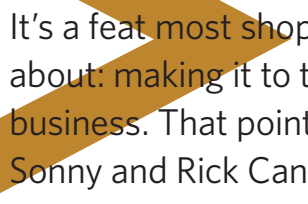


# Fantasy Baseball

**As the official florist of the Boston Red Sox, Exotic Flowers turns a marketer's dream into a reality — and wins Floral Management's 15th Annual Marketer of the Year Award**

BY KATE F. PENN

Photography by Brian Smith



It's a feat most shop owners only dream about: making it to the 50-year mark in business. That point came in 2007 for Sonny and Rick Canale, the father and son team at the helm of Exotic Flowers in Boston. Rick, who handles the marketing for the business's two locations, took advantage of the milestone to go after some free ink and airtime: He alerted the media with press releases, e-mail blasts and floral deliveries to announce the anniversary. To his disappointment and dismay, not one media outlet picked up this achievement. Zip. Zero. Zilch.







**PLAY BALL** Scoring the designation as the official florist of the Boston Red Sox directly impacted sales for Exotic Flowers, says co-owner, Rick Canale, but not without a full roster of marketing strategies.

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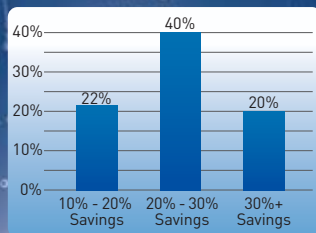


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Rather than figure out how to spin the store's anniversary into a more compelling story for the media, Rick, a self-described "marketing nut," decided to take a different path altogether. He asked himself, "What do people in Boston pay attention to? What is newsworthy?" The obvious answer: the Red Sox. (Non-sports fans, if it's not obvious, take note: The team gets more than three million fans at games each season and has had more than 400 consecutive sell-out games.) "This is our Hollywood," Canale says, of the seemingly magnetic force between Boston's sports teams and its residents. "We have the Red Sox, the Patriots, the Celtics. Everyone's into them. They are the gossip page here."

Canale cites three more compelling stats about the Red Sox: 54 percent of fans have household income of more than \$75,000, 67 percent have a bachelor's degree and 65 percent are male. "All of these demographics are completely in tune with Exotic Flowers' target market," Canale says.

Knowing the team had been aggressively pursuing sponsors in 2007 — and they did not yet have a florist sponsor — Canale buried his anniversary celebration plans and, in June of 2007, e-mailed the one individual in the corporate office whose name he knew and asked about the sponsorship. "And then it became a real-life negotiation," he recalls. "He came back with a multiple-year deal, with insanely high increases each year." Canale thought he'd have to walk away from the idea, but they eventually negotiated an affordable deal that would get Exotic Flowers the "Official Florist of the Boston Red Sox" moniker for the 2007, 2008 and 2009 seasons.

For his *chutzpah* in going after the sponsorship, the comprehensive and creative way that the shop capitalized on it, and the results it created for the shop, Exotic Flowers earned yet another moniker, as Floral Management's 2008 Marketer of the Year. Rick Canale is the first to say that snagging a sports team sponsorship does not alone guarantee results — in fact, it can be the fastest waste of money if it's not followed up. Here's how he made the most of his investment.

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**A HEAD FOR SALES** To drive home the connection, Exotic Flowers sells Boston Red Sox paraphernalia, including bobble heads and snow globes.

## MEET THE WINNER

**EXOTIC FLOWERS, Boston**

**RICK CANALE, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation in the 51-year-old business**

**GROSS ANNUAL SALES More than \$3 million**

**CAMPAIGN Marketing "Official Florist of Boston Red Sox" designation**

**STRATEGY Branding, co-branding, direct mail, e-mail, in-store merchandising, staff perks**

**RESULTS 10 percent increase in each: local sales, house charges and local deliveries; 30 percent increase in word-of-mouth referrals.**

**WORDS OF WISDOM "Don't do this unless you love sports."**





**FARM TEAM** Staff members Megan Karn, Craig Hutchins and Jenny Whitaker got into the swing of things with the help of free Red Sox tickets, caps and jerseys. All Exotic Flowers staff harvested the team perks.

## Batter Up: Time to Bring it Home

While getting sales results from the new partnership wasn't automatic, Canale says the initial media announcement of the deal in September 2007 did create some buzz. Good-naturedly poking fun at the new partnership, [Bostonsportz.com](http://Bostonsportz.com) blogger Aaron Gettings wrote that same month, "... So the next time you're at the game, or watching it on TV and your (significant other) is giving you a hard time... you'll always have a constant reminder... Buy them some flowers."

Canale rattles off additional pick-ups, after the Red Sox's "official florist" was announced: [Google.news](http://Google.news) ran the story, as did the *Boston Globe* and the *Boston Herald*. In fact, the shop has been featured in the city's two dailies 10 times since the partnership began - compared to one time in the previous five years (The *Boston Herald* recently referred to him as "Big Bloom Rick Canale"). "Exotic Flowers is now believable," Canale says, attributing that credibility to his city's love affair with the team. "Forget the history. Good enough for the Red Sox? Good enough for me."

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The savvy marketer in Canale knew that the initial buzz of the sponsorship would not alone be good enough to increase his shop's sales. He'd have to figure out how to make every potential customer aware of the Red Sox connection — without going over budget. He designated about \$25,000, or 20 percent of the shop's \$125,000 marketing budget in 2007, for marketing the Red Sox sponsorship - including the sponsorship fee. (Canale can't disclose the specific amount, per the agreement.)

But before he spent a dime, he knew he needed to have an enthusiastic staff. Each of Exotic Flowers' two locations has about 10 employees, plus between five to 15 seasonal employees and independent contractors. "If your staff aren't telling people what you're doing, who is?" he asks. He gave each staff member game tickets (otherwise impossible to get in Boston, Canale says), Red Sox caps and jerseys — all provided by the Red Sox. "I had to make sure (the deal) included perks for the employees, so they were excited about it," Canale says.



**HOME PLATE** During the sponsorship, Exotic Flowers saw local sales and deliveries both increase 10 percent, average orders go up more than 5 percent and walk-in sales increase almost 10 percent.

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**SOCK IT TO 'EM** Rick Canale didn't hold back when it came to making the shop's affiliation clear. Every gift bag, cellophane wrap, business card and magnet is adorned with the Boston Red Sox designation.

## WHAT MAKES A MARKETER OF THE YEAR?

When 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 15th 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 four categories: effectiveness of campaign, originality, 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.

■ **STEN CRISSEY, AAF**, vice president of development and industry relations for the American Floral Endowment, former SAF President and an SAF Floriculture Hall of Fame Inductee.

■ **JAMES DELPRINCE**, associate professor of floral design at Mississippi State University.

■ **BJ DYER, AAF, AIFD**, and **GUENTHER VOGT, AAF**, owners of Bouquets in Denver, and Floral Management's 2000 Marketer of the Year.

■ **TOM HOFEDITZ**, director of marketing at Baisch & Skinner in St. Louis, Floral Management's 2007 Marketer of the Year.

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

■ **ROD SALINE, AAF**, Engwall Florist & Greenhouse, president of the Society of American Florists.

### How to Enter

Want to be an entrant in Floral Management's 2009 Marketer of the Year? Call, fax or e-mail a request for an entry to Kate F. Penn, at Floral Management, (800) 336-4743; fax (800) 208-0078; E-mail [kpenn@safnow.org](mailto:kpenn@safnow.org)

## Past Winners

- 2007** John Baisch, Baisch & Skinner, St. Louis
- 2006** Lyn and Skip Shipman, Brenda's House of Flowers, Woodstock, Ga.
- 2005** Frances Hopkins, Under A Foot Plant, Co., Salem, Ore.
- 2004** Marty & Jane Loppnow, Waukesha Floral & Greenhouse, Waukesha, Wis.
- 2003** Scott Carlson, Florabundance, Miami
- 2002** BJ Dyer, AAF, AIFD, and Guether Vogt, AAF, Bouquets, Denver
- 2001** Andrew Manton-Zamora and Rutger Borst, Apisis Group, Miami
- 2000** Southern California Plant Tour Days
- 1999** Greg and Heather Katz, Al Manning Florist, Kansas City, Mo.
- 1998** Bill Cutting, Kuhn Flowers, Jacksonville, Fla.
- 1997** Brooks Jacobs, Greenbrook Flowers, Jackson, Miss.
- 1996** Sylvia Nichols, AIFD, The Window Box, Cheshire, Conn. United Floral Exchange, Carlsbad, Calif., and Denver.
- 1995** Mary Dark, Broadmoor Florist, Shreveport, La., Greg Royer, Royer's, Lebanon, Pa.
- 1994** Mary Lore, McFarland Florist & Greenhouses, Inc., Detroit Tom Aykens, AAF, Memorial Florist & Greenhouses, Appleton, Wis.



## Root for the Home Team

When customers weren't interacting with a fresh-from-the-game staff, they were sure to be reminded of the store's Red Sox connection through the shop's packaging. Canale had the shop's business cards, magnets, cellophane and gift bags reworked to include the tagline, "Official florist of the Boston Red Sox." Overkill? Some might think so, but Canale says branded packaging pays off. "Many people don't realize that packaging brings

people back to you, so a lot of shops don't put much into it," he says. "We put our name on just about everything we can."

Canale's budget reflects that philosophy: He allocates the cost of printing the logo on his packaging as a marketing expense. "That way, our product cost isn't getting skewed, and our marketing cost is getting justified," he says. "Any branding we do on the packaging goes to the marketing budget." He also had the shop windows, vans, staff aprons and all



print advertising materials re-lettered to showcase the affiliation.

And in case customers miss the Red Sox connection on the packaging, they're sure to see it in the stores: Exotic Flowers sells Red Sox gift items, from snow globes to player figurines, in the store (He buys them through one wholesaler rather than direct, which is a bit more expensive but "saves time chasing down products."). In addition to capitalizing on the "instant credibility" that the partnership brings the shop, Canale says the gift items "added another revenue stream to the tune of \$5,000 in the first three months of the campaign." An added bonus, Canale says, is that the merchandise is a great way to get employees to interact with customers, who can't help but ask, "Why are you guys selling Red Sox merchandise?"

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## Line Drive to the Masses

As you might expect, the major league deal included a few exposure opportunities for Exotic Flowers, including a full-page color ad in the monthly Red Sox magazine (distributed at games) which typically goes for \$5,000 a page. He also gets a few scoreboard messages at Fenway Park during the games, and he takes advantage of the free game tickets that are part of the partnership to shore up his e-mail list, by using them as bait in contests to acquire e-mail addresses.

To push the news out to the community, Canale sent an e-mail blast and direct mail postcard to about 2,000 and 5,000 customers, respectively. He bartered for space in the bi-weekly free city magazine, Improper Bostonian, and the annual Deutsche Bank Championship program, distributed during a PGA tournament ("a great match-up to our target audience," Canale says). The shop even includes Red Sox baseball cards in clients' statements. "Your customers and employees will spread the news for you if you tell them about it," he says.

The deal prohibits Exotic Flowers from showing the Boston Red Sox logo or touting the sponsorship online (a

typical limitation, because most sporting teams want to invest in their local fan base).

But Canale figured out another way to convey the shop's Red Sox connection to online buyers. He bought the URLs [soxflorist.com](http://soxflorist.com) and [redsoxflorist.com](http://redsoxflorist.com) and promotes them (as well as 888-SOX-FLORIST) in his marketing materials. It not only reinforces the brand but also allows him to track the effectiveness of it.

But, as big as online buying is today — Exotic Flowers does between 5 and 10 percent of sales online (“depending on whether you count the people who call in, while looking at the Web site,” Rick says) — Canale says he has a “brick and mortar mentality” and is confident he'll get the most payoff from the sponsorship from his customers who visit or call the shop. He's done some search engine optimization — manipulating keywords so a shop comes up higher in search engine results — but, ultimately, he doesn't see the loyalty from online customers.

“People who find you via referral are much (more loyal),” he says, speculat-

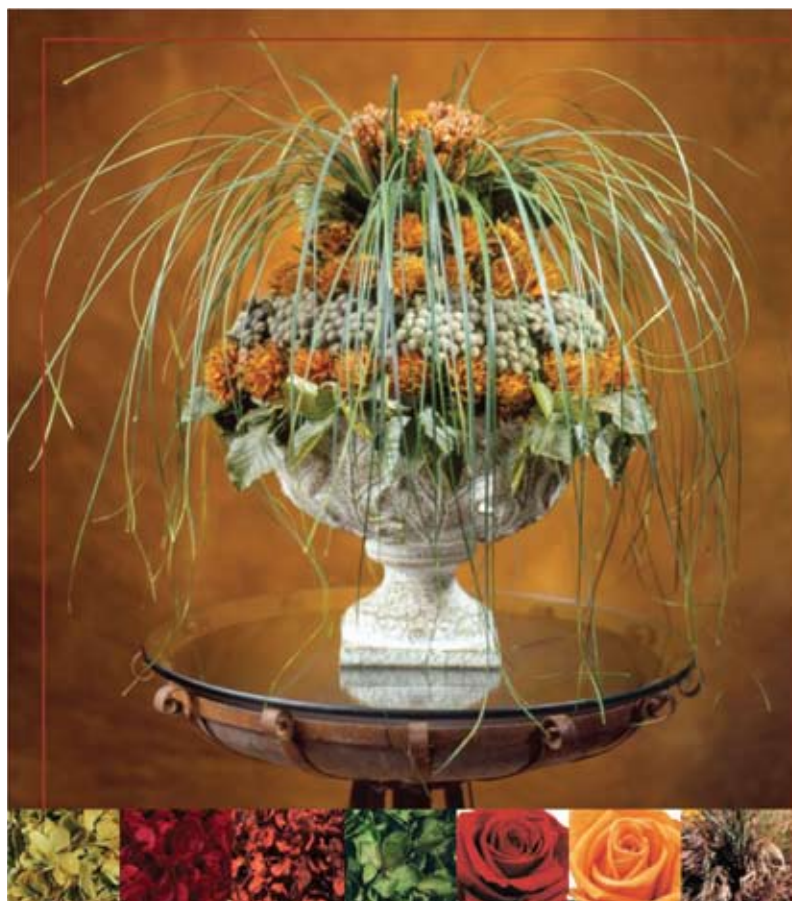


**FAN FAVORITES** Jenny Whitaker wraps up a perfect Boston bundle: fresh flowers, a Green Monster stuffed animal (named for the signature left-field wall at Fenway Park) and a Red Sox figurine. Exotic Flowers sold \$5,000 worth of Red Sox paraphernalia in the first three months of being the team's official florist.

ing that the difference in habits comes down to the fact that online customers “don't speak to you, they don't hear you,” whereas in person or over the phone, “you have a chance to interact with people much better.”

### Home Run

Based on the numbers, it looks like Canale's theory rings true. Exotic Flowers' referrals are “through the roof” (more than 30 percent, to be exact) since the summer of 2007, an increase



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**BASES LOADED** The Exotic Flowers logo, seen here on the sign outside the shop, has had quite a workout since the partnership was announced. Rick Canale has covered his bases, plastering it on the Fenway scoreboard and buying ads in prominent Boston publications.

that Canale attributes to the shop's affiliation with the Red Sox. More signs of the positive influence the sponsorship has had on sales: Between July and November 2007, local sales increased 10 percent — and Canale is thrilled to now be able to count the Red Sox as a client. In addition, during that same time period average orders went up by more than five percent, and house charges and local deliveries increased by more than 10 percent each — all of which Canale attributes to the increased exposure he received as a result of what the shop did to take advantage of the partnership. Even the shop's walk-in sales increased close to 10 percent — although he's not sure if he can attribute that jump entirely to the sponsorship, "because we don't ask every walk-in customer how they heard about us, like we do with people on the phone."

Canale used the perks of the sponsorship to more directly increase sales: The free game tickets became a nice way to "thank" some of the shop's largest clients. After giving a four-pack of

tickets to a funeral director, he got a \$2,200 funeral referral the next day. "We've definitely seen bigger business from the undertakers. We don't do kickbacks, but we'll bribe them," he says, chuckling about the power of Red Sox tickets.

Looking at these results, cashing in on a sports team can seem about as effortless as a day in the park. But Canale is quick to advise (warn, is more like it) anyone considering a sports sponsorship to be ready for a major commitment. Getting the sponsorship is only the beginning, he says. "There's the branding, the co-branding," he says. "If you can't do it all, then you shouldn't do it. And you have to love sports, so you get your target market and can bang the drum."

### All in the Timing

As hard as Canale and his team have worked, he's all too aware that the shop's "official florist" title could go as quickly as it came. Snagging the sponsorship mid-season and before the Red Sox had won the World Series certainly helped make it more affordable. Two years later, however, the sponsorship fee just might not justify the investment. What's next, after being the official florist of the Boston Red Sox? "Well, there's always the Bruins. And the Patriots are as loved as the Red Sox," Canale says. "That might be worth exploring." 🌿

**Kate F. Penn** is editor-in-chief of Floral Management and vice president of publishing and communications for the Society of American Florists. E-mail: [kpenn@safnow.org](mailto:kpenn@safnow.org).



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### Info to Go

#### Where Are They Now?

See what happens to Floral Management's Marketers of the Year *after* their time in the spotlight, in a previously published article, where we revisited several of the past winners. Go to [www.safnow.org/infotogo](http://www.safnow.org/infotogo)