Digital Strategy BY MARY WESTBROOK

BETTER USER EXPERIENCE — AND SALES — FOR EVENTS

> When Ryan O'Neil, PFCI, and his wife, Rachael, founded Twisted Willow Design in St. Louis six years ago, they knew they wanted to focus on events and grow their business. What they may not have realized at the time? The journey to do those two things would involve trial and error — and the creation of a new software company, Curate, to help other event florists succeed.

Last month, during a Society of American Florists webinar, O'Neil shared some of his top tips on how to improve user experience for brides and grooms and generate more leads (and sales). "There are so many granular pieces that my wife and I were missing on our website when we started," he said. "And what we've found over the years is that small fixes can make a big difference."

CRYSTAL CLEAR Stems in Brooklyn has a dedicated landing page for weddings and events.

Missteps to Avoid

O'Neil said florists often make a handful of common mistakes when it comes to web strategy and events:

Highlighting the wrong style. Early on, the O'Neils featured dozens of bouquets on their site — because the bouquets were beautiful and meaningful to the couple. "Many of those pictures were from some of our first weddings, so we had a strong emotional attachment to them," O'Neil said. The problem? The couple wanted to move beyond their $1,500 average event sale into higher-end work. All those (lovely) bouquets were sending an unintended message to brides looking for more ambitious floral installations: "This is all we do." Today, Twisted Willow, which now has an average transaction of $5,000,

shows what they want to sell, including hanging designs and wow-factor pieces. "The important thing is that you are thinking about the clients you want and showing the work that will most appeal to them," O'Neil said.

Making vague references. In working with other retail flower shops, O'Neil has noticed a tendency to bundle event work with other segments. (Think: "Funerals, daily arrangements and wedding and events" as a reference on your website.) "Another thing I'll see on some florists' websites is language like, 'We'd love to talk to you about weddings and events,' but no link or call to action," O'Neil said. That lack of clarity can be frustrating for clients. A better approach: Create a dedicated weddings and events website or landing page. "You need a space that is completely focused on weddings because these customers are so focused," he said. "If a bride hits your site and all she sees is funeral work, she'll leave… quickly." O'Neil also said it's important to direct any outside links from preferred vendors or sites such as The Knot or Wedding Wire directly to that dedicated page or site, a move that will help improve your SEO.

Giving clients "link paralysis." Once a bride or groom is on your site, make it easy for them to figure out

where to go next by streamlining the number of links. O'Neil suggests three to five max per page.

Better Verbiage

Sometimes, the smallest changes generate the best returns. That was the case in one memorable instance at Twisted Willow. As the O'Neils tinkered with their site, they decided to change their standard call to action from "Contact us" to "Check my date." The shift led to a 400 percent increase in inquiries.

"The reason I think is pretty simple," O'Neil said. "When you say, 'Contact us,' you're talking about yourself. When you say, 'Check my date,' you're adopting the viewpoint of the bride or groom."

The inquiry form itself remained the same — "there's no fancy AI tool to fill out a calendar," O'Neil said — but the tweak in verbiage has been a real boon for business, and it's an approach they now adopt in person at wedding shows, too. "'Check my date' is so noncommittal," he said. "We find that, when we use it, people are actually willing to share more information" — which, of course, helps with the sales process in the future. ❧

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You can check out O'Neil's entire webinar, which also includes tips on leveraging Google Analytics and utm tags, and the top mistakes florists make when creating contact forms, at **safnow.org/ webinars**. While you're there, be sure to review SAF's list of upcoming webinars, or watch a past session. Check out additional webinar resources from O'Neil, including a downloadable marketing form, at **Curate.co/SAF**.