





**TEAM EFFORT** Online, “content is king,” said Chris Drummond, AAF, owner of Plaza Flowers in Philadelphia (top left). Drummond relies on a team of staff members, along with some third-party guidance, to shape his digital marketing. Pictured (clockwise) Andrew Ragusa, merchandising director; Samantha Pascal, CFD, general manager; Kellynoreen Pascal, design director; and Heather Tuckey, vice president.

BY MARY WESTBROOK

# @lways On!

**Virtual shopkeeping takes endurance, vigilance, patience and willingness to delegate**

A couple of years ago at Bagoy’s Florist & Home in Anchorage, Alaska, Chanda and Randy Mines realized something that will sound familiar to every local florist trying to stand out in 2017. Digital marketing — blogs, scheduled emails, online ads, social media and websites — was taking up a lot of time. Precious hours they could have been devoting to HR issues, new products, planning and product development, not to mention big-picture strategic thinking, was being eaten up by the demands of this new economy and all of its constant connectivity. Posts. Clicks. Likes.

The time-suck was driving the couple crazy, and they knew it wasn’t sustainable; they were in the business of flowers, not the business of online marketing. So, they decided a new approach was in order. Their solution turned out to be two-parts strategy—they hired an outside agency to manage much of their digital marketing — and one-part luck: An intrepid team member expressed an interest in taking on more responsibilities in that world, and the Mines quickly empowered her to do so.

Today, digital marketing can still feel like a moving target at Bagoy’s — “Things are always changing, and they change so fast,” as Chanda said — but it also feels manageable, measurable and actionable, which is a big relief to the Mines, who have experienced “slow, steady sales growth” over the past five years. (And online orders and revenue are both up more than 20 percent over last year.)

The Mines were far from alone in feeling overwhelmed by digital marketing demands. According to a 2012 survey of nearly 500 small businesses by Vertical Response, 43 percent of small business owners spend at least six hours a week on social media tasks alone. About 25 percent of respondents to the software firm’s survey said they spend six to 10 hours, and 11 percent spend between 11 and 20 hours. Seven percent spend more than 21 hours per week — just on managing social media. What’s more, a sizeable percentage of CEOs/owners/proprietors — about a third of respondents — said they wanted to spend less time on such tasks. And that survey was taken five years ago. In the intervening years, the demands and outlets available to business owners only have increased.

The question, of course: How do you get to a place where you are spending, if not less time on digital marketing, then more efficient time on these tasks? If you have unlimited funds or the talent and background for digital marketing, all of this new tech is easy to manage. For everyone else, the path to manageable, measurable and actionable can feel much harder to find.

This month, we look at four very different shops and the still-evolving solutions they’ve crafted to make digital marketing a little less onerous, a little more useful and, occasionally, pretty darn fun.

JUDY PATRICK PHOTOGRAPHY



Randy and Chanda Mines

**Bagoy's Florist & Home:**

Anchorage, Alaska

**Locations:** Two

**Employees:** 13 FT; 7 PT

**Website:** bagoys.com  
(GravityFree)

**Social channels:** @bagoys;  
bagoys.com/blog

## Owner-Driven Outside Assist

Hiring an outside agency (Gravity Free) to handle its website and digital advertising and marketing in 2014 helped the Mines cut through much of the “noise” business owners face in marketing, said Chanda. Today, that company handles writing blog posts, sending scheduled emails, online ads and also supports social media efforts, providing scheduled posts and managing ads in that space.

Once a month, Chanda and the agency work out a plan for those tasks — for Chanda, that monthly check-in is as straightforward as filling out an online form on the agency’s site. At the end of the month and after major holidays, she’ll walk through analytics with them. When the shop first signed on with the agency, there was a getting-to-know-you phase, but Chanda said the transition was relatively fast.

“There was a training process of my style and what I liked, didn’t like,” she

explained. “They figured me out quite quickly. Fortunately, we are a larger shop and have the resources to hire added help,” she said, adding that the shop spends about 25 percent of its overall advertising and marketing budget on the agency.

Particularly with analytics, though, having an expert guide has been an asset. With the agency digging into hard data, Chanda can take the pulse of the business in other ways — including by talking to customers and staff. Combined, the hard data and old-fashioned conversations tend to give the Mines a reliable “big picture” view of their business.

“[Randy and I] could study graphs and monitor just about every site until our eyes cross,” she said. “My [preference] is to gather the basics from analytics as they pop up [on Facebook, Instagram, etc.] and ‘feel’ the rest by

### Who’s minding the digital store

#### Website updates



#### Analytics



#### SEO



#### Online advertising



#### Social media posts



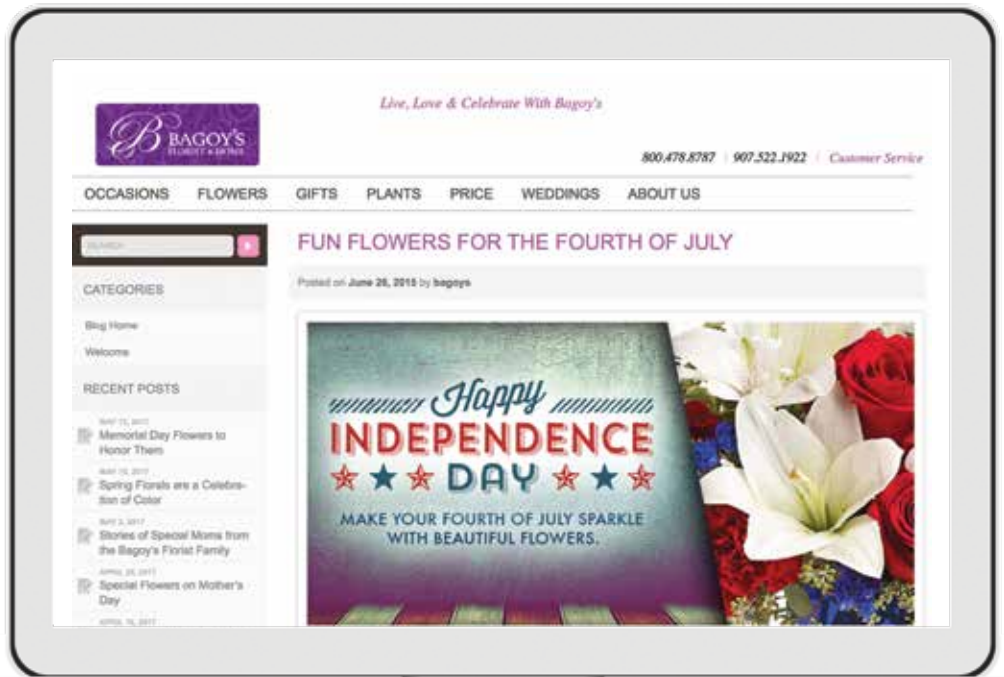
#### Blog



#### Email campaign



-  OWNER
-  SENIOR STAFF
-  ALL STAFF
-  THIRD PARTY



**UP AND RUNNING** A third-party agency helps Randy and Chanda Mines of Bagoy's Florist & Home with aspects of their digital brand, including their blog.

# 36 percent of small businesses pay for publishing/analytics tool

Vertical Response, Email + Social Marketing. Results based on an online survey of 462 businesses (93 percent with less than 100 employees). 2012.



**We could study graphs and monitor just about every site until our eyes cross ... [The agency] lives by analytics, and we discuss their findings with my feelings on a regular basis.**

CHANDA MINES, BAGOY'S FLORIST & HOME

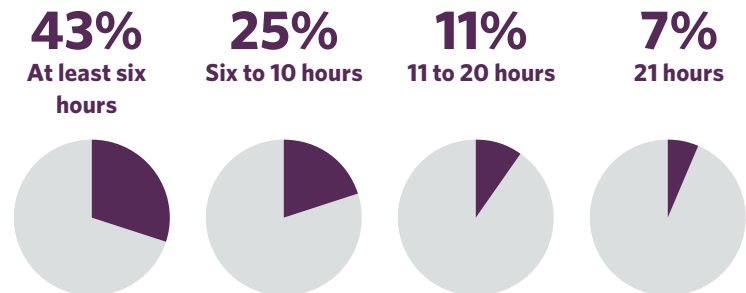
working the floor, talking to staff and our customers. You know what works when you see it all happening together. The [agency] lives by analytics, and we discuss their findings with my 'feelings' on a regular basis. They are great partners."

The business has been paying particular attention to growing online sales and customers' reliance on mobile phones. Regardless of whether customers are coming to Bagoy's via laptop, desktop or phone, Chanda said she sees social as a "friendly, neighborly" way to draw them in. In that effort, Sheila Parker, the manager of Bagoy's satellite store has become a key player.

"Sheila is trendy and has a great eye, so she handles 90 percent of our Instagram account," Chanda explained, adding that she handles the remaining 10 percent of posts on that platform. (The agency creates all scheduled posts for Facebook and Twitter.)

**Takeaway Advice:** Hiring a third-party doesn't mean you'll ever be completely free of these responsibilities, and Chanda doesn't want to be. "I like to control the voice of my company and believe that is our heart, our strength," she said. "If [online marketing] comes across as 'removed' or advertising, you lose the beauty of 'social/personal' media." Look for a company that understands your brand, truly listens and responds quickly to requests.

## HOW MUCH TIME DO SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS SPEND ON SOCIAL MEDIA EACH WEEK?



Vertical Response, Email + Social Marketing. Results based on an online survey of 462 businesses (93 percent with less than 100 employees). 2012.

## THIRD PARTY CONSULT

Considering hiring a third party to help manage some or all of your online strategy? Here are a few questions to ask the company — and yourself — before you jump in:

- 1. How will we communicate and how often will you check in?** Look for clear expectations on regular check-ins (monthly, weekly, daily) along with assurance that you can get additional info as questions arise.
- 2. How quickly can I expect you to respond to my concerns?** Florist experience is not imperative, but look for a company that is staffed to respond quickly, and one that understands (or is prepared to learn) about the seasonal aspects of the industry and your busiest seasons.
- 3. What kind of reports will I receive?** If I have a question, who will help me understand the information? Look for specific reports — versus verbal assurances that things are going well, which can be misleading — and a contact that will be your go-to person at the agency.
- 4. Which industries have you worked in?** Florist experience is not imperative, but look for companies that have worked in retail, ideally, and can help you craft long-term strategies to benefit your business throughout the year, during both slow and busy seasons.
- 5. How would you describe the "voice" of my brand?** Look for a partner that understands your brand and knows how to articulate it through words, photos and design elements.

—M.W.



Chris Drummond, AAF

**Plaza Flowers:**  
Metropolitan Philadelphia

**Employees:** 21 FT; 10 PT

**Locations:** Two

**Annual sales:** Undisclosed

**Website:** pflorist.com  
(Teleflora)

**Social channels:**  
@plazaflowers;  
blog.pflorist.com

### Who's minding the digital store

#### Website updates



#### Analytics



#### SEO



#### Online advertising



#### Social media posts



#### Blog



#### Email campaign



## DIY (With a Little Outside Help)

For five years, the team at Plaza Flowers, headed by owner and Society of American Florists Treasurer Chris Drummond, AAF, has engaged a third-party consultant for big-picture strategy recommendations (think: consumer behavior and overall direction) while senior staff drives day-to-day strategy. With the help of four department heads (called directors at Plaza), Drummond oversees management of the shop's web site, social media, online ads, blog and related efforts, including email campaigns.

Drummond's approach is a result of trial and error. In the past, for instance, he's experimented with outsourcing tasks related to SEO and analytics review, but he wasn't satisfied with the results. "I haven't found anyone that will go through the analytics as thoroughly as we do on staff," he explained, adding that he recently spent about 90 minutes reviewing results from two emails sent to promote a spring holiday.

"We'll tweak the website based on what was popular and what wasn't," Drummond said.

Drummond and his senior team also ask a lot of questions related to why a customer didn't complete a transaction: Was a photo too dark? Were there too many options? Too few? Was there a problem in the check-out process? That in-depth review helps ensure Drummond can react to shifts in customers' habits. This year, for instance, the shop had its biggest prom season ever, a feat Drummond credits in part to the fact that they applied what they'd learned from previous years (teens want to shop via mobile phones through a very limited range of options and need the ability to pay at pick-up, instead of only by credit card).

"A lot of florists say they don't have the time to go through this kind of information, but I say, 'Make the time,'" Drummond said. "Fifty percent of our customers are shopping online right now, so you need to give your online store the same time and attention you'd give a brick and mortar."

Meanwhile, engaging staff members — all staff members — in social media

**A lot of florists say they don't have the time to go through [analytics], but I say, 'Make the time.'**  
CHRIS DRUMMOND, AAF, PLAZA FLORIST

has proven to be an effective strategy for Drummond. Several years ago, he realized that the most emotional moments involved in flower-giving and flower-receiving often happen far from staff members tasked with overseeing Plaza's digital marketing efforts. Delivery drivers would come back to the shop with great stories — surprised recipients, adorable dance recitals — but anecdotes alone weren't enough to share on visual-heavy sites such as Instagram and Facebook.

"Great things happen on the road, but we were missing that content," he explained. "If you're only relying on planned content, you'll miss all this wonderful, spontaneous content."

Today, the shop takes an all-hands-on-deck approach to social media. Drivers are encouraged to take pictures of happy recipients. Buyers and designers are cheered on when they share ideas about new products, tools and designs they're excited about. Staff members generally forward pictures to one of Drummond's four directors for actual posting — an approach that helps ensure messages and pics are on-brand. (Check out "Core Values, Listed," p. 30, for additional tips on cohesive messaging.)

**Takeaway Advice:** If you're managing a lot of these roles in-house, be sure to look for and play up team members' strengths, Drummond said. "My admin director, Karl Herrmann, wears several hats. He has a strong IT background and an accounting degree. So, he manages the office (phone sales team, accounting, all admin functions) plus manages all IT, including web site content."

When it comes to authentic social and email content, "it is difficult to find a third-party who will give your campaigns the high level of attention that your own team, or you, will," he said, "If you must outsource it, then find someone on your team to be in charge of feeding content and keeping that third-party on message."



Nicole Palazzo

**City Line Florist:** Trumbull, Connecticut

**Locations:** One

**Employees:** 8 FT; 12 PT

**Annual sales:** Undisclosed

**Website:** citylineflorist.com (GravityFree)

**Social channels:** @citylineflorist; citylineflorist.com/blog

### Who's minding the digital store

#### Website updates



#### Analytics



#### SEO



#### Online advertising N/A

#### Social media posts



#### Blog



#### Email campaign



## In-House Social, Outsource Everything Else

For anyone reading about digital marketing and feeling a little - er — *old*, take heart. When it comes to feeling totally overwhelmed by all the new tech, millennial Nicole Palazzo swears she's right there with you.

"I'm only 27 and, wow, has the industry changed just since I've been submerged in it the last few years," said Palazzo, who joined City Line Florist, her family's 99-year-old-business in a full-time capacity about four years ago. "We try to do as much as we physically can in-house, but we know we can't handle it all."

That's why, 15 years ago, the business hired a marketing group to help them with SEO, analytics and some graphic design in both digital and print promotions, among other tasks, along with overall brand coordination (ensuring banners online match up with email promotions, etc.). Once a month, Palazzo conferences with the company to discuss monthly reports. She also completes a marketing form for the coming month in which she provides direction and details for weekly emails/promos, overall themes for the month and graphic design options, but she's in almost daily email communication with the company, too, she said.

"I love it because I feel like I am working hand-in-hand with the company and still having control over everything," she said.

One area Palazzo personally prioritizes: social media. When she came onboard, the shop had an outside company handling its social media, but results were lackluster and impersonal, with stock photos and captions that rarely captured the shop's unique location in a renovated barn or its distinct personality.

Once Palazzo took over, that all changed. Today the shop's Instagram and Facebook feeds are filled with photos Palazzo takes around the business. Beautiful flower and floral designs are popular photos, but Palazzo also captures

**"Spend money on a company to help you with [pay-per-click and search engine] advertising. Appearing organically may not cut it anymore."**  
NICOLE PALAZZO,  
CITY LINE FLORIST

images of the team hard at work, new merchandise as it comes in and light-hearted, personal moments (staff trying on flower crowns after a workshop) that keep people engaged. It's a change that customers have noticed. (Read more about her approach on p. 12.)

"I can't tell you how many people come into my shop and say, 'I follow you guys on Instagram, and you post the best photos,'" said Palazzo. "Or someone will call our shop and place an order and say, 'I want the exact arrangement you just posted on Facebook.' It feels amazing to hear that, and it took probably a minute total to snap a photo, come up with a fun caption and hashtag and post."

Palazzo also is seeing "a lot more traction" on social media with videos lately: "People are watching our videos like crazy," Palazzo said, adding that time-lapse videos were a big hit at Valentine's Day (and a snap to create with a smartphone.) "People love seeing what's happening in-store. It really sets us apart from order-gatherers."

**Takeaway Advice:** Demand professionalism. Palazzo worked with another marketing company once that didn't supply monthly reports and analytics info. "They would just tell us we were doing great every month, but we never got to see any of the results and just went off their word," she said. "We knew the numbers weren't adding up and we



**HERE, WE'RE FAMILY** Nicole Palazzo, 27, has taken a lead role in social media at City Line Florist, with photos, texts and hashtags that speak in a personal way to customers about the 99-year-old shop.

weren't growing. Find a company that works for and with you." Another tip: Communicate. "Find a company who is eager to help explain your monthly reports and what everything means," because the data can be confusing, she

said. "When our sales fall flat, I'll get a phone call from my company to say, 'Hey, Nicole! What's going on?' They hold us accountable and vice versa."

# 55 percent of small businesses have a blog

## TOP THREE TIME DEMANDS OF SOCIAL MEDIA:

- Finding and posting content
- Learning and education
- Analyzing efforts

Vertical Response, Email + Social Marketing. Results based on an online survey of 462 businesses (93 percent with less than 100 employees). 2012.

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**SAME PAGE** To help ensure on-brand messaging across platforms, Chris Drummond, AAF, of Plaza Flowers recommends drafting a list of statements that articulate your core values. For his business, that includes emphasizing that the shop is a family business that's a fun place to work. These values are reflected on the About Us page and in social media posts.

## CORE VALUES, LISTED

Whether you're handling your digital strategy alone, working with staff or using a third-party, the sheer volume of content across all digital platforms — social, websites and email — creates opportunities for crossed signals and miscues. That's why Chris Drummond, AAF, of Plaza Flowers recommends drafting a list of eight to 12 statements that articulate your core values and competencies.

"Once you decide that you want multiple people providing streams of information, you want to make sure that all of those tributaries are running to the same river," he said. "You don't want something random. People say all the time, 'I can't trust my staff. They'll post something off message or random.' That's why you need those messages."

Drummond developed the shop's messages with help from both his vice president and general manager. He shared the following as examples of what statements could look like:

1. We are an authentic, family-owned, brick and mortar

business that buys local and supports local charities.

2. We sell the freshest, long-lasting flowers and plants because of the farm-direct program through our wholesaler and our state-of-the-art care and handling.
3. We have a fun and rewarding work environment and retail environment.

Once you have those principles identified, "all content must point to one of the statements on your list," Drummond said. "This maintains focus and repeatedly emphasizes your most important characteristics. Start with social and see what engages consumers, then use those valuable nuggets as you develop web pages."

Content that proves popular on social media can also help you develop email campaigns and subject lines, Drummond said.

"All of these communication vehicles should have a consistent look and theme," and defining your business through simple statements can help you do that, he said. —**M.W.**



Alyson Queen

**Expressions Unlimited:**  
Greenville, South Carolina

**Locations:** Four

**Employees:** 24 FT; 4 PT

**Annual sales:** \$1 million+

**Websites:** expressions24-7.com (Teleflora)

**Social channels:** @expressionsunlimited

## Who's minding the digital store

### Website updates



### Analytics



### SEO



### Online advertising

N/A

### Social media posts



### Blog

N/A

### Email campaign





## Self-Starters Take Charge

Several years ago, Expressions Unlimited in Greenville, South Carolina, didn't have much of a presence on social media. The team posted sporadically and without much thought to overall strategy. The challenge wasn't lack of ideas or creativity but time and manpower: With so much else to handle in the business, social media simply was put on the back burner.

That all changed two years ago, when the shop hired Alyson Queen as a full-time floral consultant (salesperson). Queen happened to have a background in creative writing and graphic design — not to mention a talent for taking beautiful photos. At 25 years old, Queen also has a comfort with social media that hadn't existed in the shop before.

Today, Queen is the social media and marketing manager, a job she's taken on in addition to her sales role. In that position, Queen is in charge of Instagram and Facebook and she takes many of the shop's memorable photos. Customers are now delighted not only by gorgeous flower shots but also plenty of candid staff photos with trendy photo treatments (filters and boomerang), along with videos. (A video tour of the shop's impressive 1,000 square-foot "Enchanted Forest" prom display this year garnered about 5,000 views.) The shop posts an average of seven times a week and has seen engagement on the site jump — with overall sales up by 25 percent since 2012.

"We are working on taking more stylized, high quality photos that exhibit our current trends, and we are trying to predict or set new trends going forward," said manager Stephanie Cutts, who credits those increases to the shop's get-to-it attitude with social media. Often, senior leadership — Cutts, along with mother-daughter team, owner Debi Bush and general manager Staci Bryant — brainstorm ideas together with Queen, and then "Aly takes them, polishes them and runs with them."



**"We are working on taking more stylized, high quality photos and are trying to predict or set new trends going forward."**

**STEPHANIE CUTTS,  
EXPRESSIONS UNLIMITED**

The informal approach allows for experimentation and spontaneity, and that's an important part of their online brand, Cutts said.

"We want our social media to have more of a personal touch," Cutts said, adding that self-determination means the onus is on the team to analyze and make changes.

Beyond social media, for about six years, the shop has worked with TeamFloral, which weighs in on specific advice related to website updates. On a monthly basis, they also review analytics with TeamFloral and they participate in regular roundtable discussions among florists organized by the group. "They have also helped us with one-on-one coaching to help with individual needs and questions," Bryant said.

**Takeaway Advice:** If you're trying to do social media marketing in-house, be on the lookout for larger efforts you can hitch your marketing to, for greater effect. Last year, the team at Expressions Unlimited "crushed it" during SAF's annual Petal It Forward initiative. The shop picked up between 75 and 100 new followers on Instagram and Facebook within 24 hours of the big-hearted giveaway. To help promote the event, the shop teamed up with Greenville 360, a local social media outlet that features local businesses and events. (They traded the owner of the site: roses for his fiancée, in exchange for the prime placement on the site.) The partnership helped increase exposure for Expressions Unlimited among Greenville 360's 10,000 followers. 🌸

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## GO DEEPER

For additional tips on how to use video, hashtags and captions on social media, along with tools on how to prep now for SAF's 2017 Petal It Forward on October 11, visit [safnow.org/moreonline](http://safnow.org/moreonline).

One third of CEOs/owners/  
proprietors want to spend  
less time on social media.

## HOW OFTEN DO YOU POST TO FACEBOOK?

**10%**  
Never

**14%**  
1-3 x a month

**9%**  
1 x a week

**34%**  
Several times a week

**17%**  
Once a day

**15%**  
Several times a day

Vertical Response, Email + Social Marketing. Results based on an online survey of 462 businesses (93 percent with less than 100 employees). 2012.