

MATRIMONY: MICRO STYLE

> Okay, time to shake off COVID fears and get back to business! Yes, the virus is still around, but life goes on — and that includes weddings. I know most of you are scratching your heads on how to handle events while following CDC guidelines. I'm right there with you! But never one to sit and wait, I started getting innovative. Here's what I've done to preserve our wedding business — and tips for you to do it too!

Couples are still getting married. They are moving from ballrooms to backyards, inviting only immediate family and BFFs instead of Susan's second cousin's brother's girlfriend (what was her name, again?). And budgets are a fraction of what they were. It's not about "the show" now; it's about the celebration.

Disruption Equals Opportunity

While everyone is fighting for the handful of decadent weddings being planned, change your focus to elopements and mini weddings. Often referred to as "the budget bride," this client has been underserved in many cities for years.

This is certainly true in Columbus, but Bloomtastic's aesthetic (full, lush designs and lots of "wow" elements) didn't quite align with this clientele's style. To keep our Bloomtastic Weddings brand intact, we created a sister company: Columbus Flower Company.

Go to CFC's website (columbus-flowerco.com), and you'll find on-trend wedding designs and an easy-to-navigate à la carte buying experience; couples choose their style, personalize with their colors and order online just what they need, with no minimum purchase requirement. And since I'm eliminating the time-consuming consultation process, I can offer them a better price, giving CFC an edge over other florists.

When the pandemic hit, I knew CFC was going to be our future. Emails poured in from clients wanting to reschedule their events, but for those who still planned to say "I do" on their original wedding date and needed just a couple of bouquets and boutonnieres, CFC fit the bill! The no minimum and no-stress



COURTESY OF BLOOMTASTIC FLOWERS & EVENTS

ordering process provided welcome relief for the already frustrated couples!

Alterations for Your Brand

The wave of elopements and mini weddings is far from over. I think it will be a few years before things return to 2019 levels. Still those big, fancy weddings are not out of the question; in fact, I just created a \$24,000 all-floral proposal for a client. (Please bust out and dance with me — my average wedding is \$2,500!) But as my husband says, "You can die chasing an elephant, but you can live off the squirrels."

So, here's how to fill up on squirrels:

Create a sister company or a separate branded wedding department with a separate web page (could be simple such as: www.yourshopname.com/elopement) with elopement packages or à la carte options to cater to the smaller weddings. Someday, big weddings will return, and you will want to preserve your reputation for pampering high-end clients. A separate "side brand" lets you target a different demographic without complicating things. Be sure that it's known your main company designs the flowers and that this is a special brand to

cater to their pandemic needs. (I simply say, "Designed by Bloomtastic.")

Spread the word! In the past few months, I've spent way more time than ever on Instagram, creating conversations with customers and other wedding pros. These conversations have built friendships and trust. Photographers are busy shooting elopements and engagements right now, so chat them up! I've even offered a \$25 cash gift for referrals (hey, we all need a few extra bucks right now). I'll happily pay for someone's dinner if it could generate landing another wedding.

Educate your clients. This is a new concept for 99.9 percent of couples, so you'll have to offer some clear-cut directions on how this works. Don't get discouraged if it doesn't take off right away. Change up your website and marketing content and keep spreading the word! 🌸

Heather Waits owns Bloomtastic Flowers & Events in Columbus, Ohio, servicing as many as 400 weddings a year. She also coaches wedding pros to have profitable and rewarding businesses. heather.waits1@bloomtastic.com