours.

Unexpected Updates

Implementation of the policy to label florists as "temporarily closed" began in March, according to a Google representative. It was applied in several U.S. states and in countries where the multinational web giant had "data from an authoritative data source" indicating that flower shops should indeed be closed. The data source might be a state or local government, but it could also be an educational institution, nonprofit organization, or business.

Florists in many cases were not alerted to the change. This was true even if they had made a claim to their business profile with Google (thereby opening a free Google My Business account).

"It just popped up one morning," said Robert Bryant, owner of Flowers by Robert Taylor in West Covina, California. "Thank goodness, a customer who had

a pickup early that morning called to let me know." Like many others, Bryant could not receive customers in the store at the time, but he was open for curbside pickup and contact-free delivery.

After trying to reach Google by phone with no success, Bryant tried a second time and found that he was able to change the status simply by logging in to his Google My Business account: "An option came up, Mark This Business as Open. It wasn't there in the morning, but an hour or two later, it was there."

Once he made the change, the effect was dramatic: Orders started coming in for birthday flowers, anniversaries, even sympathy work (the latter sent to the home, of course).

Be Proactive

Claiming your Google Business Profile is a very good idea — but even if you haven't done so, you should still be able to change your status to "open" and to list the hours you are open. Find your Google listing online. If it bears a red banner with the words "Temporarily Closed," click on the downward-pointing arrow that appears to the right of those words. Google then gives you an opportunity to report that information as incorrect.

That's what happened for Melinda McCoy at Melinda McCoy's Flowers in Long Beach, California, who kept her business going, observing legal restric-

UPDATED DELIVERY ATTRIBUTES

Beyond updating or correcting your operating status, Google also has created service option attributes for businesses during the pandemic, including the ability to communicate how you can get flowers to customers.

A tip directly from Google: "When customers search for your store, your Business Profile will prominently show which of these delivery modes you currently support: 'Pickup,' 'Delivery,' 'Curbside pickup,' or 'In-store shopping.' Supported modes will have a '✓' and non-supported modes will have an 'x.'"

tions, all through California's state-ordered stay-at-home period. A florist friend, Elizabeth Seiji, AIFD, of Edelweiss Flowers in Santa Monica, California, called to let her know that Google was telling the world she was closed.

"I didn't know how to fix that, but Liz did it for me on her computer," said Liz McCoy. "I cannot thank her enough." The change took effect in a matter of minutes — and when it did, McCoy's business went from five or six deliveries a day to about 24.

A change to a business's status in online search listings will update in both Google Search and Google Maps, according to the representative from Google, who also confirms that Google does vet each request to temporarily close or reopen a business.

The Society of American Florists has step-by-step instructions on how to fix incorrect listings available at safnow.org/moreonline. 🌿

Bruce Wright is a contributing writer for the Society of American Florists. bwright@safnow.org

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REMOTE LEARNING

> When Rachel Gang saw her corporate, event and walk-in business evaporate overnight in mid-March, the owner of Helen Olivia Flowers in Alexandria, Virginia, made a quick pivot, focusing on another of her successful revenue streams: design workshops. Although social distancing protocols forbid continuing these in-person, she realized she could create floral kits customers could purchase and arrange at home following online instruction via Instagram TV. “As a small business, we’re trying to figure things out and shift gears to different ways of operating,” Gang said. Each session includes materials (flowers plus a container with a taped grid) delivered to the customer’s doorstep or available for curbside pickup. Adult classes are priced at \$100, while kids’ classes (a godsend for parents desperate to entertain their stir-crazy offspring) cost \$75. “It’s definitely not replacing the business we lost, but it is keeping the lights on,” she said. The series also helps Helen Olivia stay top-of-mind with customers and remind them of the people behind her business. The shop hosts its quarantine workshops once or twice a week, averaging 80 students per class — a combination of regulars and new faces. “I’d say our demographic is solidly professional women who are used to being out and social within our community,” Gang said. “We’ve noticed a trend of several girlfriends signing up together to take class, so even though they’re doing it from their own homes, it’s still a shared experience.”

Here is a design from one of her most popular workshops. 🌿

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LITTLE LUXURY Gang and her daughter, Evie, show amateur designers how to replicate Helen Olivia’s signature look (lush, feminine, European style) at home. Including hydrangeas, roses, ranunculus and scabiosa, this arrangement is chock full of compelling textures (adding visual interest and perceived value) and high-end flowers the shop’s clientele prizes. Design time: 15 minutes. Wholesale costs: \$27. Workshop fee: \$100.





HOW CLEAN IS CLEAN ENOUGH?

> You already have a well-established routine for disinfecting buckets, tools and work surfaces, right? All for the sake of reducing shrink and providing customers with the best-looking, longest-lasting, fresh flowers possible.

Now, you need an additional level of sanitary vigilance to protect yourself, your staff and your clientele against COVID-19. Will it be expensive? Time-consuming? Even scary?

Quite the opposite, says Vonda LaFever AIFD, PFCI, CEO of Flower Clique, a provider of business tools and

services for floral professionals: "More than anything it's a matter of changing our habits. As florists, how often are we used to washing our hands during the day? Not very often." And yet, it takes just 20 seconds of hand washing to kill the virus.

Hand washing alone, of course, is not enough. But the additional measures you take not only will protect you and others but will reassure them that your flower operation is safe and responsible. "Most of our clients are very nervous about the virus," said Chris Norwood, AAF, AIFD,

PFCI, of Tipton & Hurst Florist in Little Rock, Arkansas. "So, we are constantly communicating with them about what we're doing to keep them safe. As long as you're doing that, that's what they will gravitate towards."

Cleaning, Sanitizing, Disinfecting

Vigorous hand washing with soap works because it physically destroys the outer coating or "envelope" that the virus needs to invade a host cell. An alcohol-based hand sanitizer does the same thing in a different way, through chemical action (hand washing does it better).

What you need to keep hard surfaces in the shop virus-free, however, is not just soap or sanitizer but disinfectant. As defined by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), a sanitizer merely reduces the number of microbes on a surface; a disinfectant actually kills the microbes.

Note, however, that the same active ingredient can function as a sanitizer or a disinfectant, depending on the concentration. The alcohol in hand sanitizer is in fact a disinfectant. And while cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting technically are three different operations, they work together: A surface needs to be clean before it can be thoroughly disinfected. Cleaning products that do the best job of fighting COVID-19 typically contain surfactants and detergents along with disinfectants.

Staying Power

In the past, many florists have used chlorine bleach to disinfect buckets, tools and countertops. It's inexpensive, and the powerful smell seems like persuasive evidence that it's working.

Far more effective as a disinfectant, however, are the quaternary ammonium compounds, also called quats. While bleach quickly dissipates when exposed to air, quats have a residual effect. They do not need to be rinsed (unless applied to a surface that will be used for preparing food); they can be allowed to dry, leaving a very faint coating.

Quats are found in a number of household cleaners, but also, con-



SHUTTERSTOCK/DRAGONIMAGES

CAPTION STAYING POWER Disinfectants with quaternary ammonium compounds as the active ingredient can have a long-lasting, residual effect.

veniently, in products designed for use in the flower shop — including FloraLife D.C.D., which appears on the EPA's list of products recommended for use against SARS-CoV-2, the novel coronavirus.

With any disinfectant, it's important not to simply spray or wipe the product on and immediately wipe it off again. All disinfectants require a contact period, known as the "dwell time," to kill germs, usually ranging from four to 10 minutes (check the label on the product you are using).

When and Where

Where to disinfect, and how often? Try walking through the shop twice, suggests LaFever — once entering through the back door, once through the front — and take notice of all the high-touch surfaces, from the perspective of an employee or a customer. Doorknobs, push plates, handrails, worktables and sales counters all need to be disinfected at the beginning of the day and at least twice during the day, depending on how many different people are likely to touch them.

"We come in at seven in the morning and clean everything down," said Norwood, "and then we do it again at noon and at midafternoon too, depending on how much traffic is going in and out." They mix D.C.D. according to directions, two ounces per gallon, then spray it from mister bottles, going back to wipe it off after an appropriate time.

"We also have hand sanitizer by the front door," he continued. "We sanitize every time we go in and out the door to drop off for curbside pickup. We wipe down the containers of all the arrangements that people pick up, and we let them know that."

Note, there are no known cases of coronavirus transmission to humans via contact with flowers or plants. Hard surfaces, however, such as a glass or plastic vase, represent a hazard and need to be sprayed or wiped. This should be done by anyone restocking shelves as well as prior to design and delivery.

If you prefer wiping to spraying, you can make your own wipes by using D.C.D. (appropriately diluted) to soak



SIMPLE AND STRONG Frequent hand washing remains the most important and effective strategy against the novel coronavirus.

squares of absorbent fabric, ideally lightweight and nonwoven.

Don't forget the cooler. It should be cleaned and disinfected daily — for the sake of the flowers as well as of the people going in and out. At Tipton & Hurst, the walk-in display cooler (also used by designers) has a door with an electric eye so it opens automatically, without touching — a feature that was put in to help draw customers in, but now serves a dual purpose.

On the Road

Delivery is the last step in the journey through your own flower operation. Today it is more important than ever that customers know they can trust the safety of your delivery operation.

Drivers must, of course, wash their hands before and after loading a delivery vehicle. High-touch parts of the vehicle itself, like door handles and steering wheels, need to be sprayed down with D.C.D. several times a day, suggests LaFever: "Then let it dry and get that protective coating on there." Delivery systems (whatever you use to protect vases and hold them upright) should also be sprayed at least twice a day.

The actual frequency will depend on the volume of deliveries and how they are made. Drivers should be equipped

with gloves and should keep a spray bottle filled with disinfectant inside the van, along with paper towels, so they can respray the vase and wipe it down before making a delivery.

That's how Tipton & Hurst was able to supply clients with multiple arrangements for Easter celebrations in the home. "We would go into their garage, wipe everything down with social distancing, and then leave it for them to take into the house, so they knew the product was clean," Norwood said.

Looking Ahead

"We need more signs in flower shops, like you see in restaurants, reminding employees to wash their hands," said LaFever. Maybe florists can install dispensers of sanitizing wipes, such as many grocery stores provide near the front door.

It's going to be worthwhile making this kind of investment for the long term, she suggested — along with cultivating new habits of cleanliness and steady sanitation. No matter what happens with the economy and the regulations governing it, the need for such measures is likely to remain constant for a long, long time. 🌿

Bruce Wright is a contributing writer for the Society of American Florists. bwright@safnow.org



> If anyone doubted the value of technology, the past few months have surely erased it. While social distancing efforts have kept the world's population at home during the coronavirus pandemic, digital tools, such as e-commerce platforms and video conferencing programs, have allowed many people to keep working, shopping and connecting throughout the crisis. Expect more and more of your business to happen online. The following industry companies are ready for this shift, creating customized tech solutions to help florists deliver outstanding service, streamline operations and generate more profit.

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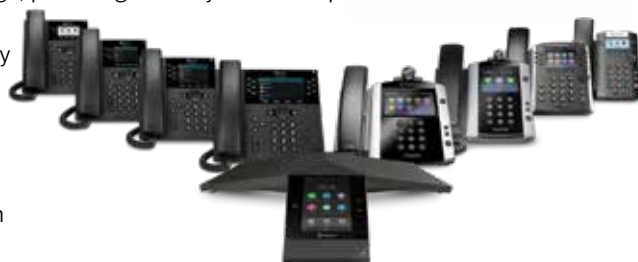


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