

floral management

THE FLORAL BUSINESS AUTHORITY

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Protect Your Digital Work p. 42

MAY/JUNE 2023 | VOLUME 40 | NUMBER 2

WIN BACK SYMPATHY SALES

As funeral homes evolve into
one-stop shops for families, florists
are finding new ways to keep the
sympathy sales coming.

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WIN BACK SYMPATHY SALES

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OUR MISSION: FLORAL MANAGEMENT STRIVES TO GIVE READERS PRACTICAL, EASILY ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION ON OPERATING AN EFFECTIVE AND PROFITABLE FLORAL BUSINESS. ARTICLES ADDRESS A WIDE RANGE OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT TOPICS, INCLUDING MARKETING AND ADVERTISING STRATEGIES, TECHNOLOGY, PERSONNEL AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AS WELL AS FRESH PRODUCT, SUPPLY AND ECONOMIC TRENDS.

ON COURTING YOUR CUSTOMERS

> Are you leaving money on the table with your wedding customers?

First, you have to ask yourself: Do you see those couples as one-time customers? You shouldn't, and here's why.

Those customers sought you out for your skills, knowledge, service, and access to quality and specialty products. While event work offers a tremendous opportunity for you to display how well a florist can fulfill customers' needs, it also offers more than just a one-time interaction. Events are opportunities for you to build trust and appreciation, and most importantly, a lifelong customer. "Wow" and impress your wedding customers so that they seek you out for all their flower needs.

But all too often, after a couple says, "I do," the florist's role is over. All the efforts to market your wedding services and please the couple come to an end. Don't waste your efforts! Get those customers on your email list and follow up with them after the wedding. In fact, I recommend simply sending a \$50 or \$100 gift card to the couple to celebrate their first anniversary with flowers. They can reflect on their beautiful wedding day flowers with a similar arrangement for their first anniversary, on you!

Mark your calendar and take notes of the flowers used at the wedding. Call

ahead of time to remind them of the gift card opportunity, and when you do, assist in the selection or offer to use some of the flowers that were in the wedding. This is great relationship building.

You can also send a gift card as a thank you, or a postcard. Just don't let that anniversary slip away. By commemorating the first anniversary, you start the pattern of sending flowers on their anniversary. This keeps flowers — and your business — top of mind.

Remember to record the couple's birthdays, too. You can email the spouse a birthday reminder. You want to become the concierge, but you have to initiate the effort.

Plant the seeds for your future and watch your business grow! 

Art Conforti, PFCI, is president of the floral marketing company Bloomerang Solutions, a motivational speaker, and has more than 35 years of experience in the floral industry.





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What Inspires Us

REINVENTING RELIABLE REVENUE



If you've been in the industry for a while, you know the flow of sympathy work has changed. For many florists, gone are the days of grieving families arriving at their shop to talk about funeral flower arrangements. Many florists are finding that funeral homes are becoming one-stop shops, offering families everything from cemetery plots to memorial gifts — and yes, flowers. This new model has challenged the way florists are doing business — and their profit margins. In our cover story (p. 24), we talked with florists about the change, how they navigate negotiating commissions, and what they do to keep their business in good standing with funeral home directors. The story also offers strategies to tackle the perennial challenge of the "in lieu of flowers" wording used in obituaries.

Sympathy work isn't the only type of business that has significantly changed. Florists' business-to-business accounts went through dramatic changes during the pandemic when many offices closed. In our feature story, "Better Business Accounts" (p. 32), we explore how corporate accounts changed and how florists reinvented their business-to-business work.

Imagine discovering that the pictures you'd taken of your original arrangements for your website had been used by other flower shops. That's what happened to one florist, who made the discovery while doing a reverse Google image search. She was successful in getting the other businesses to take down her photos, but it raised a lot of questions: Who owns the photos? What do you do if your photos are used without permission? You'll find the answers in the Digital Strategy column on page 42.

Don't forget that the Society of American Florists' 29th annual Marketer of the Year contest is accepting entries until May 31. This contest recognizes original and successful marketing strategies by any business in the floral industry in the past five years. The winner, who will be revealed at SAF Phoenix 2023, receives a \$5,000 cash prize, sponsored by Design Master, a division of Smithers-Oasis, and will appear on the cover of the September/October issue of *Floral Management*.

Thanks for reading!

Amanda Jedlinsky
Editor in Chief
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More Online

HELP CUSTOMERS CELEBRATE SUMMER

In addition to a social calendar, images and suggested captions for Mother's Day, SAF's library of social media resources also boasts graphics and banners to encourage your customers to celebrate prom, graduation, Memorial Day, Pride Month and Father's Day with flowers. safnow.org/summer



ASSESS YOUR HOLIDAY PERFORMANCE

Watch this webinar after Mother's Day and hear from floral financial expert Derrick Myers, CPA, CFP, PFCI, about how you and your staff can assess holiday performance to ensure an even smoother, more profitable holiday next year. This hourlong webinar on SAF's Floral Education Hub is available to watch on demand. safnow.org/on-demand

DETERMINE YOUR SHOP'S VALUE

Whether you are ready to sell your business, purchase a business, buy out a partner or conduct an estate valuation, you'll need to determine your shop's value. In this 30-minute, on-demand webinar on SAF's Floral Education Hub, Paul Goodman, MBA, PFCI, a former CPA and the founder of Floral Finance Business Services, walks you through the necessary steps to find what your business is worth. safnow.org/on-demand



GET TIPS FROM SAF'S VIRTUAL IDEA EXCHANGE

Mark your calendar to join your peers for these interactive, monthly virtual gatherings to discuss best practices. On Wednesday, May 3 at 2 p.m. ET, floral pros will gather to share corporate account hacks. On Wednesday, June 14 at 2 p.m. ET, the Idea Exchange will focus on gaining sympathy sales. safnow.org/events



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Greg Peck, Flower Shop Network and FGmarket

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SAF's 29th Annual Marketer of the Year Contest



2022 winner, Ryan Black of Jet Fresh Flower Distributors

Enter SAF's 29th Annual Marketer of the Year contest sponsored by Design Master, a division of Smithers Oasis

Winners receive \$5,000 and will be featured on the cover of the September/October issue of *Floral Management* magazine.

What makes a winner?

Judges look for innovative and successful marketing efforts. It can be a single campaign, or a series of promotional and advertising efforts over the course of a year or more.

Enter Today!

Submit your marketing campaign online by May 31. To submit your application and view contest criteria visit:

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**Entry deadline:
May 31,
2023**

Questions?
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PUMP IT UP

As inflation threatens profit margins, florists are finding ways to increase their average order values beyond raising prices. In a recent survey by the Society of American Florists, nearly 74 percent of florists reported that focusing on customer service, marketing and sales techniques (as well as raising prices) contributed to a higher order value in 2022 than in 2021. Here's what they had to say about their tactics.

"We are offering more compact designs; elegant and sophisticated designs — not the conventional."

Valerie Lee, J. Miller Flowers, Oakland, California

"We added a tip option to online ordering. I have been amazed at the money some people tip! I anticipated \$5, maybe \$10, but we've seen \$20 plus tips regularly and \$35 to \$50 are not uncommon. And, they are still buying the same style level of bouquets."

Regina Cannon Tremi, Belladonna Florist, Eden Prairie, Minnesota

"We put a minimum dollar value for delivery above \$75. Also, we are making sure to offer service, unique finishing touches and value on any item that leaves our store."

Polly Klein, Polly's Petals, Lake Bluff, Illinois

"We increased our prices and continued to keep our level of customer service and product at a high level. Customers pay for service and nice product."

Carma White, Four Seasons Flowers & Plants, San Diego, California

"We improved up sales training and earned a greater share of the market with great customer service! Our team is excellent!"

Kimberly Gregory, Carlsbad Floral and Gifts, Carlsbad, New Mexico

"We increased prices, but we are also offering a wider variety of price points — including a really large arrangement — on the website and over the phone."

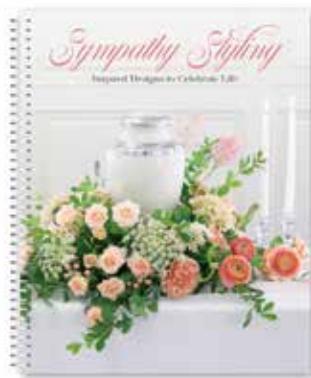
Nate Golter, Longmont Florist, Longmont, Colorado



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FLORAL PROS CONVERGE IN WASHINGTON D.C. TO ADVOCATE FOR INDUSTRY

> Growers, wholesalers, retail florists and others with ties to the industry met with leaders and staffers of 70 congressional offices in Washington, D.C., in March during the Society of American Florists' 43rd annual Congressional Action Days. There, they highlighted the issues affecting their businesses — and how Congress can help.

Attendees talked with legislators and their staffs about the need to fund floriculture research, reform agricultural labor, provide access to duty-free flowers, and renew the Farm Bill, which provides funding for innovations, research and disaster relief for specialty crops.

"Our legislators need to hear about the issues affecting the floral industry," SAF President Michelle Castellano Keeler, AAF, said. "It is up to us to bring these issues to Washington and educate our elected leaders about how they could help improve our industry." 



"I love the excitement of being on the Hill and the overwhelmingly positive response the members of Congress have for our industry. Flowers are truly a bipartisan issue and they want to support us."

— Frank Arnosky,
Texas Specialty Cut Flowers,
Wimberley, Texas



Sherry Grimes-Jenkins (center) of EMY Custom Flowers in Mahopac, New York, and Ryan Alders (right) of Alders Wholesale Florist in Campbell Hall, New York, speak with legislative aide.



FJ Trzuskowski (center left) of Continental Floral Greens in Belfair, Washington, and Martin Meskers, AAF (center right), of Oregon Flowers in Aurora, Oregon, speak with congressional aides.

At left: Stacie Lee Banks, AAF, of Lee's Flower and Card Shop in Washington, D.C.; Chris Drummond, AAF, PFCI, of Penny's by Plaza Flowers in Philadelphia; Helena Polites of Polites Florist in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania; Tim Farrell, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, of Farrell's Florist in Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania; and Samarah Banks, also of Lee's Flower and Card Shop, on their way to an appointment with a representative on Capitol Hill.



Fernando Ortega of Jet Fresh Flower Distributors in Miami; Cameron Pappas, AAF, of Norton's Florist in Birmingham, Alabama; Oscar Fernandez of Equiflor-Rio Roses in Doral, Florida; Chris Norwood, AAF, AIFD, PFCI of Tipton & Hurst in Little Rock, Arkansas; and Jodi McShan, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, of McShan Florist in Dallas.



Tim Farrell, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, of Farrell's Florist in Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania; Samarah Banks and Stacie Lee Banks, AAF, both of Lee's Flower and Card Shop Washington, D.C.; Helena Polites of Polites Florist in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania; and Chris Drummond, AAF, PFCI, of Penny's by Plaza Flowers in Philadelphia.



Dave Legge of Denver Wholesale Florists in Aurora, Colorado, and Lacee and Lenzee Bilke, AIFD, of Madeline's Flower Shop in Edmond, Oklahoma.



Nicholas Chang of Rosaprima in Miami; Andres Guzman and Juan Guaqueta of Asocolflores in Bogotá, Colombia; Corrine Heck, PFCI, of Details Flowers Software in Ormond Beach, Florida; Fernando Ortega of Jet Fresh Flower Distributors in Miami; Sofia Herrera of Jardines De Los Andes in Madrid, Colombia; Scott Blumenthal of FTD in Downers Grove, Illinois; Zoë Gallina, AAF, of Botanica International Decor & Design Studio in Tampa, Florida; David Armellini of Armellini Logistics in Palm City, Florida; Oscar Fernandez of Equiflor-Rio Roses in Doral, Florida; and Austin Bryant of Heart of Florida Greenhouses in Zolfo Springs, Florida.

NEW AWARD TO HONOR NEXT GEN FLORAL PROS

➤ The Society of American Florists has created a new award to celebrate outstanding Next Gen floral professionals for their professional achievements and commitment to the industry.

The Next Gen Rising Star Award honors forward-thinking young professionals who demonstrate creativity, innovation, tenacity and leadership in their work and the potential to make a positive impact on the floral industry.

"The Next Gen Rising Star Award highlights those in the industry that are showing courage in their innovations, and finding artistry in abstract thinking," says Renee Tucci, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, who sits on SAF's awards committee and helped develop the award. "This kind of growth is exactly what our young leaders should be doing to advance design and product development in floristry. Bringing attention to these individuals will only encourage others to do the same, which will be a win for all!"

The winner of this year's Next Gen Rising Star Award will be announced at SAF Phoenix 2023, SAF's 138th annual convention in Scottsdale, Arizona.

The award builds on the work SAF has been doing to cultivate the next generation, a vital initiative for the future of the floral industry. Last year, SAF held its inaugural Next Gen LIVE! event in Miami for floral pros in all segments 45 years old and younger. This year's Next Gen LIVE! event, June 11-13 in Miami, will feature educational sessions and two tour options: a behind the scenes look at a few progressive floral retail operations or importing and distribution facilities at the Miami International Airport.

Know a young professional in any segment who represents a promising future for the industry? Nominate them at safnow.org by June 30. 

Amanda Jedlinsky is the senior content strategist for the Society of American Florists and editor in chief of *Floral Management*.

SNAPSHOT

Transform Spaces to 'Wow' Wedding Clients



Want to make the biggest impact showcasing your wedding work, whether for the event or at bridal shows and open houses at venues? To really impress your client with the grandeur of your work, you need to transform the space.

That was the impetus of renowned Colombian florist David Vasquez's workshop last fall in Medellín, Colombia, where he hosted dozens of florists from around the world at a popular wedding venue and trained them how to transform an empty space into a grand wedding reception. The attendees learned how to drape fabrics and florals from the ceiling, create oversized floral displays for dining tables, construct a wall of flowers at the bar, customize flooring and more.

Throughout the three-day workshop, sponsored by Asocolflores, the Association of Colombian Flower Exporters, Vasquez offered this advice to florists to create an unforgettable environment:

- Get to know the space. Where are the electrical outlets? Where can you hook installations, and what is the weight capacity? How will lighting affect the look of your designs? Vasquez also recommends taking measurements, and accounting for how much space is needed for tables, chairs, and even for staff and guests to pass through easily.
- Establish good relationships with vendors for the items you don't have, such as furniture, dinnerware, linens and more.
- Seek out top-quality flowers that will arrive with enough time for them to mature to their peak. Be innovative with your designs and don't provide the same style for every client; let their style drive your designs. "Have a vision. Innovate. Don't copy what everyone else does."
- Set boundaries. Don't become a hostage of the client's time or ideas. Earn the client's trust to give yourself some room to be creative and build on their ideas. 

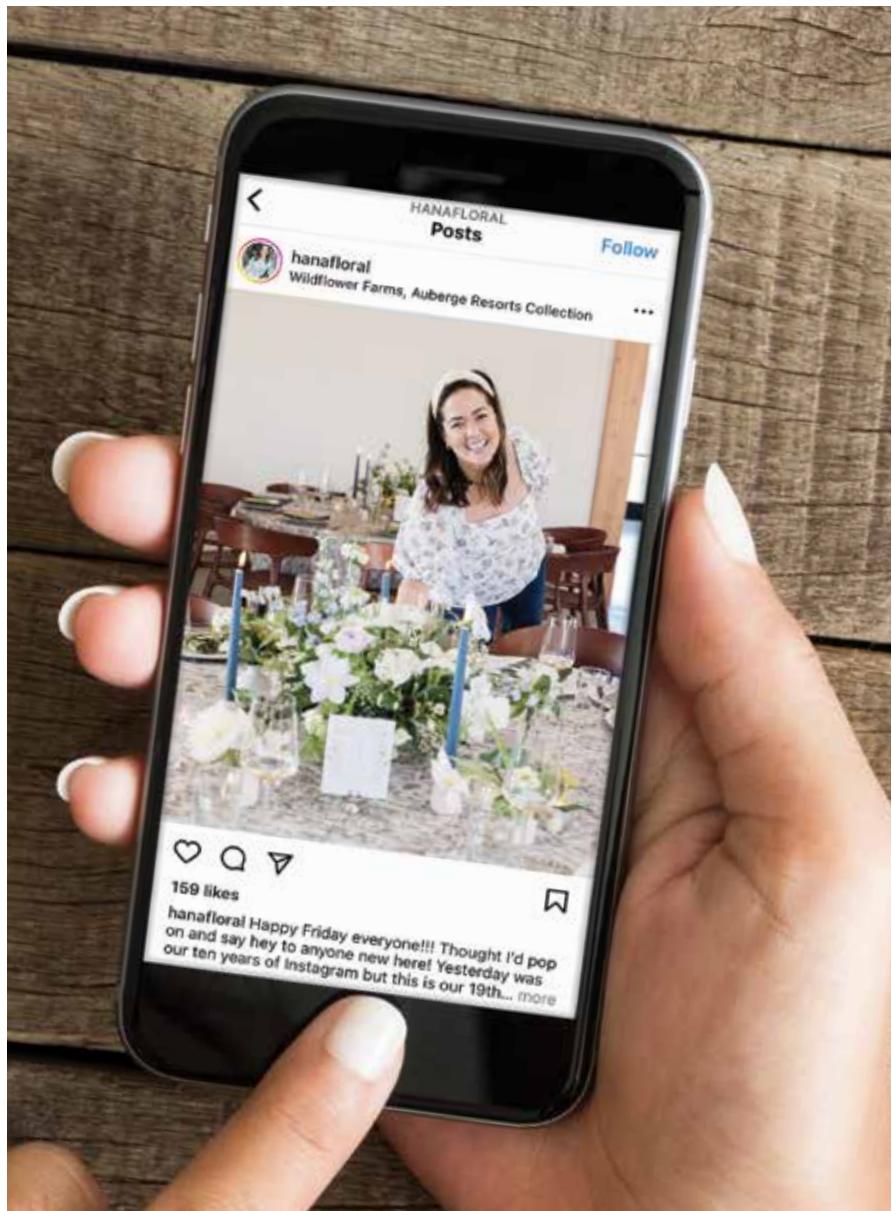
Amanda Jedlinsky is the senior content strategist for the Society of American Florists and editor in chief of *Floral Management*.





SOCIAL SAVVY

Showcase the “Who” Behind Your Work



When it comes to promoting your wedding and event services, social media is a powerful tool. Think of all your channels as an evolving portfolio that clients can view, bookmark, and share in real time.

But there's more to promoting your event capabilities than just posting beautiful images of arrangements. According to floral designer Yumiko Fletcher, owner and creative director at Hana Floral Design (@hanafloral) in coastal Connecticut, it's equally important to show the "who" behind your brand.

"Whether it's a single person or a team of pros, followers want to see who they may be hiring for their big day," asserts Fletcher, whose organic creations grace luxury weddings across southern New England and New York. "They want to know something personal about you, whether it's something close to your heart or a fun personality trait. This way, the company or brand becomes more intimate and real to them."

Throughout the year, Fletcher introduces herself to her 11,000-plus followers and counting with an upbeat caption detailing some personal info (she's a leftie and was also a classical voice major in college). She also encourages followers to share something about themselves in return, ensuring a healthy dose of friendly, conversational commentary.

In addition, the entrepreneur regularly celebrates her team. "We want clients to see that there is a group of people making their wedding florals happen," she explains. "I love show-

casing each team member because we all have different strengths when working on events. It also makes our staff feel good, too," she adds. "They feel invested in the company — and that is so important."

So far, putting herself out there has paid dividends, with engaged couples seeking out not just Hana Floral Design but Fletcher herself. "Weddings and events are very personal," says the designer. "Clients want to know who is working on their event and how that person may align with their personality or vibe." 

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TEAM BUILDER

Channel the Five A's of Leadership

► While the pandemic reminded us of the importance of core workers, it also brought into sharp focus the effectiveness of business leaders. We saw firsthand how everyone from retail shop owners to corporate CEOs had to adapt quickly to a variety of challenges, from staffing issues to changing consumer behaviors. A lot was on the line for companies of all sizes. It was a sink or swim experience.

According to Glenna Hecht, a Dallas-based human resources expert who specializes in training, speaking engagements, and consulting with clients across the country, good leadership is so much more than merely logging record profits when times are good. It's about showing up, keeping your door open, setting a good example, and walking the talk.

No matter how deeply ingrained your leadership qualities, there is always room for improvement. Here are Hecht's five A's to improve your approach:

- **AWARENESS** "Being aware involves four steps: observe, listen, think, and connect. Sometimes owners or managers leave out a step; sometimes the connecting — aka a reactive emotion or reprimand — comes too soon. How many times did we believe we had all the information and find out we were missing a valuable piece? By that time, whatever we've said can't be unsaid. Remember to observe and listen first — this gives a good leader time to think, bring down the energy, and react calmly."
- **ACCOUNTABILITY** "Ultimately, workers follow what a leader does or does not do. Ask yourself, am I consistent in my communication? Am I saying one thing and doing something else? Also, don't hesitate to get in the trenches. W. Edwards Deming once said, 'You can expect what you inspect.' You must show up to lead — otherwise, you can't effectively hold people accountable. At the end of the day, you're a role model for the entire team."
- **AVAILABILITY** "Owners and managers like to boast that they have an open-door policy. But is your door truly open or is it more like a screen door, with you half listening, distracted by your email or phone? If you're not engaged in the conversation, workers will notice and might be less likely to reach out in the future."
- **AUTHENTICITY** "At the end of the day, no one has all the answers. Whether a shipment was missed or an order of white roses delayed, every single day brings different challenges. The pandemic only amplified this trend. It's important to have a level of vulnerability and to be honest. You can say, 'I don't have the answer at this moment but I'm going to figure it out, or we'll figure it out together.'

"Sometimes errors are serious, and workers need to be held accountable and further trained. But it's also important to foster an environment in which mistakes can be owned up to and fixed — even your own."

■ **ADAPTABILITY** "Always be ready to adapt to new and changing conditions. Let's say, for example, construction interrupts your retail displays, a key worker moves on, or you miss work to stay home with a sick child. In these situations, you need to rethink and regroup. Anticipating the need to pivot many times a day will help you react to ongoing problems graciously. Ultimately, the way you deal with a problem is more important than the problem itself." 

Jennifer Sperry is a contributing writer for *Floral Management* who focuses on lifestyles, florals and interiors.



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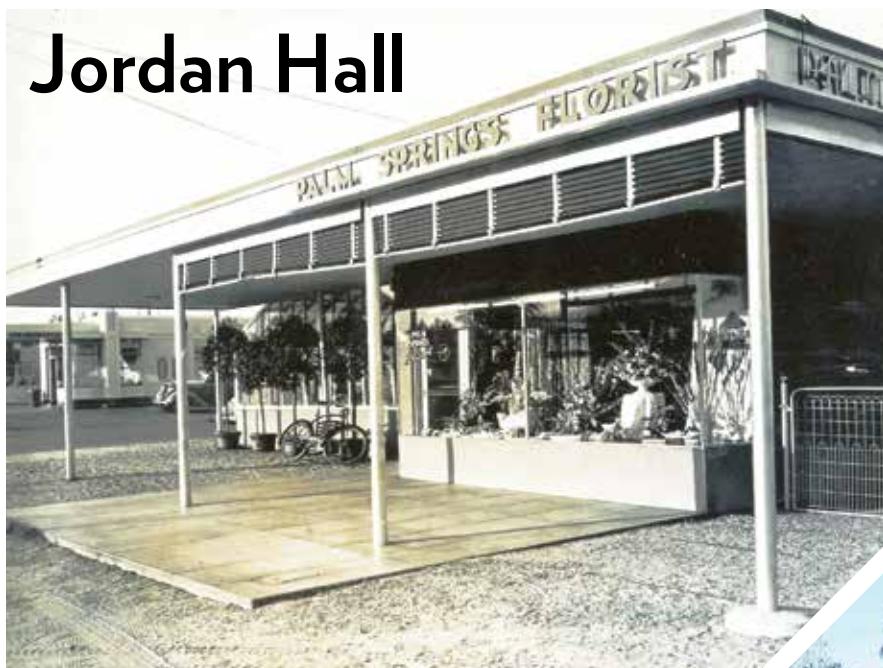
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EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Jordan Hall



**Owner/Operator, Palm Springs Florist
Palm Springs, California**

► It took the 2008 financial crisis to shift Jordan Hall back to his roots in the family business, where he would become a third-generation success story. His grandfather started selling flowers in 1947, making deliveries by bicycle with his wife perched on the handlebars holding the flowers. Today this family florist is breaking records with revenue and profit margins, thanks to Jordan's efforts at building the company's online presence.

Those online marketing efforts included failures. "The trick to failure is to fail fast, move on and try something else. It took us a bit to figure out what we were trying to do, but once we did, it's been a home run," Hall says. "I'm really standing on the shoulders of six decades of my family's time and effort and all the wonderful employees we've had as well. I take credit for nothing."

Best Mother's Day tip:

"We've finally cracked the code that works for us to scale up for the big holidays. By streamlining the greening process, it's made life easier on the employees and enabled us to fill more orders. Two full weeks prior to the holiday we green a vase, wrap the



greens in a rubber band, and put it in a bucket of water that holds 10 to 15 pre-done greens. In the cooler, we can look at buckets and know how many we have, with goals determined by sales records. Pre-greening streamlines the design process. This Valentine's Day I came in at 6 a.m. and left at 6 p.m., and we delivered more arrangements on the 14th than we did in the previous 75 years."

Biggest challenge:

"Everything has never been more expensive. The cost of doing business is high now, which makes juggling the business side of the cost of goods challenging. We've found that customers are willing to pay more money for something truly different, unique and memorable even in an economy with doom and gloom. We've been focusing on different arrangements and styles that capture attention. We've had a lot of success."



How we drive sales:

"We invested in our website and take our own arrangement photos. We've found that if we can get what we're really good at in front of customers' eyes, they're willing to spend top dollar for something that's really awesome. We have 75 percent of consumers going through our website or on our website and calling us — with more sell-through."

My secret weapon:

"Sharing my enthusiasm with customers. When I was young, I thought flowers were lame — an old person thing. Now when I'm talking to young people, especially potential wedding clients, the guys are often super disinterested. I have a conversation with the groom, telling him, 'Flowers are super cool — this could be really fun for you.' It's amazing how excited they can get about our product." 

Julie Martens Forney is a contributing writer for *Floral Management*.



Beautiful Proposals, *Made easy*

STUNNING DESIGN:

Incorporating rich, bright reds and magentas with purple accents to stylize this garden magenta-inspired wedding. The floral designs will incorporate beautiful, wispy greenery with bold pinks, reds, and purple blossoms to help coordinate designs to match the wardrobe of the bride and groom.

Garden roses will be used throughout the designs, adding sophistication, fragrance, and enhanced elegance.



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CHALLENGES, CHOICES AND COMPROMISES IN SUSTAINABLE WEDDING DESIGN

► It is becoming increasingly common for wedding couples to ask about sustainability — not only in design work, but in the industry. These couples want to know how they can have Instagram-worthy florals with little environmental impact.

Many times, my team's response to their questions varies based on the overall scale of the floral designs, whether we are designing on site or off site, the flowers used, and even how much the couple is willing to pay for extra services, such as repurposing flowers after the big day.

My team and I have found that the best way to address these questions is to be transparent. Be honest with your client about what you can do, what they can do, and most importantly — what they can afford to do to create an event that is as sustainable as possible.

Sourcing Sustainably

The good news is that if you cannot source all the flowers and foliage locally, you can buy flowers that are certified sustainable.

There are many certifications in the floral industry that require growers to collect rainwater for their irrigation systems, compost tons of vegetative waste, limit pesticide use, conserve energy, offset carbon footprints and more. Some certifications also focus on social sustainability, which includes providing medical, dental and meal programs to their employees and their families, and even offering educational and after school programs for kids and teenagers.

Of course, there are compromises: Like most other commodities, flowers grown domestically and internationally must be transported. Even some of the most sustainable companies must live with this reality, and the companies dedicated to being sustainable try to offset their carbon footprint in other ways.

Compromising on Design

Much of our team's capability to be sustainable centers on the scale of the



JERRY HAYES PHOTOGRAPHY

STUNNING AND SUSTAINABLE The florals for this San Antonio, Texas wedding were designed with sustainability in mind. The orchids on the table head are held onto steel mesh with pins and the permanent hanging botanicals can be reused for other events.

designs and whether we have access to the venue hours in advance so we can design onsite. If we can design onsite, we don't need to use as many unsustainable materials, and we don't need as much transportation. Unfortunately, many venues don't allow designers access to the site hours in advance.

When my team talks with couples that are concerned about their impact on the environment, we let them know that certain structures will require materials that aren't seen as sustainable. I want to offer a word of caution on chicken wire. While it is seen as a more sustainable option because it can be used several times, it is covered in plastic, and if it isn't, it will rust. (Recent research has shown that rust affects groundwater and wells). What's a florist to do? Compromise. Decisions about sustainable design comes down to what your client can live with — and what you can live with.

Repurposing Flowers

If clients ask whether you offer a service to pick up the flowers and distribute them to senior living facilities or hospitals where the flowers will continue to bring joy, let them know that you do it — for a price. You will need extra labor

at the end of the event to gather, separate and pack the flowers. You will need additional labor in the morning to pick them up, drive them to the dropoff locations and possibly distribute them. If the client isn't willing to pay for it, let them know how they and their friends can take the designs apart, and even offer to show them how.

It is important that every designer works toward sustainable practices and is prepared to answer clients' questions about it. But in doing so, we must be honest with ourselves and our clients about what is possible — and be ready to make compromises. 

Bill Schaffer is the owner of Schaffer Designs. He specializes in event design, education, showroom and trade show design, and overseas product development. Bill and his wife, Kristine Kratt, are cutting-edge creators of "floral-sharing" opportunities through their award-winning exhibits at the Philadelphia Flower Show and numerous commissioned floral art installations. They are authors of *Taking the Flower Show Home*. Bill now spreads his love of flowers and floral design worldwide as *Floral Fundamentals Ambassador*.



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- X-Large Blooms
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- Lush Green Foliage
- Outstanding Long Vase Life



Sun Valley
FLORAL FARMS



FABULOUS FILLERS

► For many parts of the country, late spring through summer signals the return of farmers' markets — opportunities for consumers to mingle with local flower growers and explore their array of products. Among them: intriguing fillers of every shape, color and texture.

Christy Hulsey, owner of Colonial House of Design in Atlanta, Georgia, has a soft spot for these flowers. "They're not as famous as focal blooms, but to me, they are the real superstars," she says. "They drive the color, the mood, the aesthetic of any design in my lineup. These are the flowers I use to pump up the volume — or tone down the noise, for that matter." Her "short" list of favorites include basil, chamomile, eucalyptus, feverfew, gomphrena, hellebore, lavender, lilac, narcissus, sweet peas, thistle and waxflower.



'SWEET AUTUMN' CLEMATIS
Creekside Growers



SHUTTERSTOCK/GLANDSTUDIO

STATICE
Harmony Harvest Farm



SHUTTERSTOCK/EDITA MEDINA

EUPATORIUM
Creekside Growers

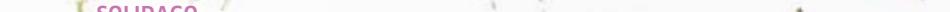


SHUTTERSTOCK/SPLINE-X

MONARDA
Harmony Harvest Farm



FEVERFEW
Harmony Harvest Farm



SOLIDAGO
Mellano & Co.



'PETER COTTONTAIL' YARROW
Creekside Growers



LARKSPUR DELPHINIUM
Harmony Harvest Farm



SHUTTERSTOCK/CRISTINA JONESCU

PASSIONFLOWER VINE
Creekside Growers



SHUTTERSTOCK/KATARZYNA MAZUROWSKA

'BLUE HORIZON' AGERATUM
Creekside Growers



NEPETA
Creekside Growers

Whenever possible, Hulsey likes to source her fillers from small Georgia farms. "My typical recipe includes more fillers than focals, so this is what I'm buying in bulk, and that volume can make a big impact for these businesses, as well as my regional economy," she says. Additionally, these products tend to be more budget-friendly, without the logistical costs of trucking and shipping. "That lower price is liberating," she says. "I love to feel free to use a lot of flowers."

Here are some stunning American-grown fillers to try this summer. 

Katie Vincent is the senior contributing editor of *Floral Management*.



NIGELLA
Harmony Harvest Farm

SHUTTERSTOCK/HAWK777

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Win Back Sympathy Sales

As funeral homes evolve into one-stop shops for families, florists are finding new ways to keep the sympathy sales coming and remain a funeral home's florist of choice.

BY LAURIE HERRERA

Paul Raimondi remembers when funeral flowers were simple: Families would pick a casket spray or standing easel from a small selection. Almost no modifications were requested. Only a few flower varieties were used and florists could simply make substitutions if needed.

"They were very standardized," says Raimondi, who purchased his parents' Baltimore-area flower shop in 1985. "It has changed dramatically with the type of flowers and the arrangements."

So, too, has how the orders come in. Many families still call or visit one of Raimondi's four shops. Others take a more modern approach, ordering through the shop's website. Raimondi's touchpoints are becoming the exception, however, as some florists across the country have little or no contact with the families and work through the funeral homes instead.

THE FINISHING TOUCH A designer at Raimondi's Florist in the Baltimore area works on a standing spray.



IT PAYS TO LISTEN Chris Drummond (left), AAF, PFCI, of Penny's by Plaza Flowers in Philadelphia, has tried a variety of ways to provide funeral homes with access to his business's sympathy designs to share with families. He says the best approach is to be flexible and listen to what each funeral home needs.

At McAdams Floral in Victoria, Texas, about 65 percent of the family tribute orders come from funeral homes rather than the families of the deceased. H. Clay Atchison III, president, says he first noticed a shift in order origination about 15 years ago when a corporation purchased a local funeral home and began promoting itself as a one-stop shop for all funeral-related needs, including flowers. About seven years ago, an independent funeral home in his community also began offering package deals.

Charlie Hauboldt III, president of Grace Funeral Home in Victoria, Texas, says the package deals streamline the funeral planning process and alleviate some of the grieving family's stress.

"It is appealing to someone to walk in and know that all the questions can be answered at one location, all of the decisions can be made at one location, and you can write one check," says Hauboldt, who independently owns every business he sells services or products for except



for the flowers. For those, he partners with Atchison, a friend and business associate for more than 20 years.

Creating a Funeral Home Presence

At Grace, families select a package that includes a price point for flowers. Then they select floral arrangements from a ring-bound book provided by Atchison. Because he's not there to talk to the families, Atchison has included pages that show how big the casket sprays are based on price, detail additional family arrangements to consider, and explain how families can customize tributes.

Atchison says the book works well until he updates prices. Then he needs to drive to each funeral home that has one of his books, remove the old pages, and insert the new ones.

At Penny's by Plaza Flowers, the shop used to provide funeral homes with custom-made photo books. That got expensive when prices changed

because they had to replace the entire book rather than a few pages. Chris Drummond, AAF, PFCI, president of the Philadelphia flower shop, says he removed all the books from circulation about seven years ago and replaced them with tablets that could only access his shop's website. The tablets were a one-time expense and required no updating when prices changed because the website itself is updated regularly.

"We thought the funeral directors would just love it, but for the most part they didn't," says Drummond. "The problem with the tablets is they have to remember to charge them and they have to be ready when the family comes in."

It was also another piece of hardware the funeral directors had to manage. Many told Drummond they would rather load the Penny's website on their own laptops. Drummond says the tablet experiment was a learning

experience. While a few funeral directors have accepted them, most declined them altogether.

"You have to listen to what the funeral director is saying," says Drummond. "It's not a one-size-fits-all solution. We have to be flexible and we have to provide them with the solution they want."

In fact, some don't want to be bothered with the flowers at all and either send the family to Drummond's shop or arrange for him to meet with them at the funeral home.

Negotiating Commission

Because one-stop funeral homes are coordinating flower sales, many request a commission from the florist. Some funeral home corporations even require the florist to sign a contract for a certain percentage of the sale.

"I would say it's the rare exception to hear 35 percent," says Tim Huckabee, president of The Profitable Florist (formerly known as Floral Strategies). "Most operate somewhere in the 20 to 30 percent range."

That's an expensive pill to swallow, especially for time-consuming and expensive casket sprays or easels, but Huckabee points to similar percentages for florists who use wire services.

Atchison says he was able to negotiate a 15 percent commission with the funeral homes he works with. That rate enables him to be profitable without sacrificing flower quantity or quality, he says. And while he's sacrificing a percentage of his sales to be a funeral home's preferred florist, Atchison says it's worth it for the secondary sales.

"I believe that when out-of-town people are talking to family, or there are cousins who can't make it, that the funeral home is passing around our name," says Atchison. "Us giving the 15 percent off is worth the referrals."

Drummond says corporations tend to push for higher commissions than independently owned funeral homes, sometimes making them unprofitable for the florist. In addition, florists may outbid one another, offering the funeral homes a higher commission rate. Florists then have to make counteroffers or potentially lose the funeral home's business.

In lieu of "In lieu of..."

The soothing nature of flowers can be so potent, just seeing a photo of them can elicit a powerful emotional response.

Case in point: A woman was driving home from the funeral home where she had been planning her late husband's service. As she passed Penny's by Plaza Flowers, the setting sun reflected off the shop's van, its vinyl wrap emblazoned with flowers. The image provided such comfort during a time of intense emotional distress, that the woman sent a thank-you note to the shop.

"It was just a vinyl wrap for the van, but she took the time to actually write a letter," says Chris Drummond, AAF, PFCI, president of the Philadelphia flower shop. "Flowers make a huge difference when they're grieving."

So when family members sit down to write their loved one's obituary, they may not realize what they'll be missing when they add, "In lieu of flowers ..." to the end.

"It's not that they don't like flowers; they just don't know how important they are in the process," says Drummond. "I've had customers say, 'I was never really a flower person, but when my husband died or my mom died and I got those flowers, it meant so much to me.'"

Todd Van Beck, program director of the Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science, says funeral flowers bring warmth and comfort to a somber occasion. He says some people see sympathy flowers as a waste because their beauty is so brief. But their impact lasts long after the funeral, says Van Beck.

"Following the service, the bereaved are left with an indelible impression of the funeral," he says. "Flowers do not wither and die in the mind of the bereaved. They are recalled time and again as indelible memories."

H. Clay Atchison III, president of McAdams Floral in Victoria, Texas, says he encourages his local funeral homes to provide families with alternative phrases to "in lieu of," which puts limits on how people grieve or express their sympathy. He provides these options:

- Memorial contributions may be made to ____.
- We encourage ____ contributions in his/her honor.
- His/her favorite cause, ____, is accepting donations.
- ____ is his/her choice for memorial contributions.
- A memorial has been set up in his/her name at ____.
- Contributions may be made to the charity of your choice.
- Flowers are welcome. Contributions may be sent to ____.



SHUTTERSTOCK/9DREAM STUDIO

Making the List



DON'T

- **Don't use old flowers.** "That is a mistake with a capital M," says Van Beck. The flowers may droop and lose petals before the day's events are through.
- **Don't use greens that drop leaves.** Funeral staff clean the facility before and after services. Don't give them more work to do.
- **Don't track dirt, mud, snow, etc., into the funeral home.** See above.
- **Don't play loud music inside the delivery van when driving up to funeral homes.** If the funeral director is meeting with a family or mourners are already on site, the music could be disruptive.
- **Don't be late.** Funeral homes may schedule multiple services in a day. If the flowers aren't on time, the funeral may go on without them, much to the grieving family's dismay.
- **Don't let your ego get in the way.** Even if the family mistakenly orders the wrong thing, fix it without comment. "What we're doing for this family is a lot larger than a \$200 arrangement," says Hauboldt.

Holidays and wedding seasons come and go, creating peaks and valleys for floral sales. Sympathy sales can help level those valleys because they come year round. But funeral directors can be gatekeepers, sending orders only to specific florists. To ensure you're on their list, offer a level of customer service that differentiates you from the competition, and avoid the pitfalls that can taint the funeral director-florist relationship.

DO

- **Make your services available outside normal business hours.** Funeral flowers may need to be delivered early in the morning and late in the evening.
- **Offer to transport flowers.** Todd Van Beck, program director of the Cincinnati College of Mortuary Services and a former funeral director, says a top-notch florist will help transport flowers from the funeral home to follow-up locations.
- **Give the funeral directors your cell phone number.** You should be easily accessible if problems arise.
- **Make fixing funeral flower mistakes a priority.** There's a tiny window to correct errors before the funeral starts.
- **Check in with the funeral home to see how you're doing.** Charlie Hauboldt III, president of Grace Funeral Home in Victoria, Texas, recommends following up once a month to ensure you are meeting the expectations of the funeral home and their clients. Try to schedule a face-to-face meeting with the funeral home director if possible.
- **Make it easy for funeral homes to promote your services.** Provide books, brochures, or websites that funeral directors can show to families.





STELLAR SYMPATHY SALES Raimondi's Florist, which has four shops serving the Baltimore area, says sympathy sales make up about 43 percent of the business's revenue. Owner Paul Raimondi credits the business's reputation and ability to do custom work for its strong presence in funeral homes.

The back-and-forth so aggravated Raimondi, he stopped offering commissions altogether. Raimondi says he was offering 25 percent commissions for a long time, but other area florists began offering 30 and even 40 percent.

Be the Florist of Choice

Atchison knows a florist who recently stopped offering commissions to funeral homes. That florist's sympathy sales dissolved practically overnight. Raimondi's Florist, however, still receives many referrals from funeral homes. In fact, funeral sales make up 43 percent of his business. Raimondi operates four locations in the Baltimore area — one is almost 19,000 square feet — delivering to 133 funeral homes.

"I think it's our reputation," says Raimondi, a third-generation florist. "I've been in the business for 62 years and we do a lot of custom work."

The shop is known for its custom easels, which can contain hundreds of flowers. Raimondi says the templates are custom made, with each flower carefully placed by hand. It can take anywhere

from a couple of hours to half the day to complete one piece.

Huckabee says florists who consistently deliver quality products and provide excellent customer service are like a feather in the caps of funeral directors. Because families often deal only with the funeral homes, everything — good or bad — ultimately falls on their shoulders. No matter how high the commission, funeral homes won't continue to work with florists who don't meet their expectations.

"It's a relationship like any other," Huckabee says. "It needs to be coddled and nurtured. It takes some effort, but it's time well spent."

He recommends florists who want more sympathy work start by introducing themselves to local funeral directors. Show them a portfolio, ask how you can work with them, and follow up periodically to see whether they need your services.

"You can get a bigger slice of the business," says Huckabee. "You've got to be proactive."

Atchison spends a lot of time nurturing relationships with his local funeral directors, two of whom have chosen him

as their preferred florist. He favors funeral orders to larger, more lucrative wedding orders and has worked to make sympathy sales almost 30 percent of his business.

Atchison likens the relationship between a funeral director and his or her preferred florist to a marriage. It can be lifelong, but it requires give and take on both sides, meeting each other's expectations, lauding each other when things go right, and communicating when things go wrong.

Hauboldt appreciates that Atchison goes the extra mile, extending the attention to the funeral home staff, he says. For example, Atchison hands out Christmas presents to everyone at Grace Funeral Home. The rapport is so great, Hauboldt — whose funeral-related businesses span almost every aspect including pet cremation, memorial gifts, and cemeteries — says he would never consider buying a flower shop. "Clay and I are good friends," says Hauboldt. "I would never cross those lines." ♀

Laurie Herrera is a contributing writer for *Floral Management*.

INSPIRED SYMPATHY DESIGNS

Celebrate Life

SYNDICATE HAS LONG SINCE OFFERED a line of sympathy products for professional florists and have recently determined that the collection has an updated story to tell. With cremations on the rise and an increasing demand for unique and personalized creations, the collection of sympathy products offered by Syndicate provide the perfect foundation for such requests. For example, the Serenity Collection of large foam cages and accessories offer a cohesive and sturdy system for displaying cremation urns, photos and statuary, and can handle just about any personal item the family wants to feature. Tried and true standards like the designer urns, casket sprays and Aquaforms round out a complete collection of sympathy products.

And this is all well and good, but it has been many years since a printed resource has been created to showcase these products, capture the essence of the advancements occurring in sympathy work, and inspire the professional florist.

Syndicate is proud to offer a new design resource for professional florists.

Sympathy Styling: Inspired Designs to Celebrate Life is a funeral flowers selection book for grieving loved ones as well as a sales tool and recipe guide for the modern florist. Packed with beautiful floral creations, this book offers tasteful tribute designs that any florist can replicate.



Florists will be delighted to learn that this book will hold up in their workroom as it is printed on plastic sheets of paper using UV ink that makes this resource **100% waterproof**.

THE SYMPATHY GUIDE FEATURES:

- 100 pages of tribute designs, 40 pages of floral recipes, 10 pages of product index
- Large feature images
- Categorized by color and category
- Construction material list and floral recipe for **every piece**
- Printed on plastic pages using UV ink for a waterproof construction
- Clear spiral binding to make it easy to lay flat

Sympathy Styling

Inspired Designs to Celebrate Life



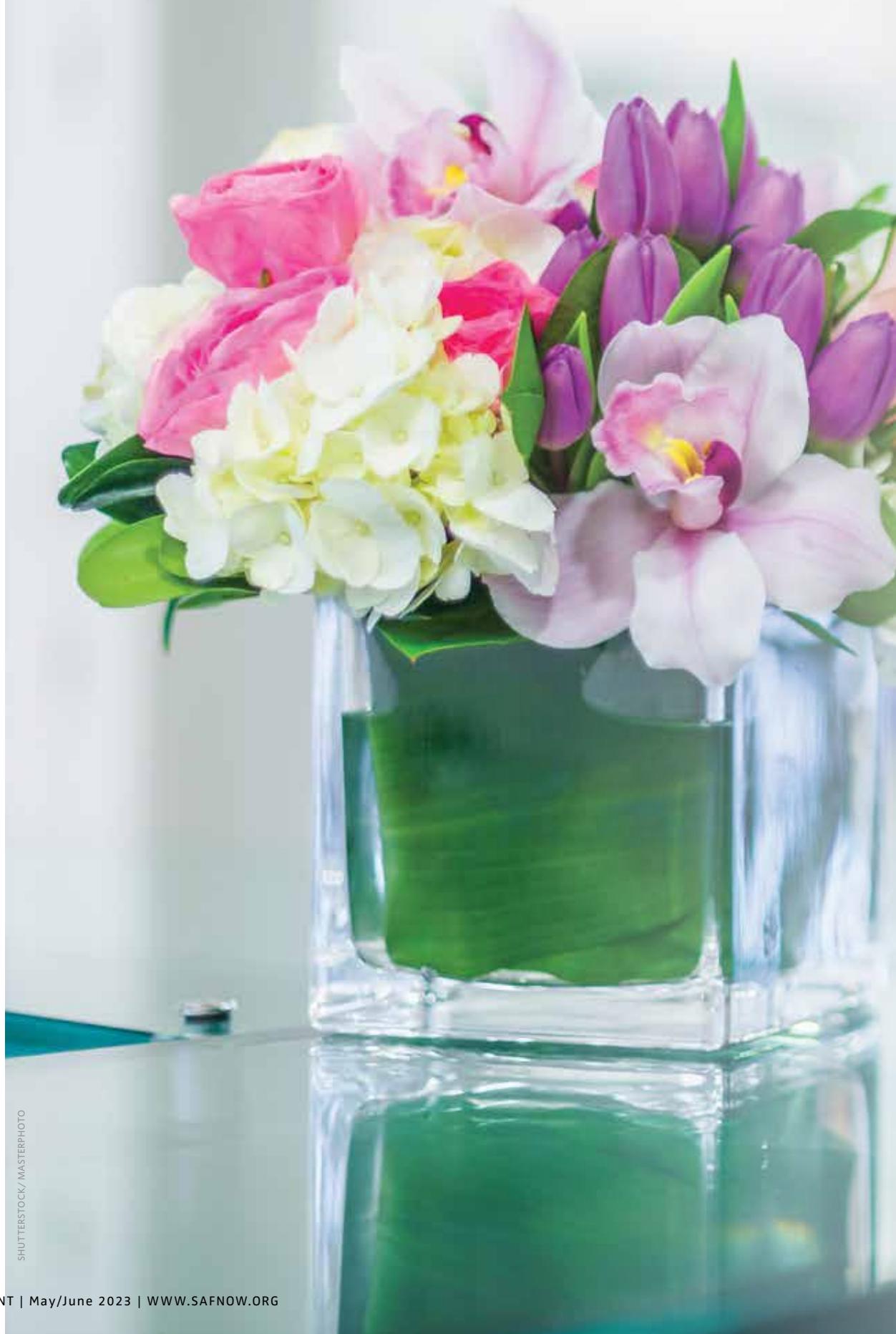
This funeral flower tribute guide features over 75 sympathy designs presented by color as well as category and offers floral solutions for casket sprays, standing sprays, cremation arrangements, wreaths, crosses, hearts, baskets, and take-home arrangements.

Large feature images help clients choose the tribute, colors, and floral styles that best represent their loved one. Designs range from classic to contemporary with construction materials and floral recipe provided for every piece. The floral material showcased in this book can also be easily substituted based on seasonality.

Thoughtful flower selections and achievable designs make this a unique and invaluable resource to Funeral Directors and modern florists alike. Clients will be pleased when the designs match their expectations as this book provides realistic floral arrangements that capture character and personality, not perfection.

Shop our full collection of Sympathy Products including the Sympathy Styling Book (#1012-06-00) on SyndicateSales.com

Syndicate 



SHUTTERSTOCK / MASTERPHOTO



BETTER BUSINESS ACCOUNTS

Florists are building back corporate work post-COVID and finding that much has changed, from budgets to delivery addresses.

BY VICTORIA ABBOTT RICCARDI

Before COVID-19, corporate work provided many florists with a steady, relatively hassle-free stream of income throughout the year, especially during slower periods. Whether beautifying lobbies with plants and florals, providing arrangements for restaurants and hotels, sending bouquets to employees for birthdays and work anniversaries, or doing flowers for annual events, such as holiday parties, business-to-business sales provided revenue florists could count on to boost their bottom line.

However, when the pandemic hit and nonessential businesses shut down, most corporate work dried up. Now, three years later, the work has returned, but for many, it's taken a different form. Some companies have reduced their pre-pandemic budgets for floral, partly due to inflation. Other businesses haven't returned to hosting big events but hold smaller events more frequently.

Ready to reimagine your corporate business? Take a page from the book of these florists who did the same.

John Angelone, MANAGER

Angelone's Florist in Raritan, New Jersey

Angelone's Florist sits next to several major corporations, pharmaceutical companies and banks and before the pandemic, corporate work comprised 25 to 30 percent of the florist's business. "For years and years, we would be going to these companies four or five times a day, whether they were sending something to their employees, there was a passing in a family, or somebody did exceptionally well that month at work," says John Angelone, who works at the family business alongside his father, Lynn Angelone (seen together to the right). "Then, we'd also do events with them, whether it was a holiday party or something in the spring. But when COVID hit, it was like a faucet that immediately turned off."

Pivot: Modernized Floral Designs for a Younger Clientele

After first going into survival mode, the florist went into creative mode to find new sources of revenue to fill the corporate void. "We started putting out new products different from the stock images we used to do," says Angelone, both in the store and on their website. "We started doing more fun designs and higher-end stuff that was more styled, asymmetrical and more bespoke to attract a younger clientele."

Current Status: Smaller but More Frequent Orders

"Now, corporate work comprises about 20 percent of our business," says Angelone. "But these clients are having smaller gatherings more often. We've recently looked at the figures and some of these smaller gatherings have been more profitable because the clients are spending more to have things look higher end." Angelone also says he's become more selective with his corporate clients, avoiding those with champagne demands on ginger ale budgets. "Before, we used to scratch our heads and say, 'Okay, how can we make this work?' but nowadays, we're not as concerned about that. We've started focusing on our local community and it's been a game changer. We're now seeing people come to us more organically and they're the ones that work at these companies. So, they're coming to us for personal reasons and they're also coming back for business reasons."



Karen Greenoe, OWNER

Lily Greenthumbs in Charlotte, North Carolina

Prior to the pandemic, corporate work comprised 25 percent of Greenoe's business, with half coming from local banks and half from the Carolina Panthers football team. "We did their flowers for game day, which meant delivering flowers to multiple suites and providing small centerpieces for the catered VIP meal," says Greenoe. When the pandemic hit, her corporate work disappeared.

Pivot: Focused on Wedding Work

To make up the business-to-business revenue, Greenoe boosted her wedding work. "In 2021, when weddings started coming back, we took absolutely everyone who wanted to book," says Greenoe. During the pandemic, she made it a point to stay in touch with her corporate clients, so she'd be top-of-mind when they needed her services again.

Current Status: Staying Flexible for All Budgets

As corporate work comes back, Greenoe sees a lot of variability in budgets and needs. "I've had corporate events where I sent them a proposal for \$1,500 and they have a panic attack and ask what we can do for \$15 a table," she says. "Then, recently, I had a Bank of America event and my contact said, 'This one is not going to be huge and we'll detail it out a week or two before the event.' Then she comes back to me and it's \$10,000 worth of flowers." Greenoe hasn't needed to seek out new corporate clients and says her business is doing well with the accounts she has. "We have a great rapport and they know they can come to me and say, 'Hey, we have an event, we need 40 centerpieces, here's our budget and our color palette.'"



BUILD BACK YOUR CORPORATE SALES

Florists with strong business-to-business sales share their best tips to build back corporate sales in a post-COVID world.

"Make sure your product is the best it can be and you're taking care of customers as best you can. The more formal you are, the more it hurts you. From your floral designs to your music on the radio to what you wear, it all makes a difference."

For us, it was about being more youthful and fun and less serious.

Don't be scared to make a change. Take the biggest risk you can and customers will come through your door. Instead of actively looking for corporate work, focus on attracting more local customers because they probably work locally."

—John Angelone, Angelone's Florist in Raritan, New Jersey

"Communication is key. **Reach out to past clients and let them know you're still there and happy to have their business in any way you can serve them.** Many of the corporate event planners might be new, or they lost your business card or can't find your email. Also, introduce yourself to event vendors, like caterers, and let them know you're available if their clients ever need flowers. When you do a corporate event, post on Instagram because you're letting people know you do this work."

—Karen Greenoe, Lily Greenthumbs, Charlotte, North Carolina

"Reach out to corporate contacts because they may still have the money, but they're spending it differently. If they used you for \$30,000 parties, make sure they know you're available to do everyday work. Those contacts still recommend florists to the different departments for birthdays, anniversaries and funerals. Also, don't be afraid to experiment or fail. Nine times out of ten, you're probably going to fail, but if you'd stopped at number nine, you would have never gotten to ten. Different things will work at different times in a business's life cycle."

—Michael Pugh, Pugh's Flowers, Memphis, Tennessee

"Do what we did at the beginning, which was to cold call, dress up and go door to door, bringing a floral gift to the gatekeepers at hotels, law offices, restaurants and colleges. Try to reach the person in human resources in charge of flowers. When new restaurants or businesses open, mail letters of introduction with marketing pieces and send a bouquet. **Most management is young and on social media, so take photos of those arrangements with the company tagged and post them on Instagram and Facebook."**

—Lisa Hays Holmes, Tiger Lily, Charleston, South Carolina

Michael Pugh, CO-OWNER WITH HIS TWO BROTHERS

Pugh's Flowers in Memphis, Tennessee

Before COVID, corporate work constituted 20 percent of Pugh's business. "Our corporate work was the traditional kind; an employee gets sick and their coworkers send them flowers," explains Pugh. "Our biggest account is Federal Express because its corporate headquarters is here in Memphis. So, every different department [at FedEx] has a budget and we sent flowers if somebody had a birthday, a birth or funeral. Because we never went after those corporate events that involved putting \$50,000 worth of flowers on tables — which is what stopped with COVID — we continued to work during the pandemic."

Pivot: Eliminated Sales Position

Pugh's hired a full-time sales rep years ago to be the face of the company and secure new corporate accounts, but the company eliminated the position a year into COVID since they couldn't secure new business accounts, Pugh says. However, the flower shop continued to service the corporate clients it had. "We kept 99 percent of our existing corporate customers," says Pugh. "People were still having birthdays and anniversaries, we just had to send the arrangements to different places. In fact, our corporate work increased. Instead of buying a birthday cake and some balloons for a birthday in the office, the office sent flowers because people couldn't gather in person."

Current Status: Leveraging Social Media Marketing

"To ramp up sales, we're trying various social media platforms and direct email," says Pugh. "We have two employees in Los Angeles attending social media training because the younger generation thinks that's going to be a better marketing vehicle than an old-fashioned sales rep trying to drop in on clients." In Memphis, about 90 percent of the businesses have workers in the office and at home, so Pugh's marketing highlights that they can service a hybrid work environment. "We're also pushing the health benefits of plants on our website and social media, hoping to catch the attention of corporate human resource people," he says.



Lisa Hays Holmes, OWNER

Tiger Lily in Charleston, South Carolina

Before the pandemic, corporate work comprised only 5 percent of Holmes' business. "Most of our corporate business was in hotels and restaurants," says Holmes. "We would do florals for their dining rooms, in-room dining, concierge desk, bakeries, spas, bars, lobby pieces and even outdoor tables and pieces around the pool, like mixed plant baskets."

Pivot: Increased Advertising

"I am not a gloom and doom person, so I tripled my advertising during COVID," says Holmes. "I took out ads in magazines, local newsletters and a city paper focusing on Charleston events. Because nobody was advertising with them, I would get a full-page ad for the price of a quarter-page ad. And I stood out because everyone was sitting at home for two months just reading."

Holmes also leaned into social media. "I hired a social media manager and we upped our game with Instagram, Facebook, blogs and direct email blasts. I didn't focus on flowers, but tried to bring comfort as in, 'We're going to get through this.'" As a result, Holmes increased her number of followers.

Current Status: Working Smarter

"I'm constantly getting called by all the major hotels and businesses, but I decided only to work with the nicest, most profitable ones close to our production center," says Holmes. She's also servicing several condominium complexes and introduced a profitable floral subscription to the residents. "Although I'm working with fewer corporate clients than before COVID, I'm bringing in much more revenue." 



Victoria Abbott Riccardi is a contributing writer for *Floral Management*.

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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.



Save on Summertime Staffing

After Mother's Day, most flower shops start a six-month stretch of non-holiday sales levels.

Proper staffing can significantly reduce payroll and increase profit margins.

BY PAUL GOODMAN, MBA, PFCI



ian to wait until summer to think about summer staffing? If so, you're throwing money out the window.

Planning staffing for the summer is one responsibility you can't afford to put off until tomorrow. If you're like most florists, you have too many employees during the summer months, which can be taxing on your payroll.

You may enjoy small periods of good business, but for most shops, June 1 marks the beginning of six straight months of non-holiday sales levels. That's a fact that bears repeating: A half-year of non-holiday sales levels starts shortly after Mother's Day.

If you're going to make money during these non-holiday periods, your payroll must drop as sales decrease. The secret? Forecast your sales and staff accordingly.

Build a Staffing Plan

Creating a staffing plan should be the starting point for your payroll reduction efforts. Just follow these steps:

- 1. Know Your Non-Holiday Sales Volume.** Divide 77 percent by 52 for a weekly average of 1.5 percent of annual sales. In other words, you will make approximately 1.5 percent of annual sales on any given non-holiday week. Multiply your annual design sales by 0.015 to get your own average weekly non-holiday design sales.

2. Figure Out Your Daily Sales.

Each day of the week has a sales pattern. For example, Friday may be your busiest day of the week and Tuesday your slowest. Your staffing needs should fluctuate with sales. A non-holiday staffing analysis will help you figure out which days you need an extra hand and when you can get by with less staff.

Start your sales analysis in the design room. First, gather design sales data for four consecutive non-holiday weeks. Make sure the data is broken down by days of the week. Use any four consecutive weeks during the year that are not during holiday periods, but avoid January and July because they tend to be the lowest sales months of the year.

Next, set up a spreadsheet. Put the four weeks across the top and the days of the week down the left-hand side. Now, fill in the blanks with your daily sales for each of the four weeks.

When staffing the design room, make sure you use only design sales — not total sales. Also, make sure you do not include weddings or large parties in your daily totals. These are special planned events. It's easy to staff these events separately because you know in advance when they are going to happen.

Add all four Mondays to get the total for Monday design sales during that period. Divide that total by four, and you'll have your average Monday volume. Do the same for the other days of the week. Now you can see how much design work to expect by day for most non-holiday weeks.

3. Assess Your Designers'

Productivity. Before you can finalize the design staffing plan, determine your designers' productivity. What is a reasonable amount of production to expect in the design room? Floral Finance has asked hundreds of florists that question and the answer is always the same. You can expect a good designer to put out four average arrangements per hour.

If your average order size is \$60, your designers should produce \$240 at retail prices in one hour. It is unlikely a designer can keep up

ANALYZE SALES PATTERNS

Florists generally see about 23 percent of their annual sales from their holiday business, according to data from Floral Finance. That figure includes Valentine's Day, Administrative Professionals Day, Mother's Day, and Christmas. The rest of the sales (77 percent) are spread evenly over the 365 days of the year.

Florists tend to think of February, April, May and December as very busy "holiday months." But with the exception of December, only a few days of each of these months are truly busy. Sales for the other days during those months are at non-holiday levels.

Profitable florists understand their permanent staff level should be just enough people to cover a non-holiday sales level. For the busy holiday days, they add extra help.

that pace all day, but it's not unreasonable to expect them to perform at that level for six hours a day. The result? About \$1,440 from eight hours of design work. Next, divide 1,440 by 8 hours to get the average design production per hour, which is \$180 average per hour — a very achievable number.

4. Establish Daily Staffing Levels.

Take your average daily design sales and divide by \$180 to get the number of design hours you need each day. For example, if your average Thursday design sales are \$2,160, you would need to provide for a total of 12 hours of design that day (2,160 divided by 180 is 12). Remember, it isn't necessary to have only full-time designers. Design hours can easily be divided among several employees. If you are a retail florist doing approximately \$400,000 in annual sales, you will need less than 8 hours of design time for most non-holiday days. Sound impossible? Not according to the numbers.

Boost Productivity

Want to boost productivity? What works for the holidays will work during the off-season as well. Everyone is more productive when the shop is making multiple copies of each design. At a minimum, make two of everything. Put the second one in the cooler. You'll soon see efficiency pick up.

Look for Other Savings

Do a similar productivity analysis for your drivers. Just use the number of deliveries (instead of number of designs produced) on a daily basis to find the average number of deliveries by day. Staffing sales is a little more difficult because the individual must wait for a customer to call or come in in order to be occupied. Once again, numbers will help.

Check to see what your sales per hour are for each day of the week. Staff according to the sales that are being experienced at any given time during the day. If you are busiest from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. every day, have two part-time people overlap those two hours.

Remember, in all these areas it's better to use more part-time help than full-time help because they bring more flexibility to any staffing plan.

Don't Wait

The best time to plan for the future is here and now. If you can't think about summer staffing until after Mother's Day, at least make plans to get things under control by June 1. If you wait much longer, summer may have already passed you by. Planning may not be one of the most urgent things on your to-do list. It is, however, one of the most important. 

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

THE 'IT' (ROSE) FACTOR

Through his travels to South American rose-growing countries, Denver florist BJ Dyer, AAF, AIFD, has learned what it takes for breeders to develop and growers to propagate and cultivate a new variety of rose. So when a new variety of rose takes over Pinterest or TikTok and becomes so popular it can be hard to get — he understands why.

"Gray roses, dusty lavender roses, bronze roses — those are the roses that are kind of a fad, and we know they are a fad. It doesn't make sense for the growers to put in huge amounts of production, because as soon as the whims of the brides change, [the growers] are stuck with all these roses that don't really work for daily work," Dyer says.

That is but one factor that affects the availability of new varieties. While the delicate balance of supply and demand plays a role, seasonal demand and the time it takes to propagate enough plants to make sending the flowers to market worthwhile also affect availability, importers and growers say.

The process to bring a new variety into existence is expensive and time consuming — sometimes taking as long as 10 years, says Jorge Constance, founder and president of Choice Farms, which imports a variety of garden, tea and spray roses as well as novelty flowers, from South America, Africa and Europe. Breeders set out to create a rose with very specific traits such as color, productivity, resistance to disease or a longer vase life. They might start with up to one million seeds from crossed roses, which are germinated, cultivated, evaluated and — the majority of the time — eliminated.

When a breeder believes they have a new variety, farms in Europe, Africa, Colombia and Ecuador grow a very small number of the plants as a test, because the different climates in those countries affect plants in various ways. If the plant makes it through that testing phase, the shoots from the mother plants are grafted onto root stock for production. It can take years to propagate enough plants to make it worthwhile for a farm to produce and sell, says Joey Azout, president of Alexandra Farms, a large grower of garden roses.



SHUTTERSTOCK/ADCHARIN CHITHAMMACHUK

"It takes a long time to propagate something," Azout says. "If you have one plant and you want to grow 10,000 plants, you can't do it in a short period of time."

Another factor affecting availability is the seasonality of the flower. "Everyone wants the same thing at the same time," Azout says, but rose plants produce year round. "In November, when we have beautiful white roses, no one wants them. The growers are left stranded with a lot of roses that have nowhere to go." Azout has to balance how many roses he wants to sell during the height of wedding season with how many he'll have to throw away in the off-season. It's not feasible to increase production just for wedding season, he says. "Growers can't up their production one month and lower it the next."

Sometimes, a breeder will only permit a limited number of farms to

grow a new variety for a set time frame, which can also limit availability. Azout's farm has such arrangements, but he tries to make sure he is planting to meet demand, he says. "If we have a lot of demand, we'll plant a lot of it, it's just slower to get there."

On the flip side, Constance points out that if too many farms grow a new variety, supply can outweigh demand and spell trouble for the survival of a new variety.

"Is a little demand better than a little supply? If the supply is big, the variety dies," he says. "You can't gauge demand, and while something might be in demand at first, demand can die off," and with it, the variety. 🌸

Amanda Jedlinsky is the senior content strategist for the Society of American Florists and editor in chief of *Floral Management*.



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IS YOUR DIGITAL WORK PROTECTED?

Just as the pre-Valentine's Day rush was kicking in, Jackie Levine discovered photographs of bouquets unique to her store, Central Square Florist, were being used by other florists.

A reverse image search on Google revealed about 10 different floral websites had posted the exact images from Central Square Florist's website. Some sites had multiple images, many from Central Square Florist's most popular designs. Some even used the same name and descriptions. "English Garden," a design featuring large cymbidium orchids, hydrangeas and roses, and "Sweet Sea Breeze," arranged with delphiniums, hydrangeas and roses were two of the designs she found appropriated by others.

Levine felt violated. "We felt as if our hard work — designing the arrangement, photographing it, editing it, naming it, writing the product description — was stolen from behind our back," says Levine, vice president of the Cambridge, Massachusetts flower shop. "Which it was."

In the U.S., copyright protections extend to photographs, says David Wolfsohn, an intellectual property trial lawyer at Duane Morris LLP in

Philadelphia. Copyright does not protect against the plagiarism of names and descriptions of designs. That falls under trademark rights, which are significantly harder to acquire, Wolfsohn says.

Establishing Copyright

Technically, a creator does not have to do anything to establish copyright, Wolfsohn says. "If you take a picture that has some originality and aesthetic to it, you are now the author, and you own it," he says.

Wolfsohn suggests asking these two questions to determine whether a photo is protected under copyright law:

1. Do you own the photograph? This includes having a written contract with the photographer that says the business owns the photographs.
2. Does the photograph have some originality? The lighting, arrangement, vase, positioning, and background are all elements that provide originality and creativity.

While it isn't required that copyrights be registered with the U.S. Copyright Office, Wolfsohn says it's a step worth taking because it enables the owner to

establish damages by giving a minimum value of the stolen work. It also allows the owner to seek attorney fees.

"The goal is to make the infringer think it is in their best interest to take the images down," he says.

Registering copyrights for photos might sound daunting, but the government has established fees for a group of work, such as 100 images, which could allow a floral shop to update their portfolio in batches as designs are changed with the seasons.

Seeking Removal

Levine didn't consult a lawyer or take legal action after she became aware of the copyright infringements of her photographs. But she did defend her store's work by emailing the offenders and asking that her images be removed while also asserting her copyright and ownership of the work. She also reported the abuse to the web hosting site for each of the websites where the images appeared.

Both strategies proved successful. In some instances, the store quickly removed the images. But in other instances, the web hosting company removed the images or took down the entire page, Levine says.

Those are exactly the steps Wolfsohn recommends. If the images are registered with the copyright office, the owner can also include language that if the images aren't removed immediately, they will sue and seek statutory damages, Wolfsohn says.

Educating Others

Levine plans to remain vigilant to protect her business's images. Meanwhile, she hopes others in the industry will recognize how to tell the difference between protected images and those that they have license to use.

"In most cases, a lot of infringement is not necessarily intentional," Wolfsohn says. "A lot of people copy things off the internet and have the misimpression that because they can access it for free that they don't need permission to use it." 

Sarah Sampson is a contributing writer for *Floral Management*.



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LESS IS MORE

➤ The COVID-19 pandemic's regulations — coupled with social and health concerns — created the trend of micro weddings, intimate celebrations with only family and close friends. The scaled-down approach really resonated with florist and flower farmer Lyndsay Biehl, owner of Wildroot Flower Co. in Marietta, Ohio, who discovered that with micro weddings, her stress went down, her profits went up, and she consistently booked down-to-earth, easygoing brides. In 2022, she dropped full-service weddings from her business — and she couldn't be happier.

NATURAL SELECTION "This bride picked us because she liked our 'natural' style," Biehl says. "She had no preference what flowers we used but requested purple and white and originally said 'no pink whatsoever.'" Biehl convinced her client to embrace some blush accents to avoid designs having a "polka dot" effect. Here, she used coral dahlias and pale pink lisianthus. Design time: 10 to 15 minutes. Estimated wholesale cost: \$28.50. Cost: \$95.00 plus tax. Recipe:
1 stem of apricot stock, 1 stem of blue Caryopteris,
2 stems of Dusty Miller, 1 stem of Arena apricot lisianthus,
2 stems of eucalyptus gunni, 2 stems of eucalyptus
'Silver Dollar', 1 stem of dahlia 'Babette',
3 stems of Calamagrostis brachytricha,
3 stems of Queen Red Lime zinnia,
2 stems of Eryngium, 2 Little
Lime hydrangeas





"I have my Saturdays back!" Biehl says. Eliminating setup not only freed up her personal time but also removed a substantial labor cost. She still creates large installations, like arbors, but she does so at her design studio and has her clients pick it up and set it up at the wedding venue. "I was skeptical at first that brides would be okay picking up their own flowers, but I've had no complaints," she says. Additionally, she's managed to streamline the entire planning process by forgoing in-person consultations, which have the potential to be drawn out and lead to ongoing back-and-forth communication. Her website directs prospective clients to a questionnaire — primarily to gauge their style and color preferences — followed by a confirmation email and a 20- to 30-minute phone call. "It's pretty cut and dried — not much hand holding," she says. "I basically have a chart that shows flowers by color and what season they're available. No one's requesting specific varieties."

Without detailed wish lists, Biehl has been able to design exclusively with what she grows. "I used to hunt down product from multiple wholesalers, purchasing more than I needed," she says. "Seeing that line drop from my expenses has been so gratifying and great for my profitability." She also supplies flowers to other local florists. "They're priority customers who move large volumes of product in one sale," she says. "If they're happy with the flowers and colors we have, we can fulfill orders quickly — ideally with about a two-week notice. That product will be pre-processed and 100 percent usable, so those are dollars back in their pocket." ♣

Katie Vincent is the senior contributing editor of *Floral Management*.

ELEVATED (Opposite page) Biehl designed this large piece on a gold stand so it could easily be moved from the ceremony to the reception site. "She, like a lot of micro wedding brides, wanted designs that could be repurposed," she says. Design time: 25 to 30 minutes. Estimated wholesale cost: \$89.20. Cost: \$295 (does not include the stand). Recipe: 2 stems of snapdragon, 8 stems of Caryopteris, 4 stems of Ammi, 2 stems of Eryngium, 6 stems of lisianthus, 5 stems of cosmos, 8 stems of eucalyptus gunni, 6 stems of eucalyptus, 5 stems of ball dahlia, 2 stems of dinnerplate dahlia, 4 stems of Agonis, 6 stems of Calamagrostis brachytricha

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INFLATE THE ROMANCE

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Sheila Santiago is the director of development for the Society of American Florists.



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BEWARE OF BOTRYTIS

► Botrytis, the gray mold menace, has caused serious losses for all segments of the flower industry. The good news? If the industry widely adopts protocols based on new research, the entire supply chain will benefit — including florists.

The American Floral Endowment (AFE), with the support of 24 national and international growers, flower grower associations and wholesale florists, recently completed a five-year project to identify new and more effective control and management practices to reduce losses from botrytis. In particular, this project has identified new grower practices that help ensure that the flowers delivered to florists are free of the mold.

What Is It?

Botrytis is a fungus that affects many plant species including flowers, fruits and vegetables. Flower petals provide an excellent food source for the growth of spores. The disease is established in flower petals and may appear as irregular, enlarged, water-soaked or tan spots. The disease invades the petal and begins to kill cells, leading to fuzzy gray growth on the petal surface. Aging flowers are particularly susceptible. While botrytis cannot be eliminated, it can be controlled by minimizing exposure to or killing



spores during production, treating the flowers with newly identified measures, and assuring that conditions following harvest do not promote growth.

New Control Approach

Traditional control measures, such as commercial fungicides, have become less effective because botrytis spores have become resistant to them. As a result, botrytis problems have become more common. Clemson University researchers Jim Faust and Melissa Muñoz, supported by AFE, found that dipping flowers in calcium and other biological solutions following harvest reduces botrytis infection. In their research, flowers were grown and treated in Colombia and then shipped to Clemson University for botrytis assessment. This study, combined with other tests, show that the best control for botrytis is an integrated program of synthetic fungicides and biological products during crop production, with the flower dip following harvest.

Retailer To-Do List

- **Check the source of your flowers.** You can reduce botrytis problems by asking growers to use a program that effectively integrates biological control products and synthetic fungicides to botrytis. Check out AFE's website for written materials and videos on controlling botrytis.

- **Inspect all arriving flowers carefully.** Alert your supplier if your incoming flowers have botrytis symptoms. Flowers with botrytis will not recover.
- **Remove plastic sleeves and protective materials around flowers.** When flowers processed at warm temperatures are moved to a cooler, condensation forms on the interior surface of plastic wrappings and on petals. Prevent this moisture buildup! Condensation on the bud/flower and packaging is often enough for the botrytis spores to quickly develop.
- **Avoid spreading botrytis spores.** Spores can be spread in the air, on clippers and knives, clothes or on dirty benches and design tables. Maintaining clean surfaces, sterilizing tools and cleaning coolers (every one or two months) will help to reduce the spread of botrytis.
- **Check your cooler conditions.** Maintaining proper conditions in the cooler is important. Keep the cooler between 34 to 38 F with a relative humidity between 75 to 85 percent. Do not let the cooler humidity rise above 85 percent.

Terril A. Nell, Ph.D., AAF, is the research director for the American Floral Endowment.

WHY DO SOME FLOWERS HAVE BOTRYTIS, AND SOME DO NOT?

Like it or not, botrytis spores are always present and will grow if the air is above 85 percent humidity, or if petals are wet for eight hours or longer while temperatures are between 65 to 75 F (botrytis is not killed at lower storage temperatures but they do not grow as rapidly).

Some types of flowers are more sensitive to botrytis than others. If you always see botrytis on some varieties, consider using other varieties that are more resistant.



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