

floral management

THE FLORAL BUSINESS AUTHORITY

Inside: Time to raise prices? p. 14
A feast for foliage lovers, p. 20
Three bridal looks for 2017, p. 30

MARCH 2017 | VOLUME 34 | NUMBER 1

Make Their
Big Day
a Worthy
Payday



Five fixes to ensure you maximize profits on every wedding





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THE FLORAL BUSINESS AUTHORITY MARCH 2017 | VOLUME 34 | NUMBER 1



22

RAISE THE ROOF

Five ways to make their big day a worthy payday.

30

THE LOOKS COUPLES LOVE

Following months of research, a trend hunter shares his findings, revealing three dominant styles for 2017 weddings.

36

STAFFING FOR PRODUCTIVITY

Deciding how many design hours to schedule requires knowledge. Paul Goodman gives 'best practices' advice for getting it right.



20

2	VIEWPOINT	18	GROWTH
4	WHAT INSPIRES US	20	FRESH CHOICES
4	MORE ONLINE	38	INDUSTRY NEWS
6	AD INDEX	40	YOUR DIGITAL STRATEGY
8	MEMBER FORUM	42	BUSINESS OF DESIGN
10	SAF IN ACTION	44	NEW PRODUCTS
12	SNAPSHOT	46	CLASSIFIEDS
14	THE RIGHT PRICE	48	QUALITY
16	TALENT		

> COVER: JEN AND DAYTON PHOTOGRAPHY,
COURTESY OF TWISTED WILLOW DESIGN



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Viewpoint BY KAREN FOUNTAIN

FIGHTING THE GOOD (LONG) FIGHT

> For more than 20 years, The Vermont Teddy Bear Company has made floral industry members cringe with its marketing efforts that disparage flowers. So when I heard the announcement last month that the Society of American Florists had finally gotten through to the company, and that the CEO himself had promised that the company would now take a more positive approach, I jumped for joy. "Yes!" I thought. "We finally made a difference!"

Then, I got back to work. After all, it was days before Valentine's Day, and I'm a florist.

I'm also a believer in celebrating victories like The Vermont Teddy Bear Company's about-face. The floral industry is made up of family businesses — my own shop was founded in 1976 by my parents, Fern and Larry Denholm. Many of us have been working for the benefit of our businesses and the industry not for years, but for generations. When we work together and speak with a unified voice ("Please promote your products on their own merits; there's no need to disparage flowers."), we can make a difference. As a longtime SAF volunteer leader and active member, I've seen that happen with negative advertising and when it comes to voicing industry concerns to lawmakers in Washington, D.C.

I attended my first Congressional Action Days (CAD) in the late 1980s. Back then, I worked on flowers for the events, which included making bouquets that SAF members gave to lawmakers and staff on Capitol Hill, along with designs for our end-of-day reception. Then in 1991, my mom "dragged" me into the lobbying aspect of CAD — walking from one congressional office to the next, talking about how issues and legislation were helping or hurting that business.

By day's end, my feet hurt. My head hurt. I was also totally hooked.

I've since attended dozens of CADs. With mom, and later on my own, I've helped broach a breathtaking number of issues. I've asked Congress to streamline rules for independent contractors and to review credit card fees and banking practices. I've talked about the estate tax, and how it hurt our family. With help from growers and wholesalers (and support from SAF issues briefings), I've also helped

educate legislators and staff members about issues that affect the entire industry and supply chain: immigration reform, research funding, health care, and so much more.



Some of those issues probably sound familiar. Twenty-six years after my first day of lobbying, our country's immigration system remains in need of reform. Health care is perhaps more convoluted and, potentially, more contentious than ever. Research funding is at risk. Taxes are mind-numbing.

It's easy to look at things that haven't changed or to home in on the complex bureaucracy and partisanship in D.C. and think, "I'm a small-business owner. I have better things to do with my time." Focusing on the work that's left to do, though, can obscure all the good that's come out of CAD. Since the 1980s, CAD has helped ease 1099 reporting requirements, reform the Estate Tax law, and secure more money for floriculture research funding. Some of our wins have been major, the equivalents of The Vermont Teddy Bear Company ditching its negative ads. Others, more subtle. But, throughout the history of CAD, there have been victories, and those points of light should guide us forward.

This month, when dozens of SAF members take to Capitol Hill once again for CAD, we'll be doing it in an unusual environment. We have a new president. The House and Senate are held by Republicans, many of them sympathetic to small-business concerns. It's possible that on some of our key issues, we might just see progress.

For all the changes this year, though, one thing remains the same: If we don't tell our stories, our legislators won't know how their decisions impact our businesses.

Lawmakers work for us. We owe it to ourselves, our businesses, our industry and our future generations to fight the good fights, even when they're long — and maybe, especially when they're long. 🌻

Karen Fountain, AAF, is the owner of **Flowers 'n' Ferns** in Burke, Virginia. flowersnferns@gmail.com

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What Inspires Us

> “If everyone is saying ‘yes’ to your wedding proposals, then you probably aren’t charging enough.”

That’s what Tim Galea, AAF, of Norton’s Flowers & Gifts in Ypsilanti, Michigan, told his peers on the SAF Retailers Council during last September’s meeting. He had been closing 90 percent of his bridal proposals, but rather than feeling buoyed by that — “I’d like to think it was my dynamic selling technique,” he joked — Galea suspected he was making it a little too easy for brides to sign on the dotted line. And it was costing him money. He has since upped the shop’s labor and product markups on bouquets and also increased its delivery and set-up fee. While it’s too early to tell whether the price hike has cost him any brides, the shop’s average wedding ticket is up, and Galea feels better about what he’s charging because “it better represents the labor and commitment that goes into wedding orders.”

It’s a gutsy move in a climate where the number of floral designers vying to transform a bride’s Pinterest-enabled vision into a reality seems to

be growing exponentially. But as you’ll see in this month’s cover story, Galea might be onto something. In “Raise the Roof,” **p. 22**, senior contributing editor Mary Westbrook details top strategies employed by eight wedding florists whose bridal revenues are on the rise. The No. 1 strategy? You guessed it: Charge more. They’re also instituting minimums and turning down business — and, in a seemingly counterintuitive move, catering to budget and DIY brides.

These tactics seem to be right out of the playbook of monthly contributor and floral entrepreneur Brad Denham, of Arizona Family Florist. This month, Denham (**p. 18**) advocates growing your business by challenging processes: “Just because something has been done a certain way doesn’t mean you have to accept that.” Floral finance guru Paul Goodman’s strategy for scheduling designers (**p. 36**) might challenge your current approach, but he promises it will result in lower labor costs. Also this month, we celebrate a victory in one of SAF’s longest-running challenges: The Vermont Teddy Bear



Company has assured SAF it will no longer disparage flowers in its advertising (**p. 38**). SAF’s 20-year effort to encourage the company to promote its product on its own merits provides a lesson in how perseverance pays off. Retailer Karen Fountain, AAF, (**p. 2**) hopes the entire industry will keep that in mind as SAF advocates for the industry’s legislative priorities at this month’s Congressional Action Days and year-round. 🌿

Kate Penn
kpenn@safnow.org

More Online ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON WWW.SAFNOW.ORG



GETTING TO KNOW THE BRIDE

When a bride comes to the consultation with thousands of pins and images that are “all over the place,” what’s a florist to do? Trend forecaster and seasoned floral designer Michael Skaff (“The Look Couples Love,” **p. 30**) shares his strategy for turning a cacophony of images into a look that reflects the brides’ tastes. safnow.org/moreonline



PLAN AHEAD FOR SPRING, SUMMER SALES

Why not use the (ever-so-brief) lull between Valentine’s Day and the spring holidays to pre-plan some spring and summer promotions? Check out safnow.org/marketingkits, and you’ll see a full collection of beautiful, four-color artwork with slogans promoting whatever suits you: “Married to Perfection” for pushing bridal work, “Express Yourself” for targeting hipsters (and prom-goers), “Shop Locally, Live Colorfully” for reinforcing your value to the local community and much more.



WEDDING PROPOSALS MADE EASY

Catering to millennial brides requires a fast turnaround of proposals and lots of visuals. Several new floral software programs come to the rescue on this front — some created by florists themselves — to help create beautiful, detailed and fully branded proposals. Learn about some of the latest options and how florists are using them. safnow.org/moreonline



TUNE-UP FOR TEENS

In the next few weeks your shop will be overrun with teens ordering prom flowers (or at least you hope it will be). If prom work is more burden than boon, you and your team may be missing some of the key “do’s and don’ts” of selling prom work profitably. Fortunately, help is just a click away. safnow.org/moreonline

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- Party Like a Pro
- The Generations of Flowers Study
- How Much is Your Business Worth?
- Is Your Workplace Drug-Free?



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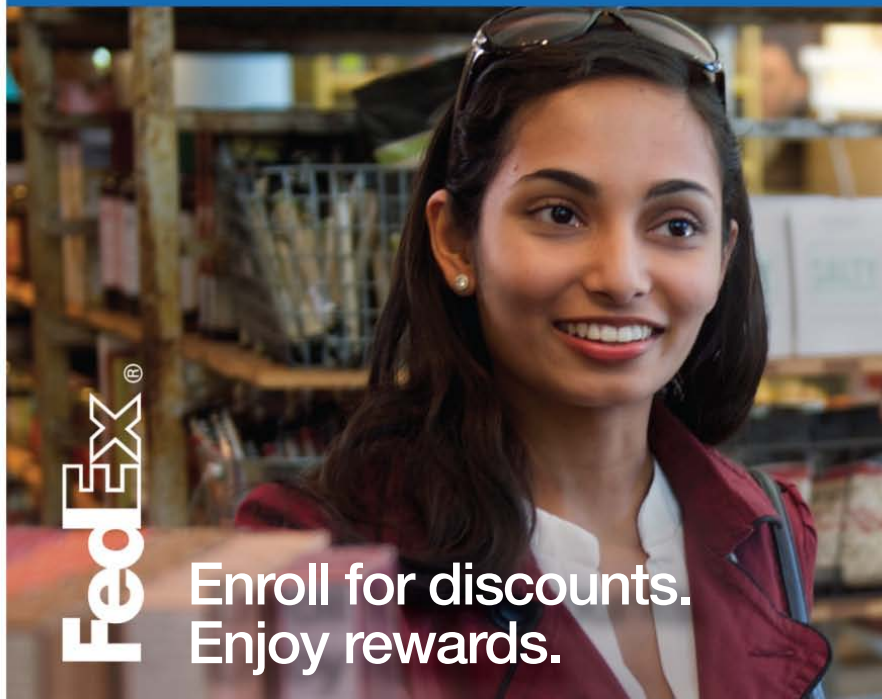
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**Valentine's Day De-Brief**

At press time the Society of American Florists was analyzing results from its consumer and SAF member 2017 Valentine's Day surveys (see *More Online*, p. 4, for a link to results). Here's what a handful of retailers said about the holiday.

> We prepared ahead and were well organized. We offered less than 10 upscale designs and sold everything!

Alman James, Elliott's Flower Shoppe, Morristown, New Jersey

> While sales were up over 2016 and 2012, I think that lack of income made people either skip flowers this year or respond to the deceptive discount deals from the direct shippers. It is hard for a florist who wants to be honest and fair to compete with those deceptive offers.

Kenneth Denton, Tillie's Flower Shop, Wichita, Kansas

> I think Trump's win, the stock market and the idea of lowered taxes has bolstered the average Joe's confidence. My core consumer is the middle class, upper class and blue collar white man. He feels hopeful now. It was a completely different attitude.

Bridgette Arnold, Posey Peddler, Jonesboro, Arkansas

> Flowers become the main Valentine gift when the date falls midweek, so it is especially important to offer products and packaging that is more distinct than whatever can be mass produced at the local grocery store.

LeeAnn VanWees, Mostly Roses, Woodstock, Ontario

> We raised our prices for product and deliveries and heard no complaints. Clients saw the difference in the quality and variety of flowers and designs and opened their wallets and kept our register ringing.

Carolyn Minutillo, Lavendar Hill Florals, Jeffersonville, Indiana

> We had a really good holiday. The flowers were all good quality, so we had no complaints of any kind. We had a strong walk-in business on Monday and Tuesday as well.

Cathy Herrold, Graci's Flowers & Gifts, Selingsgrove, Pennsylvania 🌸



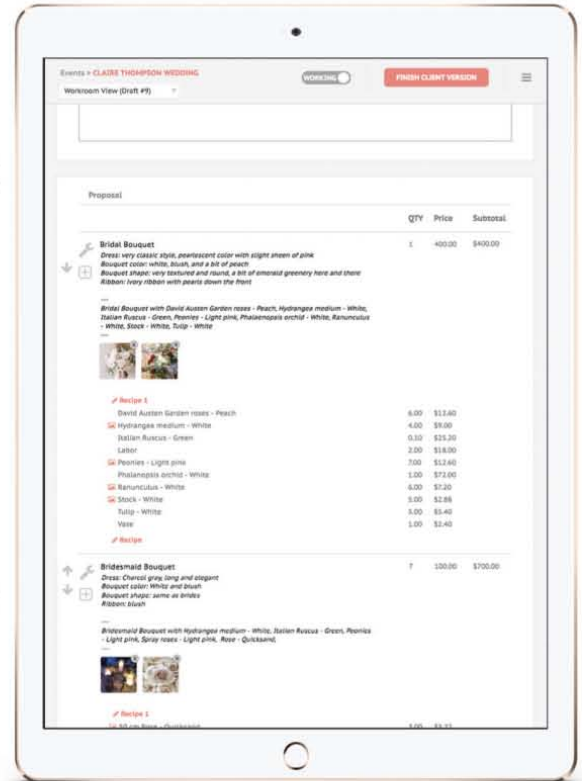
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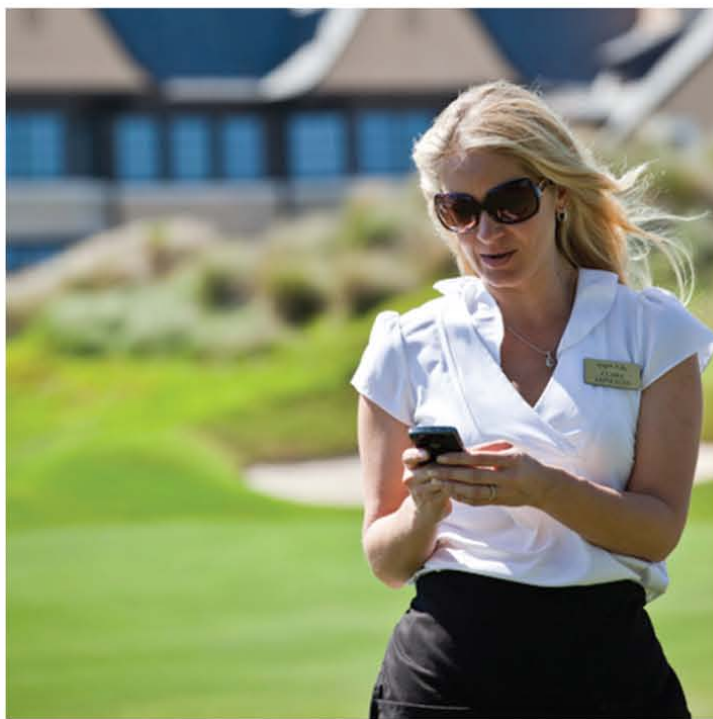
What makes [Stemcounter.com](https://www.stemcounter.com) the most florist-friendly?

- ✓ Create your entire proposal (WITH stem count) from a single screen on your desktop or iPad.
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Brides can **view, sign, and pay your proposal from one screen** on any device. (Or you could even send them an old-fashioned PDF!)



florist's view



As a wedding florist, we not only have multiple weddings on one weekend - we spend many hours on paperwork leading up the events. **After trying a handful of wedding florist softwares, we discovered Stemcounter ~ jackpot!** They have just made it so seamless and efficient for us: inputting flower wants and needs, customizing pricing and format, tallying flower stems, and even creating a flower master shopping list! Thank you Stemcounter!

-Clara Gonzales
 Tiger Lily Florist, Charleston, SC

SAF in Action

IMMIGRATION, TAX POLICY, RESEARCH TOP CONGRESSIONAL ACTION DAYS AGENDA

> The Society of American Florists 37th Annual Congressional Action Days (CAD), March 13-14, comes at a time when many high-profile issues are up for review by Congress and the Trump Administration, including immigration and tax policies.



BREAKING NEWS Follow #safcad on social media to see CAD updates, like this Instagram post last year by Resendiz Brothers Protea Growers LLC.

“The act of coming to Washington and sharing the story of your business is always meaningful, but this year, it’s more important than ever to have those personal, real-world examples of how policies and laws affect business owners,” said Shawn McBurney, SAF’s senior director of government relations. “Legislators and their staff are working right now on legislation that will have a direct effect on industry businesses.”

During their congressional meetings, CAD attendees will talk about three core issues: immigration, tax reform and funding for The Floriculture and Nursery Research Initiative.

“Our goal is to ensure that every CAD attendee — especially someone who is joining us for the first time — feels confident and supported when they go for their visits on Capitol Hill,” said McBurney, noting that SAF provides attendees with briefings on the issues, talking points and defined “asks.”

McBurney added, “Ultimately, however, the best tool we have is our collective stories — being able to tell a staff member or member of Congress, ‘Look, this is an issue that matters to my business and my family, and it’s one that affects me in these specific ways.’”

Want to stay on top of the action? Follow CAD on social media (#safcad) for up-to-the-minute reports.

PARLAY CONSUMER TRENDS INTO EVERYDAY DESIGNS AT SAF’S 1-DAY PROFIT BLAST



SATURDAY, MARCH 25, 2017

NEXT STOP SAF’s 1-Day Profit Blast in Philadelphia, underwritten by DVFlora, packs design, sales, technology and management education along with a Supplier Showcase into its eight-hour program.

> Laura Daluga, AIFD, will headline SAF’s 1-Day Profit Blast, underwritten by DVFlora, in Philadelphia on Saturday, March 25.

A fourth-generation florist, Daluga grew up in her parents’ flower shop and honed her design style for 10 years in the Chicago event market before opening the Department of Floristry in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She specializes in one-off special events and corporate designs, floral sculpture and fleur couture.

During “Exceeding the Design Demands of Today’s Gift Givers,” Daluga will showcase five key consumer movements: sustainable design, co-creation, “made for me,” fighting for a cause and subscription-based products. Sponsored by Smithers-Oasis, Daluga will show specific ways to design and promote sustainable floral arrangements, embrace the DYO (design your own) movement, interpret personal style in designs, attract millennials through cause-based design and more.

SAF’s 1-Day Profit Blast also includes presentations on technology, sales and money management:

- “ABCs of Social Media Advertising” by social media consultant Crystal Vilkaitis, of Crystal Media and one of Floral Management’s newest monthly contributors
- “Build the Perfect Sales Script” by Tim Huckabee, president of FloralStrategies LLC
- “Treasure Hunt: Finding Your Hidden Profits” by Derrick Myers, CPA, CFP, PFCI, president of Crockett Myers & Associates Inc.

Attendees also can network and peruse the Supplier Showcase. For details, visit safnow.org/1-day-profit-blast.



FOUR EXPERTS

Laura Daluga, AIFD; Derrick Myers, CPA, CFP, PFCI; Tim Huckabee; and Crystal Vilkaitis will offer practical, proven tips that retail florists can use right away.

SAF in Action

PUT A SPRING IN THEIR STEP WITH PETAL IT FORWARD VIDEO

> Looking for a fun way to show the power of flowers and engage your social media followers and customers? Share the poignant video showcasing the smile-generating impact of the Petal It Forward effort. Post this link — aboutflowers.com/youtube — on your social channels. Here are suggested messages to include:

- Put a spring in your step! Watch this: aboutflowers.com/youtube
- Watch what happens when you spring flowers on someone: aboutflowers.com/youtube
- The best reason to give flowers — just because Watch: aboutflowers.com/youtube

The Society of American Florists' two-minute YouTube video showing the emotional responses to the Petal It Forward effort in October has garnered more than 223,000 views, 200 likes and dozens of positive comments from consumers to date — and those numbers continue to rise.

"Now is a great time to share the Petal It Forward video on social media," said Jennifer Sparks, SAF's vice president of marketing. "It really makes you to want to give flowers, and that's the message we want to leave with consumers, especially with the spring holidays coming up," she added.



SPRING FORWARD Share the Petal It Forward video — aboutflowers.com/youtube — on social media.

SAF began paid promotions of the Petal It Forward video in November and accelerated the promotions to reach key YouTube audiences over the holidays. SAF will continue to promote the video throughout 2017. "Our goal is to keep floral gifts top of mind among consumers," Sparks said.

HURRY! FCA VEHICLE DISCOUNT OFFER EXPIRES SOON

> Shopping for a new car or work vehicle? If you buy a new vehicle before the end of March, you could save \$500.

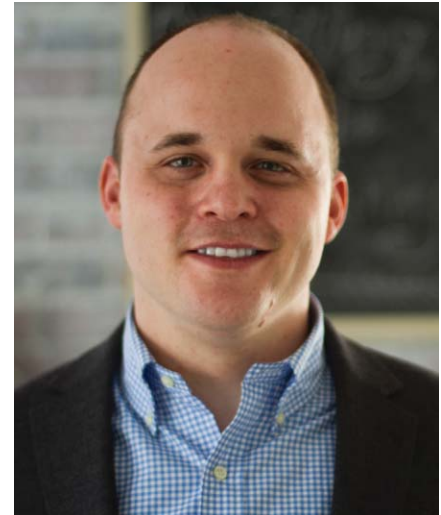
All Society of American Florists members and their family members in the same home qualify for a \$500 cash allowance on the purchase or lease of most Chrysler, Dodge, FIAT, Jeep and Ram models. The \$500 discount is off the final negotiated price of the vehicle and, in most cases, can be combined with other offers. In addition, SAF member business owners and their employees also may qualify for On The Job program allowances, including up to \$1,000 to add new equipment, a company logo or graphic to their work vehicle. Get details at safnow.org/fca.

SAF's Vehicle Discount program through FCA US LLC (formerly Chrysler Group LLC) ends March 31. For information about other discount programs and services available through SAF membership, visit safnow.org/business-service-discounts.



OFFER ENDS SOON SAF members have until March 31 to take advantage of the vehicle discount program through FCA US LLC (formerly Chrysler Group LLC).

WATCH "5 STEPS TO PROFITABLE WEDDINGS AND EVENTS" WEBBLAST



ON DEMAND SAF Members can watch "5 Steps to Profitable Weddings and Events," presented by Ryan O'Neil of Twisted Willow in St. Louis, and other WebBlasts at safnow.org/webinars.

> The "secret" to more profitable wedding work may be as simple as raising your prices or offering couples a service they want but never realized you offer. Those are two of the practical tips from "5 Steps to Profitable Weddings and Events," a recent Society of American Florists WebBlast presented by Ryan O'Neil of Twisted Willow in St. Louis.

With his wife, Rachel, O'Neil came up with a list of tips after several years of fine-tuning their approach to weddings — the shop's average event has gone from a budget of around \$1,500 to \$4,500.

"Every floral shop has their own goal, so not all of these [tips] will work for everyone," said O'Neil, also the founder of StemCounter.com, a wedding software tool that generates custom quotes. "Pick one or two. Analyze how you work."

SAF members can watch the 30-minute "5 Steps to Profitable Weddings and Events" and other WebBlast recordings, including "The Generations of Flowers Study," "Party Like a Pro" and "Mother's Day Pricing for Profits" at safnow.org/webinars.

snapshot



Wedding Consultation Spaces

FOCAL POINTS A portrait of Elizabeth of Austria, Queen of France, “presides” over every consultation at Jodi Duncan Designs in Norris City, Illinois. (Duncan inherited the painting from a great aunt and liked the style.) Otherwise, “we keep our consultation area pretty clean,” Duncan said, of the 12- by 8-foot space. “It’s the least-decorated room in my shop.” Duncan continued, “I find it’s hard for a bride to visualize her wedding if there’s too much clutter.”





BY MARY WESTBROOK **Snapshot**

SMALL SPACE, BIG LOVE

> When couples come in to talk weddings, make them feel comfortable — and maybe just a bit dreamy. That means ambiance (music, lighting, candles) but also resources (lookbooks or tablets/TVs with photos, sample props and linens).

The trick, say some of the florists featured in this month's cover story, is figuring out how to welcome potential clients into the space, make them feel quickly at home and then efficiently move them through the meeting. (Some brides, after all, could happily talk weddings all day. Organization is key.)

One thing an effective consultation area doesn't require? Lots of space. Check out how three florists maximize relatively small spaces for great effect. 🌿

ROOM FOR LOVE About 18 months ago, Tracy Park of Park Place Designs in Battle Creek, Michigan, started offering linens to brides as a complement to her floral services. Today, linens constitute about 25 percent of her wedding sales, and her consultation area — which takes up a corner of her 1,200-square-foot retail space — highlights the romantic props and rentals she offers. "I want it to be an experience for the bride," she said. "I turn on soft music, and I always have cold, bottled water."



REFRESHED Duncan personalizes snacks by adding logoed ribbon to bottled water and adds scented candles and fresh flowers as finishing touches to the room's look.

SOFT SELLS Cady Vance of Floral V Designs in Bellbrook, Ohio, created her approximately 200-square-foot consultation area with two words in mind: "warm" and "inviting." "I want brides to feel at ease — and not as if they're being sold to," she explained. One thing they will see: examples of add-on services the shop offers, including escort and place cards, displayed on a bulletin board, and customized reception seating charts.



The magazine of the Society of American Florists (SAF)

13

The Right Price BY MARK ANDERSON

THREE EVENT PRICING HABITS TO BREAK

➤ Gather a group of five florists and you'll likely get five different event pricing strategies. One florist might say she rigidly adheres to a cost-plus formula, and that she booked the last 12 events she quoted.

That sounds enviable until she also admits that, while her shop was indeed busy with all those events, she barely made any money from them.

Meanwhile, another shop owner might confess that while he knows cost-plus is important, he's more likely to price an event based on a "cold read" of a customer, or how much he wants to make from a customer who has the potential to be a nightmare. He doesn't book as many events, but the ones he gets are very profitable.

Both illustrate that profiting from event work requires more than just a formula. To hit the sweet spot, avoid these three bad habits:

The Habit: Focusing on 'Not Losing'

Imagine a tennis player who focused solely on defense: getting every shot back over the net. She'd be very busy, with lots of long rallies, but she wouldn't be putting the ball away and scoring points. She'd be doing a lot of work for small wins.

It's the same when you quote events. If your focus is on costs and not losing money while booking as much work as possible, you limit the size of your wins. If the price you quote includes a small profit, then a small profit is the best possible outcome you can hope for.

THE FIX: An accurate understanding of your costs is essential to avoiding losing money with complex event work. But you also have to set up yourself to score wins. Look for opportunities to charge more. If a customer has booked a premium venue on a premium date, then they're comfortable with paying premium prices. Quote accordingly.

Your cost-plus formula should ensure that you won't lose money on an event. Now look at it from a different perspective — the profit you stand to make. Is it enough? Are you willing to risk losing that small profit for a chance at a bigger win? If so, raise the price.



PREMIUM PRIMER Steal a page from the gasoline industry playbook on pricing events: Offer a premium option.

The Habit: Not Letting Them Pay More

We tend to get so focused on the customers we fear losing to a cheaper competitor (maybe even a drop shipper) that we forget there are others out there who are not just willing, but actively looking, to pay more.

Take gasoline. Each year, U.S. drivers spend an extra \$2 billion putting premium fuel into vehicles that don't benefit from it. Why? Because it says premium and it costs more. For most consumers, price is the single biggest indicator of quality, making the "ultra-premium" name and any additional, even dubious, claims seem credible.

THE FIX: A premium option on event work might mean that all consultations will be conducted with your American Institute of Floral Design-certified designer, or the one who was an SAF Sylvia Cup Finalist or has become a local celebrity designer. Perhaps the ultra-premium option guarantees that same designer will personally prepare all the work. It doesn't matter that your customers won't be familiar with AIFD or the Sylvia Cup — they don't understand octane numbers either! Combined with a higher price, however, they become meaningful.

In a lot of shops, the star designer is going to do all that anyway, so why charge for it? Because some customers will be willing to pay extra to be assured of that level of service.

Another option is to offer local/sustainable/recycled/fair-trade/pesticide-free options (for flowers and containers) where possible. These terms are code for

"I'm happy to pay more," so be sure to charge higher margins on these options.

The Habit: Confusing Busy with Profitable

I once worked with a technology freelancer who was new to the game, having just left a traditional job. He was inexpensive and great at what he did. Clients beat a path to his door, but within months, he confessed to wanting to go back to a regular job. He had more work than he could handle, and he was forced to turn still more away.

At that point, I had to make an awkward confession: I would send him just as much work at double his hourly rate. Other clients might not, however. Somewhere there's a price that would self-regulate the amount of work he received. Why turn down work when you can raise prices and let market forces do it for you?

THE FIX: The goal is not to book the most events but to make the most money. If you price all your event work using the same formula, then closing every single sale may be a bad sign — one that indicates you are pricing too low. If you find that you have already booked to capacity long in advance and are turning down work, it's even worse. Try raising your prices to control demand so you don't have to turn down work. 🌱

Mark Anderson is founder and president of FloristWare. When he's not developing and servicing POS software, he's pursuing his other passion, pricing strategy, as a contributor to Business.com as well as through programming at SAF and other industry events. mark@floristware.com

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Talent BY MARY WESTBROOK



EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

ATHENA VALLE

Production Manager and Floral Designer
Botanica International Design and Décor Studio
Tampa, Florida

Why do good employees leave?

Fifty-one percent of U.S. employees say they are actively looking for a new job or watching for openings. The relatively strong economy may be the reason: In 2012, 19 percent of Americans said it was a good time to find a quality job. In 2016, 42 percent of Americans said the same. The top reasons employees give for moving on:

- career growth opportunities
- pay and benefits
- manager or management
- company culture
- job fit

Gallup's 2017 State of the American Workplace report

> Working at Botanica International Design and Décor Studio would seem from the outside to be an exercise in glamour: The average decor budget for its customers is about \$12,000, and the business has its own super lux brand in Ian Prosser Productions, where the average budget is \$35,000. The Botanica team has worked with more than its share of celebrities and perhaps that's why it's so important that, in the back of the house, the business can depend on Athena Valle, a cool-headed, no-nonsense pro who isn't likely to get star-struck or intimidated — and who really, really loves a good checklist.

Why I Said Yes.

"I joined Botanica in March 2008, kind of as a freelance person. I did whatever needed to be done. I'd worked in the floral industry before, but I'd been out of it for a while when my husband and I relocated to Tampa. I loved the people right away,

but when I first came aboard, we'd go out on a Saturday for a big set-up and realize we'd forgotten something and have to go all the way back to get it. This happened a few times before I said, 'OK. We need a better system.' No one asked me to fix the problem. I took it on myself."

How I Operate.

"There's the front of the house, where they meet with the brides, and the back of the house, where we handle logistics. Honestly, I prefer the back of the house. I may meet brides on the day-of, if I'm bringing flowers, but talking to them is not my forte. I compile all of the information for each wedding into a 'Bible' and create the hard goods lists. When our team starts pulling hard goods together, I'm there, overseeing things. We tag each wedding, and I have it down to a science: I even want the tags facing a specific way. I double, triple check everything. The day of the wedding, all

we have to do is load the flowers. During set up, we use another checklist to make sure every hard good and floral design is accounted for. I don't leave any room for errors. I run a tight, strict ship."

Most Challenging Part.

"Product comes in wrong, or it's held up at customs — things happen. It's important when something goes wrong to have a Plan B and to put that into action fast. With weddings and events, you're working on what could be the biggest day of a person's life. That can be stressful. I take the work personally. I act like the company's mine."

Why I Stay.

"At a recent wedding set-up, I watched one of our new employees take it all in — this wedding really had that 'wow factor.' I do this week in, week out, but in that moment, I got to see things through his eyes. It was absolutely beautiful." 🌸

Help 'Em Shine

It's not an accident that employees such as Athena Valle thrive in a job that suits their talents. According to Gallup's 2017 State of the American Workplace report, 60 percent of employees say the ability to do what they

do best in a role is "very important" to them.

"Employees (across gender and age categories) do their best in roles that enable them to integrate their talent (the natural capacity for excellence), skills (what they can do) and

knowledge (what they know). Essentially, 'do what I do best' comes down to matching the right person with the right role and the right culture," the report notes.

How can companies make sure that happens?

Communicate. When you

hire someone new, stress that you value individual strengths. Encourage new hires to learn about all facets of the business and give them opportunities to learn more about other departments and areas.

Educate. Give current employees the chance

to improve their skills or learn new ones.

Review. Talk regularly to employees about their short- and long-term goals. Find ways to help motivated go-getters find new opportunities within your business.

CUSTOMER
SERVICE
TRAINING

BIGGER
WEDDING
SALES

STAFF
MANAGEMENT

INCENTIVE
PLANS
FOR STAFF

TRAINING
NEW
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Growth

 BY BRAD DENHAM

TURN YOUR IDEA INTO A PLAN

➤ Starting in 2010, my wife, Cheryl, and I made a series of decisions that set our business on a path to far greater profitability. We consolidated locations, created a wedding brand and opened a wholesale market. In hindsight, each of these moves was the right decision for our business — but that doesn't mean any of them were easy calls in the moment (or that we didn't make plenty of mistakes along the way).

Finding a new revenue stream for your company, or a way to even out the peaks and valleys between major floral holidays, can create tremendous rewards for your business. At the same time, making a change almost always involves taking a risk. The most successful entrepreneurs and business owners understand that balance, and they work hard to minimize risk and maximize the potential reward.

My experience tells me that doing that is easier than you might expect, with some thoughtful planning.

What's In Your Toolbelt?

In our journey to build a more diverse business model while keeping costs low, we needed to leverage the synergies we already had at our fingertips.

First, we took stock of our resources, particularly underutilized assets. In our case, for instance, we had a reliable source of qualified seasonal staff, but many of them wanted to be employed year-round. Rather than losing these employees and all of their skills and experience with our business, we wanted to create new opportunities for them. In addition, because of our high volume of wire service orders, we had many design supplies and containers that sat waiting for the next wire order. Instead of letting those gather dust, we wanted to monetize that existing inventory and increase inventory turns so that we were not dependent on the next wire order to move those containers.

Your own list of tools and resources may surprise you. As business owners tied to the daily grind, we sometimes forget to take stock of underutilized "tools," which may include staff, contacts, customer data, retail stores, website design-

ers, industry associations, marketing resources and, most importantly, your own skills and talents. As Tim Ferriss, the entrepreneur and New York Times bestselling author notes, "Your network is your net worth."

One tool you should never underestimate: the power of our product. Giving flowers has great power when it comes to bartering or persuading others to help you accomplish your goal.

Tied to the daily grind, we sometimes forget to take stock of underutilized "tools."

What about funding? Utilizing your existing profits to fund a new business idea will help keep you from overleveraging debt, which is how we funded our Lux Wedding Florist business. Generally speaking, you don't want to launch into a new opportunity unless your current one is working — unless you intend to replace the existing, unprofitable model, or if it brings new synergies and economy of scale to help your existing business become more profitable. This was the case with our addition and expansion of the Arizona Flower Market. We already were buying flowers and design supplies for our everyday and wedding businesses. Why not monetize the inventory by selling to DIY brides?

Take Action

Once you have an idea and a good handle on your resources, it's time to move forward. Unfortunately, at this point, many business owners get caught up in a

cycle of self-doubt. Don't let those kinds of feelings stand in your way. Instead, embrace these directives:

Communicate openly and honestly.

People trust leaders who are proactive and honest. Don't ever leave your staff or your partners wondering what you mean.

Be optimistic. Call me Mr. Brightside, but if you dwell on the negatives (i.e., "What if this fails?"), you may miss additional opportunities.

Be enthusiastic. Enthusiasm is contagious and a great way to get others on board. "Leggo" your ego. Remember, your idea may not always be the best. Keep an open mind and embrace the best ideas.

Collaborate. Plain and simple: to be successful, you have to work with others.

Accept constructive criticism.

Constructive criticism is just that — constructive. Accepting it makes you better, and if you use it to make improvements, you will go far.

Challenge processes. People think they shouldn't challenge something, especially if it's been somewhat effective in the past (e.g., a heavy reliance on low-value wire orders or writing off DIY brides). Just because something has been done a certain way doesn't mean you have to accept that.

Stay hungry. This may sound cliché, but staying hungry for knowledge, feedback and opportunity is essential for success and helps keep you relevant.

Work hard. This single skill will take you far in life. You simply can't teach someone how to be a hard worker. 🍌



Brad Denham is a founding partner of Arizona Family Florist, the parent company of Arizona Florist, Arizona Flower Market and

LUX Wedding Florist and winner of Floral Management's 2012 Marketer of the Year Award. He oversees the strategic business development, including branding, web development and e-commerce strategy, of all of the brands. Arizona Republic and BizAZ Magazine have named Denham one of Arizona's top entrepreneurs. brad@azfamilyflorist.com

The Bride refuses to pay!



What should YOU do?

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

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

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

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

Through the partnership, SAF members can contact attorney Paula A. Calimafde (Kal-i-MAF-da) for a free 15-minute legal consultation at 301-951-9325. Be sure to mention your SAF membership.

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SAF

SOCIETY of
AMERICAN
FLORISTS

Your Growth is Our Business

Fresh Choices TREND-SETTING TIPS FOR BUYING FRESH CUT FLOWERS AND GREENS

GOING BOTANICAL

➤ Back in 2015, Karen Greenoe flew from North Carolina to California to style a bridal photo shoot for a Los Angeles-based PR agency. Her directions: Bottle up the easy, breezy Key West ambiance Ernest Hemingway knew and loved.

Greenoe responded by arranging monstera and ti leaves on top of tall, cylindrical vases to create miniature “palm trees.” Since the photos hit the blog “Style Me Pretty” in December 2016, she has fielded countless questions about the distinct centerpieces. “It’s one of our most pinned images,” said the owner of Lily Greenthumb’s Wedding and Event Design in Charlotte. “I get messages from brides and planners all over the country asking how I did this.”

Across the nation, brides are clamoring for a verdant look. “All these years, we’ve heard ‘no greenery!’ because Martha Stewart showed these tight bouquets of roses and tulips, and that’s what

every girl wanted,” said Jodi Duncan, AIFD. “Now the pendulum has swung the other way, as customers recognize the amazing texture and interest foliage provides.”

The Norris City, Illinois, designer loves the creative freedom this trend allows, but she cautions that it requires careful descriptions. “In consumers’ vernacular, ‘greenery’ sounds like a cheap option, perhaps because they think of it as filler,” Duncan said. “But the reality is that these specialty grasses, leaves and pods can be pretty pricy.” When communicating with brides and planners, she describes foliage-heavy designs as “botanical” pieces. “It sounds upscale and conveys to the wedding market that these items are still expensive,” she said.

Here are some fantastic foliage brides will want to have and hold. 🌿

Katie Hendrick khendrick@safnow.org



THEO MILO PHOTOGRAPHY

TROPICAL CENTERPIECES

Lily Greenthumb’s Wedding and Event Design



AUSTRALIAN UMBRELLA FERN

Fern Trust



BLUE CALATHEA

Fern Trust



CHILEAN PON PON MASK

Fern Trust



COONTIE

Fern Trust



FOXTAIL

Fern Trust



GREEN HUCK

Fern Trust



KOALA FERN

Fern Trust



‘HONEY BRACELET’ MELALEUCA

Ocean View Flowers

Fresh Choices



KUNZEA
Ocean View Flowers



'PAPERBARK' MELALEUCA
Ocean View Flowers



'TEARDROP' MELALEUCA
Ocean View Flowers



AUSTRALIAN PINE
Resendiz Brothers



'HOOKERIANA' GREVILLEA
Resendiz Brothers



'IVANHOE' GREVILLEA
Resendiz Brothers



'MAUI SUNSET' LEUCADENDRON
Resendiz Brothers



'PHYLLA' LEUCADENDRON
Resendiz Brothers



'RED HOOKS' GREVILLEA
Resendiz Brothers



'RED JELLY' BEREZILIA
Resendiz Brothers



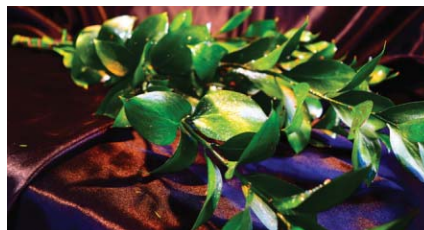
'TERETIFOLIUM' LEUCADENDRON
Resendiz Brothers



BLACK SHIMMER MONSTERA
William F. Puckett Inc.



UMBRELLA PALM
William F. Puckett Inc.



ISRAELI RUSCUS WITH SHIMMER
William F. Puckett Inc.



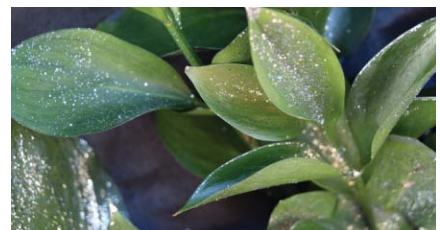
PALM FAN
William F. Puckett Inc.



PURPLE FOXTAIL
William F. Puckett Inc.



SAGO PALM
William F. Puckett Inc.



SHIMMER ISRAELI RUSCUS
William F. Puckett Inc.



S E

Five ways to maximize the revenue and profit potential of wedding business

BY MARY WESTBROOK

➤ Ah, weddings. The romance. The personal touches. The elegance. The poignant moment when two lives become one.

Cue the screeching record sound.

Who are we kidding? For florists, weddings are less about glamour and more about hard work, sweat and, occasionally, tears.

Despite the fact that The Knot estimates the average U.S. couple will spend upward of \$32,000 on their wedding (\$2,300 on flowers and décor), for some florists, this grueling segment is less profitable than it could be or should be. Costs can spiral quickly, and couples who have immersed themselves in Pinterest and Instagram posts often come to the table with wildly out-of-whack expectations and tiny budgets. Lucky you.

Here's the good news: There's a better way, say florists who have taken charge of their wedding businesses, redirecting energy to higher-paying gigs — and, in some cases, finding a way to make smaller affairs far more profitable.

This month, we turn our attention to five strategies, some of them unorthodox, that can help you grow your wedding business and keep your sanity.

O O F

> RAISE THE ROOF



PHOTO BY STEPHANIE SUSIE, COURTESY OF JODI DUNCAN DESIGNS

RACHAEL AND RYAN O'NEIL
Twisted Willow Design
StemCounter.com
St. Louis

Weddings in 2016: **42**
Average: **\$4,500**
Minimum: **\$3,000**

Wow Factor: By introducing a minimum, changing their pricing strategy and raising prices, the O'Neils tripled their average wedding sale, while cutting out less profitable affairs.

1 CHARGE MORE

One straightforward way to get brides and grooms to spend more on wedding flowers? Raise your prices.

We know what you're thinking: "Thanks, Captain Obvious." Before you dismiss the idea with a barrage of "reasons that won't work for me," consider the advice Floral Management contributor Mark Anderson offers this month on p. 14. Namely, if your special events and wedding calendar is booked, it's probably time to raise your rates.

That's essentially what happened at Twisted Willow Design in St. Louis. Several years ago, Rachael O'Neil and her husband, Ryan, were doing about 55 weddings a year, with an average budget of about \$1,500. Couples loved the work, and the shop was busy — but the O'Neils were run-down and ready to start their family. Together, they came up with a multistep plan to nudge budgets higher while taking on fewer clients.

Their first step, in 2015, was to tweak their markup formula, from an old system based only on hourly labor to a new system that included a standard labor markup (cost plus 20 percent). That change increased estimates by an average of 12 to 15 percent. (Learn how to account for labor on p. 25.)

As the shop's prices slowly moved up, the O'Neils, creators of the wedding florist software StemCounter, also instituted a minimum (\$3,000) in 2016 and increased the required deposit amount, from \$500 to \$1,000. The changes required some subtle customer service accommodations and thoughtful phrasing, Ryan said.

"We started saying, 'We do full-service florals for weddings and events that have a ceremony and reception,'" he explained. "Typically, when customers are engaging us for both ceremonies and receptions, they'll end up at that \$3,000 minimum."

And if a couple's budget comes in below that level, the O'Neils have a standard, gracious reply: "We do have a minimum of \$3,000, but the great news is you can have a beautiful wedding for less than that and we know some florists who will be perfect for your event." Then, they refer them to another shop in town that caters to smaller affairs.

The O'Neils and Heather Waits of Bloomtastic in Columbus, Ohio, say that instituting a minimum — and taking on fewer, but higher-end weddings — has made wedding work more profitable. Waits and her team instituted a \$1,000 minimum in January 2016, after analyzing the cost of those smaller affairs.

"We calculated the cost of the whole process — including generating the lead, the consultation, follow-ups, design time and after-wedding maintenance — and discovered that under-\$1,000 weddings are not profitable for us," Waits said. "In 2015, we had 63 weddings under \$1,000 that accounted for a hair over \$13,000 total revenue. It was completely not worth it from a business standpoint."

The minimum helped drive up Waits' average wedding by \$700, from \$1,200 in 2015 to \$1,900 today. (The shop did 180 weddings in 2015, 183 last year and is on track for 180 this year.)

BUT WHAT ABOUT BLOWBACK?

Won't customers — especially clients who have plenty of other options in town — balk at the idea of minimum requirements or higher prices? ("That's not what my sister paid three years ago!")

Not if you do some legwork upfront, say florists who have successfully made these changes.

TRACY PARK
Park Place Design
Battle Creek, Michigan

Weddings in 2016: **35**
Average: **\$5,600**
Minimum: **\$3,500**

Wow Factor: After Park instituted a minimum in 2012, she helped raise her average budget from \$1,000 to \$2,500 to \$5,600. Today, linen rentals constitute 25 percent of wedding sales.



For the O'Neils, that means getting — and giving — lots of information upfront.

In 2015, the couple introduced a “budget calculator” on their site. The simple form asks prospective brides about key details of their weddings and helps weed out couples who won't meet the \$3,000 threshold. (That's when the shop follows up with its referral email.)

“The goal is think ahead about potential situations and address the mismatch then,” Ryan said. In other words, “before we meet with brides.”

Tracy Park of Park Place Designs in Battle Creek, Michigan, also has brides complete a form early, and she lists her minimum, \$3,500, prominently on her website under a tab titled Investment.

Like the O'Neils, she's found that strategic phrasing helps. In that same Investment section of her site, Park plays up the shop's credentials (“you are not just buying flowers ... you are hiring a team of designers with the combined knowledge of 50 years”) and explains that her minimum may include flowers, linens, props and event styling for “couture” affairs.

Park initially worried that her minimum, instituted in 2012, might scare off brides. Instead, it's helped her realize how unprofitable some of the smaller-scale events had become.

Park's average event is \$5,600, compared to \$1,000 to \$2,500 before she had a minimum. She also does fewer weddings: 35 in 2016 compared to 120 before that minimum.

“Before, I was wasting a ton of time on brides who only have \$600 or \$800 to spend on flowers,” she said. “For me, the lower-end brides seem to be the most demanding.”

Jodi Duncan, AIFD, of Jodi Duncan Designs in Norris City, Illinois, agrees with that sentiment.

“A bride's budget doesn't tell you much about the level of service she's going to expect or feel entitled to,” Duncan said, who has a minimum of \$6,000 for flowers, linens and prop rentals. “You can have a \$3,000 wedding with 300 emails and a higher-end wedding”— with a floral and décor budget of \$20,000-plus — “with 12 emails.”

The real trick to a happy bride and a profitable wedding is to make sure a couple's expectations align with their budget, Duncan said, which is why she requires potential clients to fill out a form within 24 hours and includes a gentle but direct disclaimer on her website: “We won't be your least expensive option. If price is your deciding factor, we won't be a good fit.”

2 OPTIMIZE WEDDINGS

Not ready to write off smaller clients and DIY brides but worried those customers will eat up your time — or potentially hurt your high-end reputation? You could try launching a second, no-frills brand.

That's what Sarah Campbell did in 2014 when she launched Pops of Plum, a sister site to her lux Intrigue Designs & Décor in Annapolis, Maryland.

After a flurry of positive press and media appearances between 2010 and 2014, Campbell started receiving inquiries from brides with budgets well below Intrigue's range (\$10,000 and up). Her dilemma: She hated turning away those brides, but she knew she couldn't provide the same service level to an \$800 or \$1,000 bride.

Inspired by Amazon — point, click and buy — Campbell worked with an outside web designer to create Pops of Plum, a website that shows a tightly edited list of wedding floral designs, created in the Intrigue studios by Intrigue designers but with far less hand-holding and a more limited range of flowers, based on stems Campbell already had on hand. On Pops of Plum, brides select the designs, and Campbell's team delivers the designs to the venue. They can make minor adjustments to the designs, but there are no consultations and no setups.

“Now, when a customer [with a lower budget] contacts us, we can say, ‘Oh, we have this great sister company,’ instead of turning them away completely,” she said, adding that since its launch hundreds of brides have ordered through the site, spending an average of \$2,000, far above Campbell's predicted range of \$800 to \$1,000.

Waits is experimenting with a similar approach through her Columbus Flower Company, which launched in January 2017.

“The website allows brides to shop online, choose a style of bouquet, pick the boutonnieres and choose a center-



ZOË PROSSER GALLINA
Botanica International Design and
Décor Studio, Tampa, Florida

Weddings in 2016: **103**

Average: **\$12,000**
(\$35,000 for the business's lan
Prosser Productions division)

Minimum: **\$4,500**

Wow Factor: To save time and provide better service, Gallina uses a wedding software program to quickly formulate estimates for brides who are unlikely to be a good match for the business.



GO DEEPER

Are you including taxes and other employment-related costs in your labor fee on weddings? If not, you're undercharging and eating into your profits, said Floral Management contributor Paul Goodman, CPA, PFCI.

“You have to add taxes, FICA, Medicaid, Worker's Comp, etc., to the hourly wage” to cover the real cost of servicing the bridal customer, he said, which adds about 15 percent to the hourly pay. If you offer paid vacation and holidays, add .33 percent for each paid day off.

Goodman suggests a “normal markup” of **double the hourly rate after you've added 15 percent.**

“So, for a \$15 per hour designer, I would add 15 percent (\$2.25) to get \$17.25 per hour (without other benefits) and charge the customer \$34.50 per hour for wedding set-up and other services.”

Get more tips on maximizing wedding profits with smart buying and labor cost management, at safnow.org/moreonline.

> RAISE THE ROOF



JODI DUNCAN, AIFD
Jodi Duncan Designs
Norris City, Illinois

Weddings in 2016: **20**

Average: **\$15,500**

Minimum: **\$6,000**

(includes flowers, linens and prop rentals)

Wow Factor: Duncan takes a straightforward approach with brides who price shop, telling them that if price is their No. 1 issue, she might not be a good fit.



COURTESY OF
HOTHOUSE
DESIGN STUDIO
& PROPHOUSE



MANDY MAJERIK, AIFD, PFCI
Hothouse Design
Studio & PropHouse,
Birmingham, Alabama

Weddings in 2016: **250**

HotHouse average: **\$10,000**

PropHouse average: **\$1,500**

Minimum: **\$3,500**

(less for brides who don't want delivery and set-up services)

Wow Factor: Four years after launching a separate prop division, Majerik can now attribute 35 percent of sales to rentals — and the business is still growing.

**GO DEEPER****Automated Proposals and Planning**

Getting a proposal to the bride in a timely and professional manner can make or break whether you get the business. Several new software solutions have come onto the market during the last few years to streamline this process. See a list of top programs and standout features at safnow.org/moreonline.

piece, place the order, give us the wedding details and voilà!" she said. "We design and deliver on the wedding day."

Waits has been promoting the new sister company as "better than DIY" and says she's targeting couples with budgets of less than \$1,000 — the group she determined wasn't profitable for full-service work.

"The only customization aspect [with Columbus Flower Company] is that they choose their colors and style and give us quantities, thus making the process streamlined and uber simple for the bride," she said. "The prices are also slightly lower than what we would charge if we quoted the piece as a custom wedding via a consultation."

BUT WHAT ABOUT CANNIBALIZING MY OWN SALES? If you offer a lower price point, won't some brides who could spend more gravitate to that option, costing you a higher sale?

Not necessarily, according to Campbell, who jokes that, through Pops of Plum, she's created her own knockoff.

Far from hurting her flagship brand, the new site has helped her reach a wider audience, including customers who simply don't want the full-service treatment she traditionally offered.

"I definitely designed it with the millennial bride in mind," she said. "And, as it turns out, some of them are pretty happy to have less service."

3 RETHINK CONSULTATIONS

Should you spend time on a bride you know you don't want?

For Zoë Prosser Gallina of Botanica International Design and Décor Studio in Tampa, Florida, the answer is yes — if it means saving time in the long run.

About a year ago, Gallina started experimenting with a new approach to pricing, particularly for potential clients whose budgets are likely to fall short. Instead of waiting until after the consultation to work up an estimate, Gallina and her team will do a rough outline ahead of time — a process that usually takes 15 to 20 minutes. (For estimates, Gallina Details Flowers. See Go Deeper, this page, for a review of Details and other wedding planning software programs.)

"If we know there is a strong chance that, with the client's guest count, basic needs and budget, we will indeed surpass their budget, we quickly put together an estimate," she said, noting that an in-house consultation takes an hour, along with two to three hours of prep time for a comprehensive proposal.

The pre-consultation estimate often deters brides who are a bad fit for Botanica, but it's also an opportunity to educate brides who have the cash but simply don't appreciate how much wedding details run.

"Sometimes clients don't know their budget and just throw a number out," said Gallina, whose average wedding runs around \$12,000 for flowers and décor. (Botanica also has a higher-end market run by Gallina's father, Ian Prosser, AAF, AIFD, NDSF, PFCI, where average tickets are closer to \$35,000.)

“We like to be respectful of everyone’s budget, regardless of how large or small, but want to make sure we don’t go through the process of a meeting and then leaving a bride disappointed or [feeling like her] time is wasted.”

In Columbus, Waits also has been re-thinking her consultation approach in recent years. That’s meant paring back services brides weren’t taking advantage of while spending time and money on services that ultimately lead to happier couples.

From 2013 to 2015, for example, Waits offered her brides three consultations: a mandatory first and final consultation, along with an optional meeting halfway through the planning process. That system was a hit the first year, with many brides expressing appreciation for that extra face time. By 2015, however, the three-meeting approach was weighing down the business: 30-minute consultations were stretching to 60 or even 90 minutes, and brides who forgot to schedule that optional second meeting felt cheated if they didn’t get all three (even if they were ultimately satisfied with the wedding).

So, in 2016, Waits ditched that second consultation. “We saved money on labor, and it made the brides happier,” she said.

One service the shop still offers: mock centerpieces, which brides can review at that final consultation. Doing so adds time and costs (about \$50 the shop’s 15 percent service charge).

Offering mock-ups in 2013, no one else in Columbus offered it,” Waits said. “The benefits are that the bride sees her flowers ahead of time, knows she will love them, and if she doesn’t, we play with them on the spot with her there until we get it right.”

BUT WHAT ABOUT PRICE SHOPPERS? Grrr. You go through all the work of a consultation, prepare a proposal and then — wait and wait as a bride shops around or tries to haggle.

Duncan said she doesn’t play those games anymore.

Instead of sending out individual pricing, she prices the wedding party, ceremony and reception as three items for potential clients, with a price for each bundle. Then, she adds 20 to 30 percent for labor depending on logistics.

“Once I have a retainer and signed contract, I divulge specific pricing,” she explained. “Otherwise, it’s bundled pricing. This approach eliminates price shoppers.”

In Bellbrook, Ohio, Cady Vance of Floral V Designs added in a second, shorter consultation period after she realized many customers were using her estimates as a starting point for conversations with other florists.

During the brides’ initial consultation period, Vance shifted her approach: “I’ll ask them directly, ‘So, how many other florists are you meeting with?’ From there, I’ll take all of their information and ask them to come back for a shorter meeting after they’ve met with everyone else. That’s when I present pricing. Now, they don’t book florist No. 2 or 3 because they’re still waiting on my final proposal.”

Vance’s booking rate has jumped from 50 percent to about 90 percent.

4 TURN TO RENTALS

When Mandy Majerik, AIFD, PFCI, of HotHouse Design Studio in Birmingham, Alabama, couldn’t find

SARAH CAMPBELL
Intrigue Design & Décor,
Pops of Plum
Annapolis, Maryland



Intrigue weddings in 2016: **49**
Pops of Plum transactions in 2016: **67**
Intrigue average: **\$10,000 to \$30,000**
Pop of Plums average: **\$2,000**
Minimum: None, although the Intrigue web site tells brides to expect to spend at least **\$6,000** on flowers and décor.

Wow Factor: Determined to capture brides below her ultra lux Intrigue brands, Campbell created an easy site tailored for millennials who want beautiful wedding flowers but less service.



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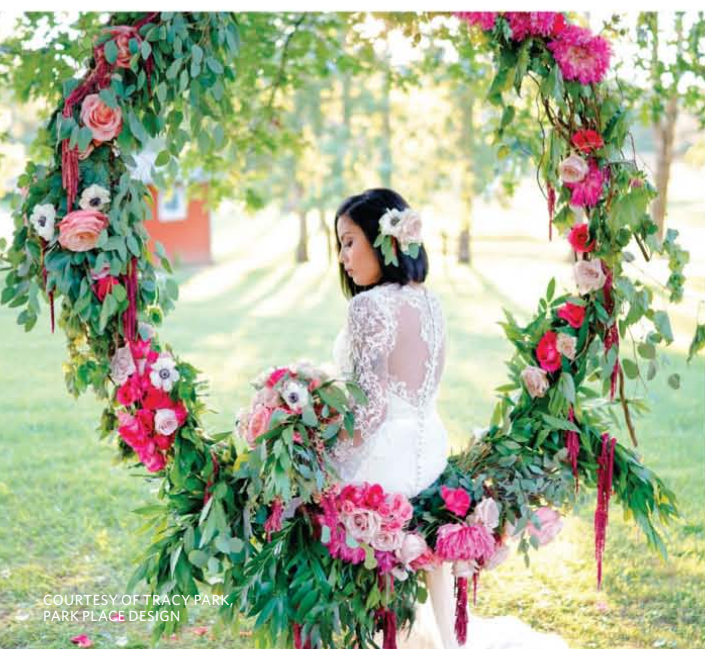
HEATHER WAITS
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Columbus, Ohio

Weddings in 2016: **183**

Average: **\$1,900**

Minimum: **\$1,000**

Wow Factor: Waits and team have increased their average wedding budget by \$700 since 2015 and recently launched a sister site to cater to more DIY-minded brides.



COURTESY OF TRACY PARK,
 PARK PLACE DESIGN



CADY VANCE
Floral V Designs
Bellbrook, Ohio

Weddings in 2016: **130**

Average: **\$2,900**

Minimum: **None**

Wow Factor: Intent on stopping her brides from price shopping, Vance now presents her clients with a final estimate after they've met with other florists during a second, shorter consultation.

the unique props she wanted for her wedding clients, she started her own collection: unusual containers, antique furniture and even an oversized "Magic City" sign. Seven years later, that collection had grown so impressive that Majerik saw the potential for a new revenue stream, and in 2013, she launched PropHouse, a rental division.

Today, PropHouse has become a booming business, growing from 10 percent of company sales in 2014 to 35 percent today. The one-of-a-kind nature of Majerik's collection has made PropHouse a go-to stop for area vendors — including some of

Majerik's competitors — and brides. In fact, about 40 percent of PropHouse sales in 2016 came from transactions unaffiliated with HotHouse, including at least five brides a month.

"Even if a bride doesn't reserve us for her wedding florals, we definitely encourage them to use PropHouse," Majerik said. "They can come in and rent containers and do their floral part on their own, or perhaps partner with another florist, and come to us for our vast amount of items such as candelabras, vases, etc. We have so much more than the 'average' florist. I love to work with fellow vendors to help, as well as encouraging sales in the part of my business that has higher profit margins."

Indeed, Majerik estimates the profit margin at PropHouse is about 15 percent higher than HotHouse, even when you include the cost of sourcing the items, storing and cleaning them. (Earlier this year, Majerik consolidated the businesses into one 10,000-square-foot warehouse location; before, HotHouse operated out of a studio across the city, while PropHouse was in a section of the same warehouse the business is located in today.)

PropHouse has essentially created a new "revenue stream," Majerik said. "It's exactly what I hoped would happen."

BUT WHAT ABOUT COSTS? A new revenue stream may sound great, but Majerik has also invested significantly in PropHouse to ensure its success: Since its launch four years ago, Majerik has hired three additional people to run the division, and each year, she reinvests about 10 percent of sales in new rental items.

As Majerik is quick to note, prop rentals can also be competitive territory: Vendors and brides in many areas have plenty of options, which is why Majerik and her team focus on truly unique items. (They've also spent the last decade building their impressive collection.)

Pricing rentals for profit can prove challenging, warns Floral Management contributor Paul Goodman, CPA, PFCI. He recommends a rental rate of 100 percent cost on smaller items (e.g., containers) and 25 to 33 percent on larger ticket items (e.g., settees and lounges) so that florists can recoup costs quickly. He, too, cautions that prices may be pushed downward in more competitive markets, cutting into potential profits.

Still, even if you aren't prepared to start a new division, you can dabble in additional services, with good results. That's what Park has been doing in Michigan.

Two years ago, she started to notice that linens in some of her clients' preferred venues simply were not up to her standards. She realized beautiful linens, and particularly runners, could be "an easy add-on" in consultations, where she was already working with brides on a complete vision for the wedding. Eighteen months after introducing the option, linen rentals make up about 25 percent of wedding sales.

"They've become an asset," she said. "Really, for me, it was a no-brainer."

5 SELL YOUR STAFF — AND YOURSELF

Majerik has another "secret" weapon at her business, and this one has nothing to do with props and rentals: her staff.

In the past five years, she's added two designers to her team: Jessica Morris, AIFD, and Shawn Foley, CFD. The pair have helped grow wedding sales by about 60 percent in that time, in large part because Majerik has an empowering philosophy when it comes

to design: You do you. Rather than imposing a shop aesthetic on the pair, Majerik plays up the fact that she, Morris and Foley all have slightly different styles.

"Jessica and Shawn really have played such a critical role in the growth of my business," Majerik said, noting that Morris tends to favor textural, organic looks, and Foley gravitates to more modern, edgy designs. "Clients have come to know them and search them out for particular weddings that may fit their style a bit more and be the perfect fit."

Differences in personalities also come into play with customer service. Not long ago, a wedding planner brought in a bride who had recently lost her mother. Majerik knew right away that Morris, with her patient and compassionate style of listening, was the best match for that job.

BUT WHAT ABOUT TEAM MEMBERS JUMPING SHIP? If you create a following for a designer on staff, aren't you setting the stage for that team member to go off on his or her own? Please, said Majerik, who is always on the lookout for new talent.

Rather than worrying about designers getting an inflated ego, she's created an atmosphere of constant learning. Both Morris and Foley started out in the shop's workshop or design room but have worked their way into wedding sales.

Here's a final note on talent, though: Don't forget to actively promote your own talent, unapologetically, particularly to brides who have fallen down a rabbit hole of web research. For her part, Duncan says her brides have come to appreciate her clear aesthetic — and the fact that Duncan can help them find their style.

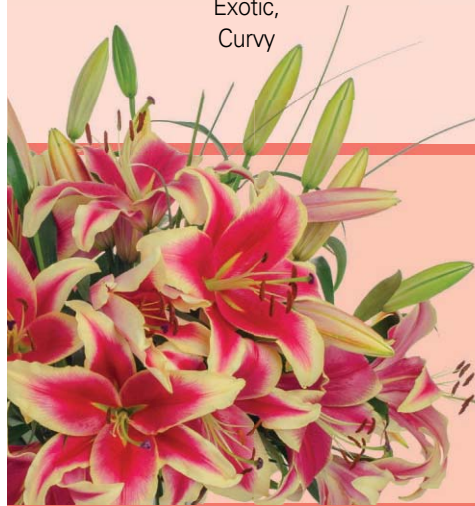
"When brides come in with a bunch of Pinterest boards, I say, 'Great! That's their wedding. Now, let's create yours,'" said Duncan. "When you have confidence and training and act like a professional, brides respond well."

Mary Westbrook is a senior contributing editor for the Society of American Florists. mwestbrook@safnow.org

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Following months of research, a trend hunter shares his findings, revealing three dominant styles for 2017 weddings.

THE LOOKS COUPLES LOVE

BY KATIE HENDRICK

PHOTOS BY DAVID KESLER

Over the past year, Michael Skaff, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, made it his mission to enter the world of the modern bride.

As the 2017 Trend Forecaster for International Floral Distributors, Inc, the Savannah, Georgia-based designer immersed himself in the rituals of the newly engaged: He dug into the authoritative literature (Grace Ormonde, Martha Stewart Weddings, BRIDES), spent countless hours on the blogosphere (The Knot, Style Me Pretty, Worth Global Style Network, Fashion Snoops), bookmarked dressmakers' websites for easy access to Vera Wang's and Monique Lhuillier's latest creations, attended bridal shows around the country, and became a frequent window shopper in Nordstrom's and Neiman Marcus's wedding departments. Next, he amalgamated all that he'd seen, curating his findings into three distinct themes — Romantic Enchantment, Natural Selection and Modern Sophistication — which he happily discussed in detail with Floral Management.

Study them, embrace them, and get ready to recreate them.



ROMANTIC ENCHANTMENT

The look: This bespoke style teems with opulent and feminine details (think: oversized bouquets, lace dresses, antique china). "It's the quintessential fairytale wedding," Skaff said.

The bride: This theme's grandeur appeals to the bride who has spent a lifetime fantasizing about her big day. "These tend not to be intimate affairs," Skaff said, explaining that a bride who's channeling her inner Kate Middleton or Kim Kardashian wants to be surrounded by as many loved ones as possible.

The venue: These brides gravitate to traditional and esteemed settings, such as historic estates and gilded ballrooms in luxury hotels.

The colors: The palette is soft and demure, "but not full of girly, cotton candy-like pastels like we've seen in the past," Skaff said. These colors have gray undertones, which give them a complex finish. Champagne, blush, sage and

honey act as neutrals, with deep reds and blues as accents.

The dress: Floral appliques, lace and fur trims are some of the **ladylike touches** romantic brides appreciate. They're also sidestepping bright white fabrics in favor of gowns that are ivory, cream, champagne, blush "or even gray," Skaff said.

The bouquet: "The look is all about abundance," Skaff said. "**Multi-petaled blooms** like hydrangeas, peonies, dahlias and garden roses create a lush, romantic feel." Those particular flowers have sat on top of the popularity pyramid for quite some time, but the way they're used has changed drastically. "Brides aren't interested in the tight, structured bouquets that we've seen in recent years," he said. "They are embracing **cascades** and other loose designs that have freedom of movement." **Foliages** contribute to a fluid, "flow-y" aesthetic, while **berries** add a pastoral pop of texture.

The décor: "We're seeing a lot of **shimmery champagne-colored linens** and **micro floral prints**, as well as **overlays**," Skaff said. He recently did a wedding in Chicago that involved three layers of tablecloths. "Even the china had a pattern to it," he said. "Brides aren't afraid to mix and match!" Eager to add a personal touch, some brides like to wrap containers with **artisan paper** that ties in with their invitations. **Flowers seem to tumble down the table en masse.** "Garlands and vines of jasmine fit in here," Skaff said. "Or you might have an aged pedestal or a bowl with flowers spilling out — a look seen at Donald Trump's inauguration luncheon" in sumptuous arrangements of 'Free Spirit' roses and orange ranunculus.

The lighting: Candelabras and mercury glass votive candles create a dreamy ambience. **Pin lighting**, a method where a spotlight is positioned directly above a centerpiece, "is a very elegant feature found at formal events," Skaff said.

> THE LOOKS COUPLES LOVE



NATURAL SELECTION

The look: This trend celebrates Earth's beautiful bounty, whether it's the shore's tranquility or a garden's nostalgic charm. "It's inspired by nature, but the look is not necessarily rustic," Skaff said. "It's more grown up than the barn weddings we've seen in recent years."

The bride: Someone enraptured by nature will seize the opportunity to bring organic elements into her wedding. "Millennials, in particular, really like this trend," Skaff said. "They appreciate the outdoors, as well as products that are handcrafted — or at least appear to have been."

The venue: Botanical gardens, vineyards, solariums and atriums offer very sensual, natural experiences. Brides with special affection for the sea might opt to tie the knot on the beach or at a property with a waterfront terrace.

The colors: Various shades of blue and green dominate here, rounded out by taupe and gray.

The dress: Grecian-style gowns and other designs that drape (not hug) the body match this style. Natural brides appreciate **flowing fabrics**, such as organza, chiffon, tulle and silk. **Aqua sashes** provide a marine vibe.

The bouquet: "Greenery is huge here," Skaff said. "Girls are choosing many types of **ferns** to give their bouquets a lush, drippy feel." **Herbs, fruits and vegetables** are other desirable accents for this organic style. "Garden roses paired with delphinium, lavender, artichokes and ornamental kale would fit in beautifully," he said. The result is less formal than the romantic trend, while still very kempt. **Burlap** — long a staple in outdoorsy weddings — continues its reign, but the nubby fabric has become more refined. "It's appearing as trim on ribbon or in shades of blue," Skaff said.

The décor: Anything that looks as though it was plucked from outside helps pull this look together. "**Bark, stones,**

shells and sea glass have become extremely popular," as have hanging elements, such as **driftwood lanterns** and **terrariums**, Skaff said. On the table, you might have **moss-covered containers, clay pots, teapots or glass vases adorned with foliage**. (An easy trick of Skaff's: glue galax to a basic vessel and wrap with twine.) **Succulents** are the darlings of this trend, whether tucked in the bride's bouquet, nestled in centerpieces or offered to guests as party favors. "Brides love that they can be planted after the event," he said.

The lighting: "Lighting is extremely important," Skaff said. An informal version might employ white **twinkle lights**, while **tea light candles**, whether displayed in a **mason jar, clay votive holder or teacup**, create a more lavish vibe.

MODERN SOPHISTICATION

The look: This contemporary style emphasizes clean lines and strong colors. It makes a fashion statement without frill or fuss.

The bride: "This is for a confident woman who wants to stand out," Skaff said. "She tends to be educated: she's researched unique materials and styles and can articulate exactly what she wants." Her style is chic but with a bit of an edge.

The venue: "These weddings call for a sophisticated, urban backdrop," Skaff said. "A high-rise overlooking the city or an art museum would be perfect."

The colors: This palette walks on the dark side with shades like burgundy, eggplant, rust, copper, cinnabar and charcoal.

The dress: Modern brides fancy a streamlined silhouette with subtle — but striking — details, such as a **keyhole cut-out**, an **unusual neckline** or a **ruffle**. Don't expect to see a gown donning more than one standout element though, Skaff said: "These dresses' have a couture look because they're understated, like something Jackie O would have worn."

The bouquet: "It doesn't have to use a lot of flowers, but it must have drama," Skaff said. A modern bride is drawn to products with tropical or exotic mystique, including **proteas**, **orchids**, **ginger**, **aspidistra**, **lotus pods**, **leucadendron**, **bamboo** and **hanging amaranthus**. A **calla's** long and lean physique catches her eye, as well. She craves a bouquet with length and motion. "Once again, cascades are huge here, as are asymmetrical bouquets," he said.

The décor: This trend presents florists an opportunity to flaunt their design prowess. "Centerpieces are very architectural," Skaff said. "This look involves a lot of **caning material**, **exposed wire** and **armatures**." Containers tend to be low and sleek, perhaps made of **stone** or sporting a **metallic finish**. Japanese-inspired accessories, whether **folding fans**, **Oriental china** or **origami**, convey worldliness and serenity. **Potted trees and plants** throughout the venue add a verdant touch.

The lighting: Pin lighting has a dramatic effect. "You might also set up actual lamps, powered by battery, on the tables," Skaff said. 🌿

Katie Hendrick is a contributing writer of *Floral Management*. khendrick@safnow.org



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STAFFING FOR PRODUCTIVITY

BY PAUL GOODMAN, CPA, PFCI

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the fifteenth in an 18-month series that tackles essential flower shop accounting, financial management and benchmarking best practices. See previous columns in the digital archives, safnow.org/floralmanagement.



What is Staffing for Productivity?

The single biggest reason for low designer productivity is scheduling too many design hours each day, i.e. staffing too high. In our consulting work many shops have one to two more designers than they need.

Deciding how many design hours to schedule each day requires knowledge of two items:

- Design volume per day
- Output per designer per hour

What Makes Staffing for Productivity Tricky?

While the retail flower business is typically thought to be very cyclical, sales volumes are actually fairly constant most of the year. The months of February, April, May and December are really not holiday "months." They are months that contain a holiday. There is a difference.

The Valentine's Day rush, for example, lasts from three to five days for the average retailer. It's certainly not the whole month of February. Administrative Professionals Day/Week will also last three to five days. Mother's Day will typically be seven to 10 busy days. Christmas can be 20 to 25 days, though still not the entire month.

Admittedly, these periods include very busy days, but the rest of the month goes back to normal, non-holiday volume. Annually, increased holiday volume comes into play for only 29 to 43 days of the year. The rest of the time, your business is made up of fairly level, non-holiday sales volumes.

In other words, up to 11 months of the year involve predictable and flat sales. In the typical retail flower shop, holiday volume accounts for approximately 23 percent of annual sales. A big 77 percent is everyday business — birthdays, anniversaries, sympathy, get well, events and other occasions.

That means for every \$100,000 you do in annual design work, \$23,000 will be holiday volume and \$77,000 will be non-holiday. If you divide that \$77,000 by 52 weeks, you get approximately \$1,500 of non-holiday volume per week for every \$100,000 of annual design volume you do. A shop doing \$300,000 in design work per year would do approximately \$4,500 per week in non-holiday

designs. A shop doing \$500,000 in annual design volume would experience \$7,500 per non-holiday week.

The average flower shop does approximately two-thirds of its sales in arrangements. The rest is green plants, blooming plants, gifts, delivery, wire outs and other miscellaneous items.

If a shop is doing \$500,000 per year in total sales (slightly higher than the average shop in the United States), it would have on average about \$333,333 of design sales. Using our formula (\$1,500 of sales per week for every \$100,000 in annual sales), you will get \$4,500 of design sales per week.

If this shop is open six days per week, that would be an average of \$750 per day. However, we can't stop our analysis here, because sales will vary by day of the week. The good news is that just as non-holiday weekly sales are fairly predictable, average daily sales are also consistent.

Best Practices

Sales are not level every day. Our research shows that non-holiday daily sales are amazingly predictable from one week to another. To find the pattern for your shop, take four non-holiday weeks. Add up arrangement sales for all the Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, etc. Divide each day's total by four and you'd get your average non-holiday sales for each day of the week.

One note: When calculating your average non-holiday daily volume, do not use four consecutive weeks in January or July. These are typically a bit slower than the other months. Do not include weddings or events in your sales numbers. These are special planned events that do not fall into the everyday category.

Once you know your approximate design sales volume for each day of the week during the 11 months of non-holiday sales, you can determine how many design hours to staff each day and how much can you expect a designer to do in an hour.

Let's assume, for instance, that the average designer will actually be designing for six hours per day. That's 75 percent of the available time. How much can a solid designer produce, on average, in those six hours?

We have asked that question many times in seminars across the country. The answer is almost always the same.

A designer moving along at a reasonable speed can put together an average arrangement in 15 minutes. Four per hour. Or 24 in a six-hour day.

If the average order is \$55, that translates to \$220 per hour or \$1,320 in six hours. More can be expected in a production environment where multiple versions of the same arrangement are being made.

Once your analysis is complete you might find that your average Tuesday is only \$500 and your average Friday is \$1400 with the others somewhere in the middle. This is why you shouldn't think of the design room in terms of number of full-time designers. Instead, think in terms of the number of design hours you need each day. One person can be scheduled for three design hours and three hours doing other activities.

Don't Do This:

Make sure you aren't over-staffing for the amount of business you have. If you do, there is no way your designers will be productive.

You're probably shaking your head and thinking: "That may be true in the theoretical world of averages, but I run a real live flower shop with various crises occurring on a weekly basis."

That's true. Emergencies can never be eliminated; yet it doesn't make sense to staff daily for the unexpected. If it's busier than expected, bring in extra people. If you find emergency days are becoming more the rule than the exception, however, you'll need to adjust your overall allocation of design time.

Doing a non-holiday staffing analysis by day of the week will take less than an hour of your time. If you're not satisfied with one sample, do another one from another time of the year. Say, one from March and the other from September.

The results will most likely be similar and should give you a greater comfort in the numbers. Once that's done, all you have to do is look at the most common objection. 🌿

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

Industry News BY MARY WESTBROOK

VERMONT TEDDY BEAR COMPANY TO SAF: 'YOU WON'T HEAR THOSE ADS AGAIN'



TRASH TALKIN' NO MORE The Vermont Teddy Bear Company, which has relied on disparaging flowers in its advertisements since the '90s, recently told SAF, "Let's bury the hatchet."

➤ The floral industry scored a major win in February in its efforts to combat negative floral advertisements and references around the holidays.

For more than 20 years, florists have been frustrated and annoyed by The Vermont Teddy Bear Company's (VTBC) marketing, which repeatedly disparages flowers. The Society of American Florists has reached out to the company dozens of times, urging them to reconsider their approach, only to be ignored or rebuffed — until now.

After receiving an email from SAF that addressed the floral industry's concerns with VTBC's negative approach and this year's commercial in particular, which showed dead flowers in a vase, CEO Bill Shouldice replied on Feb. 8: "I hear you loud and clear."

The next day, in a follow-up phone conversation with Jenny Scala, SAF's director of marketing and communications, Shouldice, who took over as CEO four years ago, said, "If I could

pull the ads now, I would but they're already scheduled and paid for. But you can bet you won't hear those ads again next Valentine's Day."

The shift represents a remarkable turnaround from a company that has disparaged flowers at varying levels in their advertisements since the '90s, said Scala.

"There were certain years that the negativity would be relatively tame but then the blatant disparagement would flare back up again," she said. "SAF has reached out to VTBC's marketing department every year, sending emails, faxes, letters and phone calls, trying to get to the right person to listen to the floral industry's point of view."

Therein lies "half the battle" of fighting negative publicity, Scala said. Finding a contact at the company who's most likely to be receptive to SAF's message isn't easy. "Ideally, we like to go beyond a general email address and connect with the individual responsible for the marketing campaign," said Scala. Marketing representatives at VTBC have stood firm behind their approach over the years, Scala said, and information on how to connect directly with the the company's CEO proved elusive — until this year, when Scala was able to send her concerns directly to Shouldice. In an email, Scala wrote in part: "Your products make wonderful gifts, as are flowers, or any other gift that is the perfect fit for the recipient. Shouldn't we let the consumer decide?"

Shouldice took over as CEO in January 2013. Prior to that, he was CEO of the family-owned Vermont Country Store and Commerce Secretary of Vermont under Governor Howard Dean.

During their Feb. 9 conversation, Scala asked Shouldice why the change of heart. Shouldice's answer: SAF's email said it best.

"We have the world's greatest bears, and we should be promoting our merits," Should said. "Let's bury the hatchet, and move forward." 🌿

SAF MEMBER CREATES FLORAL DESIGNS FOR NEW FOREVER STAMPS

➤ Here's some fun news to report to your brides and grooms: When they send out their wedding invitations, they can include some flower love — beautifully designed and artfully photographed — on each and every envelope.

The U.S. Postal Service recently unveiled its Celebration Boutonniere and Celebration Corsage Forever Stamps. Longtime Society of American Florists member and volunteer leader (and floral designer extraordinaire) Carol Caggiano, AIFD, PFCI, created the designs for the stamps, which were photographed by Renee Comet, who worked with Caggiano on SAF's 2015 Consumer Marketing Kit.

"We had several conference calls regarding what they were looking for, style, color, etc.," said Caggiano, who served on the SAF Board of Directors and is an SAF Tommy Bright Award recipient. "The day of the shoot, I created a selection of both corsages and boutonnieres based on our previous discussions which we photographed and then the USPS made their selection, and, viola the stamps!" 🌿



SIGNED, SEALED, DELIVERED The floral designs featured in the Celebration Boutonniere and Celebration Corsage Forever Stamps include ranunculus, with floral accents of succulents, astringia, berzelia, and clubmoss greenery. Carol Caggiano, AIFD, PFCI, created the designs.

Industry News



NEWSPAPER DIGS INTO COST OF VDAY ROSES — AND COMES OUT ON FLORISTS' SIDE

> The lead-up to Valentine's Day inevitably included news stories on "high priced" roses (and indirect and direct accusations that the industry is taking advantage of love-struck consumers). That's why it was refreshing for industry members to read a level-headed and informative take on the economics of holiday flowers in *The Christian Science Monitor*.

In a story that originally ran on the consumer website *Brad's Deals*, reporter Rebecca Lehmann details an effort to track the prices of a dozen roses through five online floral companies over the course of the year, to compare non-holiday and holiday prices.

The floral industry-friendly result? When it comes to accusations that florists, wholesalers and growers price-gouge around Valentine's Day, the writers conclude that "nothing could be further from the truth."

"What we found was a lot more complex than that," the story goes on to explain. "Although flowers are largely treated as a standard retail item, they are in fact a highly perishable agricultural product, which introduces all kinds of difficulties and scenarios that can affect their price on any given day." 🌹

INDUSTRY SAYS GOOD-BYE TO BELOVED DESIGNER: BOBBI ECKER-BLATCHFORD, AAF, AIFD, PFCI

> Floral industry members around the country — and, really, the world — said farewell to Bobbi Ecker-Blatchford, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, the celebrated designer and mentor extraordinaire who died unexpectedly in early February.

"Bobbi meant the world to everyone she came in contact with," said Rodney P. Crittenden, CEO and executive vice president of the Michigan Floral Association. "I have been blessed to have had her part of my life for over 30 years. I will miss our talks on flowers, marketing, politics, people, children, love and life. She was truly a special lady."

Ecker-Blatchford dedicated her life to the floral industry. She worked in her family's floral and greenhouse operation in Waverly, Iowa. In Chicago, Illinois, she later started her own company, *The Flora Pros*. Over the course of her 60-plus-year career, she became a noted speaker, commentator, award-winning floral designer and sought after consultant to manufacturers, growers and distributors in the U.S., Canada and South America. She was recognized and honored by many, many industry groups, including the American Institute of Floral Designers, International Floral Expo and the Michigan Floral Association, which inducted her into its prestigious Hall of Fame in 2012. The Society of American Florists recognized her with its 1997 Tommy Bright Award. In 2010, a rose was named in her honor.

For 15 years, she worked with *FernTrust*, a co-op made up of 13 family farms, in Seville, Florida. One of her signature contributions include the development of the company's *Fabulous Foliage* bouquet lines, a series of pre-bunched foliage that helped streamline the work of floral designers while introducing consumers to a wider variety of foliage.

"Bobbi lit up the room when she walked in and she connected with people in way that few can," said Jana Register, *FernTrust's* director of sales and marketing. "I was always amazed by her ability to remember even the smallest details of a person's life."

Ecker-Blatchford is survived by her daughter, Cyndi, and Cyndi's husband, Lyman Campbell; and her son, Bruce, and his wife, Kim Folkers. Her husband, Joe Blatchford, died in 2015. 🌹



A BEAUTIFUL LIFE Bobbi Ecker-Blatchford, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, passed away unexpectedly in February. "Bobbi meant the world to everyone she came in contact with," said Rodney P. Crittenden, CEO and executive vice president of the Michigan Floral Association.

WF&FSA PRESIDENT TALKS BIG DATA



When it comes to getting a good value on top quality product delivered efficiently to retail flower shops, Santiago Cock-Rada is adamant: Wholesalers do it best.

The statement shouldn't come as a surprise. After all, Cock-Rada, the general manager of *Liberty Blooms*, is president of the Wholesale Florist & Florist Supplier Association.

In that role, Cock-Rada, the group's first Colombian president, is charged with supporting and promoting wholesalers — but his passionate argument for the segment goes far beyond talking points and stump speeches. When growers and retailers work alongside wholesalers, he says, the industry, and ultimately consumers, benefit.

Read SAF's full interview with Cock-Rada, which includes his insights on consumer segments that are being ignored, at safnow.org/moreonline.

Your Digital Brand BY CRYSTAL VILKAITIS

FACEBOOK ADS THAT CALL FOR ACTION

> Here's a scenario I see often. Wanting to reach more people through social media, a retailer boosts a post on Facebook. She sees an increase in engagement and then — she's not sure what to do next. Boost every post? Create an ad? She feels intimidated or overwhelmed. (Advertising on social media, after all, is a tiny part of her overall day.) Ultimately, she gets stuck and stays with her scattershot approach, which doesn't generate any real ROI.

Most retailers I work with do not have a robust Facebook marketing effort. That's a shame: Over the years, Facebook's organic (free) reach has significantly dropped, making it harder for businesses to get their posts seen. With Facebook ads, you're paying to ensure more people see your posts. You still need to provide high-quality, relevant content, but without some paid advertising, you're wasting your time.

Last month, I discussed several ways to engage with brides on social media. This month, I'll focus on how retailers can use the results from Facebook ads to reach more people and close more sales.

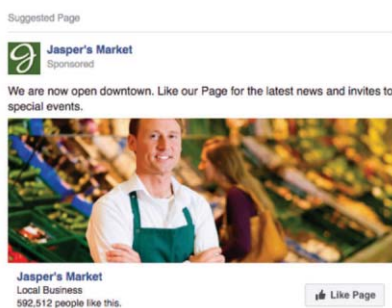
Getting Started

You can choose from several types of ads to run on Facebook, and your budget will vary depending on your goals, the audience size and campaign details.

For brick-and-mortar stores, I usually recommend running the following three ads consistently, meaning 365 days a year. You can add in other types of ads (Event or Website) depending on particular sales or promotional needs and what's going on in-store.

One disclaimer: Ad costs listed throughout are based on averages I've seen. Your actual cost and results may vary.

Page Like Ad



What It Is: An ad designed to get more page likes

Average Cost: \$0.10 to \$1 per page like

This type of ad helps you find new people on Facebook and build your base. When people like a business page, they'll receive some posts by the business in their News Feed, as long as Facebook deems them relevant to that Facebook. (To get more of your posts seen, make sure you're posting relevant content and using Page Post Engagement ads; keep reading for more.)

Run a Page Like ad to people who are on your email list or have been to your website. Or target a "look-alike audience" — people who are similar to the people who like you on Facebook today.

Page Post Engagement Ad



What It Is: An ad designed to get more post engagement

Average Cost: \$0.08 to \$0.16 per post engagement

A Page Post Engagement ad is one of the best ways to ensure more of the people who like your page see your post.

There are two ways to promote a specific post: 1. Boost it using the tool found on each post. 2. Use a Facebook Ad tool such as Ads Manager, Power Editor, Business Manager or the Ads Manager App.

Boosting every post is more time-consuming than editing an ad in Ads Manager when you have a new post. Each time you boost, you choose the audience, budget and duration. With Ads Manager, you simply select the newest post to be the live ad.

In addition, since you must set up the budget each time you boost, you have a higher margin of error (e.g., \$200 for two days when you meant to select \$20 for two days; I've seen this happen several times!) With Ads Manager, you set the budget once (typically for the month), and each post gets part of that budget. Finally, if you're scheduling posts, which I recommend doing, changing the ad in Ads Manager daily ensures the post gets advertised. If you're boosting, you may forget a new post has been published and then forget to boost it.

Internally, my team and I refer to this ad as the "Most Recent" ad because I recommend changing this ad out each time you post to your page, so that the most recent post is always being advertised to current fans.

Local Awareness Ad



What It Is: An ad designed to promote your business to people who are nearby

Average Cost: \$2 to \$5 per 1,000 impressions

Use this ad to reach people within a certain radius of your choosing. It's a great tool if you want people to come in your store. Be targeted with this, choosing the demographics of your perfect customer. Target further based on likes and interests, age, gender, marital status and more.

Post-Campaign Action

Once your ads run, access the analytics through the Ads Manager or click on "Ads Reporting" on a specific advertised post. Look at your cost per objective (engagement, likes, etc.). If your costs are too high, experiment. Change the audience, objective, placement, copy, image or video. (Only change one variable at a time to see which one is the important factor.)

Because each ad type has different goals, each requires you to take different follow-up actions. If your campaign generated more likes, your next step is to share relevant, engaging content that customers want to interact with. If your goal is to have users check into your business, offer these people limited-time deals to keep your business top of mind. 🍀

Crystal Vilkaitis is a social media teacher, owner of [Crystal Media HeyCrystalMedia.com](http://CrystalMediaHeyCrystalMedia.com), and founder of [Social Edge](http://SocialEdge.com), a membership website for retailers on social media trends and changes, socialedge.co.

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Derrick Myers, CPA, CFP, PFCI, vice president of Crockett, Myers & Associates, Inc.

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Crystal Vilkaitis, owner, Crystal Media

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Business of Design

INTO THE WILD



DAVID CHANG

> Nationwide, millennials are tying the knot with foliage, gravitating to floral designs that have a fluid shape and

tons of texture. The shift in preference from a perfectly round mass of flowers — ubiquitous for so many years — presents florists with an opportunity to “be adventurous by stepping away from traditional methods and demonstrating their creativity and skills,” said David Chang, general manager of Boulder Blooms in Boulder, Colorado. Here, he shares three easy (and profitable) pieces your nature-loving brides will adore. 🌿

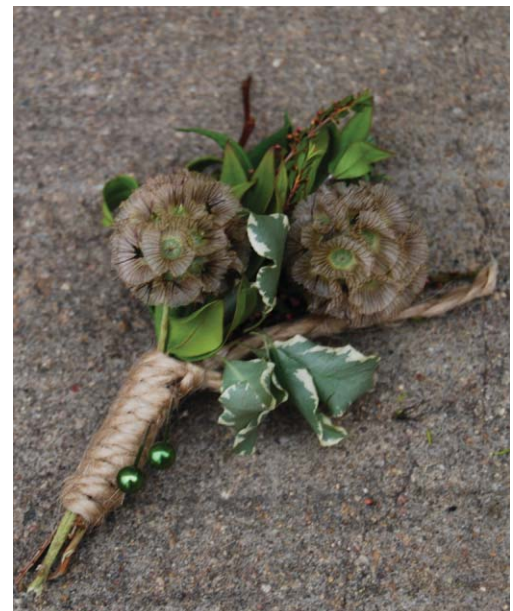
Katie Hendrick khendrick@safnow.org
Find complete recipes at safnow.org/moreonline.



WHITE HAUTE “Green and white is an underrated palette that makes a great accent in a ‘busy’ venue with many distinctive features,” Chang said. The design faces one direction, which makes it ideal to place on a bar or registration table. Labor time: 10 to 15 minutes. Wholesale costs: \$20. Suggested retail price: \$75.



EARTHY ELEGANCE Two cymbidium orchids and a single succulent provide eye-catching details in this budget-friendly bouquet. “Asymmetric designs with loose greenery have been growing in popularity without any end in sight,” Chang said of its appeal. Labor time: 10 to 15 minutes. Wholesale costs: \$33. Suggested retail price: \$135.



DAPPER DESIGN A sprig of calcynia adds a pop of color in this rustic design “that would fit in at a backyard wedding or a ballroom,” Chang said, adding that grooms appreciate the wild and organic (read: more masculine) aesthetic. Labor time: 3 minutes. Wholesale costs: \$6. Suggested retail price: \$15.



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ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

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BUBBLY BLESSINGS

Wouldn't it be lovely to send a reminder of how much Moms are appreciated well after Mother's Day? That's what these soaps do. Each is engraved with a term of endearment. Choices include: Best Mom (lavender scent blend), Luv U Mom (rose geranium scent blend), or Thanks Mom (spearmint scent blend). > aWildSoapBar.com

floral management's



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BEST CARE PRACTICES FOR BETTER HOLIDAY SALES

➤ By most early indications, Valentine's Day 2017 was a good holiday for many florists. (That Tuesday celebration sure helped.) But could it have been even better? Maybe.

When I visited shops in the run-up to the holiday, I was struck by some missed opportunities: chances to talk to customers about care and handling and staff occupied with flower quality tasks that could easily have been handled ahead of time, instead of while customers were coming in to buy.

Good sales and care strategies actually have a surprising amount of overlap. Customers today are hungry for background information on products of all type, and the more time you have to talk to people about care, and to show them all that you do to make their purchase a top value, the more likely you are to make that sale.

Here's my advice on how to make the next holiday — hello, Mother's Day — even better.

Measure Twice, Cut Once

Pre-holiday prep activities free up time for sales people to sell rather than getting bogged down making delivery boxes, wiring picks, inflating balloons or making bows.

Most flowers sold in the United States are long-distance travelers; they arrive thirsty and nutrient-starved. The only way to achieve 100 percent results (read: get your money's worth!) with flower chemicals is to mix solutions according to the manufacturer's instructions. Guessing on the dose is a waste

of time, but often the employee charged with filling buckets never gets a minute of training (and if she's rushed while performing the task, that hurry can add to the chaos).

Provide directions so the task happens right, even when the shop is especially busy. Set up a photo chart or an actual bucket template. Mark the correct water level and corresponding amount of flower food needed for each size. Remember that anyone on your staff might get a question from a customer on homespun remedies: Stories of adding 7-UP, pennies, vodka and even Viagra to water to prolong life are fun, but educate staff to communicate that a commercial solution and consumer food packets have been proven to improve vase life by more than 50 percent.

Another good approach when you are time-crunched and want to speed solution uptake? Pre-chill bucket solutions. Cold water (34F) flows fast through stems, so forget those warm water comments from web "experts." They are relying on information from the 70's. More current university research proves that cold water lets stems harden fast, without blowing open blooms. Bacteria is not happy in cold water, and cold blooms placed in cold water don't suffer condensation inside sleeves, thereby reducing Botrytis pressure.

Deal with Disease Control

Botrytis spores need water to germinate — even a micro-film on petals suffices. Plan ahead to help protect your flowers. Let bunches sit out of the cooler for

about 20 minutes so moisture evaporates. Speaking of temperature, do not rely on the cooler wall thermometer. Buy a needle kitchen thermometer calibrated as low as 32F. Record cooler bucket temps first thing every morning (even on your busiest days). Compare that number with the wall thermostat reading. Cooler set point is 34F to 36F for storage coolers and 38F to 40F for sales floor display coolers.

Fast Transfers Matter

Stems need at least two hours to hydrate fully, even if you use a quick dip product. Remember, instant dip solutions act as liquid bandages that seal freshly wounded (freshly cut) stem tissues from the entry of bacteria or air bubbles, but it is physiologically impossible to hydrate any flower with a one to 10 second solution dip.

The key to effective hydration is quick transfers after cut. Flower solutions are formulated specifically to dissolve air bubbles in stems and combat bacteria explosions. Once bacteria enters a stem, it can migrate as high as four to five inches, which is why it's so important to remove the bottom two inches (and sometimes more) when transferring stems into solutions.

Don't forget the importance of sharp, clean tools either. Dull knives and cutters leave ragged stem ends that leak cells into the water which sets the stage for bacterial explosions. 🌿

Gay Smith is the technical consulting manager at Chrysal USA in Miami. gaysmith@earthlink.net

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