

# BACK FROM THE BRINK

BY KATE PENN

*Floral Management's 1999 Marketer of the Year combined high-tech marketing with some old-fashioned public relations to turn around a failing business.*

**WHICH PATH WOULD YOU CHOOSE:** Keeping your successful, comfortable, established career, or taking over a barely surviving floral business? Gregg and Heather Katz found themselves weighing these options in February 1997, and they chose the path of most resistance: buying Heather's grandparent's flower shop that was on the brink of failure. Just two years later, Al Manning Florist, Inc., in Kansas City, Mo., is not only in the black but has also reestablished countless lost customers, increased outgoing wire order sales by seven-fold and created a new name and reputation for itself in the Kansas City area.

## MISSION: WEB SITE

After spending a challenging four months getting the business out of the red and calling each and every vendor and house charge account that had been neglected, Gregg and Heather's chief vehicle to resuscitate sales was a Web site. "But not just any Web site," Gregg says. The Katzes knew that the "build it and they will come" adage has little application to most Web sites. Just talk to the thousands of businesses with Web sites that get little more than a few "hits" a week — much less actual business.

While Heather spent her time running the shop, Gregg set out to create a Web site that would generate attention from new customers — on a



conservative budget. It did that and then some — and captured *Floral Management's 1999 Marketer of the Year Award* as a result. Here's how.

## STICK TO A BUDGET

After reviewing Web site construction bids ranging between \$10,000 and \$25,000, the Katzes decided they would construct the site themselves. Gregg bought Microsoft's FrontPage

98, a user-friendly internet Web site design program. He "played around" with the program for a few weeks and within a month had created a foundation for the site.

Next on the agenda: a name for the site. "We wanted to keep it personal to our business," says Gregg, "and not mislead the customers into believing that we are a major corporation, spanning the globe with stores." They agreed on "KCFlorist.com" and, for \$150, purchased and registered the domain name for two years.

## TINKER, TINKER, TINKER

Over the next three months (filled with plenty of 12- to 14-hour days



**Gregg and Heather Katz spent less than \$500 to launch their Web site — that generated \$39,000 in sales in its first five months.**

“and a lot of coffee,” says Gregg), KCFlorist.com evolved through three stages of development. One of the Katz’s goals was to make the Web site easy to understand and navigate. “I had to act as a customer,” Gregg says, “and continue to ask myself if this was something that I would understand and whether I’d find what I was looking for if I were shopping the site.”

To see his work in progress, Katz would upload the site through various Web browsers such as Internet Explorer, Netscape Navigator, AOL and Web TV.

Once the opening foundation looked good, the Katz’s put their products online. Gregg got written permission from FTD, 1-800-Flowers, Teleflora, AFS and Florafax to use their images. He “cut and pasted” images from the FTD and 1-800-Flowers Web site, and Teleflora, AFS and Florafax sent their product images on a CD-ROM. “Little did we know that this volume of prod-

uct images made KCFlorist.com the largest online florist,” Gregg says — an attribute that became the cornerstone of their PR campaign and the official tagline for KCFlorist.com.

### A SECURE SITE

The next step was to incorporate e-commerce into the site. Gregg experimented with four different e-commerce programs but did not find one that provided both ease of use and adequate security. So he signed a one-year contract with an outside company, Virtual Solutions (vcart.com), to develop the e-commerce and security aspect of the site. Vcart gave KCFlorist.com a way to process orders “with a level of security found on very few Web sites,” says Gregg. When a customer transmits an order, their credit card number is split into two pieces of data — one part is sent to Al Manning Florist and the other is stored on a Vcart secure site. “At no time does our shop or Vcart ever have enough

complete credit card information to allow someone attempting fraud to make use of it,” explains Gregg.

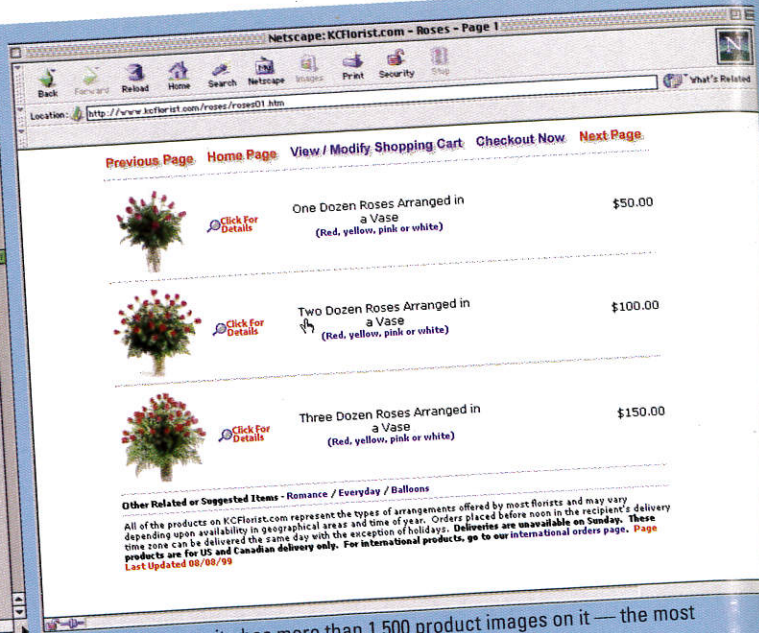
So that the site would not be limited only to customers with credit cards, KCFlorist.com utilizes I-Check — a secure method for personal or business check purchases. Gregg also worked with Vcart to develop a program to allow established house charge accounts to submit an order without credit card or check information.

### GETTING THE WORD OUT

“Constructing a site is one task, but advertising it is another,” says Gregg, who was determined to get the word out on the site for free. Gregg and Heather sent out press releases along with a hefty rose arrangement to three local news station personalities. “Within a day all three personalities called to do a broadcast from our store,” Gregg says, which translated



The opening page of KCFlorist.com makes it easy for customers to order flowers right away, "without having to read a bunch of copy about the company, first," says Gregg.



The KCFlorist.com site has more than 1,500 product images on it—the most of any Web site.

into four minutes of prime time and late night advertising.

The results were immediate: Within five to 30 minutes of each broadcast on the nightly news, visitors to the Web site increased by the hundreds.

The Katz's also sent press releases to a handful of local business publications, which led to a series of articles ranging from brief mentions to cover stories.

Over the next five months, KCFlorist.com welcomed 13,900 visitors

and paying customers to the web site at no advertising expense to the business.

## LET'S MAKE A DEAL

While positive publicity for KCFlorist.com continued (the shop

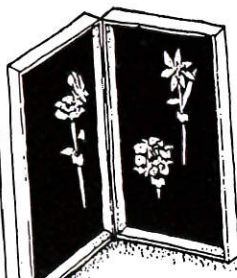
**FLORAL SPECIALTIES**  
P.O. BOX 897 THEODORE, AL 36590  
A DIVISION OF  
**HALL INTERNATIONAL TRADERS**

# Cling\*

*The Floral Adhesive That Really Sticks!*

AVAILABLE FROM YOUR LOCAL WHOLE-SELLER

\*Cling is a registered trademark of United Technologies.



Mini-Showboards come in 4 sizes and 4 colors. Great for showing bushes, stems, ribbon, cards, etc.

Spanish Moss - Sheet Moss - Glue Guns  
Bulk Glue - Skillets - Spray Adhesives  
Velcro\* Fabric - Velcro\* Hook Tape  
1-800-633-6986 #FAX (334)653-7712

*We Bring You Nature's Finest*



*Largest Selection Available*

*19 Species To Select From  
12 Stock Paint Colors & 7 Stock Glitter Colors  
Picked or Wired Options  
Scented and Wax Dipped Cones  
Retail and Warehouse Packaging  
Pine Cone Wreaths & Gift Packaged Cones*

For Your Color Catalog and Samples  
Call or Fax

**719-539-1288**

Or Write: P.O. Box 902, Salida, Co 81201

## WHAT MAKES A MARKETER OF THE YEAR?

**W**hen *Floral Management* launched the Marketer of the Year Award in 1994, we hoped to draw attention to some of the industry's outstanding marketing efforts — and inspire the rest of the industry with their ideas. *Floral Management* invites retailers, wholesalers and growers to take part in the contest, luring them with the prospect of a \$5,000 cash prize. For the sixth year in a row, that cash prize is sponsored by Design Master color tool, Inc.

### The Criteria

What constitutes an outstanding marketing effort? The judges are charged with reviewing the entries and rating each entrant in the following six categories: effectiveness of campaign, originality, success, use of available resources, professionalism and overall excellence.

### The Judges

We know that only experienced marketers with a track record of success are qualified to judge other marketing efforts. So, each year we choose a panel of seasoned professionals within and outside the floral industry:

**George Boulton**, retailer, Flowers by George in Arlington, Wash.

**Holly Money-Collins**, educator, Department of Environmental Horticulture and Floristry at City College of San Francisco.

**J. Sten Crissey**, AAF, retailer, Crissey Flowers & Gifts in Seattle, Wash., and past president of SAF.

**Steve Dahloff**, marketing director for Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide, the agency that handles the Society of American Florists consumer relations campaign.

**Gordon Perkins**, retailer, Perkins Flowers Inc., in Lapeer, Mich.

**Leo Roozen**, grower, Washington Bulb Company, Inc., Mount Vernon, Wash.

### How to Enter

Want to be an entrant in *Floral Management's* 2000 Marketer of the Year? Call, fax or e-mail a request for an entry form to Cheryl Burke at *Floral Management*: (800) 336-4743; fax (800) 208-0078; email [cburke@safnow.org](mailto:cburke@safnow.org). Applications for the 1999 award will be mailed after the first of the year.

was recently named South Kansas City Chamber of Commerce's Small Business of the Year), Gregg and Heather knew they would need to supplement the PR campaign with paid advertising. So they made some strategic and cost effective media buys to continue to draw traffic to [KCFlorist.com](http://KCFlorist.com). First, they bought a banner ad and hyperlink on [kansascity.com](http://kansascity.com) and [kstar.com](http://kstar.com), a web site operated by *The Kansas City Star* newspaper. Whenever a customer makes a search for "florist" or "flowers" on either of these sites, the [KCFlorist.com](http://KCFlorist.com) banner appears. "We formulated a contract (through 2000 with an option to renew) that would guarantee that no other florist could replace our banner," Gregg says.

They also negotiated ad rates — at about 50 percent of the original quote price — with *The Kansas City Star* for a campaign that would run during the



*Blue Bird, one of our many varieties*

## *Our Promise To You: Roses of Lasting Beauty*

*Koch Mesa Nursery Premium California Roses  
are guaranteed to open...and hold...and last!*

*Each and every rose receives the tender loving care  
that only a small family-owned nursery can provide.*

*Ask your wholesaler for a list of  
our gorgeous rose varieties from A to Z,  
or call us— we would love to talk roses with you!*



**NURSERY, INC.**

*Growers & Shippers of Hydroponically Grown Roses*

PHONE (805)929-4683 FAX (805)929-1843

E-MAIL [kmesarose@aol.com](mailto:kmesarose@aol.com)

885 MESA ROAD, P. O. BOX 979, NIPOMO, CA 93444

## Marketer of the Year Runner-Up

**B**all Horticultural Company was the first runner-up in *Floral Management's* 1999 Marketer of the Year. Here's a quick synopsis of their campaign.

When Ball Horticultural Company set out to create the first branded bedding plant, they were hoping that consumers would "catch the wave." They have. Wave petunias, only in their fourth year of retail promotion, are now in major North American retail chain programs, such as Home Depot, Target, K-Mart, Kroger and Lowes. Independent retailers in the U.S. and Canada, including Home and Garden Showplace, are also carrying the product.

So, how did Ball Horticultural Company meet its goal of producing and marketing a product consumers would ask for by name? They made the "Wave" hard to miss.

Immediately after the Purple Wave petunia was introduced at the PanAmerican Seed "pack trial" for new products in 1995, the marketing campaign began. Although it started with traditional promotional materials throughout the industry, Ball quickly expanded the product line and advertising by adding the Pink Wave in 1996. By the next spring, the campaign was beginning to take root — the plant appeared on the Discovery Channel 'Home Matters Show' and on the NBC Today Show.

Ball also developed Wave point of purchase items for in-store advertising. The "Point of Purchase Kit" includes area signs, bench cards and in-store and home care instructions. To help enhance promotion efforts, Ball encourages "Wave Rave" weekends in stores that distributed the petunias. The "Wave-Rave event kit" includes Wave tie-dye staff t-shirts, buttons, balloons, and advertising supplies to publicize the "Wave party."

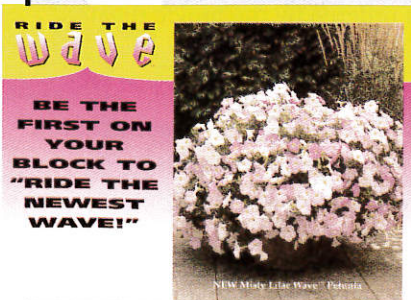
A Web site was the next piece of the marketing strategy, and in March 1997 "www.wave-rave.com" premiered. The site offers product information, gardening tips, a retailer-only

area, and a search function that allows consumers to find where Wave petunias are sold in their hometown. The pink and yellow color scheme used in the site was reinforced with the pink pot marketing blitz in the spring of 1998. Consumers throughout the country saw the Wave in pink pots during live TV news spots in New York, San Francisco, Kansas City and other cities. Since then, the packaging has become a signature feature of the product and Wave grower surveys indicated 57% planned to use wave-pink pots.

By creating brand recognition and excitement for their product, Ball Horticultural Company has

created the largest selling petunia, and one of the top ten bedding plants sold in North America. And if the Wave continues its expected growth, it will be the number one selling bedding plant by the year 2001.

—Katie Potthoff



“Darn.  
Where’s my  
money?  
Why can’t I  
pay my bills?  
How can I...”

How can I be more profitable? How do I compare to similar floral businesses? What is my business worth? **Does my accountant really understand my business?**

Talk with the CPA who knows your business. **Floral Advisors, Inc. knows the floral business** and is ready to answer your business questions.

Give us a call today on our toll free number (888) 712-7979 or visit our web site:

[www.floraladvisors.com](http://www.floraladvisors.com)

- Gain greater control of your business.
- Stop educating your accountant.
- Save time on your bookkeeping.
- Identify profit roadblocks.
- Outline plans to increase profits.



**Floral Advisors**

2626 East 21st  
Tulsa, Oklahoma 74114  
(918) 712-7979  
Fax (918) 712-7981

e-mail: [kevin@floraladvisors.com](mailto:kevin@floraladvisors.com)

*Kevin J. Munay, CPA*

Experience with over 1,000 florists  
10 years service to the industry  
*Floral Management* magazine, monthly columnist  
References available

CIRCLE READER INQUIRY CARD NO. 54

### Tropical Flowers

Anthurium • Banana  
 Calla • Ginger  
 Heliconia • Strelitzia

### Cut Foliage

Areca • Cordyline  
 Croton • Cyperus  
 Dieff • Pandanus



**FLORICA FARMS**

Worldwide Plant & Flower Distributors

### Tropical Bouquets

#### Florida

Patrick Muntz  
 Tel: (561) 791-4588  
 Fax: (561) 791-0666

Wholesalers Only

#### Costa Rica

Julio Araya  
 Tel: 011 (506) 453-1927  
 Fax: 011 (506) 453-1928

CIRCLE READER INQUIRY CARD NO. 38

introducing...

# DESIGN ready™

a unique new line of bunches from Dos Gringos

The ultimate in convenience,  
 this product line guarantees:

Each stem graded, cleaned and  
 ready for arrangement

Consistent stem count  
 for accurate costing

No extra labor

Design Ready™ by Dos Gringos ... it's the way to go!

1 • 800 • 466 • 2852

Retailers...  
 please call us for a wholesaler near you!

dos  **gringos**  
 A FLOWER COMPANY

an H&L Group LLC Co.

CIRCLE READER INQUIRY CARD NO. 165

major floral holidays. "We thought we'd be able to generate the most amount of new hits and customers to the Web site during the largest floral holidays," Gregg says. In addition, they also negotiated an ad for KCFlorist.com that is dispatched via email to 12,000 subscribers of kstar.com for 1 cent per email, compared to the original quoted 3 cents. To help track the results, customers who mention they are placing an order because of the email receive a free delivery.

To ensure the local customer base knows about the Web site, Al Manning Florist includes FTD's customer imprinted postcards with ever order sent out of their store. "Customers could see the featured holiday and everyday items of FTD, and then how they could purchase them: through KCFlorist.com, by phone or by coming into the store," says Gregg.

The Katzes make a point to get the wire service holiday selections on the KCFlorist.com Web site as soon as they're available. "Our thinking," says Gregg, "is to feature as many future holiday specials as possible to encourage early shopping." By February, KCFlorist.com already has Easter, Secretaries Week and Mother's Day selections online.

Manning Flowers supplemented the local advertising with a barter agreement with National Cinema Networks. They got \$1,440 worth of slide ad placements on 10 screens at a local theatre during Valentine's Day — at a cost to the business of about \$500 worth of product (\$1,440 at retail price) ordered by the movie theatre.

## RESULTS

Within five months of its launch (prior to any of the paid advertising), the store had received more than 925 orders, averaging \$42.30 a piece; more than \$39,000 in additional revenues — a profit for a start-up cost of about \$400. Al Manning Florist had the most success

### The Original Gardencut™ Shears

by **Joshua Roth Ltd.** are general purpose, heavy duty shears, especially well suited for any gardening, hobby or commercial task requiring sharp, precise cuts with minimum effort. Exceptionally sharp, pointed tips that give access to otherwise inaccessible areas have made them favorites of Florists and Basket makers, alike. Plus: Low cost & long life.

**"Best shears for Floral design- bar none!"**  
J.B., Ft. Collins, CO

**"Best floral shear available at any price!"**  
B.J., Mars, PA

**Joshua Roth Ltd. (800) 624-4635**

For Catalog with our many fine floral, bonsai and gardening tools: Fax (503) 246-3017  
floral@joshuaroth.com www.joshuaroth.com



CIRCLE READER INQUIRY CARD NO. 75

## Celebrate the Millennium!

Celebrate 2000 is a pattern of bursting fireworks with bright, millennium inspired color. It is available in Clearphane® rolls, Metallized Film rolls, Speed Covers® and Film Sleeves.

Millennium is a pattern of vivid stars and bursts with crisp blues and vivid magentas. It is available in Metallized Holographic Rolls, Clearphane® Rolls and Speed Covers®.

Announce the new century by complimenting your festive plants with Highlander® Millennium Patterned Speed Covers®. Enhance cut flowers, gift baskets and party decorations with Millennium themed film, making every gift a celebration!

Let the electric colors of the new year spark your decorative choices. Buy Highlander® Millennium products to add style to your new year!

HIGHLAND SUPPLY CORPORATION  
1111 Sixth Street • Highland, IL 62249  
(800) HSC-FOIL (472-3645) Fax: (800) 553-2948  
www.highlandsupply.com



© 1999 HSC 8/99

CIRCLE READER INQUIRY CARD NO. 23

ful Christmas and Valentine's Day in its history. The shop's FTD outgoing order sales increased more than sevenfold in November 1998 compared to the same month in 1997. December followed suit with a 400 percent increase, and January 1998's outgoing wire order sales were more than twice as high as the previous year's.

In addition, the Katzes attribute a 30 percent increase in house accounts since the fall of 1998 directly to KCFlorist.com. "Many businesses are equipped with Internet access and prefer to use the Web site, since the emailed receipt provides them with a record for their own accounts," says Gregg.

More evidence of success: While Web site sales slow considerably during non-holiday times, Gregg says the shop's summer sales are up about 30 percent over last summer — an increase he attributes to the new customers gained through KCFlorist.com.

### ANYONE CAN DO IT

If a complete business turnaround seems like no easy feat, then a do-it-yourself Web site likely seems monumental to most florists. But Gregg — who knew nothing about designing a Web site until a year ago — concedes that "anyone who can sit down with an instruction manual at a computer can do it." Easier said than done? Perhaps, but Gregg says having an online presence is a matter of surviving a telephone," he says. "If you're only open from eight to five, you're losing a lot of potential business."

A Web site alone, however, won't carry the future of any flower shop. Ultimately, Gregg says, "it comes down to how well you sell the order and provide personal service and customer satisfaction." ■

Kate Penn is editor in chief of Floral Management, SAF's vice president of publishing and communications.

E-Mail: kpenn@safnow.org

OCTOBER 1999 • FLORAL MANAGEMENT