

## THE CONTAINER CONUNDRUM

**Customers call to place an order when they are on someone else's website (often, a wire service to which I don't belong). Typically, I don't even carry the containers or flowers they are looking at, but I don't want to lose the sale. Help!** LOUISE CHIVERS | OWNER | CHIVERS FLOWERS | LONDON, UK

**Welcome to the 21st century.** Get used to those calls, because you are only going to get more of them — it's just the nature of Web shopping for flowers today.

The Internet is a very competitive market, and everyone is fighting to capture every order in aggressive — and, at times, unethical — ways. But don't blame the customer. She simply searched for a flower type, ZIP code or hospital name and landed on another company's site instead of yours (either because they paid for higher search results, are practicing good SEO and/or are masquerading as you by buying your shop name as a keyword). Look at the silver lining: At least she called your shop instead of buying from that other vendor. You want to capture that sale, make her happy and ultimately convert her into a repeat customer. Here's how:

### Say Yes

I'm a firm believer in the adage that it's always easier to ask for forgiveness than permission. Applying that concept to the calls you're talking about, when a customer says, "I see this XYZ design on your website and I would like to get it delivered today," instruct your team to always say "Absolutely!" OK, you may need to adjust your moral compass here because I am advocating telling a white lie. However, after taking half a million orders since 1993 (not a white lie — I did the math), I know customers will typically be amenable to an alternative. Try: "I just checked and we don't have the orange roses you saw online, but I can use a gorgeous soft pink one instead, or I have beautiful orange tulips." Or: "I know that we are out of that smiley face mug you saw online; however, I have some bright cube vases and we can attach a smiley face balloon to the arrangement!" As I said, this approach usually works as long as you are able to think quickly and

offer your alternative enthusiastically instead of in an apologetic tone.

### Make Her Happy

When you need to alter the design (swapping flowers, container or both), remember to build up the customer's confidence by validating her choice among the alternatives you've offered. My favorite statements include, "She'll love that!" and "That's going to be a wonderful gift," or "This is going to look beautiful with (that flower, that container)." Essentially, you're offering a little pat on the back that while it won't be exactly what she saw online, she made a fantastic and equally (or even more) attractive choice.

### Start an LTR

You want to be in a long-term relationship (LTR) with every customer who calls your shop. She may have just stumbled upon you today, but you need to take steps to make sure you get future business from her too. At the end of the call, I typically offer the shop credentials this way: "I'm not sure how you found us today, but I want to give you our toll-free number to make shopping easier for you the next time you have to send flowers. And here's our

website address too." And make sure to capture that customer's email address so you can add her to your mailing list and remind her which florist to use! 🌸



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**Got a sales or service challenge?** Tell Tim about it, and he'll tackle it in an upcoming column. Email [tim@floralstrategies.com](mailto:tim@floralstrategies.com), or call him, (800) 983-6184.

