

# Hands On

TIPS, TRENDS AND TACTICS FOR THE SAVVY RETAILER

## First Hand Account

### SORORITIES + SISTERS = SALES



**GO GREEK**  
Designer Amber Moore wins sorority business with the right products, plan and attitude.

> Learn the **Alpha, Beta, Chis** of selling to sororities and you'll have a plentiful supply of return customers this fall and potentially all year. Take it from someone who's become quite a pro at marketing to the Greek girls (and their families) in her campus town — Amber Moore, a designer at Boulder Blooms in Boulder, Colo.

Moore is gearing up to decorate the nine sorority houses at the University of Colorado for "rush," Sept. 2-6, their formal recruitment period, a gig she took over when she joined the shop's team about five years ago and maintains through good rapport with the houses. Sorority sales, which also include orders to many of the 60 to 80 new members per house, "jump-start" an otherwise slow month, she said, garnering about 700 more orders.

"Since we carry sorority merchandise, we are able to create designs in containers with their colors, letters [and] mascots," Moore said. "We can also have add-ons like frames, jewelry, key chains [and] charms."

Boulder Blooms built the relationships over the last 16 years to keep winning sales, including bouquets to pledges from their new "sisters," and often from their parents and other family members, a service that differentiates the shop from others, said Moore who was a Kappa Alpha Theta at the University of California, Santa Barbara. "It has been fun when the girls come in to chat about that [connection]," she said.

It doesn't hurt that sororities all want to outshine each other. If the Tri-Deltas have beautiful arrangements at their events, the Thetas will want them too. That goes double for families who sometimes vie to honor their daughters, grand-

daughters and nieces on Initiation Day with the biggest bouquets, Moore said. "It can be a little competitive between the parents, which we have fun with."

To win customers from Alpha Chi Omega to Pi Beta Phi, follow Moore's winning formula:

- **Identify the go-to person.** Go straight to the decision maker within a sorority. She might be new member educator, rush chair or anyone on the executive committee. If you're not sure, contact your local university's Panhellenic council. When sisters pass on their positions, such as new member educator, they also hand down the shop's and Moore's names.
- **Create traditions.** Make it easy for parents to send flowers to new members on Initiation Day. The website for Art of the Flower, Boulder Blooms' second location, even has an information page for parents listing each sorority's colors, flowers and symbol. Track how many girls will receive flowers out of the pool of possible orders. If anyone is missed, ask your contact to remind families who haven't ordered yet. Boulder Blooms gives girls who are overlooked a free bud vase or other small item, Moore said. "We don't want anyone to be left out."
- **Meet and greet.** Visit the houses during their weekly meetings. "Every girl in the entire house is present that night so it's a great way to reach everyone all at once," Moore said.

One thing Moore is still trying to figure out: How to capture the fraternity market. An idea that has the most promise is starting a tradition of fraternity members giving flowers to women in their sister sorority, Moore said. 🌻

# Colorado Shop Boosts Fall Sales with Sorority Ties

By Mary Westbrook

Want to boost sales during the relative slowdown between the busy summer wedding season and Christmas? If you're located in a university town, you might want to start thinking Greek — soon. (As in, now.)



Greek rush season at the University of Colorado has proven to be a lucrative time for Boulder Blooms in Boulder. Over the past six years, the shop has steadily built relationships with all 10 of the school's sororities —

relationships that translate into hundreds of new customers, across demographics — every fall. (Sound familiar? We've written about them [before](#), but their outreach has only gotten more successful.)

Boulder Blooms has a relationship with all 10 sorority houses at the University of Colorado. The outreach provides for new customers and lots of orders in the relatively slow fall season.

"October and November can be slow for florists — you have Thanksgiving and you have Halloween, but they aren't busy floral times of year," said Tim Jordan of Boulder Blooms. "The revenue and business [from sororities] helps bridge the gap."

The shop works closely with the sororities for rush, "Big-Little Week" (when older girls give gifts to younger girls joining the sorority) and initiation. The sororites need flowers for décor and gifts, and each sorority also sends a letter to new members' parents, suggesting they call Boulder Blooms if they'd like to send congratulatory flowers to their daughters (hint, hint).

Because the shop stocks sorority-specific merchandise and understands the groups' calendars and logistical details (e.g. when and where to deliver), "we make it very easy for the parents," Jordan said. (Sororities have other events later in the years, including formals and events, but fall by far is the busiest time, Jordan said.)

For his part, Jordan sees the outreach as much more than a one-time effort to drum up orders in a slow season. "Many of the students will graduate and stay in the area, and many of them will end up in good jobs," he said, presumably getting married, having children and buying flowers. The inclusion of parents sweetens the deal even more, giving Jordan a chance to win over their business, too — and that can mean "decades of anniversary and birthday gifts."

Thinking of the local college down the road and opportunities for your business? Start laying that groundwork, Jordan said. Some of his suggestions for getting in with the sorority crowd:

**Make it an Inside Job:** Jordan hires a part-time worker to serve as a "sorority liaison." Usually, the employee is either a current student or recent grad. Her understanding of her own sorority, and the broader system, helps the shop better understand and serve this niche base.

**Show Your True Colors:** Boulder Blooms stocks sorority-specific merchandise — "In fact, we stock University of Boulder sorority-specific" merchandise, Jordan said. The shop, one of the few local brick-and-mortars to have such items, also devotes a page on their [website](#) to the goods. (Don't worry: If you don't have time or money to invest in those goods, you can still research sorority history, colors and traditions and work those ideas into designs.)

# STUDENT LIAISON HELPS COLORADO SHOP BUILD SORORITY BUSINESS



**INSIDE JOB** Boulder Blooms has a relationship with all 10 sorority houses at the University of Colorado. The outreach benefits from a “sorority liaison” on staff. Rebecca Holt, hired as the full-time office manager earlier this year, was originally a liaison.

➤ For one shop in Boulder, Colorado, sisterhood pays.

Over the past six years, Boulder Blooms has steadily built relationships with all 10 of the University of Colorado’s sororities. Those relationships translate into hundreds of new customers across demographics every fall.

One of the shop’s “secret weapons” to scoring the lucrative business during a relatively slow period is a sorority liaison. The liaison talks about the shop’s services to the different houses and helps staff members better understand the groups’ needs, along with key dates and events. One of those liaisons, Rebecca Holt, proved to be so good at her job that, today, she’s the office manager at Boulder Blooms.

“October and November can be slow for florists — you have Thanksgiving and you have Halloween, but they aren’t busy floral times of year,” said Tim Jordan. “The revenue and business [from sororities] helps bridge the gap.”

The shop works closely with the sororities throughout the year, but particularly in the fall for rush, “Big-Little Week”

(when older girls give gifts to younger girls joining the sorority) and initiation. The sororities need flowers for décor and gifts, and each sorority also sends a letter to new members’ parents, suggesting they call Boulder Blooms if they’d like to send congratulatory flowers to their daughters (hint, hint).

Boulder Blooms also stocks sorority-specific merchandise. “In fact, we stock University of Boulder sorority-specific” merchandise, Jordan said. In addition, the shop, one of the few local brick-and-mortars to have such items, devotes a page on its website to the goods. All of that adds up to a very easy ordering process for the parents and sorority members, which helps the shop shine.

“Many of the students will graduate and stay in the area, and many of them will end up in good jobs,” Jordan explained, presumably getting married, having children and buying flowers. The inclusion of parents sweetens the deal even more, giving Jordan a chance to win over their business, too — and that can mean “decades of anniversary and birthday gifts.” 🌸

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### FROM SCHOOL SPIRIT TO SCHOOL PROFITS



**HEAD OF THE CLASS** In the past, Betsy Hall of Hall's Flower Shop & Garden Center in Stone Mountain, Georgia, loaned plants to schools on a complimentary, first-come, first-serve basis. Today she charges a discounted rental fee and uses a formalized rental policy tailored to schools' year-round needs, which maximizes her profit.



#### GO DEEPER

Check out two more in-store displays from Winston Flowers, review Betsy Hall's rental contract and learn about how Hall's Flower Shop & Garden Center has leveraged its school connections to build a strong prom business at [safnow.org](http://safnow.org).

> As local schools go back into session this fall, many florists will face a common dilemma: how to handle the many requests for donations, product loans and support from area schools, without alienating community members or sacrificing profits.

In Stone Mountain, Georgia, Betsy Hall of Hall's Flower Shop & Garden Center has freed herself of that worry. Five years ago, Hall realized her shop was receiving far too many requests from area schools for loaner plants, often used in school ceremonies and programs.

"We hated saying no to schools," said Hall, who works regularly with 12 to 15 high schools and four to five elementary schools. "We tried to be generous with them, but with so many requests, it became difficult."

Difficult — and potentially harmful to the business. Without a formalized rental policy in place, school requests were handled in a scattershot manner. A school rep would request a specific type or number of plants; Hall and her team would hustle to oblige, then loan the plants for free to the school. If plants came back to the shop damaged (and therefore unsellable) Hall had no real recourse. Occasionally, Hall had to turn down people she wanted to help in favor of early birds.

"Schools that were good customers sometimes missed out if another school asked first for loaned plants needed for the same day," she explained.

To make her system fair and profitable, Hall developed a rental policy and a scheduling calendar. Now, instead of giving out plants on a complimentary basis, she offers schools a discounted rental rate (cost plus 15 percent). During the busy spring graduation season, "we're able to rent the same plants three weekends in a row and then sell the plants in-store at a special price," which helps maximize profits, she explained, adding that her rental policy covers details such as transportation, proper care, storage guidelines and standards for return quality. She can also include extra fees for additional services, including extensive set-ups. (Some of her local schools hold their most important events at the nearby Georgia Dome.)

Far from alienating the schools, the new system seems to have strengthened bonds and professionalized the shop's relationships, in part because Hall and her team are now proactive about calling administrators to set up rentals.

"We set up house accounts for them and work to build a relationship with [key contacts such as] the principal and bookkeeper," Hall said, adding that the goodwill pays off year-round, not just at graduation time.

"Schools are our largest vocation base for Administrative Professionals Week and Boss's Day," which falls on Oct. 16 this year, she said. "Our schools send flowers for the Teacher of the Year winners and retirement parties. Many times the teachers and faculty that order on behalf of the school they work for become good customers for their own personal floral purchases." 🌸