

# floral management

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THE FLORAL BUSINESS AUTHORITY

JUNE 2019 | VOLUME 36 | NUMBER 3

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# floral management

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## IN LIEU OF LOVE?

> Interesting, isn't it? When society hurts the most, people turn to flowers.

Our deeply felt need for flowers to soften pain came to mind recently with the unfathomable massacre of Muslims in Christ Church, New Zealand, and Christians on Easter in Sri Lanka. Immediately and spontaneously, flowers appeared at the sites where the tragedies occurred. The common motivation among people was the simple desire to say, "I hurt. This is wrong. This must stop."

In fact, with virtually all tragic events, the same script plays out. Think of 9/11, the shootings at Virginia Tech, Sandy Hook Elementary, Las Vegas, Parkland, the Pittsburgh Synagogue ... and the list of mass tragedies goes on. In all these cases, flowers served as salve to soothe the collective souls of a grieving public.

And it is not just tragedies on this scale, either. When dignitaries' lives end, tragically or not, impromptu floral memorials appear as if from the ether. John Lennon, Princess Diana, Prince, John McCain, and more recently, community activist and rapper Nipsey Hussle comprise a partial list illustrating the point.

Even in our local communities, unexpected deaths inspire floral tributes. Bouquets dot our highways, where accidents claimed lives of motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians.

So why is it that with the deaths of those we love the most — our wives, husbands, children and grandparents — today's social norms insist on the phrase "in lieu of flowers"?

There was a time when families would not think of a funeral service for a loved one without flowers. Likewise, friends and business associates of the deceased or the family expressed their love by sending flowers. For most florists, the result meant that through the 1960s, into the 1970s and beyond, funeral flowers were a significant, and in many cases, the majority of a flower shop's business.

Circumstances changed, however, with the advent of the fundraiser. People began sending donations to charities in the name of the deceased. This gesture left the impression that something good,

and of lasting value, had been done in their memory.

Over time, however, another reality has developed. With the commonplace "in lieu of flowers" directive, people have realized they can make very modest gifts to charities named by families. Their gifts will be acknowledged by the charity, the family will be informed of the gift — though not the dollar amount — and their obligation to the deceased has been satisfied.

Often sacrificed in this modern ritual, unfortunately, is a visible token of love. The perfunctory pattern of sending small checks to charities has evolved into a rote exercise with little thought or meaning for either the deceased or their family. How sad!

But what if we could change this pattern? What if we could draw on people's impulsive desire to turn to flowers in times of mourning and use this same need to express their love with flowers when the death of a loved one occurs?

Suppose, for example, a new tradition called for mourners to arrive at funeral services with a single flower, or a small cluster of flowers?

No, it likely wouldn't equate to a lot of money for florists. But wouldn't it go a long way to reestablish flowers to their rightful and natural place as the primary vehicle for expressions of love at times of grief?

There was an era when industry ads said, "Say it with flowers." It worked magnificently because the buying public knew, at its core, it spoke the truth. Funeral services without flowers creates another, rather sad and distressing message. It reads "in lieu of love." 🌻

**J. Sten Crissey, AAF**, is a second-generation retail florist from Seattle who sold his family's 65-year-old business and retired in 2006. He is a former SAF president and member of the Floriculture Hall of Fame. [stencrissey@gmail.com](mailto:stencrissey@gmail.com)







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## TECH TIPS AND FLOWER POWER



> Speed. Versatility. Features that are designed for florists (and, in many cases) directly from florist feedback. Streamlined functionality.

These are just some of the qualities that Society of American Florists members told contributing writer Tom Gresham they were looking for in point of sale systems as he set about researching the standout qualities of some of the industry's leading providers in this month's cover story (p. 24).

As Tom notes in the story, a decade ago, the number of companies offering POS systems was much smaller; today, florists have options galore

— which is great, but it can also be overwhelming. Tom's goal as he worked on the story was to figure out the key features of each system — what they are, who might benefit most from them — and to talk to real-world users about what each company does best.

The story itself is intended to be super practical, and it came about via another technology, SAF's Live Chat, intended to provide equally practical solutions for our members.

Several months ago, an SAF member logged onto [safnow.org](http://safnow.org) and asked one of our team members via Live Chat about POS providers. At the time, SAF had a basic list of providers, which we shared with that florist, but the query made us think we should dig in further to create a more comprehensive rundown. If you haven't yet had a chance to engage with our team on Live Chat, you should try it out. It's a great way to find resources fast and get to know our staff — plus, you never know: Your question or request might lead directly to a Floral Management story!

You'll find lots of additional practical information throughout this month's issue — customer service tips that will help improve phone sales (p. 16), SEO best practices (p. 40), care and handling advice on garden roses (p. 48) and more — but you'll also get a reminder about the powerful impact flowers have on emotions, specifically stress.

Last April, SAF launched a StressLess road tour on the West Coast, complete with flower giveaways, influencer partnerships, media appearances and a decked-out Volkswagen/Flower Power Mobile (p. 30). Organized to tie in with Stress Awareness Month, the tour highlighted the results of SAF's research on the positive effect of flowers on health, including the latest study from the University of North Florida.

The best news? You didn't have to take part in the tour directly to benefit from SAF's research. You can put it to work right away in your business, and summer is a great time to start doing just that. You can find out more about the tour and our research at [safnow.org/moreonline](http://safnow.org/moreonline).

Thanks for reading!

Mary Westbrook, Editor in Chief  
[mwestbrook@safnow.org](mailto:mwestbrook@safnow.org)

## More Online



### RANK & STYLE

Once you're finished with this month's cover story on point of sale (POS) system updates, why not refresh your website knowledge with the cover story on SEO best practices from our June 2018 tech story? Read the full article at [safnow.org/moreonline](http://safnow.org/moreonline).



### COUNTDOWN TO PARADISE

SAF conventions are known for top-notch educational sessions that explore topics that matter most to floral businesses. Get a feel for what's on tap this year with free 20-minute WebBlasts offered in June. The sessions will offer bite-sized samples of what you can't afford to miss at SAF Amelia Island 2019! [safnow.org/webinars](http://safnow.org/webinars)



### KNOCKOUT NUPTIALS

Calling all Midwest florists: Boost your wedding business by attending SAF's 1-Day Profit Blast in Kansas City. There, you'll hear expert Loann Burke, AAF, AIFD, CFD, PFCI, of Furst Florist and Greenhouses, Dayton, Ohio, share the latest and greatest info you need to thrill brides and grooms and make a profit on events large and small. [safnow.org/1-day-profit-blast](http://safnow.org/1-day-profit-blast)



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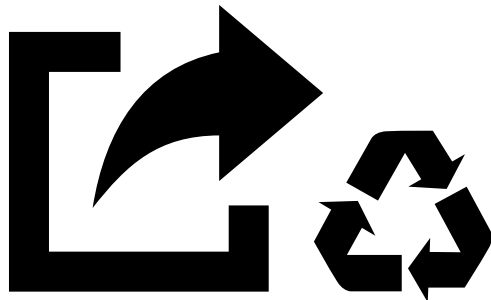
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## TIMELY TIPS, CONVENIENTLY DELIVERED



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> The Society of American Florists' three-part webinar series on digital strategies for Mother's Day was a hit with many members. The 20-minute format (plus additional time for Q&A) allowed retail florists and their team members to log on for targeted tips, without having to step away from their stores. Check out the list of upcoming sessions at [safnow.org/webinars](http://safnow.org/webinars). Here's what your fellow SAF members had to say about recent sessions:

SEO is crucial in this day and age and I have been approached so many times as a new business owner by companies trying to get me to pay them monthly [for SEO services]. This webinar was amazing in helping to get down some basic info that can make a big difference.

**Liana Labrador**

All in Bloom, Las Vegas, Nevada

The [session] gave me enough information that wasn't overwhelming and at the end I felt educated enough to go and apply it to my business.

**Brooke Johnson**

Flowers By George, Arlington, WA

I found this webinar very worthwhile. Looking forward to future topics!

**Debbie Clark**

Zeidler's Flowers, Evansville, Indiana 🌻





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## EXCITEMENT GROWS FOR SAF AMELIA ISLAND 2019

> School's out for summer, and many floral professionals have their eyes on September for four days of world-class business education, powerful connections and creative inspiration they'll receive from SAF Amelia Island 2019, the Society of American Florists' 135th Annual Convention, Sept. 18-21 at the Ritz-Carlton in Amelia Island, Florida.

Reece Nakamoto Farinas with Beretania Florist in Honolulu is ready. "I always tell our florist friends that it's foolish for them to miss out on the wealth of knowledge that comes with the SAF conference," Farinas said. "Every year we go, we find some way to improve our sales and better position ourselves for the future."

Shirley Lyons, AAF, PFCI, of S. Lyons Consulting in Veneta, Oregon, and a former SAF chairman, echoes those sentiments. "The SAF convention is the only venue where the entire floral industry comes together," Lyons said. "The educational, networking and relationship building opportunities are remarkable. It is where all the industry leaders and leaders of the future meet. Every industry business owner or manager should put this at the top of the 'to do' list."

Jeremy Lohman of Scott's House of Flowers in Lawton, Oklahoma, agrees. "For those of us who have been in business a while, we've experienced lots of changes of the last 20 years," Lohman added. "We can encourage others and learn how to stay relevant in a changing industry. For new florists, it's a great place to learn and gain wisdom from old hands in the industry."

Experts from inside and outside the industry take the stage at SAF Amelia Island 2019. Here is a look at a few of their presentations:



**State of the Industry — and SAF.** SAF CEO Kate Penn will explore the challenges and opportunities in the industry and unveil SAF's new vision.



**Onboarding Best Practices.** Barry Gottlieb of Coaching the Winner's Edge will show how companies with impressive longevity welcome new hires and set them up for success.



**2020 Floral Trends Preview.** Helen Miller, AIFD, CAFA, CF, and Derek C. Woodruff, AIFD, CF, PFCI, will present the industry's leading forecast of flower trends and styles for events and weddings.



**Relational Leadership.** Dysfunctional relationships exist in workplaces. Human resources expert Glenna Hecht of Humanistic Consulting will offer solutions to resolve conflicts.



**Consumer Trends and Buying Behavior.** Floral industry economic analyst Charlie Hall, Ph.D., will point out factors driving consumer purchases and recommend ways to prepare for the next recession.



**What's Your Next Move?** Clara Gonzales, former owner of Tiger Lily Florist, is prepped to share secrets of some of the shop's greatest successes, such as forecasting sales and implementing a performance-based compensation plan.



**High-Volume Fulfillment.** Skip Paal, AAF, and his team at Rutland Beard Floral Group will pull back the curtain on their process for high-volume fulfillment and explain how it can work for you.



**Be the Flower Shop Worth Buying.** Dreaming about retirement? Former SAF Chairman Shirley Lyons, AAF, PFCI, who sold Dandelions Flowers & Gifts last summer, and Paul Goodman, MBA, CPA, PFCI, president of Floral Finance Business Services, will guide you through succession planning with recommendations on how to boost your business's value.

### IMPORTANT CONVENTION DATES

- July 1:** Supplier Expo Early Registration Deadline
- Aug. 9:** Sylvia Cup Design Competition Entry Deadline
- Aug. 9:** New Products Showcase Exhibitor Deadline
- Aug. 16:** Outstanding Varieties Entry Deadline
- Aug. 23:** Early-Bird Convention Registration Deadline
- Aug. 28:** Deadline for SAF hotel rate

[safnow.org/annual-convention](http://safnow.org/annual-convention)







**OUTSTANDING FLOWERS** Jeremy and Robbe Lohman of Scott's House of Flowers in Lawton, Oklahoma, and Brian Kusuda of Jimmy's Flower Shop in Ogden, Utah, review the Best in Class Cut Bulb Freesia 'Versailles' by The Sun Valley Group during the 2018 Outstanding Varieties Competition.

Convention sessions include panels of industry professionals discussing strategies on in-depth topics, including:

- **Investigating New Revenue Streams.** Entrepreneurial florists share strategies for pumping up cash flow and profits with new products and services.
- **Turn Your Shop into a Destination.** Experiential shopping is all the rage. Learn how to draw consumers to your shop for a meaningful and personal shopping experience.

- **Social Media Marketing Demystified.** Florists who've grown their businesses through social sites share their knowledge — what works, what doesn't and how to manage your time.
- **Online Shopping Through Your Customers' Eyes.** The industry's technological leaders cover best practices for elevating your online presence and your customers' virtual shopping experience.
- **The Price Is Right — Or Is It?** There's no one-size-fits-all equation



**EMERGING LEADERS** Reece Nakamoto and Jaimie Kim Farinas with Beretania Florist in Honolulu, Hawaii; Jacqueline Ow of J. Miller Flowers in Oakland, California; and Peter Zuccalo of Central Square Florist in Cambridge, Massachusetts, experienced last year's Next-Gen Reception, for industry members who are age 40 and under.



**ADVANCED DESIGN TECHNIQUES** Loann Burke, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, of Furst Florist and Greenhouses in Dayton, Ohio, demos cold glue at one of six stations in last year's Advanced Design Techniques.

for pricing floral arrangements. Debate best practices for sound markups, labor charges and calculating discounts.

SAF Amelia Island 2019 also brings the industry's best products, services and artists to the forefront during these annual convention favorites:

- **Outstanding Varieties Competition.** Growers and breeders display more than 300 varieties of flowers and unique plants to vie for the top prize in one of the industry's biggest flower and plant competitions.
- **Supplier Expo.** Browse through dozens of new products and services, and get to know the vendors who can answer your questions and point you toward profitable opportunities for your business.
- **New Products Showcase.** Enjoy this fast-paced show-and-tell of the newest floral supplies, gift accessories and fresh product led by the industry's top floral educators, the Professional Floral Communicators-International.
- **Sylvia Cup Design Competition.** Watch as some of the nation's best floral designers are given the same flowers, foliage and supplies — and just two hours to create the surprise challenge.

For convention details and to register, go to [safnow.org/annual-convention](http://safnow.org/annual-convention). 🌿



## BOSTON SHATTERS ATTENDANCE RECORD FOR SAF 1-DAY PROFIT BLAST

> Well, that was wicked fun. (Sorry. Can't help ourselves!) In late March, 168 floral industry members from 20 states plus Washington, D.C., and Canada gathered in Boston for the Society of American Florists' 1-Day Profit Blast sponsored by Jacobson.

This turnout represented the highest attendance yet for SAF's popular 1-Day Profit Blast events, a series that delivers educational programming in regional locations.

"The popularity of the event really speaks to the need for opportunities in our industry to learn and network," said Nick Fronduto, president of Jacobson in Boston. "I think it's inspiring and a little humbling to realize how many people came out on what is probably their only day off for the week to take advantage of this programming and to learn new things and meet new people."

On the agenda: design inspiration (and new tools to help designers work more efficiently and more profitably); financial tips and best practices from a longtime accountant; practical customer service advice and pointers on staff training; social media trends and insight on how to pick and choose the best platforms, posts and strategies for maximum ROI; plus a supplier showcase, and a networking lunch sponsored by Hortica.

"I came today feeling a little tired and uninspired," said Teresa Cabral of Ray's Flower Shop in Fall River, Massachusetts. "I'm leaving with new ideas and energy. I can't wait to get back to work."

Joel Houston of Flowers Plus traveled from Charlotte, North Carolina, for the programming. It was his third SAF Profit Blast.



**NEXT UP** Sponsored by Flower Shop Network and Baisch & Skinner, SAF's 1-Day Profit Blast in Kansas City, Missouri, features a wedding design program, customer service, event finances, search engine marketing, and a supplier showcase. Get details and register at [safnow.org/1-day-profit-blast](http://safnow.org/1-day-profit-blast).

"It's a great way to network with other industry professionals about things that work and don't work in your shop," he said. "The presenters are always informative, and there are takeaways that I can implement right away in my shop. The strength of the knowledge and ability to network in the room is pretty amazing and being able to see products and talk in person [with vendors] is invaluable."

Nicole Palazzo of City Line Florist in Trumbull, Connecticut, attended with

her mother, Sue. Back at her family's business the next day, Nicole said she was "bursting with inspiration."

Palazzo is president of the Connecticut Florists Association and an active member of SAF's Next Gen Floral Pros Group. "It's one day of education, meeting like-minded florists and suppliers in my area," she said. "Education is everything in this ever-changing industry and Profit Blast really makes it easy to stay updated." 🌸



**THE PROS KNOW** Derrick Myers, CPA, CFP, PFCI, of Crockett, Myers & Associates, Crystal Vilkaitis of Crystal Media Group and Sam Bowles, FSC, of FloralStrategies LLC and Allen's Flowers in San Diego shared tips and best practices.



**DESIGN HACKS** Jody McLeod, AIFD, NCCPF, from Clayton, North Carolina, shared design tips and showed how to make the most of industry tools in a presentation sponsored by Syndicate Sales. By tossing a bouquet, he proved the durability of the construction of the Pillow and Egg.



**FACE TIME** During networking breaks, participants visited vendor stations and talked about new products and services.

## PETAL IT FORWARD SET FOR OCT. 23

> Imagine the streets of your city filled with smiling people holding bouquets. Picture your social media feeds brimming with messages of thanks to your shop, for making a person's day brighter with flowers. Envision a local reporter calling, asking you why floral gifts make such a profound, positive difference in people's lives.

These scenarios and others like them have played out for hundreds of floral industry members who have participated in Petal It Forward.

SAF's 2019 Petal It Forward campaign date is set for Wednesday, Oct. 23, 2019, and the Society of American Florists is spreading the word to increase industry participation and make it easy for members to start planning their local events now.

"The Petal It Forward concept is simple and easy to do, and it is one of the most engaging floral promotions in the industry's history," said SAF Vice President of Marketing Jennifer Sparks. "The ROI is huge for industry participants, as the program's random-acts-of-kindness premise raises visibility with local news, social media and consumers."

Since 2015, SAF has choreographed Petal It Forward. What started as an SAF-led promotional event in New York City has grown into a nationwide phenomenon that connects the entire floral industry bringing smiles, hope and encouragement (as well as hugs and tears of joy), and positioning florists as do-gooders in their local communities.

Last year, floral teams in 410 cities in all 50 states, plus Washington, D.C., took to the streets in 457 local Petal It Forward events with one simple goal: Share the power of flowers to strangers, giving them the opportunity to be both a recipient and giver of kindness. Passersby received two bouquets — one to keep, one to share — and were asked to post a picture about it on social media with the hashtag **#petalitforward**.

The pay-it-forward concept illustrates survey results that show that while 80 percent of people say *getting* flowers makes them happy, even more



**GOOD NEWS** Botanica International Design & Décor Studio handed out bouquets in Tampa, Florida, and scored prime news coverage last year with a story on ABC's "Good Morning Tampa Bay."

(88 percent) say *giving* flowers makes them happy. Flowers are scientifically proven to increase happiness and decrease worry and anxiety, according to SAF-commissioned research by Rutgers and Harvard.

As participating florists created local visibility, their common efforts generated national reach. Public relations and social media efforts for the 2018 Petal It Forward garnered nearly 90 million consumer impressions, reaching people far beyond the direct flower recipients with the power of flowers and an inspirational message of kindness.

Get ready now to bring this award-winning promotion to your local community.

"It's not too early to start laying the groundwork for your Petal It Forward event," Sparks said. "You can make your Petal It Forward local event as big or small as you want. It's a win-win to participate. For little effort, you give consumers the opportunity to experience the scientifically proven happiness that occurs when you give and receive flowers. At the same time, you position your business as a positive force in your community. That makes consumers feel good about you, which goes a long way in establishing customer loyalty. And, you give a morale boost to employees who play a part."

SAF provides members with advice on program logistics, as well as easy-to-implement materials and resources at [safnow.org/pif](http://safnow.org/pif). 🌸

**Jenny Scala** is SAF's director of marketing and communications. [jscala@safnow.org](mailto:jscala@safnow.org)

## HOW TO PETAL IT FORWARD IN YOUR COMMUNITY

### Lay the Groundwork

Talk to your staff and decide if you would like to hold a Petal It Forward event in your community. Many participants say Petal It Forward provided a morale boost internally for their staff.

Start small and grow from there. Even handing out 20 to 50 bouquets or single stems can make a big impact.

Think of Petal It Forward as advertising. That way, any expenses associated with the effort are worth it.

**Retailers:** Talk to your supplier(s) to see if they would be willing to work with you on product, through a discount or donations.

**Wholesalers and growers:** Talk to your retail customers about how you would like to help them in their Petal It Forward efforts, and/or consider holding an event of your own in your community.

Tell SAF about your plans. Fill out the online participation form at [safnow.org/piform](http://safnow.org/piform). This will help SAF compile a list of Petal It Forward events to show the media you are part of an effort happening all over the country.

### Scout Your Location

Choose a busy pedestrian area, such as a bus or train stop, office or community park, in front of your shop or anywhere you'd like to hand out flowers.

Consider venues where your gifts might be particularly appreciated, such as schools, senior centers and hospitals.

Check with your city and the location to inquire if permission is needed to hand out flowers.

### Get Help from Your Friends

Invite staff, regular customers or family members to participate as volunteers; they'll help promote the effort through their own connections.

Ask area nonprofits and civic groups in advance if they'd like to participate in handing out flowers.

### For More Petal It Forward Information

SAF provides members with step-by-step instructions, planning timelines, success stories from other florists, media talking points, suggested social media posts, T-shirt and flower card templates, media advisory, sample press releases and more at [safnow.org/pif](http://safnow.org/pif).



# snapshot

Bonboni Home & Gift Co. ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI



**TAKE FLIGHT** The exterior of the store currently features an installation of 1,000 butterflies affixed to preserved birch trees (inset); last year, the store had an installation of permanent botanicals in the same spot. Both were created by artist Erin Chenoweth of Palmdale, California.





## BIG LOOK, SMALL SPACE

> Bonboni Home & Gift Co. hadn't even been opened two full years when Architectural Digest swooped in and named the 490-square-foot gift boutique "the most beautiful store in Missouri." The designation (and the ensuing publicity from the big-name shout-out) was a heady experience for shopkeeper, stylist and owner Lauren Thorp, but the visual merchandising element in-store that attracts the most attention is decidedly down to earth. "People love my paper bag shingle wall," laughed Thorp, who founded a startup subscription box service for handmade goods (think: a CSA for Etsy) before opening Bonboni. "I needed to do something with that space and, mentally, I just couldn't paint another wall." So, she stapled 2,000 plain old lunch bags and voilà! Instant texture and ready-made conversation. "When the AC vent [near the wall] blows air, there's even movement, so people love it," said Thorp. While Bonboni isn't a flower shop, Thorp's reputation for creating memorable vignettes in small spaces led us to seek her out this month for some summertime inspiration. 🌿

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**MAKE IT WORK** The paper bag wall is just one example of Thorp's personal motto: "Do it now; make it work." Thorp, who shares merchandising tips on her Instagram page (@bonbonistl) said she works to create layers and textures around the store through her displays.



**BRIGHT LIGHT, BIG COLORS** Thorp has gradually been moving away from the "farmhouse aesthetic" she started out highlighting. "I realized that was the look I tended to follow on Instagram, but it wasn't really me," she said. "I felt like I was copying others." Today, she calls her store's style "boho/eclectic with some traditional elements." In other words: "It's a mashup of everything I love, pulled together by a strong, bright color palette."

## EXOTIC MISTAKES

> I went back to the Midwest this month and offered a straightforward scenario: I posed as a proud uncle whose niece just got a big promotion and would be moving to Hawaii. For the most part, the clerk took my lead and ran with it; however, at the beginning of the call she made one of the worst customer service blunders possible. Intrigued? Good! Listen to the recording to see if you and your staff can spot it.

### The Opportunity: Congratulations from Afar

The salesperson and I talked about what a big move this was for my niece, and how exciting it would be for her. As always, I played dumb, leaning on the employee to guide me on what to order and even what to spend. I explained that I couldn't go west to see my niece, so I was opting to send flowers instead. I gave the clerk a blank check. Where would you have started me?

### Thumbs Up: Energy and Personality

I enjoyed this woman's enthusiasm, energy and ability to pick up on some clues. She was efficient and thorough and laughed with me on the phone. It was refreshing to hear someone connect the dots and offer a design appropriate to my needs instead of the typical, robotic, "Our arrangements start at..." Those things may not seem like a big deal, but as you listen to the recorded call each month (and dip back into the archives), notice how most salespeople keep a super-stern demeanor. I say it in my training sessions all the time: The floral industry takes itself *way too seriously*. Let down your guard, have more fun at work and get chatty with customers. They like it!

### Thumbs Down: Going Low on Price

Beyond the huge breach of customer service protocols in the beginning on the call —

again, you'll have to listen at [safnow.org/TimsCalling](http://safnow.org/TimsCalling) to hear that — this clerk made multiple gaffes that had a negative impact on the sale. To start, she insulted me by asking, "Is there a price range?" Yes, there is a price range, but it's in your head, as the sales expert, and you need to make that suggestion to a customer and then let him or her go lower or even higher!



Don't be afraid to hear a customer say, "I don't want to spend that much." The clerk also offered, "Our minimum is \$30." Who cares? I, as the customer, never asked! She took the card message *after* we talked about flowers. That approach is clunky and backward. Always take the card message before selling your product so you know what to offer based on the occasion, relationship between sender and recipients, and the number of names on the card. Sadly, I was not offered the chance to personalize the flowers with a balloon, candy or other finishing touch. Finally, even when I asked her if I was spending enough she tentatively offered a higher price by stating, "We can go to \$90 or \$100 if that isn't going to hurt you." Can you imagine a waiter offering you a steak and saying, "You can order that prime rib at \$45 if that isn't going to hurt you"?

### The Takeaway: Offer What They Should Send, Not What You Would Spend

I regularly remind staff that the customers are the ones paying for the flowers, not themselves. It's easy to overlay our own spending patterns and budgets onto what you recommend to customers, *but* when you do that everyone suffers: The shop doesn't make as much money, the recipient is underwhelmed, and the sender is disappointed. Customers rely on professional florists to offer the best design for their needs. They trust us. A common customer complaint I hear: "The flowers were pretty. They got there on time. They smelled wonderful *but* they weren't as big as I thought they would be. If I had just been told to spend more money, I would have!" Don't let that happen in your store anymore! 🌸



### The Recording

You're only half-done learning from this column. Next step, gather your staff 'round a store computer, read this column to them and then play the recording of my call to this shop by visiting [safnow.org/TimsCalling](http://safnow.org/TimsCalling). Turn it into a group discussion: Ask your team for feedback on what they heard and have them talk about how they can make better sales moving forward.

**"Always take the card message before selling your product so you know what to offer based on the occasion, relationship between sender and recipients, and the number of names on the card."**



**Tim Huckabee, FSC**, is the president of [FloralStrategies.com](http://FloralStrategies.com), which teaches ultimate customer care to retail and wholesale florists. [tim@floralstrategies.com](mailto:tim@floralstrategies.com)

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## EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

# Juan Lopez



**Operations Manager**  
**FernTrust Inc.**  
**Seville, Florida**

> In the floral business, it's not hard to find folks who are living their dream. Juan Lopez is one of them. When he was 15 years old, he left his home in Zacatecas, Mexico, to head for the American Dream. During his first year in the United States, Lopez, a resident alien who will soon take his citizenship test, did yardwork in Texas and shrimping in Louisiana. Then an invitation from a friend led him to the Florida nursery trade. Lopez started in the fern business working in the fields. That was 25 years ago. Today, he oversees day-to-day operations at FernTrust, a co-op of farms in central Florida, helping to coordinate inventory, orders, production and packing lines. "I can do it all, because of the experience I have," Lopez said. "My best day is when everything goes smoothly. When things go wrong, there's stress, but when you like what you're doing, it's not a heavy burden."

### My go-to tool:

"My phone. I have to use it all day — to get orders out, to call our growers to see what products they have ready, and to coordinate everything that needs to be done each day.

When I go home, I put my phone down and leave it. I really don't use it outside of work."

### The biggest challenge I've faced:

"It took me 20 years to get my immigration papers in order so I could go back to Mexico to see my parents, and I lost a lot of money to lawyers who told me something would work, and it didn't. It was very hard. My wife stuck by me during these hard times. I don't know what I would have done without her."

### My life's dream:

"I have five children, and my dream has always been that they could go to college. I know if they get an education they can do better. When my oldest daughter, Janet, first started at the University of Florida, I would tell her, 'You can do it. Do the best you can. Keep that dream of going to college in your mind.' She will graduate with a Ph.D. in nursing next year. My second daughter, Selena, is a University of Central Florida graduate and will begin her master's degree next year. My son, Juan Manuel, will begin college next year and our two youngest children, Monica and Gabriela, are both doing very well in middle school and elementary school. I am living my dream." 🌿

**Julie Martens Forney** is a contributing writer for *Floral Management*. [fmeditor@safnow.org](mailto:fmeditor@safnow.org)



Good-bye...  
Now Pay Up?

**Q: "If I let an employee go, am I required to pay them severance?"**

**A:** It depends. Unless your business has a guaranteed severance plan, you have no legal obligation to offer an employee severance upon termination. Depending on the circumstances, however, a business may wish to offer an employee severance.

If severance is being offered, the employee should sign a separation agreement releasing any claims that the employee might have against the employer. In this situation, offering severance can essentially buy the employer peace of mind, because the employee isn't going to come back and sue you over something related to their employment or the termination of their employment.

SAF partners with Paley Rothman, a Bethesda, Maryland law firm, so that members can get fast, free answers to business legal questions. Have a question you want to ask? Call Jessica Summers at (301) 968-3402. Be sure to mention that you are an SAF member.





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- State of the Industry – and SAF
- 2020 Floral Trends Preview
- Consumer Trends & Buying Behavior
- Attracting Talent



#### PROFITABLE DESIGN

- Advanced Design Techniques
- Creating Everyday Value Using the Latest Trends
- Mini-demos of Designs Made Easy



#### DIGITAL MARKETING

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- Instagram Strategies
- Five-Star Customer Service
- Boosting Social Media ROI



#### GROWTH STRATEGIES

- High-Volume Fulfillment
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- Be a Retail Destination
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## TECH TO GROW

> Technology defined is the use and/or application of scientific techniques and knowledge for a practical useful purpose. You can be tech-savvy, tech-literate, tech-ignorant, a tech geek, a tech student, a tech nerd, etc. However you define yourself, or not, technology has, and is, changing the lives of countless people. It's debatable by some whether it's a positive or a negative influence on our lives, but it has been here in some form for as long as human memory and is an intricate part of our evolution.

The benefits to our floral industry are too many to enumerate. Technology has allowed us to streamline our business, from the production and distribution of product to the incredible efficiency with which we process orders. It brings young and old together, sharing and uniting "old school" ways of doing business while converting antiquated systems to streamlined perfection.

It has been a process for many florists, especially the ones that have been in the industry for a long time such as ourselves. (We've been in the game for 132 years.) Putting down old paper filing and order processing systems has been a challenge for many, myself included; yet once embraced, as with so many things, new technologies can be a welcome and productive change, particularly if you

take the time to assess what you really need to thrive in your business.

### The Essentials

Several of the major wire services offer tech solutions for order entry, point of sale, and credit card processing. At my business, we've used Teleflora's RTI in the past, and we've been using the FTD Mercury system for more than seven years. My main advice for florists looking for the best solution is to look for streamlined options: You want to be sure that any and all wire services you may deal with play well with each other, keeping order flow seamless and easy.

Many of the wire services also provide web design and management with great options to customize your site and cater to your particular needs, which includes making it easy for you to add graphics, special messages and your own designs. Many florists now opt to have their sites custom designed featuring their own specific content. This option can be more costly and time consuming (especially during initial setup and when doing major seasonal updates), but they give florists complete control.

Credit card technology is a must for almost every business these days, and there are some great options out

there. Most wire services offer credit card processing with their systems and some at a substantially lower rate than most financial institutions. Keep in mind, as with many products and services, the price is negotiable. Be sure you have your best business cap on while making these deals and be cautious of long-term contracts. It is not unusual for florists to change or upgrade their technology every five to eight years, or more often in some cases, so try not to lock yourself into a tight commitment in the event a more attractive opportunity comes along.

### Opting Out of High Tech (Sometimes)

While technology is great, it never hurts to hang on to some old school techniques and knowledge. Not long ago a system failure had us shut down for an extended period. In a bit of a panic some of the crew asked, "What do we do?" A few veterans hit the storage closet, pulled out some old order forms, and with a few short lessons we went "old school" on the work, handwriting our orders and entering them in the system once things were up and running. We were down for a while but didn't miss a beat, and the customers were none the wiser. The lesson here is to embrace technology, but keep a little "old school" in your pocket just in case.

When considering new technology, be aware of your tech fears and apprehensions. Meditate on your anxiety if it helps. Your fears are in your mind, not the technology. Relax, embrace the change, surge ahead. For the majority of businesses, including florists, technology in the workplace can make the difference between failure and success. So let out your tech genius and go forth! It's a new day.... Your day. 🌱

**Patrick Kelly** is the owner of Stein Your Florist Co. in Philadelphia and Burlington, New Jersey. In addition to his family's business, he maintains a personal blog, [WakingUpWithPatrick.com](http://WakingUpWithPatrick.com), on meditation. [steinyourflorist@aol.com](mailto:steinyourflorist@aol.com)



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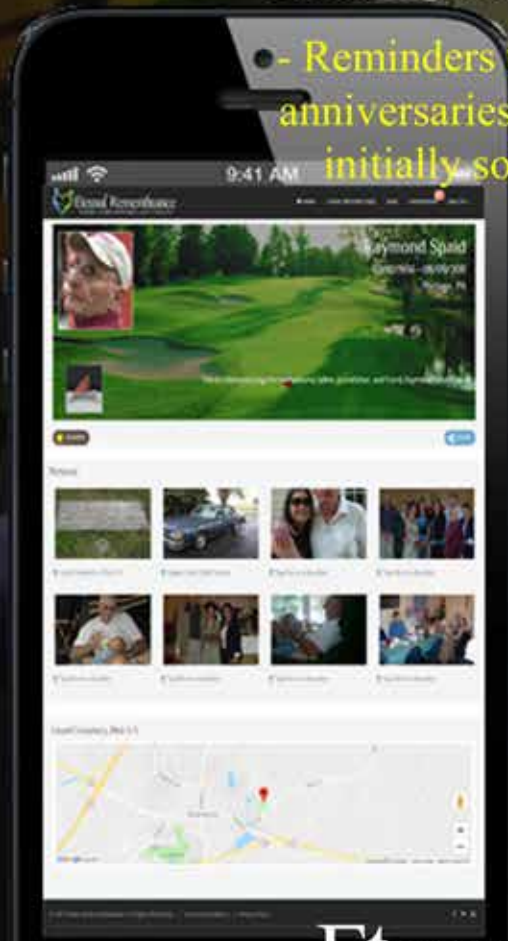
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## NOT YOUR GARDEN VARIETIES

> Garden roses — those full, fragrant, luscious embodiments of old-world glamour — seem to become more popular by the year. The style, pioneered by English rosarian David Austin, who passed away in December, has particularly enchanted brides. Whether they envision a wedding that is grand, intimate, formal or casual, 2019 couples clamor for “an organic aesthetic,” which frequently translates to garden roses with lots of greenery, florists and planners from around the country told Floral Management editors earlier this year. (Find a rundown of the latest trends at [safnow.org/moreonline](http://safnow.org/moreonline).)

“This category of flowers has grown tremendously in the past decade,” said Jose Azout, president of Alexandra Farms in Bogotá, Colombia, which specializes in garden roses. “We started in 2006 with seven varieties, none of which were white — a bridal staple. The closest option was ‘Mythos,’ an ivory rose with no charm or fragrance that simply would not open!” These days, Alexandra Farms grows more than 60 garden roses bred in Great Britain, the Netherlands, France, Spain, Denmark, Germany and Japan. “Customers have no shortage of choices,” Azout said. “The breadth of colors, shapes and scents is really remarkable.”

Here are just a few of the latest varieties to enter the marketplace. 🌹

**Katie Hendrick Vincent** is the senior contributing editor of Floral Management. [kvincent@safnow.org](mailto:kvincent@safnow.org)



**'PRIDE OF JANE'**

Royal Flowers



**'PRINCESS SUKI'**

Alexandra Farms



**'MAYRA'S WHITE'**

Alexandra Farms



**'PRINCESS HITOMI'**

Alexandra Farms



**'PRINCESS MAYA'**

Alexandra Farms



**'SPLASH EYE'**

Dümmen Orange





'POMPEII'  
Rosaprima



'VICTORIAN PEACH'  
Dümmen Orange



'NEXUS'  
Rosaprima



'MARVEL'  
Rosaprima



'EFFIE' (AUSGRAY)  
David Austin Roses



'SUPER GREEN'  
Royal Flowers



'ELLA' (AUSWAGSY)  
David Austin Roses



'MIYABI'  
Green Valley Floral



'EUGENIE' (AUSIMAGE)  
David Austin Roses



# POS SOS

## A buyer's guide to picking the system that truly registers

BY TOM GRESHAM

**T**en years ago, a florist looking for a point of sale system had a handful of choices. Today, the field of systems is packed — and growing. Longtime companies are introducing cutting edge features and other companies are coming in with new technology.

Overall, the competition is good for retail florists, who now have more options when it comes to services and pricing. Still, a crowded field can make it hard to figure out what you actually need for your business — the tools that help you be more efficient and provide outstanding service to your customers — and perhaps more important, what you don't need — the buzzy features that can be fun but aren't really helping you make money and create lasting impressions on clients.

This month, we talked to the companies behind some of the industry's most popular systems and asked them to give us their best elevator pitch or opening lines. We also asked die-hard fans why they love their systems. It's up to you to decide which features are lifesavers for your business and which ones are simply added weight.





## User-Friendly, Fast Training

### BloomNet Business Management System

**On the Market Since:** 2010

**Cost:** \$149.99 per month

**Accounting Software Integration:** Yes (QuickBooks)

**Bells and Whistles:** Full and lite cloud-based solutions. Delivery management powered by Route4Me. Ability to print professional enclosure cards and messages. Integrated systems for address and route verification, time cards, and more.



**What's New:** Local delivery management, which means unlimited deliveries per route, real-time delivery confirmations from drivers' smartphones, and route planning through the Route4Me software tool. The system can capture and integrate signatures and pictures of deliveries, transmitting those back to the customer or sending florist.

**Help! I Need Somebody:** On-site and remote training, as well as support via phone, email, and live chat, available seven days a week. Quarterly updates with small-patch improvements between large releases.

**Big Fan:** Bob Tucker, owner of Miss Daisy's Flowers & Gifts in Leesburg, Florida, adopted the system about 10 years ago because it was "affordable and cloud based," allowing him to log on from multiple sites — an especially important feature since he often works on location at weddings and events. Tucker, who has one location, said the system is user friendly, making training simple for short-term employees over holiday periods; he also likes that regular updates keep it fresh and offer users new features. He particularly appreciates the system's detailed invoices and capabilities to produce a variety of reports that help Tucker track how his shop is doing over a given period.

## Responsive Support, Accessible Tech

### Floranext

**On the Market Since:** 2010

**Cost:** Starting at \$59.99 per month

**Accounting Software Integration:** Yes (QuickBooks Online)

**Bells and Whistles:** No membership fees, contracts, or per order fees. Compatible with any computer, smartphone, or tablet. Optional iPad-based POS and wedding/event proposals suite, which the company boasts as a first in the industry. Accounting and management reports.



**What's New:** Instant address search and delivery routing, which uses Google Maps. Floranext has also introduced a delivery driver app, which provides turn-by-turn directions, updates order statuses while on the road and enables drivers to call senders or recipients with a single click. This year, the company added an option that allows florists to prompt customers to post reviews on Google after a delivery.

**Help! I Need Somebody:** Support via phone, chat, email, or ticket, six days a week. Extended hours during major floral holidays (Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, etc.).

**Big Fan:** Speedy response keeps Lynn Frost a customer. The owner of The Tuscan Sunflower in Bennington, Vermont, said Floranext remains a responsive partner, consistently quick to reply to questions or concerns. The Tuscan Sunflower is a single-location, independent shop (Frost has just one year-round, part-time employee), and Frost said she chose Floranext because it was user friendly, cost-effective and simple for non-techie types. "It's very easy to navigate," Frost said. "It's a great fit for us."

## Customizable Solutions

### FloristWare

**On the Market Since:** 2004

**Cost:** \$1,499 to \$3,999 per year

**Accounting Software Integration:** Supports most major accounting software packages

**Bells and Whistles:** Extensive reporting capabilities, including new features that allow florists to create reports that offer more granularity and better visualizations on trends in their businesses. A production manager allows florists to create a custom production process, along with personalized options for receipts, invoices, statements and more.

**What's New:** New system-monitoring tools keep maintenance requirements (which can easily fall off florists' radar) front and center so that owners can react before problems arise.

**Help! I Need Somebody:** Support is handled by full-time employees, each with at least 10 years' experience in retail floral, seven days a week. Upgrades are automatic, overseen by support personnel, and with consideration for seasonal patterns (i.e., major changes are not implemented before peak holiday periods).

**Big Fan:** Customization attracted Adam Pomerantz, owner of Belvedere Flowers in Havertown, Pennsylvania, to FloristWare almost a decade ago. Pomerantz, who has one location, said he appreciated that he could opt for a scaled-down POS without extra features he didn't need. "We have [staff] who don't have a lot of computer experience who have no problem with it," he said. "It's very easy to train someone new." When Belvedere switched to FloristWare, the shop saw a "significant" drop in its monthly bill, and Pomerantz said that came without sacrificing any needed tools or resources.



## Streamlined Approach

### FTD Mercury

**On the Market Since:** 2003

**Cost:** \$104.99 per month plus hardware costs (\$3,000 to \$6,000 total; monthly payment plans available). \$139 to \$249 per month in support fees (tiered based on the number of modules to which a user subscribes)

**Accounting Software Integration:** Yes (QuickBooks)

**Bells and Whistles:** Mobile app, event planning module, delivery module, email marketing platforms, and more. FTD Mercury also supports a web order interface that imports orders from non-FTD websites, the only provider to offer this feature, according to the company.



**What's New:** A software enhancement between Teleflora and FTD ensures transactions between the two companies are imported into FTD Mercury "simply and easily." Strengthened system and credit card security programs. Updated mobile delivery application and text delivery confirmations to provide better information about the location of orders in real time.

**Help! I Need Somebody:** Free software updates released via an automated process. New modules are released with license keys and usage. Live chat, phone and email support available six days a week.

**Big Fan:** Sophisticated delivery management and ease of use have kept Anton Engelmann, owner of Town & Country Gardens in Elgin, Illinois, invested in the FTD system for more than 12 years. Engelmann, who has one location, said his favorite feature of the system is the capability to get real-time mobile delivery updates from drivers, who carry iPad minis and take photos when (and where) they leave flowers — time-stamping and location-stamping deliveries. Engelmann said the system mimics the look and feel of Windows, helping employees feel comfortable with it quickly. He also praised Mercury's "robust" reporting capabilities.

## DO I REALLY NEED A POS?

In addition to more traditional POS systems launching in the last decade, a number of tech startups that aren't specific to the floral industry have also entered the space, offering event and wedding florists who may not have brick-and-mortar retail locations a number of payment processing options, some of them at very low cost. Among the offerings: Square and Stripe. Find out more about how some designers are using these companies, and the integration available with industry companies, at [safnow.org/moreonline](http://safnow.org/moreonline).



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## Flexibility and Scale

### GotFlowers Inc.

**On the Market Since:** 2014

**Cost:** \$900 to \$12,000 per year

**Accounting Software Integration:** Supports most major accounting software packages

**Bells and Whistles:** A unified database to manage website and POS. Graphical view of web products during order entry. Digital archive with ability to send pre-delivery pictures, integrated delivery manager, mobile apps for managing products, real-time delivery confirmation app, and more.

**What's New:** A complete, integrated flow from order entry through design and delivery, automated sending of pre-delivery pictures, and a delivery app. The company's "Where's My Order?" feature will soon allow customers and staff at a flower shop to track an order to the driver's location on a map in real time.

**Help! I Need Somebody:** Unlimited tech support 365 days a year, in the local time zone of the florist. Weekly software and feature updates at no charge.



**Big Fan:** A desire for a more modern, dynamic POS led Keith Hill to GotFlowers. The owner of Beaverton Florists in Beaverton, Oregon, began using the system in November 2018 after a search for a flexible system that could be updated "at a moment's notice," he said. Hill, who has one location, also points to the remote login capability and the system's "scalability" to handle large volumes, such as at holiday time when Beaverton needs a system that accommodates up to 25 users, as keys to its appeal. Hill said he loves the delivery app that allows contract drivers to run routes off their personal phones. Any technical issue is resolved quickly, Hill said — "usually within 15 minutes of a request." When Hill requested custom programming to help with his payroll — which is tied to the shop's sales — GotFlowers provided it, cutting the time it takes him to complete payroll by more than half.

## Adaptable Features

### Hana Floral POS

**On the Market Since:** 2013

**Cost:** \$0 to \$150 per month (system available at no cost to florists who also use the company's website services)

**Accounting Software Integration:** Yes (QuickBooks)



**Bells and Whistles:** Real-time address and business lookup option. Advanced dispatch and routing capabilities. Mobile app for real-time delivery confirmation. An advanced proposal module with ability to email professional wedding and event proposals. Email marketing module, and more.

**What's New:** A redesigned interface in summer 2017 added more advanced Google Maps routing capability, email marketing and tracking capability, integration with Flower Shop Network, and Canada taxation capability.

**Help! I Need Somebody:** Updates are made biweekly, usually on Saturday. Help button on website offers live support, along with reps available six days a week via email and phone.

**Big Fan:** In search of a flexible plan and a web-based POS, Jeff Osterman of Plantation Flower Designs & Gifts, one location in The Villages, Florida, switched to Hana's system in June 2015. He liked that it required no long-term commitment and that the web-based system would be more easily accessible than a previous system that needed to be installed on his computer. Osterman has remained with Hana because of "very quick" customer service, a "comprehensive" range of features and the company's openness to suggestions — "they take a lot of input from florists." He says the dashboard is designed well for florists' needs, and he appreciates the customer database capabilities that help him manage and track key data points for his business.

## Speedy Systems

### IRIS Floral POS/IFN Enterprises

**On the Market Since:** 2009

**Cost:** \$89 to \$169 per month

**Accounting Software Integration:** Yes (QuickBooks)

**Bells and Whistles:** Touchscreen capabilities, interface customization, mobile technology, and more.

**What's New:** A new web suite, launched in 2018, gives users the ability to design, customize and publish their own website with drag and drop functionality. Point of sale users can now run the system offline and take sales in the event of a lost Internet connection.



**Help! I Need Somebody:** System upgrades are released monthly. Florists get a dedicated support rep assigned to their account. Support is available seven days a week, and those on the premier support plan have 24-hour support via email.

**Big Fan:** No florist is the same, and Denise Fuller, owner of Castle Rock Florist in Castle Rock, Colorado, has been using IRIS for about five years in part because she loves that the system can be adjusted to meet her needs and preferences. "You can be as detailed or as simple as you like," she said. Fuller, who has one location, said Castle Rock started simple but has gradually begun to use more of the system's capabilities, such as exploring more detailed order entry options. Fuller said the system's "efficiency and ease of use" means that the store can process an order from an existing customer in under one minute. Another perk? She says customer service is tops. "I love that they listen to us," she said.



## Team Focus

### Lovingly

**On the Market Since:** 2016

**Cost:** \$1,200 per year but currently offered free to florists who have a Lovingly store website.

**Accounting Software Integration:** Lovingly provides its own statements and sales reports, with downloadable reports and CSVs.

**Bells and Whistles:** Online marketplace that is fully integrated into the POS. Streamlined sales hub featuring automatic guidance for add-on sales, one-click business lookup, easily searchable customer data records, order tracking visualization, card message suggestions, and reputation management for online reviews.



**What's New:** With the new automated "Thanks!" feature, customers can share a message and photo, which is then emailed to the sender and shared on social media. In July, Lovingly plans to introduce house accounts to support billing of loyal clients and a delivery routing service.

**Help! I Need Somebody:** Weekly updates, upgrades and new features; support team is available Monday through Friday online, via email and online chat.

**Big Fan:** Kambra Bacon, owner of Prosper Blooms in Prosper, Texas, said she appreciates the "close, collaborative relationship" she has with Lovingly staff, noting their quick response time. "They really try to keep up with their florists," said Bacon, who has one location. "It feels as though they're teaming with me and want me to succeed." Among the highlights of the POS, she said, is the system's capacity to create reports — for instance, she said it was "incredibly easy" for her recently to create a sales tax quarterly report. Her employees, including some who are not tech savvy, need minimal training to get accustomed to the system, she said.

## High Tech, High Touch

### MAS Direct Network

**On the Market Since:** 1997

**Cost:** \$114 to \$550 per month

**Accounting Software Integration:** Supports most major accounting software packages

**Bells and Whistles:** Tools to manage inventory, accounts receivable, delivery routing and mapping, order processing and reporting, marketing, florist-to-florist order exchange, human resources, wire service and website integration.

**Coming Soon:** New web-based floral management system optimized for mobile and desktop devices, meaning it reformats automatically when used on those devices. Ongoing improvements to its integrations and partnerships with credit card processors, website developers, wire services and other third-party vendors.



**Help! I Need Somebody:** Automatic, regular system updates quarterly to twice a year. Weekday support available via website and telephone. Weekend emergency service support and extended holiday hours.

**Big Fan:** Justin Sheffield, owner of Ashland Addison Florist in Chicago (four locations), said his shop has been using MAS Direct for more than 15 years, having first selected the system "because they offered features no one else had developed yet and were pushing new directions in floral technology." He said the highlights of the system are that the "speedy interface and events system streamlines our product ordering — also delivery mapping for routing." Sheffield said it can take new staff time to get acclimated to the system's format, "but after that it works well" and MAS has "a very responsive and helpful staff when the occasional issue pops up." The shop added custom printing for delivery tags for packages to send to its delivery service, saving the time of handwriting them.

## POS CHEAT SHEET



Thinking about investing in a new POS? Here are some topics to consider:

- ✓ **Price.** How will the cost of a new system compare with your current setup? Be sure to research all costs — including contract requirements and any other tools or hardware you'll need to buy.
- ✓ **Support.** What happens when your POS stops working properly on Feb. 13? How easy will it be to reach a support tech — and who will you be working with when you do make that call (or send the email or live chat query): Will that person be well versed in the system?



## Integrated Elements

### QuickFlora

**On the Market Since:** 2010

**Cost:** \$99 to \$1,800 a month

**Accounting Software Integration:** Yes (QuickBooks and the company's Generally Accepted Accounting Principles, GAAP, accounting module)

**Bells and Whistles:** Automatic routing and delivery. A built-in wedding and event module. Real-time inventory control, purchase order management and multi-location order management, along with an integrated ecommerce module, and more.

**What's New:** QuickFlora plans to add support for Zapier API, which allows users to connect their apps, automate their workflow and gain real-time access to their data, and offline order-taking capability. In response to feedback from multi-store customers, the company built a purchase order management system that can consolidate requests from all store locations into master purchase orders to Miami and South American vendors, cutting order time and reducing costs.

**Help! I Need Somebody:** Systems upgrades automatically post every Saturday night to all users. Support is provided via e-support ticket and then escalated according to priority level and time zone. Seven days prior to Valentine's Day, Mother's Day and Christmas, support is available 24 hours a day.

**Big Fan:** Marni Leyva, owner of Apache Junction Flowers in Phoenix, was anxious about switching POS systems in 2014, but she soon became enamored with her new QuickFlora system.

"When they taught us how to use it, I couldn't believe how simple it was," said Leyva, who has one location. "I can navigate the system as though it was my best friend." Leyva said she is not tech savvy and appreciates how straightforward and practical the system is. She said she rarely needs tech support, but when she does: "It's quick, responsive, and they handle it remotely — I don't need to be on the phone with them the whole time and can keep working." Leyva said new employees learn the system quickly, and her bookkeeper's work has been streamlined, allowing her to generate reports and manage taxes in far less time than before. Next, Leyva plans to use the feature that allows delivery drivers to use the POS on tablets.



## Timely Upgrades

### Dove POS/Teleflora

**On the Market Since:** 2007 (Dove is one of several POS systems from Teleflora and it's the company's most popular option.)

**Cost:** \$50 to \$350 per month

**Accounting Software Integration:** Yes (QuickBooks)

**Bells and Whistles:** Automatic integration with a florist's eFlorist website. Smartphone-, desktop- and tablet-friendly delivery management and mapping. Email, multi-store manager and more.



**What's New:** Mobile functionality, website integration, EMV/Chip cards, ApplePay and Google Pay. To address the need for mobile flexibility, Teleflora introduced mobile orders, delivery management, time clock, and shop management data tools designed for florists on the go. The company is also investing more in Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI-DSS) compliance and data security.

**Help! I Need Somebody:** Automatic, ongoing upgrades. Assistance via phone support, remote access and on-site installation and training, weekdays plus Saturday, with extended hours during major holidays.

**Big Fan:** Nic Faitos, senior partner at Starbright Floral Design in New York City (one location), said his shop installed Dove POS in April 2012. He said the system is "incredibly easy to use" so that new employees can understand the basics of the system in less than a day. Faitos said he appreciates Teleflora's frequent updates to the system and its "aggressive support team that solves problems quickly and is knowledgeable." Other highlights for the shop include the remote login feature ("a lifesaver for us") and the Data Pro feature that allows the shop to customize reports to match its needs. Overall, Faitos said, "It is a robust system that makes us look professional (and bigger than we are) in the eyes of our clients." 🌿

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- ✓ **Ease of Use.** Learning new tech takes patience, especially if you don't have an especially techie crew at your shop. Most of the companies featured in this month's story offer free demos of their products so that you (and your team) can assess how easy the features are to find and use.
- ✓ **Tech.** Consider asking questions of POS providers related to how and when they introduce new features, along with the trends they're seeing in consumer buying patterns, and how they as a company are adapting.
- ✓ **Who You Are.** Before making a decision, consider your own business model (one location versus four) and your team (mostly year-round and full-time staff with time to train versus part-time and seasonal helpers who need to get up to speed fast). You're the customer and you have options, so ask sales rep about how they can provide specific solutions for your unique, pressing challenges.

San Francisco



# Miles of Smiles



Portland

Seattle



BACKGROUND GRAPHIC BY REVELSTOCKART/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

## An 800-mile journey — full of smiles, hugs and tears — generates widespread awareness of flowers' stress-busting powers.

BY KATIE HENDRICK VINCENT

Leveraging Stress Awareness Month for a timely news hook, representatives from the Society of American Florists hit the road in early April in a vintage Volkswagen bus — “the Flower Power Mobile” — on a three-city tour to tout flowers' stress-busting qualities.

The promotional effort kicked off April 2, at the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco, where the Flower Power movement soared to popularity 50 years ago. A team of industry volunteers, wearing purple T-shirts with the hashtag #StressLess, treated unsuspecting passersby to bouquets to brighten their days and let them experience the research-proven impact flowers have on our mental well-being.

“Flower power is absolutely real and provides a moment of calm we all need in the fast-paced world we live in,” SAF Vice President of Marketing Jennifer Sparks told reporters who turned out to cover the eye-catching bus and group of do-gooders sharing the joy of flowers.

After San Francisco, the tour continued to Portland, Oregon, and then to Seattle. In each city, SAF enlisted new teams of volunteers to visit high-visibility locations, including town squares, commuter train and bus stations, colleges, and senior centers, for flower giveaways.

### Nothing Tops Experience

The #StressLess Tour served as a creative extension of the University of North Florida's research study, “The

Impact of Flowers on Perceived Stress Among Women,” which SAF commissioned last year ([aboutflowers.com/StressLess](http://aboutflowers.com/StressLess)). Following a more traditional public relations campaign launch in 2018, which featured lead researcher

### SAF PR FUND

All of SAF's consumer marketing programs to create positive perceptions of flowers are made possible by the generous supporters of the SAF PR Fund. Read more about the PR Fund and who supports it at [safnow.org/prfund](http://safnow.org/prfund).



**HAPPY CAMPERS** SAF hit the road in early April in a vintage Volkswagen bus — “the Flower Power Mobile” — on a three-city tour to tout flowers’ stress-busting qualities.

Erin Largo-Wight, Ph.D., as spokesperson, and garnered more than 142 million impressions from August to December, the tour took a fresh, new approach in early 2019.

“These study findings, which resonate so well with consumers, provided the perfect opportunity for SAF to capitalize on the trend of ‘experiential marketing’ by doing something memorable to attract attention, and which dovetailed with April’s designation as Stress Awareness Month,” Sparks explained.

Many advertising professionals, including Forbes contributor Steve Olenski, have praised experiential marketing as the answer for making lasting impressions that people want to share with their friends and families. “The best way to reach consumers in an emotional and engaging way is to create experiences that they actually want to be a part of,” he said.

In addition to fun and heartfelt posts and stories on SAF’s Facebook (/about-flowers), Instagram (@about\_flow-ers), and Twitter (@flowerfactor) channels, consumers and media alike shared the experience. The Flower Power Mobile, branded with the #StressLess hashtag and decorated with a cheerful motif of smiley faces, peace signs and daisies, created a visually intriguing event to encourage people to share images with their family and friends on social media

— and to attract TV cameras on its journey. Additionally, the surprise gift of flowers inspired happy recipients to share their experience online and tag #StressLess and @about\_flow-ers. (Each bouquet included a sticker that told recipients about the study and encouraged them to post on social media with the hashtag #StressLess so SAF and others could follow the conversation.)

“People loved taking selfies with the bus and their flowers, and many posted on social media about how the experience turned their day around,” Sparks said. “They clearly spread the message that flowers provide stress relief amidst a hectic day.”

When Nic Faitos of Starbright Floral Design in New York City heard tentative plans for the tour last winter, he immediately blocked off his calendar for a cross-country trip. “I had to volunteer,” he said. “Events like this are what Starbright’s all about.” Following the positive reception of SAF’s Petal It Forward effort in recent years ([safnow.org/pif](http://safnow.org/pif)), Faitos incorporated more experiences into his business plan, such as installing a sunflower selfie wall outside the shop, hosting design classes and throwing a Día de Los Muertos party.

While in San Francisco, Faitos shared numerous behind-the-scenes photos and videos with his shop’s followers on social media. “They ate it up,” he said.

“They didn’t care that it was happening 3,000 miles away.” That documentation laid the framework for the Stress Awareness campaign he launched upon returning home. He decorated Starbright’s windows with photographs from the tour and vinyl stickers that read #StressLess and #FlowerPower and launched a discount for the remainder of 2019 to anyone who uses the code “NOSTRESS.”

For Scott Isensee, general manager of Frank Adams Wholesale Florist in Portland, Oregon, the tour presented an opportunity “to see people’s faces light up when they receive flowers.”

“Their gratitude was heart-warming,” he said. “It’s not just a ‘gift’ to them. It’s a bouquet of flowers! So many people forget how much they appreciate nature until they hold it in their hands — and so putting more flowers in more people’s hands is a good thing.”

Likewise, Rachel Martin of Ballard Blossom in Seattle said she was struck by how people’s expressions changed as the SAF team approached with flowers, from skepticism (“What do these people want from me?”) to joy (“Free flowers!”). “When I told one young college student that flowers reduce stress, he said it was



**STORIES TO SHARE** Surprised recipients took to social media to share how much they enjoyed their gift of flowers.



great that he had run into us," she said. "It turns out that he and his roommates had been working on different ideas to reduce stress and they had not thought of incorporating flowers into their lives until then."

## Media Magnet

The Flower Power Mobile's journey spurred a flurry of news stories in the Pacific Northwest's biggest media markets, as journalists clamored to cover not only the intriguing vehicle and bouquet giveaways but also the scientific research supporting flowers' stress-reducing powers.

"We are providing a solution that helps people cope with stress in little ways throughout the day," Sparks told Kara Mack, co-host of "Afternoon Live," a program with KATU, Portland, Oregon's ABC affiliate channel. During the live broadcast, she introduced April as Stress Awareness Month, citing statistics from Wakefield Research (68 percent of Americans report feeling stressed on a weekly basis; 32 percent endure it every day). "Pretty much everyone can relate to stress," she said. Sparks then dove into results from the UNF research study. "It's that contact with nature so many of us crave," she said. "The really great thing about flowers is that they bring the beauty of nature indoors. Simply having them on your desk or nightstand can significantly improve your well-being."

KGW, Portland's NBC affiliate, sent two anchors to Pioneer Courthouse



**SCREEN TIME** To complement the giveaways, SAF reached out to news stations and publications. By the end of the tour, 158 media outlets nationwide had covered the story, including KOFY in San Francisco.

Square, a 40,000-square-foot block in the city's center, to help SAF volunteers distribute flowers on a cold and drizzly Friday. Their commentary noted recipients' relaxed reactions when handed a bouquet. KOMO News 4, Seattle's ABC station, captured similar footage (minus the rain). "It totally works," anchor Molly Chen said of flower power.

Prior to embarking on the #StressLess Tour, SAF sent a press release to news organizations in the region. After the San Francisco event, SAF emailed a nationwide media blast with pictures and video footage to carry the flower power message far beyond the three cities visited. The effort resulted in 14 local TV news

stories and pickup of the story by 158 media outlets nationwide, totaling almost 103 million impressions.

## VIP Endorsements

To take the message even further, SAF partnered with key social influencers with large, dedicated followings. Portland fashion blogger Kristina McInnis joined SAF on location and spread flower power to her 87,000 Instagram followers and 5,000 blog subscribers. In an April 17 blog post, she outlined some of her favorite stress-reducing activities and detailed her personal experience giving and receiving flowers.

Her April 20 Instagram post, which featured a photo of the Flower Power Mobile and facts from the UNF study, got nearly 1,300 likes and more than 100 comments.

In Seattle, YouTube star Monica Church, whose channel "Millennial Life Crisis" has more than 350,000 subscribers, joined the effort to greet pedestrians with flowers and vlogged about the experience, naming flowers as a top way to relieve stress. Her video, "6 Ways to Destress Your Life This Spring" has almost 22,000 views and counting. 🌸

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## LONG LEGS

The promotional opportunities of the #StressLess Tour will last long after the actual events, said SAF Vice President of Marketing Jennifer Sparks. "That's the beauty of capturing the consumer experience on film," she said. SAF is using the ample footage to create a series of videos targeting a variety of audiences. Find them on SAF's [youtube.com/safaboutflowers](https://www.youtube.com/safaboutflowers) and share with your followers.

In early May, SAF featured one of the videos in a paid promotion on Facebook, which garnered more than 122,000 views, 1,600 likes, and 799 shares. More promotion of the videos is planned to carry the message to new audiences.

Furthermore, stress reduction is an evergreen topic. Find content ideas, graphics, press releases, videos and more at [safnow.org/stressless](https://safnow.org/stressless).

-K.H.V.

EDITORS' NOTE Paul Goodman, MBA, CPA, PFCI, and Derrick Myers, CPA, CFP, PFCI, love a good financial management challenge, however big or small. Send your questions to [fmeditor@safnow.org](mailto:fmeditor@safnow.org), and we'll challenge the experts to tackle them in an upcoming article.



# The Skinny on

# Product Sales Reports

**How understanding this key report can put your business on a path to long-term profitability**

BY PAUL GOODMAN, MBA, CPA, PFCI

Your point of sale system can produce many management reports. The product sales report is critical in order to manage for profitability. One great thing about the report? It's flexible. You can generate a product sales report to cover any date range, a day, a week, a month or a year. In fact, your product sales report is one of the most important tools you have from your POS to run your flower shop with an end goal of profitability. It provides the data required to accurately forecast your buying and to staff properly. It's easy to get from your POS system and is something you ought to rely on at least monthly if not weekly. This report gives you the information you need to manage both your cost of goods sold (COGS) and your payroll. Those are the two most important expenses to control if you want to make a decent profit.



## Buy Smarter

Controlling COGS is a function of both your buying habits and how well you stick to your pricing formulas in the design process. A good product sales report won't help with the problem of stuffing (i.e., putting too many flowers in an arrangement). It will, however, help you on the buying side to make sure you don't buy too much product. Your product sales report is an invaluable tool to get your buying right.

Most retail florists have two types of modes: holiday and nonholiday. For nonholiday times, which make up 10.5 to 11 months of the year, your weekly sales will be amazingly level, with an occasional spike due to extra funerals, weddings or events.

Create a product sales report for several nonholiday weeks and find your particular pattern. Exclude weddings and events because you plan for them individually. You can quickly determine your fresh flowers sales for your average nonholiday week. Cut flowers and greens should not exceed 25 percent of your fresh sales. If you can stick to buying no more than 25 percent of your expected fresh sales, you should maintain good control of your COGS. Many florists do even better than 25 percent and get down to 20 percent.

Your product sales report will also tell you what your plant and gift sales are each week. You can then plan to purchase enough of those items to be fully stocked.

Your major holidays — Valentine's Day, Administrative Professionals Week, Mother's Day and Christmas — will show an increase in sales that vary by the holiday. It is important to know how much to expect for the whole holiday period, not just the day. It is also important to know your sales by day leading up to the holiday. This daily data will help you make sure your product will arrive on time to meet your needs.

## Keep Payroll on Track

Your payroll target is 30 percent of sales. That includes a salary for the owner/manager and all payroll taxes and employee benefits. It's not an easy formula to stick with, but the product sales report will help again.

Use your report to get the data necessary to project various work levels

in your shop. I'll use the design room as an example. The report can tell you how many arrangements your team created each day of the week. You know about how many designs you can expect from your designers. (Normally, an experienced designer can produce four average arrangements per hour.) Set the number of design hours to match the workload expected and no more. That will ensure a reasonable payroll come payday.

Do the same for sales and delivery. Your reports will tell you how many deliveries you can expect each day of the week and how many sales by hour of the day, and you can staff accordingly. You can see the busy periods and can staff to meet the customers' needs while not overstaffing.

## Generate the Report

There are two steps to obtaining the information you need. Start by getting the product sales report for the month just completed from the previous year. Compare that report to how your sales are running for the same month this year. If you have been running at a 10 percent increase, you can safely assume your sales next month will most likely follow that pattern and plan accordingly.

Sales, however, can change quickly. That's why you must do this analysis at least every month to see how you are doing and then make necessary adjustments in your buying. The quicker you make an adjustment, the better you will control your COGS, especially if your sales are decreasing. You can lower your future purchases and have a sale to move your current excess product.

Here's that scenario in action: Suppose you sold 2,500 poinsettias for the Christmas season last year. By breaking the report down to smaller date ranges, you know that you sold 2,000 of the plants by Dec. 18, 2018. Since your sales have been fairly level year over year, you order the same 2,500 poinsettias for the 2019 season. You then use your product sales report to monitor how you are doing. If you notice that you've sold 500 fewer in the first two weeks of the holiday compared to last year, you can react proactively, perhaps with a special sale to move more poinsettias quickly.

  
**SAF**  
*Amelia Island*  
**2019** Sept. 18-21  
**135<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL CONVENTION**

## PREP FOR THE FUTURE

Thinking about what you need to do *today* to prep your business for its next chapter and yours? Join Paul Goodman, CPA, MBA, PFCI, and veteran retailers in September at SAF Amelia Island 2019, the Society of American Florists' annual convention, for an educational session on how best practices in financial management can make your business attractive to potential buyers and ready for the next generation. Find out more and register for the convention at [safnow.org](http://safnow.org).

## User Beware

Today's POS systems make the job of tracking sales like a walk in the park. That's good; however, it can also tempt you to get more detail than you need. You can break your sales down into hundreds of categories if you want. You could make every different arrangement into a category. Be careful. Too much detail can not only be overwhelming but also make the report meaningless for management purposes. Make the data work for you, not the other way around.

If you keep a lot of detail on sales to help you with buying, make sure you categorize them into a few larger categories to make your overall managing tasks a bit easier. For example, you might want to limit your major categories to "Silk & Dried," "Loose Flowers," "Arrangements," "Blooming Plants," "Green Plants," "Balloons, Food Items and Gifts." These six categories will give you the big picture of what is happening with sales in your shop. 🌿

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## SAF COORDINATES WITH LAWMAKERS' OFFICES

> Just weeks after dozens of growers, wholesalers, suppliers and retailers traveled to Washington, D.C., for the Society of American Florists' Congressional Action Days (CAD), lawmakers started to give heightened attention to key industry issues, thanks to the ongoing efforts of SAF and its members.

Since the mid-March event, SAF has coordinated with nearly two dozen congressional offices on follow-up requests for more information on the Floriculture and Nursery Research Initiative and the Floriculture Crops Summary. During CAD, SAF members met with lawmakers and key staff to explain the value of FNRI research and statistical reporting to the industry.

Before taking to the Hill during CAD, Terril Nell, Ph.D., AAF, research coordinator for the American Floral Endowment, briefed SAF members on the research and how it has played a central role in creating new technology and best practices in pest and disease management.

"Research is all about your business, it doesn't matter the segment," he said. "Money toward research makes it happen."

Marvin Miller, Ph.D., AAF, of Ball Horticultural in West Chicago, stressed the importance of the Floriculture Crops Summary during the briefing, noting that it provides the floriculture industry with critical information about what crops are being sold and in what quantities, and where they are being grown and in what quantities, along with other critical data that allows growers to plan.



**TALKING SHOP** SAF Chairman Martin Meskers (center) of Oregon Flowers in Aurora, Oregon, and Scott Isensee of Frank Adams Wholesale in Portland, meet in the office of Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Oregon) during CAD.



**ISSUES BRIEFING** Jodi McShan, AAF, of McShan Florist in Dallas, Texas, and Charles Ingram of Dr Delphinium Designs in Dallas, meet with lawmakers in the office of Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) during CAD. Such visits have laid the ground for productive follow-up in the month since the event.

Within days of CAD, SAF began fielding inquiries from lawmakers' offices for more information on FNRI and the report. SAF staff also reached out directly to specific staff to keep the momentum generated from the visits going.

Those follow-up conversations among lawmakers, SAF and SAF members show the power of firsthand testimonials — and the important role industry members can play in shaping funding priorities, said Shawn McBurney, SAF's senior director of government relations.

"As the national association for the entire floral industry, SAF maintains a presence on Capitol Hill year-round, and the relationships we build certainly help open the door to these important conversations," he said. "But it's critical to the health of our industry that we complement our year-round efforts with these one-on-one meetings between our members and lawmakers, so that representatives, senators and their staff hear directly from the people they represent."

The CAD funding requests this year — to support FNRI and the renewed publication of the Floriculture Crops Summary — came on the heels of significant gains last year, when SAF members successfully pitched lawmakers on increased

funding for the efforts. (FNRI had seen its funding eroded by inflation and budget cuts, and the crops report, which provides important information on the overall industry, was not published for several years due to budgetary constraints.)

"Lawmakers remember our members' stories — and it's those stories that often compel them to reach out later and ask for more information," McBurney said. "That's a sign we're making progress."

It's also a sign that CAD meetings aren't simply "one-off" conversations, McBurney said.

For example, Jodi McShan, AAF, of McShan Florist in Dallas was contacted by the office of Rep. Lance Gooden (R-Texas-5) shortly after her visit to his office during CAD. She was informed that the congressman would be supporting her requests to fund FNRI and the report.

Another example is an email to SAF Chairman Martin Meskers, AAF, of Oregon Flowers in Aurora, Oregon. Sen. Ron Wyden's (D-Oregon) office not only asked Meskers for more information but also mentioned a potential visit from the senator to Meskers' operation — a visit that could create even more opportunities to keep Oregon Flowers, and the industry, in front of Congress. 🌸



## HORTICA HEAD TALKS CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES

> When Tim Noble took over as president of Hortica at the beginning of the year, it marked a significant change in company leadership. In taking on his new role, he succeeded Mona Haberer, who retired after a 30-year career at Hortica. Noble, who joined Sentry, the parent company of Hortica, in 2011, brought with him a wealth of experience in insurance, a personal connection to family businesses — and a desire to get up to speed, fast, on the floral industry.

As part of a new series spotlighting executives, Floral Management recently talked to Noble about what he's learned during his first few months on the job, including the key opportunities he sees for Hortica and the industry; the challenge of insuring horticulture companies moving into the cannabis space; and his plans for strategic growth.

**Floral Management: Now that you've been in the job for a few months, can you share a little about what you've learned so far? What's surprised you?**



Tim Noble, president, Hortica

**Tim Noble:** I've been spending a lot of time getting to know my team in Edwardsville, Illinois, where we have about 110 employees, along with our salespeople all around the country. I'm still new to this group.

So, I'm listening a lot. Hortica has a long history and I want to tap into the expertise of our team as I learn about and try to understand the different dynamics of our diverse customer base. I've also been meeting with customers. One thing that's impressed me is that our team recognizes that we are part of this industry. When our customers are successful, we're successful. I think you can see an

example of that in action when it comes to, for instance, scheduling payment plans around businesses that are very cyclical in nature, with busy and slower periods that need to be worked around. I've also been impressed with how many longtime family-run businesses are in our industry. That's a wonderful thing.

**FM: You have some personal experience in family businesses yourself.**

**TN:** I grew up in Mount Carroll, Illinois, a really small town that's about two hours from Chicago. My great-grandfather, grandfather and then father ran a small, local grocery store. It was a great thing and something I take pride in; it allowed my dad to put five kids through college. I graduated from the University of Iowa in 1986 and got a job as an underwriting assistant in Minnesota. I've been in the insurance industry ever since.

**FM: Hortica has a long history in the industry. The company started in 1887 and signed its affiliation agreement with Sentry in 2015. What do you see as the major challenges and opportunities for Hortica?**

**TN:** Our biggest challenge is continuing to grow our book, meaning our overall premium, while doing it in a way that allows us to generate a profit. Growth for growth's sake, without profitability, isn't sustainable. We're on the right path, but we need to be diligent and make the best decisions in the interest of our customers and our business. A newer, more specific challenge for us involves cannabis. As more states legalize production, more companies are interested in producing these products, but until and unless federal laws change, we can't provide coverage. We're not against this production, and I'd like for us to be in a position to provide the needed protec-



**LEAD TIME** Noble, president of Hortica, joined with more than 90 other industry members, including Traci Dooley, a senior vice president at the company, to discuss issues with lawmakers last month during the Society of American Florists' Congressional Action Days.

tion for these growers, but that just can't happen until there is broader agreement on the federal level.

**FM: What about the overall floral industry? What challenges are your customers facing?**

**TN:** The big one I hear about is workforce development and availability of a reliable labor pool. For these businesses to be successful, they need to be able to tap into and have a quality workforce. That's a challenge right now and that challenge affects their ability to grow and change. Another challenge is the increasing popularity of online sales. I think people are really wrestling with that new business dynamic and how to better engage and flourish. It's a challenge for us, too. People also want to buy insurance online.

**FM: Is there a misconception about insurance that you'd like to clear up?**

**TN:** Price isn't always king. It's important. I understand that. But I think it's also important for people to understand the true value of what they're buying — the service and claims expertise that comes with it. In many cases, a value option comes with its own costs: When something unexpected happens, you want to be sure your carrier is ready to step up and help. 🌿

**Mary Westbrook** is the editor in chief of Floral Management. [mwestbrook@safnow.org](mailto:mwestbrook@safnow.org)

By the time you read this issue, the Society of American Florists will have full results from our spring holiday survey of members. How did your Mother's Day compare with your peers? Find out at [safnow.org/moreonline](http://safnow.org/moreonline).

**BREAKING NEWS:**  
**Mother's Day Sales Results**



**WAX ON** Obra Verde Growers in San Diego County is responsible for introducing waxflower to the U.S. cut-flower market.

## DIVERSITY DELIVERS SUCCESS

➤ In the foothills of northern San Diego County, Obra Verde Growers brings plants from Australia, South Africa and New Zealand to market. Their business model hinges on diversity. “We have over 200 different plant varieties on site,” said Joe Walker, owner and grower. Obra Verde makes the most of each plant they grow, offering varieties three ways: cut flower, cut foliage and liner.

Exclusive propagators, Obra Verde doesn’t finish crops, selling to some of the largest nurseries in California and professional landscapers. Other plants are contract grown for local flower growers who want to raise the plants for cut flowers.

### From Citrus to Flowers

Walker is a third-generation farmer. His father and grandfather raised citrus and avocado. Not sure he wanted to follow in the family’s farming footsteps, Walker studied and worked in archaeology. As he and his wife, Julie, contemplated starting a family, they realized his schedule of constant travel to archaeological sites wasn’t ideal. “We returned to San Diego County and rented our first home from Trino Aguilar, a local flower

farmer,” Walker recounted. “I started an avocado nursery, and Trino asked me if I would consider growing waxflower. He needed 5,000 plants — a huge order at the time.”

At that point, there was no body of research to unravel how to propagate waxflower, but through trial and error, Walker unearthed the magic key that rooted them. “The secret was all in the media, where we took the cutting on the plant, using rooting hormone and a dry method,” Walker shared.

Trino inspected the crop on a Friday, planning to pick it up on Monday. For Trino, Monday never came. That weekend a tractor accident took his life. “It was so sad,” Walker said. “Trino really took me under his wing. Less than a week later all 5,000 flowers were sold to other cut-flower growers. That’s how I learned there was a market for waxflower.”

### A Signature Crop

Today waxflower is Obra Verde’s signature crop. “We worked with Australian plant breeders to refine propagation techniques and develop the U.S. waxflower market,” Walker said. The Aussie plant team took a 1,000-kilometer trip from western to southern Australia to find the best isolated populations of waxflower. They searched for plants with unique flower colors, stem length, disease resistance — all the best traits.

“We trialed those plants for two years here, and then they released them to us for exclusive propagation rights,” Walker explained. “When they saw their export market explode, they decided to create waxflower hybrids.”

Those hybrids are the Pearl Series (white) and Gem Flowers (pink and purple), which bloom from Christmas to Mother’s Day. “These plants are bred to be superflowers,” Walker said. “They have a 20 day-plus vase life, botrytis resistance and terminal flowers (no bearding).”

Star waxflower (five colors) came about purely by accident. In Australia, a bush fire destroyed two isolated fields of verticordia and waxflower. After the fire, seeds that sprouted were an intergeneric cross between the two plants. “No one even knew those plants could cross,” Walker said.

### Growing a Niche

Obra Verde started trialing and growing Australian waxflower, and that niche has grown exponentially. “Our business has expanded to include trialing new plant varieties,” Walker said. “We’re very innovative when it comes to searching for new plant varieties.”

Currently Obra Verde is trialing new *Leucospermum* (protea) varieties from John Cho, Ph.D., professor emeritus at the University of Hawaii; banksia with Digby Growns out of Kings Park and Botanic Garden in Perth, Australia (“one of the best breeders in the world,” per Walker); and *Dietes* from Dennis Fisk in South Africa.

Walker is most excited about work they’re doing with *Grevillea*. “We have so many beautiful varieties of *grevillea* already available, but we have even more to come,” he said. 🌿

**Julie Martens Forney** is a contributing writer for *Floral Management*.  
[fmdecorator@safnow.org](mailto:fmdecorator@safnow.org)



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## WHAT'S NEW IN SEO

> As you and your team plan for the fall holidays during the (relative) summer slowdown, you may be brainstorming ways to drive more traffic to your website. Should you hire an outside party to improve your SEO? Stuff more keywords in on your site? Work up a bunch of new blogs? Tired just thinking about all that you could do, and still confused about what you should do? Don't be.

In a recent webinar for Society of American Florists members, Eric Wu, head of product and growth at BloomNation, shared how to make some strategic changes to your SEO strategy in advance of the mega-holiday — tweaks that will deliver real results. "SEO in most senses is a long-term game," said Wu, who has 20 years' experience in the field with companies such as Uber and TripAdvisor, in addition to BloomNation. "But there are things you can do [right away] to really maximize traffic."

### Think About Intent

For the past two decades, when SEO experts talked best practices, they discussed three things: content (keywords); code (crawlability); and credibility (e.g., links). But in the past few years, a new element has been introduced: customer journey.

"It's basically thinking about how and why people are clicking to your site," Wu explained.

Ask yourself: Are you solving that customer's problem or filling their needs? When you do, search engines respond. To illustrate his point, Wu graphed what a search for a birthday gift might look like online. When a customer lands on your site and doesn't leave — because



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they've found a post, for instance, about "birthday gift ideas for people who have everything" — Google actually takes note that they stayed on your site and didn't return to their search; this can mean your business appears higher in search results.

"If you solve the customer's intent, you can leapfrog over the competition," Wu said.

### Embrace the Google Search Console

If you aren't already using the **Google Search Console** to discover the keywords and phrases people are searching for when they land on your site, the time to start is now.

"This is a great way of measuring where you are and what kind of things people are coming to you for," Wu said, noting that for more in-depth information you can use paid tools such as Keyword Hero (**keyword-hero.com**) or

SEMRush (**semrush.com**), which will help you map competitors' keywords.

### Aim for Consistency

If you can only do one thing this week to improve your standing online, try this: Ensure all of your business information, including your name (Jane's Flowers & Gifts vs. Jane's Flowers vs. Jane's Florist), address, phone, hours of operation and other contact information, is consistently and accurately presented.

"You want all of this to be reflected the same way across the web, always," Wu said, meaning on Google, Facebook, Yelp and any other site. (Yext, **yext.com**, is one tool that can help you check.) Remember, search engines don't like inconsistencies.

Two final tips from Wu? If you aren't using **Google My Business**, try it out. The platform has free tools and new techniques that can help you stand apart from competitors. And if a company tries to sell you a fancy package that includes custom keywords — run. The practice of loading up a site with every possible keyword is outdated, Wu said, and it's been so abused in the past that some search engines see keyword overload as suspicious content, which could hurt your ranking. 🌱

**Mary Westbrook** is the editor in chief of Floral Management. [mwestbrook@safnow.org](mailto:mwestbrook@safnow.org)

## SUMMER SCHOOL

SAF has targeted webinars coming your way this summer — including a series that previews educational programming at SAF Amelia

Island 2019 in September. You can also download past programs, including the presentation by Eric Wu. All sessions are 20 minutes, plus an additional 10 minutes for questions — and they are free for SAF members. Visit [safnow.org/webinars](http://safnow.org/webinars).





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## SUMMER STUNNERS

> At Beretania Florist in Honolulu, Hawaii, designs with tropical flowers and foliage sell like a cold tropical drink on a hot summer day. It's not just that these bright products epitomize The Aloha State, said sales and marketing director Reece Farinas, but rather that "their texture feels exotic and high end, without coming off as ostentatious."

Tropicals' vibrant colors also photograph beautifully, so they catch customers' eyes on the shop website, added Farinas, who shared best practices for putting arrangements in the best light during the Society of American Florists' 134th annual convention last year in Palm Springs, California, as well as in recent issues of *Floral Management*.

(Find his pointers at [safnow.org/moreonline](http://safnow.org/moreonline).)

Here are two low-labor yet luxurious options to wow your customers. 🌿

**VITAMIN C IN A VASE** Perfect for anyone needing a mental pick-me-up, this perky palette conjures a healthy bowl of lemons, limes and grapefruit. Astilbe adds unexpected texture to this tropical design, creating visual interest and upping the perceived value. Design time: 10 to 12 minutes. Wholesale costs: \$30. Suggested retail price: \$185.

**Katie Hendrick Vincent** is the senior contributing editor of *Floral Management*. [kvincent@safnow.org](mailto:kvincent@safnow.org)

Find recipes at [safnow.org/moreonline](http://safnow.org/moreonline).



**POLYNESIAN POSH** This vibrant collection of tropical flowers and foliage, the ideal size for a desk, coffee table or entryway, captures the essence of a Hawaiian rainforest — a luxurious treat for those stuck on the mainland. Design time: 8 to 10 minutes. Wholesale costs: \$20. Suggested retail price: \$150.







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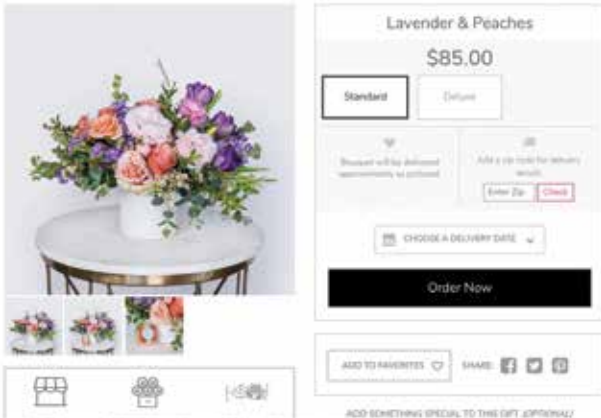
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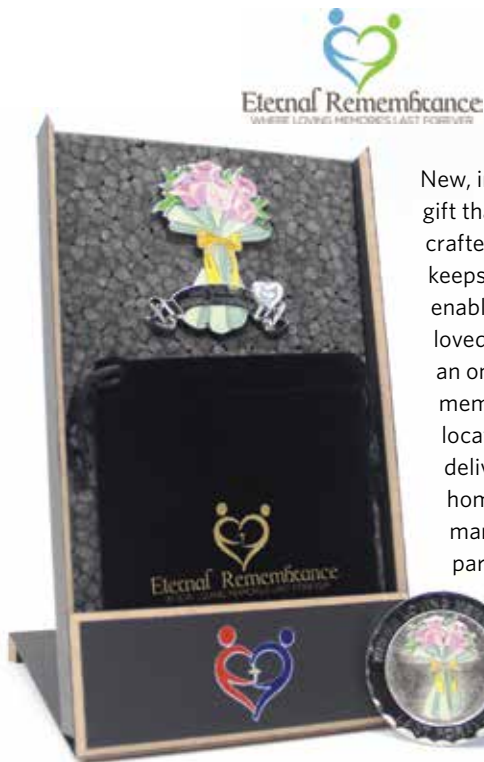
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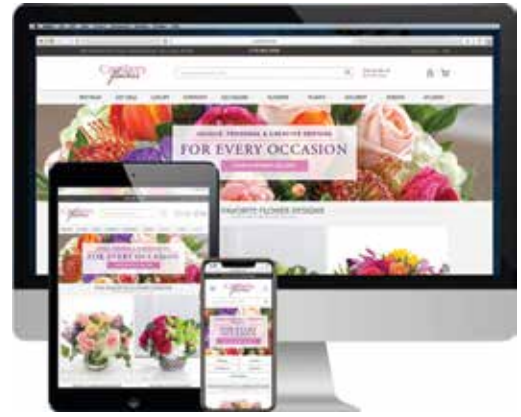
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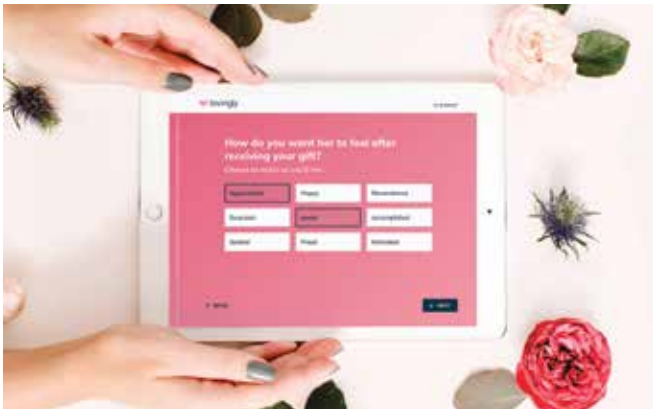


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## LASTING, FRAGRANT GARDEN ROSES

> The fragrance of garden roses is a sentimental reminder of bygone times. Today, a walk through the Roseraie de L'Haÿ gardens south of Paris, established in 1892, will quickly overwhelm your olfactory glands with fragrances from a collection of more than 11,000 heirloom rosebushes and nearly 2,900 species and varieties of roses. By offering fragrant roses, florists can add to the romance of weddings, the nostalgia of anniversaries, and the delight of birthday parties.

Fragrant garden roses have a more open flower form that is more like a cup or rosette, rather than the pointed bud of hybrid tea roses. These flowers offer an increase in petal count, therefore the "open flower look" will offer a fuller appearance and last longer in this open state. Garden roses are more fragile, lasting only about seven days, even with proper care. By comparison, hybrid tea roses and spray roses can last for 10 to 14 days. Breeders will eventually develop longer-lasting fragrant roses, but it will take time. Fortunately, researchers

have now identified the genes responsible for fragrance, enabling breeding programs to get faster results.

### The Journey Begins with the Grower

Garden roses are typically harvested at a more open stage than hybrid tea roses and the flowers have a very high petal count, both of which make these flowers more fragile. Cutting the flowers more open requires careful packaging to avoid bruising in transit. The need for lower density packing to reduce freight or shipping damage may increase delivery costs!

Flowers should be pre-cooled and placed into a cooler (34 F to 36 F) quickly after harvest. It is important to maintain these cold temperatures throughout the journey from grower to consumer. Garden roses are more sensitive to Botrytis and ethylene than tea roses, with a lot of difference in resistance among varieties. It is best to become familiar with the more resistant varieties to minimize loss and get the best performance from these flowers. Garden roses

need to be pre-treated by the grower with an anti-ethylene product and an effective Botrytis treatment before shipping. In these roses, ethylene causes petal wilting and drop, failure to open and reduced vase life.

### Wholesaler and Retailer Roles

Wholesalers and retailers have three main priorities for garden rose care: avoid bruising; keep flowers cold and hydrated; use proper flower food solutions. Here's how to do those things, and one additional tip:

- **Avoid Bruising:** Flowers should be removed from the boxes carefully and one inch of the stem should be cut immediately.
- **Use Flower Food and Clean Buckets:** After cutting stems, place them into a clean bucket with either a hydration solution (wholesaler) or flower food (retailer). The stems do not need to be cut if a hydration or flower food solution is used that does not require cutting. Leaves that will be below the water line should be removed. Use of clean high-quality water and sanitized clean buckets and vases during postharvest is highly recommended... make 'em last!
- **Keep Flowers Cold:** Once in the proper solution the flowers should be moved to the cooler at 34 F to 36 F. After five to six hours of hydration, carefully remove the paper and plastic sleeves so air reaches the flowers, thus reducing the incidence of Botrytis.
- **Promote Proper Care by the Customer:** Customers should be given flower food to use with their flowers and encouraged to mix it properly. Of course, if the flowers are for a special event, the retail florist is probably responsible for assuring proper care at the event. 🌹

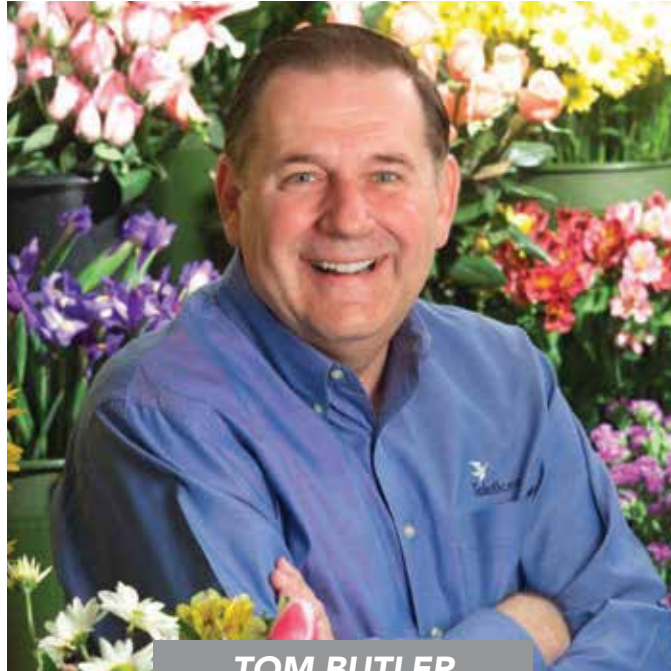
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