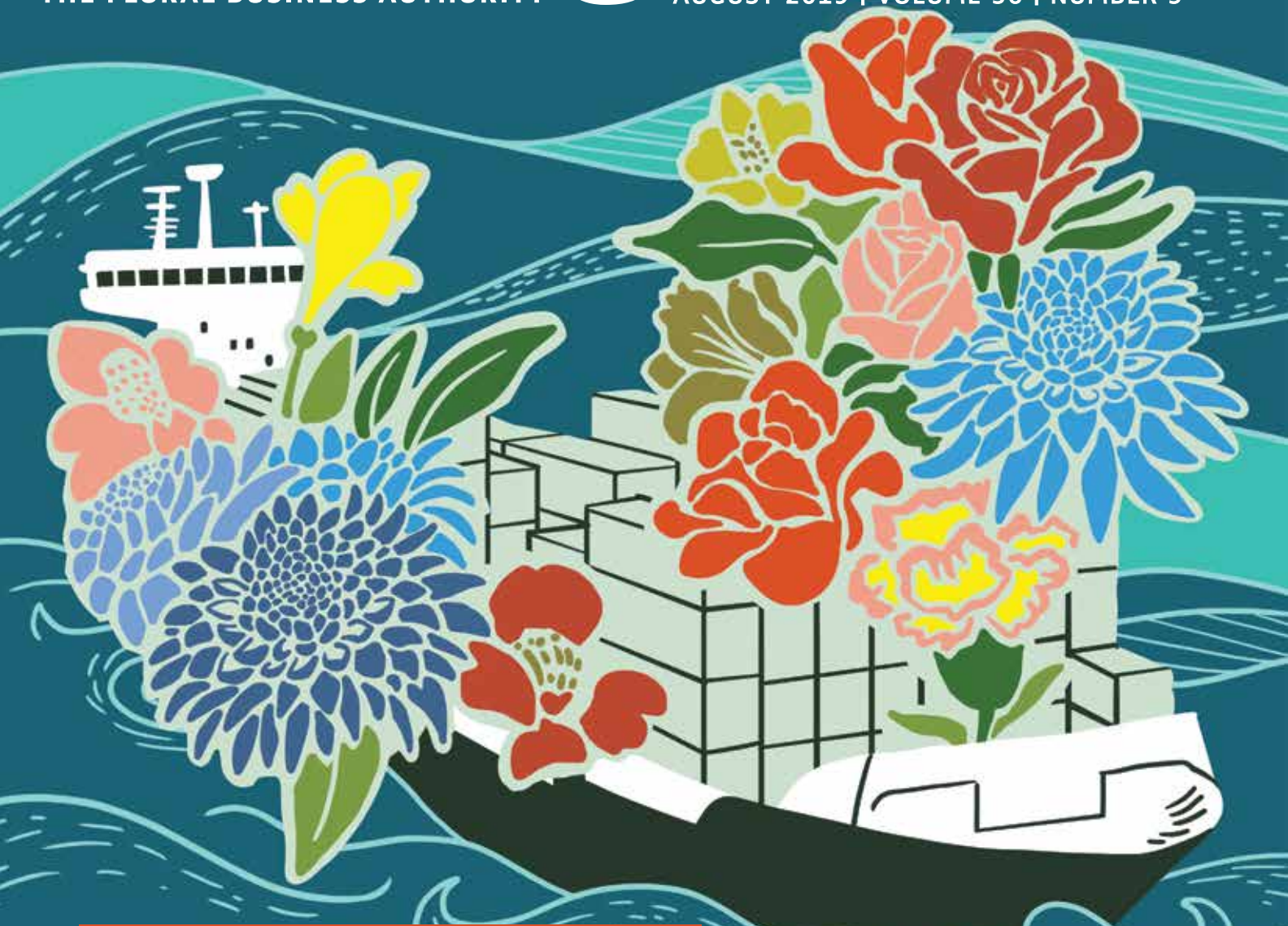


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THE FLORAL BUSINESS AUTHORITY

AUGUST 2019 | VOLUME 36 | NUMBER 5



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Ship Shape

How sea shipments are changing the supply chain

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THE HOLY TRINITY OF PLANNING

> How can we better prepare our businesses today for the future?

It's a unique conversation that's different for everyone. After all, for some of us, the future involves growth — hiring people, opening another location, growing sales or adding new products and services. For others, it involves pulling back — cutting products that aren't profitable, letting go of team members who aren't a good fit, closing a location or even selling the business and retiring.

We're all on different paths and that's a good thing! But based on my 20 years' experience owning and running Tiger Lily, a successful floral business in Charleston, South Carolina, with my husband, Manny, I feel that there are three things everyone who really wants to be in this industry should focus on — no matter their goals. It's the "Holy Trinity," if you will, of making a business as healthy as possible today while prepping it for the future, your future, and whatever that might bring. Of course there are many other factors that go hand in hand with success, such as customer service, quality products and much more ... but the following three were at the top of our pyramid.

Build Your Brand. Branding has always been important for any business, but in today's social media world, it's even more important. We decided early on that we wanted our brand to be "solid and here to stay" and not "trendy." We also decided that weddings are different from much of a retail florist's daily work, and they are, to a great degree, "trendy." So, we branded our everyday and wedding business separately, as Tiger Lily Florist and Tiger Lily Weddings. We had separate logos, websites, photos, packaging, blogs and social media sites. We also capitalized on our local roots. After all, when a website is all that most people see of our business, it's our job to make sure we display it in the most effective way, with photos of our building and our staff, along with our products and blogs to make sure people know we are not order-gatherers.

Track Your Numbers. Two years into owning Tiger Lily, we almost went out of business, so we rebranded and

decided who our customer was going to be and were rewarded with 10 years of incredible growth, but little tracking of our numbers.

Then came the recession around 2008 and a 40 percent drop in business. What to do? While we had been tracking daily/weekly sales for about five years, we weren't tracking labor or cost of goods sold, COGS, effectively. We weren't managing them on a daily basis. So in came performance-based compensation plans and systems for obsessive tracking by all departments along with goals shared with the staff on a daily basis. A team effort to get through the recession and build a solid business with fingertip control was the result.

Learn to Lead. We all come into this industry in many different ways. Some because of a passion for flowers and design, others were born into it and some said "Hey, how hard could it be?" (That last one was my path!). Whichever the path of entry, learning how to lead a successful team isn't initially as important as ordering, designing and delivering flowers, especially for those of us who like to do everything ourselves. But quickly we start to wonder why we are always working so hard and burnout soon follows. As owners, we need to be leaders and more importantly *develop* team leaders along the way. Doing so takes ongoing commitment, time and energy. Remember, while some people are born to lead naturally, most of us need ongoing guidance and support — even as owners. Everything comes from the top down and if you stop growing so will your team! 🌱

Clara Varga-Gonzales owned and operated Tiger Lily Florist for two decades before selling the business in 2018 and founding Fleurish Coaching this year. She will be speaking on this topic next month at SAF Amelia Island 2019. Visit safnow.org to register. clara@fleurishcoaching.com



PLANES, TRUCKS...AND SHIPS?



> Last September during SAF Palm Springs 2018, the Society of American Florists hosted a panel discussion on transportation and logistics — a critical topic since, no matter your role in the industry — you depend on the ports, air-planes, trucks and, increasingly, ships that bring flowers to market.

This month in our cover story (p. 22), contributing writer and longtime floral industry reporter and editor Bruce Wright takes a deep dive into sea transportation, including the value this mode of transportation adds and the new realities it both presents and underscores for

our industry and the flower-buying public. It's an important read and one that touches not only on the growing, shipping and quality considerations but also trends in how people buy flowers today.

One of those trends? Last-minute shoppers are on the rise. The American public has become so accustomed to online buying and overnight shipping that many consumers now assume everything is available lickety-split, including flowers. That shift in attitude was also apparent in some of SAF's spring holiday survey results, which we share on p. 30, with many respondents noting that their customers are waiting longer and longer to place Mother's Day orders. Seeing that trend, floral professionals across the country are working to adjust their timetables, so that they are staffed for the later push and ready with the right amount of product. It's an evolution in buying patterns that we'll continue to cover, to help you better prepare your business.

And speaking of preparing your business, we hope that we'll see you next month in Florida for SAF Amelia Island 2019 — our 135th annual convention and an event that is bursting with educational programming, expert advice, networking opportunities and new products galore. If you haven't registered yet, you still have time to do so today at safnow.org. (Can't make it to convention but hungry for some ongoing educational programming for your staff? Don't forget that SAF has a library of targeted webinars that you can access for free at any time. See our full catalog, including our recent three-part series on HR issues, at safnow.org/webinars.)

Finally, it's with a heavy heart that our SAF staff said good-bye to Krissy Doyle in July. Krissy worked at SAF for nearly two decades. In her role she interacted daily with members, helping them make better use of our SAF resources to grow their businesses and becoming a friend to so many. We miss her humor, her intelligence and her deep love of songs. You can read more about her life on p. 8 and at safnow.org/moreonline.

Mary Westbrook, Editor in Chief
mwestbrook@safnow.org

More Online



BLAST FROM THE MIDWEST

Well, Kansas City was FUN! If you took part in SAF's informative and entertaining 1-Day Profit Blast last month, you'll want to see all of the great pics we snagged at the event. Find your own smiling face and check out all of your friends at [flickr.com/photos/societyofamericanflorists](https://www.flickr.com/photos/societyofamericanflorists).



IRINA STRELNIKOVA/SHUTTERSTOCK

KNOW YOUR NUMBERS

We're sharing tons of great info on Spring 2019 holiday sales this month on p. 30 — but did you know that SAF maintains a comprehensive page filled with holiday stats that can help you benchmark your success and plan for future sales? Visit safnow.org/statistics.



DRIVE-BY PROFITS

Delivery costs got you down? Late summer is an ideal time to review delivery costs and make sure you are making a profit. SAF has resources to help keep you and your team on track. Visit safnow.org/moreonline.

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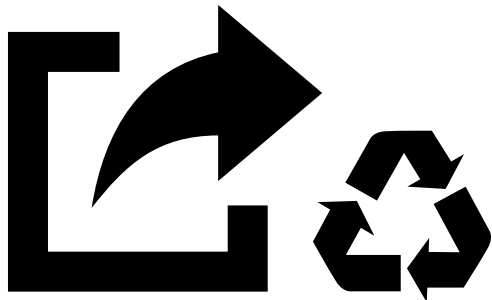
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KRISSY DOYLE:

**AUGUST 23, 1969
- JULY 1, 2019**

> If you've called, emailed or stopped by the Society of American Florists' headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia, sometime in the past 18 years, chances are, you talked with Krissy Doyle, the group's longtime manager of member and data services. Whatever the purpose of your exchange, it probably included a huge smile from Doyle or a burst of her unforgettable laugh — and maybe even a quick rendition of a popular show tune.



Doyle, a driving force behind the association's membership department for the better part of two decades, died July 1 after a valiant, eight-month battle with cancer. She passed away as she had lived — surrounded by family, friends and the music she loved.

"We — like so many businesses in our industry — are like a family here, so the loss and void we are feeling right now is profound," said Kate Penn, SAF's CEO. "Krissy had a passion for our industry and what SAF does for our members. Just ask anyone who ever called or emailed to drop their SAF membership — little did they know what they were in for: an impassioned pitch from Krissy on why they should stay a member. And many of them, after talking to her, did. We all want employees who are passionate about our mission — it's not something you can train; either it's there or it's not. Krissy had that in spades."

Doyle left behind her beloved husband, Kevin, cherished "fur babies," Lizzie and Penny, and countless friends, colleagues and extended family. Read more about her life at safnow.org/moreonline.

SAF AMELIA ISLAND 2019 DEBUTS WITH PACKED AGENDA

> This September hundreds of floral professionals and dozens of experts will come together in Florida for SAF Amelia Island 2019, the Society of American Florists' 135th annual convention. This year's event includes educational sessions on some of the biggest challenges your business is facing, along with myriad opportunities to network with peers and the industry's top suppliers to find new ideas, products and inspiration to take back home.

During SAF Amelia Island 2019, SAF's CEO Kate Penn also will unveil the group's bold new mission and vision, the result of a year-long strategic planning effort that incorporated direct feedback from SAF members and nonmembers, volunteer leaders and outside counsel from an experienced third party. 🌿

SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

Wednesday, September 18	
7:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.	SAF Registration Desk & Resource Center
5:00 p.m. - 5:45 p.m.	First-Timers Reception
6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.	SAF President's Welcome Party
Thursday, September 19	
7:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.	SAF Registration Desk & Resource Center
7:00 a.m. - 8:45 a.m.	Kick-Off Breakfast: State of the Floral Industry and Floral Management's 26th Annual Marketer of the Year Award
9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Outstanding Varieties
9:15 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.	Concurrent Educational Sessions Company Culture: Walk the Talk; Be the Business Worth Buying; Social Media Savvy: Instagram Tips
10:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Refreshment Break
10:35 a.m. - 10:55 a.m.	Experience Zone: Time Management Tools
11:00 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.	All-Industry Session: Forecasting Amidst Expansion, Trade Wars and a Looming Downturn
1:15 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.	Let It Go: Leadership Skills to Empower Your Team and Free Up Your Time
1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.	New Products Showcase
2:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Supplier Expo
6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.	American Floral Endowment Annual Fundraising Reception and Dinner*
Friday, September 20	
6:00 a.m. - 6:30 a.m.	Sunrise Yoga
7:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Outstanding Varieties
7:00 a.m. - 8:45 a.m.	Innovation Breakfast: The Experience Revolution
9:15 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.	Concurrent Educational Sessions Rebooting a Dysfunctional Team; Monday Morning Quarterbacking: 20 Years from a Retailer's Playbook; Experiential Retailing
10:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Refreshment Break
10:35 a.m. - 10:55 a.m.	Experience Zone: Photo Editing Made Simple
11:00 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.	Concurrent Educational Sessions What Consumers REALLY Want; Protect Your Brand with Proactive Customer Service; Rebooting a Dysfunctional Team

CONVENTION DATES

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

For details and to register, go to safnow.org/annual-convention.



1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.	28th Annual SAFPAC Golf Tournament*
1:30 p.m. - 2:45 p.m.	All-Industry Session: 2020 Floral Trends Forecast, What Consumers Crave: Trend Translations for 2020
2:45 p.m. - 3:15 p.m.	Refreshment Break
2:50 p.m. - 3:10 p.m.	Experience Zone: Quick Tips for Better Videos
3:15 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.	Concurrent Educational Sessions Advanced Design Techniques; What Consumers REALLY Want; Let It Go: Leadership Skills to Empower Your Team and Free Up Your Time
5:00 p.m. - 5:45 p.m.	Next-Gen Reception
6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.	Networking Reception
Saturday, September 21	
6:00 a.m. - 6:30 a.m.	Sunrise Yoga
7:00 a.m. - Noon	Outstanding Varieties
7:00 a.m. - 8:45 a.m.	Keynote Breakfast and Business Session: How I Did It
9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	51st Annual Sylvia Cup Competition
9:15 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.	Concurrent Educational Sessions Online Shopping Through Your Customers' Eyes; Onboarding Best Practices; Translating Trends into Everyday Designs
10:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Refreshment Break
10:35 a.m. - 10:55 a.m.	Experience Zone: Up Your Packaging Game
11:00 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.	Concurrent Educational Sessions High-Volume Fulfillment; Boosting Social Media ROI; Protect Your Brand with Proactive Customer Service
1:30 p.m. - 2:45 p.m.	Concurrent Sessions New Revenue Streams; The Price Is Right: Or Is It?; Steps to PFCI Membership
2:45 p.m. - 3:15 p.m.	Refreshment Break
2:50 p.m. - 3:10 p.m.	Experience Zone
3:15 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.	Concurrent Educational Sessions Next-Level Idea Exchange; Steps to Membership with the American Institute of Floral Designers
6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.	Stars of the Industry Awards Reception and Dinner
9:00 p.m. - 11:00 p.m.	Afterglow Party

*Separate registration required

SAF MEMBERS TO ELECT NEW LEADERS

> Society of American Florists members will vote for three new members to its Board of Directors during SAF Amelia Island 2019.

“SAF depends on the expertise and feedback of our volunteer leaders — having this group to turn to for advice and insight is critical to our work as an association laser-focused on meeting the needs of our members,” said Kate Penn, SAF’s CEO. “We’re lucky to have such a strong group of volunteer leaders serving our membership already and to have such excellent candidates this year.”

Election results will be announced on Sept. 21 during the convention’s Keynote Breakfast and Business Session. Once elected, the new members of SAF’s Board of Directors will serve three-year terms beginning after SAF Amelia Island 2019.

To cast an absentee ballot, submit a written request on company stationery to SAF by Aug. 19 via mail (1001 North Fairfax St. Suite 201, Alexandria, VA 22314) or fax (703) 836-8705. Completed absentee ballots must be received at SAF headquarters by Sept. 8.

Board of Directors candidates are:



Growers

Stephen Kennicott
Kennicott Kuts, LLC,
Donovan, Illinois



Retailers

Stacie Lee Banks, AAF
Lee’s Flower
& Card Shop
Washington, D.C.



Michael Pugh, AAF
Pugh’s Flowers
Memphis, Tennessee



Wholesalers

Liza Atwood
Fifty Flowers
Boise, Idaho 🌸

PAST PARTICIPANTS SHARE TIPS ON HOW ANYONE CAN ‘PETAL IT FORWARD’ ON OCT. 23

> Think the Society of American Florists’ Petal It Forward is “only” about retailers? The big-hearted outreach also provides a chance for those floral professionals who are typically behind the scenes, including growers, suppliers and wholesalers, to experience what retail florists witness every day — the happiness that flowers bring to others.

“It’s a great opportunity to remind us why we all grow and/or sell flowers,” said Tracy Easter of Resendiz Brothers Protea Growers in Fallbrook, California, the grower that won Floral Management magazine’s 2018 Marketer of the Year award. “The joy experienced by the gift giver and gift receiver is something that we are somewhat removed from so this is a great chance to experience what we are working for.”

The day of Petal It Forward, to be held this year on Oct. 23, Resendiz sends its farm employees out to public locations such as restaurants and gas stations to hand out bouquets.

“We catch them by surprise, which adds to the experience of what Petal It Forward is all about,” said Easter, who helped hand out 300 bouquets last year.

Since 2015, SAF has led the industry in Petal It Forward. During this flower giveaway, passersby receive two bouquets (or flowers) — one to keep and one to share — to demonstrate the Rutgers University research that shows flowers make people happy, and they are encouraged to post on social media about their experience using the hashtag #petalitforward.

Resendiz starts promoting October’s event in June to customers and community through its website and social media.



TEAM BUILDING The Sakata team passed out 250 bouquets last year, partnering with grower Kitayama Brothers. They plan to participate again this year.



GRIN AND SHARE IT A happy recipient benefits from the coordinated efforts of Kitayama Brothers, Sakata Seed America and Floralife during the 2018 Petal It Forward.

Supplier Smithers-Oasis starts in the summer, too. Kelly Mace, marketing programs and communications manager, said that the company orders T-shirts early and follows the SAF checklist. (Find out more at safnow.org/moreonline.)

“SAF does a great job of preparing people for it with their checklist, and we follow that,” said Mace.

This will be the fourth year that Smithers-Oasis participates. The Kent, Ohio floral supply company contributes in two ways — by donating flower food packets to customers and by purchasing 200 bouquets from a local wholesaler to hand out on the college town’s streets.

“We try to schedule it around lunchtime when there are a lot of people out. Our corporate office is right downtown, so we bring the bouquets there and that’s where we station everyone. It’s super fun,” she said.

Jamie Kitz, a key account sales manager and corporate citizenship specialist with Sakata Seed America, a breeder of ornamental and vegetable seeds and plants, shares the same sentiments. She urges everyone to participate, advising first-time participants to start small.

“It doesn’t have to be a Hollywood production or a huge number of flowers; it’s the one-on-one interaction of handing out flowers that matters,” she said. “Any amount of flowers that you feel comfortable handing out — small bouquets or even single stems — they have the same effect.” 🌸

Jenny Scala is SAF’s director of marketing and communications and **Renee Houston Zemanski** is a contributing writer. fmeditor@safnow.org

snapshot



TALE TO TELL At Fleur in Chicago, Illinois, the customers encounter products grouped in merchandised "stories" on tables as they make their way to the flower cooler near the back of the store.

FUNDAMENTALS OF FIXTURES

➤ Within any industry, trends come and go, and visual merchandising in the retail sector is not exempt. However, consumer patterns have proven true to some simple philosophies that, when recognized and accommodated, result in an increase in customer purchases.

When choosing fixtures, several factors are integral to the final decision. Knowing what merchandise needs to be displayed and determining what space the fixture will occupy are the key components, followed by style, price and other features.

Display tables and shelving units are the most common fixtures in retail stores. Round tables are popular in specialty stores due to their versatility and style. Ideal for 360-degree presentations, round tables lend themselves to cross-merchandising displays of gift products with floral arrangements as well as table-setting displays. In contrast, rectangle tables are better for nesting and stacking, making them well suited to plants and containers.



VERSATILE APPEAL Stand-alone shelf units are mobile and provide flexibility in usage options throughout the store. Many have varying shelf sizes allowing for larger products on the bottom. This also makes them sturdier at the base. At Flourish Flowers and Gifts, white containers are displayed with cactus-themed gifts and plants on an open-back, five-shelf unit in a front window corner of the store in Lewisville, Texas. The simple, almost neutral color palette allows this display to effectively show greater amounts of product without appearing too cluttered.

When creating table and shelf displays, create height by using risers as “lifts” to create varying levels that generate visual interest within a display story. Consider a single theme or color palette that will catch customers’ attention and group smaller, like-items in multiples for greater impact. In general, asymmetrical displays are more likely to capture a customer’s eye. 🌿

Becky Tyre is a writer, retail consultant, shop local advocate and founder of the Retail Details blog and Retail Details the Podcast. becky.tyre@gmail.com



BOLD STYLING Alicia Racine chose black wall shelving against a matte black wall for part of her store, Adorn Fine Flowers in Northville, Michigan. “We have so much color in our shop between all of the flowers, plants and merchandise,” said Racine. “I really wanted all of that to pop within the space.” The choice was bold, but it has proven effective for displaying many products, including clear items like beverage glasses and vases.

MYSTERY CALLING A WIRE SERVICE

> For August I decided to call the consumer division of one of the wire services to hear how they might handle me versus my treatment from a traditional retail flower shop. I know this is a slight deviation from calling brick and mortar stores, but it's important for you to learn how customers are being treated when they buy flowers anywhere and to learn from that experience.

Honestly, I was not sure what to expect but proceeded as always, with an open mind. For this call, I decided to be in dire need of help and guidance because I just heard some bad news and had no idea of what I needed or should spend. The rep both surprised and disappointed me; the call really was a mixed bag. But do play the recording to hear exactly how these national companies serve local customers.

The Opportunity: A Family Breaks Apart

I explained that I just learned that my parents were getting divorced after 40 years and I wanted to cheer up my mom with flowers. In my typical fashion, I quickly threw out that I had no clue as to what I wanted and had not been on the website. (I joked that I did look but did not find a "soon to be divorced" section.)

Thumbs Up: Engaged, Interested Service

This rep engaged and connected with me, and it was a pleasant surprise. Upon hearing that I was about to be from a broken home, she chimed in and expressed regret. Additionally, she made an attempt to personalize the sale by asking for my mom's favorite color. Yes, that is a standard question; however, listen to her funny comment when I paused to try to remember the color. In short, she made an impression because she sounded engaged and

tuned in to my needs. But that's not enough to make a good sale.

Thumbs Down: Undersold and Underwhelmed

Sadly, even with our great rapport, the rep horribly undersold me. When I stated my desperate need for guidance, she chose a \$55 item from their website and started rambling off a list of flowers (information, of course, that is wasted on most customers who know very little about flowers). When I pushed her about the possibility of spending more, she switched gears and recommended an open order, allowing the filling florist more creative license, but she only went up to \$60! Take a close listen to how she talked about the fees (and make sure your team members don't do that). Finally, this sale screamed for a finishing touch, perhaps candy. But none was offered. And that meant a smaller sale.



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 this call by visiting 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.

"If we fear rejection and sell from our own pockets, sales will never rise."



Tim Huckabee, FSC, is the president of FloralStrategies.com, which teaches ultimate customer care to retail and wholesale florists. tim@floralstrategies.com

The Takeaway: Offer More

More than half a year into this column, I hope that you are learning from the one trend present in nearly every shop I call (and even the wire service call center): we determine what customers spend and if we fear rejection and sell from our own pockets, sales will never rise. But I have the answer: Use one of the most powerful elements of my training process and simply tell customers, "This is what I recommend for that occasion..." and when you offer a bigger price, they will buy it. Really. 🌿

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

How does your staff REALLY treat customers? Call (800) 983-6184 to volunteer your shop for a free Tim's Calling undercover shopping call, anonymity guaranteed. (Retail value: \$50.)

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT



Sara Davis

Lead Designer
Arizona Family Florist
Phoenix, Arizona

> For 23 years, Sara Davis has called the flower business home. Her career took root at a small family florist in New Brunswick, New Jersey. "I started at Flowers by Barbara when I was 17," Sara said. "James and Barbara, the owners, taught me everything I know about floral design."

Today Sara runs the design center at Arizona Family Florist. A typical day can include routing deliveries (180 daily on average), guiding employees on tasks, ordering hard-goods and designing when needed, and, every so often, pulling from the skills she learned along the way while working at smaller operations. "Six months ago, someone wanted a floral American flag, and no one knew how to do it," she said. "In the days before floral foam, we'd use toothpicks and Styrofoam. So, I spray painted carnations blue and used toothpicks to hold all the flowers in place."

Best business decision:

"During holidays, we do 8,000 to 10,000 arrangements per week. Every year we change one thing in preproduction to improve the

process. This past Mother's Day we decided to work smarter, not harder, by building our cooler racks up and utilizing the space above. Doing this allowed us to preproduce more in advance, which made for a smoother holiday. By using a ladder and having two people in the cooler constantly rotating everything, we fit more in. Instead of working until midnight like in years past, the latest we worked was 7:30 p.m. It was one of our best years."

On training designers:

"Previously, training our design team was not something I felt there was enough time for. But now I realize it is more important than ever, especially for consistency. Sharing my knowledge with others is what motivates me."

My philosophy in life:

"Go with your first instinct and don't overthink — that applies not just to floral design but everything in life. My other secret to success is that I treat the business as if it's my business." 🌸

Julie Martens Forney is a contributing writer for Floral Management.
fmeditor@safnow.org



Credit Card Woes

"I signed a contract with a credit card processing company. The salesperson I spoke with told me I could cancel at any time after my initial year. Now I want to cancel early, but the company says there is a big penalty. What can I do?"

We have heard from a number of SAF members who have had this kind of problem — the salesperson tells them one thing and then they learn down the line that the contract they signed says something different. The problem with this type of scenario is that, under the law, someone who signs a contract is typically assumed to, and held responsible for, having read and understood the contract. Additionally, most contracts include a provision that states that any promises made before the contract was signed aren't enforceable unless they are specifically included in the contract. For this reason, we strongly urge all business owners to carefully read (and, if needed, seek legal advice) on any contract before they sign it to make sure (1) that they understand what they are committing to and (2) that any promises or representations that have been made to them are accurately reflected in the contract.

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.

SECRETS TO BETTER SYMPATHY SALES

> Of all the occasions florists share in, the passing of a loved one may be one of the most difficult to navigate with a customer. While illness, death and misfortune are natural experiences in our lives, many an industry has risen from the needs of the bereaved, including ours. Sympathy and grief are strong emotions, and it is with compassion that we, as florists, aid our customers during these difficult times.

It is no secret that funeral and memorial flowers make up a large portion of revenue, not only for brick and mortar retail florists, but for the highly competitive order-gathering services as well. Even local grocers sell bunches for roadside memorials and gravesites. The standout for retail florists during such a difficult time is their exceptional customer service and, of course, beautiful custom floral designs.

Here are a few key points to remember when working with the bereaved, especially close family members:

Be compassionate. It seems so obvious, but it is important to balance compassion and professionalism. Too stoic and you may appear uncaring, which can be very off-putting to people who are filled with emotion; however, being pulled too far into their grief can potentially make a difficult moment worse for your customers and be emotionally trying for your staff as well. Our advice is to take cues from your customers. We have had families that require a lot of time to gather themselves to make their floral choices, and we offer patience, compassion, comforting words, professionalism and plenty of tissues. We have also had families that joyfully share stories of their loved ones with smiles and laughter. Embrace their joy in the moment

GO DEEPER

Sympathy Tools

Read more about florists who have improved their sympathy sales and download a letter that the Kelly family brings to local funeral directors to strengthen relationships at safnow.org/moreonline.



NKM999/SHUTTERSTOCK

and share a laugh or two with them. No matter the situation, thank them for visiting your shop, assure them you'll take good care of the flowers for their loved one's service and tell them you're sorry for their loss.

Understand your customer. Spend a few moments getting to know them. Have they ordered funeral flowers before? Designing beautiful bouquets for a memorial service may be old hat for you, but for many it may be the first time they've had to plan something like this. Those customers may need some extra guidance, advice on what is appropriate and what funeral traditions they may or may not want to observe. Other customers may have planned funeral services before and know exactly what they are looking for.

Establish relationships with funeral homes. When it comes to funeral homes and crematories, the competition can be steep. Many are eager to work with a florist when a commission is offered — and some directors ask a little more than they should. For instance, a local director solicited a florist asking for a 40 percent cut on all orders; that's too much. Another director asked for commissions on all flowers sent to their funeral home from us, whether they ordered them or not. That did not happen, either. Our best funeral colleagues ask for nothing more than good, dependable service for their customers. They know the

reputation of our business and are confident using our services. Often paying commission on funeral sales can lead to additional cost to the consumer and can make your product appear overpriced and undervalued as you attempt to make up the lost percentage. We choose not to pay commissions on any of our funeral work.

Know the deceased. As important as getting to know your customer is getting to know the deceased. Was she a mother, a sister, an aunt, a grandmother? Most families will want flowers to represent all of the relationships, usually with a ribbon and banner to display that connection as well; for example, "Beloved Mother" or "Loving Sister." It is also important to ask what the deceased's likes or dislikes were; if Uncle Joe really disliked lilies, you wouldn't want to include them in his final tribute. Finally, ask if the deceased had any special interests, hobbies or if they were a veteran or member of any special organizations. It can make a memorial service especially touching and personal to incorporate these elements into the floral designs. 🌿

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, on meditation. steinyourflorist@aol.com

GLAMOROUS GERBERAS

> Gerberas have long been a mainstay in daily orders, particularly for “Get Well” arrangements and other pick-me-up occasions, thanks to their availability in perky colors, including red, orange, yellow, lime and pink — not to mention an uncanny resemblance to the sun. Upping the design possibilities: a rise in novelty and miniature varieties.

North America’s largest gerbera producer, Rosa Flora in Dunnville, Ontario, grows more than 130 gerberas on roughly 22 acres — a third of which is replaced annually. “We are in very close touch with our breeders to learn the latest improvements in vase life, disease resistance and productivity,” said owner Arielle DeBoer. While always on the hunt for top performers in the standard category, “We also keep another eye open to what is new and different to provide the fullest array to our customers,” she said. For instance, Rosa Flora grows many bi-colors, spiders (spindly specimens that appeal to young customers), gerpoms (multidimensional flowers with a ball-like shape) and minis.

Four thousand miles away in Encinitas, California, the team at Dramm and Echter is following a similar course. “Our ‘Pomponi’ gerberas remain a customer favorite,” said marketing specialist Beth Hartman. “Super hardy and long-lasting, they are perfect substitutes for dahlias.” The company has ramped up its production and range of colors of ‘Pomponis,’ while also focusing heavily on “Piccolini” mini gerberas, an excellent choice for corsages, boutonnieres and hair pieces. “They have the same high-impact color and sturdy form of standard gerberas, but their small size means they won’t overpower the arrangement,” Hartman said. “They also last a ridiculously long time.”

Here are just a handful of the latest and greatest gerberas to turn customers’ heads. 🌻

Katie Hendrick Vincent is the senior contributing editor of *Floral Management*. kvincent@safnow.org



‘HYPNOTICA’ SPIDER GERBERA
Rosa Flora



‘STARDUST’ SPIDER GERBERA
Rosa Flora



‘MAMAMIA’ MINI GERBERA
Rosa Flora



‘SUNDANCE’ STANDARD GERBERA
Ocean Breeze



‘KERMIT WHITE
GREEN POMPONI’ GERBERA
Dramm and Echter



'CHIVU GERMINI'
MINI GERBERA
Dümmen Orange



'PLUCK'
GERPOM GERBERA
Rosa Flora



'ASTRONAUT'
SPIDER GERBERA
Rosa Flora



'MAXIME'
STANDARD GERBERA
Rosa Flora



'ANCONA YELLOW
PICCOLINI' MINI GERBERA
Dramm and Echter



'DIXON GERMINI'
MINI GERBERA
Dümmen Orange



'MOLARA IT PINK
PICCOLINI' MINI GERBERA
Dramm and Echter





A Sea Change in Transportation

As shipping costs rise, can sea transport provide some relief — and will it change how we do business?

BY BRUCE WRIGHT

When Hurricane Irma hit Florida in September 2017, the impact on local residents and businesses was devastating and immediate. The most powerful Atlantic hurricane on record, Irma flooded cities, felled trees and power lines, and triggered the largest evacuation in U.S. history.

But Irma also had wider, if more remote repercussions. Among them, the storm may have served as a pivot point in the floral industry's slowly mounting transportation crisis.

"Before Irma, the pressure was already being felt," said Christine Boldt, executive vice president of the Association of Floral Importers of Florida. Airlines had begun to charge much higher rates to bring flowers from Colombia and Ecuador into Miami. Those cargo routes had become more costly for the airlines — for reasons that had nothing to do with flowers, or even with the price of jet fuel, and everything to do with macroeconomic trends (more on that in a moment).

The core of Hurricane Irma bypassed Miami. Nonetheless, service from the airlines was interrupted for two days, causing a backup in flower deliveries.

"When they

came back, the airlines said, 'We're not going to provide as many flights, because we don't have enough cargo going south,'" Boldt continued. "It was the perfect time for them to make that excuse — the perfect storm."

Suddenly, flights that would take flowers as cargo were not only more expensive but also there were fewer of them. Shippers who had previously struggled with the higher rates began to look around for alternatives. One option jumped to the fore: sea freight.

Hanging in the Balance

Sea transport has long dominated the global shipping of perishables such as produce and fresh fish. Until recently, however, it has played a much smaller role in the cut-flower market. Even today, it represents only a small percentage of the total for cut flowers and greens — probably somewhere between 2 percent and 5 percent.

Still, it's growing: Asocolflores, the Association of Colombian Flower Exporters, reports an increase of 177 percent in exports by sea freight over the past five years, as measured in tons of flowers, to all markets.

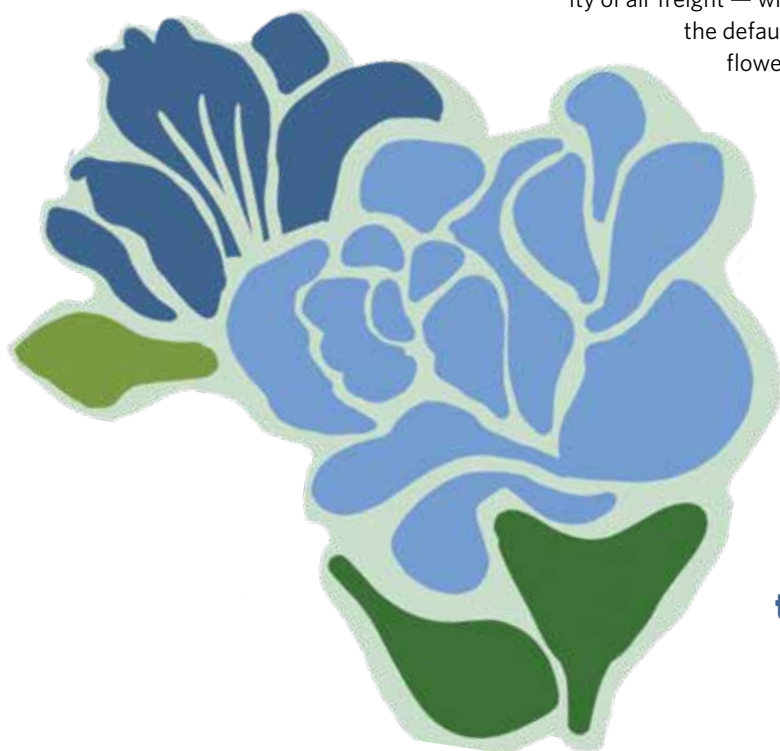
Part of the reason for that growth relates to changes in the cost and availability of air freight — which has provided the default means of getting flowers from farm to

florist ever since the U.S. floral industry began to rely on year-round imports from South America. Indeed, it remains so for the flower trade worldwide, from South America or Kenya to markets in Europe, China and Japan.

It was only when the price of air freight began to rise dramatically in recent years — and when cargo space became scarce at holiday times, straining the system and putting quality and freshness at risk — that more flower shippers began to look at sea freight as an option.

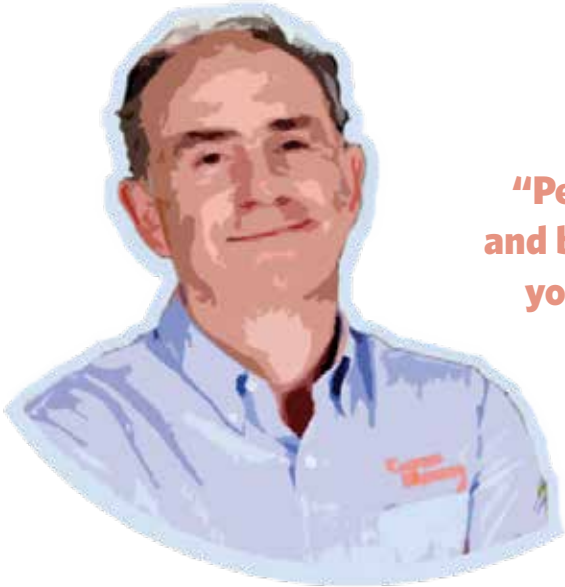
The current supply chain from South America works like this: When flowers produced in Colombia or Ecuador are flown into Miami, they can be flown at a reasonable rate only by paying for one-way transport. That same airliner's southbound flight is paid for with cargo headed from the U.S. to a variety of destinations in South America. (Much of that southbound cargo, in recent years, has been electronics, including smartphones.)

With 212 million people, Brazil has been the biggest importer of U.S. products on the continent. Venezuela has also been a significant export market for U.S. goods. But in the three years leading up to 2017, Brazil was hit with an economic crisis that caused severe unemployment and a plummeting GDP. Over an even longer period, Venezuela's economy has been in a state of total collapse.



"The big challenge is that our industry is so segmented that nobody knows about what goes on outside their segment. Flower buyers need to understand that the prices we're selling for are not increasing enough to make up for all these added costs. There is no place to squeeze any more."

—Christine Boldt, Association of Floral Importers of Florida



“People have learned that when you ship by boat and book your boats and containers ahead of time, you can program your crops and take a lot of the pressure off flowers for the peak seasons.”

—Felipe Sanchez, CargoMaster

“Once Brazil went to crisis, the rates on the northbound flights had to go up,” said Felipe Sanchez, founder of CargoMaster, an international cargo agency based in Bogotá (and specializing in cut flowers) that was acquired earlier this year by the Swiss company Panalpina. Within the past five years, he estimated, rates from Bogotá to Miami have increased by as much as a third.

Rates are especially high at Valentine’s Day and Mother’s Day. Airlines have always levied a surcharge leading up to those major holidays, starting perhaps 10 days before the holiday, according to Tim Dewey, group vice-president of procurement, e-commerce, marketing and quality for the Delaware Valley Floral Group in Sewell, New Jersey. In the new, supply-driven climate for transportation services, the surcharge is starting earlier, three weeks before the holiday (and before the high volumes really kick in) — a move that represents an increase in freight costs of about 30 percent.

Meanwhile, on the ground, a driver shortage is putting pressure on trucking companies as they compete with the ever-increasing volume of parcel deliveries by UPS and FedEx, thanks to the “Amazon effect” (see “On the Road,” page 26).

Ramping Up

Sea transport of cut flowers and greens is not new. Piggybacking on infrastructure deployed for other perishables, shippers have long used ocean freight containers to move cut greens from

Costa Rica and Guatemala to Miami — a relatively short, three-day trip.

CargoMaster started shipping flowers by boat 12 years ago, from Colombia to Europe — no less than nine to 15 containers a week, according to Sanchez. Seven years ago, the company launched a sea freight program from Ecuador and Colombia all the way to Japan.

Experience with these longer distances taught CargoMaster that not all flowers travel well by ship. In general, it is the hardier flowers — carnations, chrysanthemums, alstroemerias — that are the best candidates for sea freight. Within those categories, some varieties do better than others. CargoMaster ships other colors of carnations to Japan, for example, but not reds, which can lose 30 percent of their color intensity on such a long trip.

In the case of roses, reds can be shipped via sea freight from Colombia or Ecuador to the United States without compromise of quality. Indeed, it’s not unlikely that the red roses in a Valentine’s Day bouquet might have traveled by sea. But if you purchase more delicate white roses for Mother’s Day, they will probably have come in by air.

How Does It Work?

Can flowers really travel by sea and arrive just as fresh as they do coming off a plane? How is that possible, when the sea trip from Colombia to Miami takes three days, versus three hours by plane — and the entire trip, including the time it takes to truck the flowers from the in-

land city of Bogotá to a seaport, can take as many as six or seven days?

The key factor, as in the quality of fresh cut flowers generally, is the cold chain. When flowers travel by air, temperature fluctuations are inevitable, both within the airplane’s cargo hold and as the flowers are loaded and unloaded. Small fluctuations can be tolerated because the trip is relatively short.

In contrast to the cargo hold of a plane, a sea freight container is essentially a very large refrigeration chamber, equipped with a particularly effective, forced-air, bottom-up type of internal cooling system, according to Steve Daum, director at the postharvest-care company Floralife, which has been conducting extensive research into sea transport.

“The ocean freight container is very effective at sucking heat out of a box of flowers,” said Daum. “It maintains a static temperature. You can adjust the relative humidity, even the air exchange in some of these containers. It’s not a bad way to store flowers.”

In fact, at holiday times — when at least some flowers have to be cut earlier than usual and stored a few extra days to meet demand — sea containers can actually fill a gap in industry logistics, not just for transport but also for storage, said Boldt: “The container functions as a temperature-controlled facility. So if product needs to be stored, instead of being stored at the farm or in Miami, it can be moving on a ship while the holiday volume is trying to come in.”

Quality Considerations

Sea shipping requires strictly enforced protocols, said Daum. Measures that restrict the growth of bacteria and fungi must be carefully observed; the containers must be sanitized; the flowers must be properly precooled. These are the same precautions that should ideally be observed with air freight, but the risk is greater when flowers are shipped over a much longer timeline, even at a consistently low temperature.

When everything is done right, however — and taking into account that only some flowers and varieties, not all, are candidates for sea shipping — the results in terms of freshness can be impressive.

“For me the biggest value of sea freight is the quality of product,” said Sanchez. “There is less handling of the flowers, and you’re keeping them at 1

C, 35 F, all the way through the trip. So you’re really respecting the cycle of the flower. We see that when product arrives by boat, the vase life can be three, four, or five days longer than by air.”

Experts agree that when flowers travel by sea and everything is done right, quality outcomes at least meet industry standards. For most shippers, however, the deciding factor is cost savings, driven by the recent rise in the cost of air freight. And sea transport does involve risks — risks that can bring the cost savings down.

Size Matters

The first big difference between sea freight and air freight is the timeline required to get flowers from there to here. The second is the size of the shipment. Sea containers are 40 feet long. That’s a lot of flowers.

“If you load a 40-foot container with roses, it’s a huge risk if you don’t know what you’re doing, because the value of the shipment is \$80,000,” said Terril Nell, Ph.D., AAF, research coordinator at the American Floral Endowment, a former SAF president and professor emeritus at the University of Florida.

The risk stems not only from the need for extra-scrupulous attention to precooling and other procedures to protect quality, both at the farm and when flowers are unloaded. There is also the ever-present risk that when a shipment arrives in Miami, U.S. customs inspectors will find a proscribed pest in one of the boxes. When that happens, they can require that the entire shipment be fumigated.

The inspectors do have some leeway. As Dewey explained, with air freight, if a shipment includes 15 different products from 15 different farms, and the inspec-

On the Road

Unsung heroes, truck drivers are a lynchpin in the flower business, as in just about every business sector. They are also a disappearing breed.

“The younger generation does not want to drive an over-the-road vehicle,” noted Laura Shinall, president of Syndicate Sales. “The driver population is aging out. Syndicate has a wonderful stable of drivers, but we don’t know how much longer we can hold onto them.”

Salaries have not kept up with the increased demand for truck drivers, who do a physically taxing job that puts a strain on family life in an era when both parents typically have to work to make ends meet.

But lately it has been difficult to hire a truck driver at any price. Aside from changing cultural expectations, another reason is the “Amazon effect”: e-commerce has sent UPS and FedEx scurrying to keep up with demand for home delivery. Not only are there more packages being delivered all the time, but expectations for timeliness continually escalate.

“As we try to provide the increased service, it increases costs,” said Shinall. “We can be as efficient as possible. But the bulk of those costs are way beyond our control.”

Yet another factor: In December of 2017, regulations went into effect that require drivers to limit their hours on the road, with enforcement from electronic logging devices (ELDs). The new rules make the roads safer, but they inevitably drive up costs. The rules can also affect the quality of service by restricting the routing options available.

For a floral transportation company like Armellini Logistics, which delivers shipments from Miami importers to wholesale florists across the country, these challenges come on top of another one: “Over time, as the mass market gets stronger, wholesaler volume tends to shrink,” noted company president David Armellini. Deliveries of fewer flowers are stretched farther apart.

In the past, the company has been able to maintain the same level of service by realizing efficiencies. But with the driver shortage, they might have to squeeze the same load

tors find an illegal bug in just one box from one of those farms, they are likely to isolate the products from that farm — not the whole shipment.

But with sea freight, because all the products have been held together within one container for a much longer time, inspectors are more likely to require fumigation of the entire container — a factor that significantly increases the risk of shipping by sea over shipping by air.

The risk is multiplied for consolidated shipments that are shared by smaller players: One partner's bug means fumigation for all. And fumigation is never good for flowers, especially when they are coming off a long ocean voyage.

That's just one reason why the ideal scenario for sea transport is to fill a container with flowers of one type, from one location, so that all quality control factors are managed in the same way. Only the biggest shippers can manage such volumes. Usually they are on the mass-market side of the industry.

onto six rather than seven drivers — “not just from a dollar standpoint, but physically because we don't have the drivers, which could mean delays to certain customers.” Over time, Armellini estimated, “In certain markets where we now serve six days a week, we may have to cut back to five.”

Are there solutions? Providers of trucking service to the floral industry say one thing that would help a lot would be if flower boxes came in standard sizes. “It's like a puzzle trying to load our trucks,” said Armellini.

But while box standardization could make loading and unloading of trucks and storage coolers far more efficient, saving time and money, there's a hitch: “Typically the rate shippers pay to an airline is triple the transportation rate by truck,” Armellini continued, “so box sizes tend to accommodate any efficiency realizable with airline cargo space. As a grower, your main goal is to save on airline freight costs.” Maybe standard boxes could save 10 percent on trucking costs, but using non-standard boxes saves 10 percent on airline freight cost, by fitting more boxes into the same cargo hold. The airline wins out.

“As a wholesaler, we're basically taking orders today for delivery tomorrow. The industry has evolved into a very last-minute business.”

—Tim Dewey, Delaware Valley Floral Group

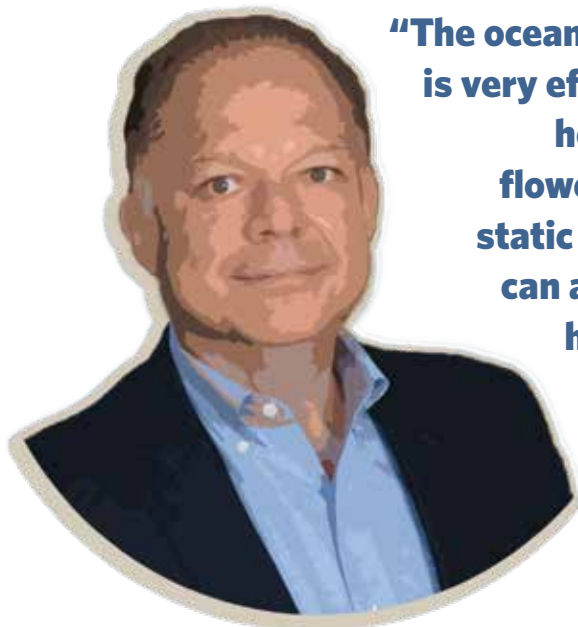


If wholesale florists are fewer in number these days and more spread out, increasing delivery times and costs for a company like Armellini, their wholesale customers face a similar challenge.

How much does it cost a wholesaler to make a delivery to a retailer? “A lot more than we charge,” said Tim Dewey, group vice-president of procurement, e-commerce, marketing and quality for the Delaware Valley Floral Group in Sewell, New Jersey. Like most wholesalers, Delaware Valley will deliver free if the customer orders over a certain amount; otherwise, there is a nominal charge that does not cover the real cost.

“We built our system trying to meet traditional expectations of late ordering and early delivery, within a two-hour time frame, but it gets tougher and tougher to do that,” Dewey said. One bright spot: Having tried several routing systems, the latest one seems to be helping by alerting the managers at each of Delaware Valley's eight distribution centers to which routes are sustainable and which ones are not.

—B.W.



“The ocean freight container is very effective at sucking heat out of a box of flowers. It maintains a static temperature. You can adjust the relative humidity, even the air exchange in some of these containers.”

—Steve Daum, Floralife

Shipping Mode Changes

To gain more than a toehold in the overall picture for cut-flower transport, sea transport will necessitate some big adjustments in practices and infrastructure. “People who are going to use this technology need to recognize it will be a long-term relationship,” said Daum.

“For example: Let’s say you are a rose farm that’s been shipping by air, and you want to add the ability to ship by ocean during peak times,” said Daum. “You need an additional cooler, because the cooler you’re using for air freight fluctuates too much in temperature as the doors are opened all day long. The new cooler needs to be kept at 0.5 C and have a dock that seals.

“Plus, your scheduling has to change. The roses you are shipping by sea need to be harvested eight days earlier than roses shipped by air. Now you’re running two farms: one for air freight and one for ocean shipping.” Sanchez agreed with that assessment, adding that some crops, like spray chrysanthemums, have to be planted earlier to be ready for harvest on the schedule required for ocean shipping.

By the same token, when those adjustments can be made, they bring returns, said Sanchez: “People have learned that when you ship by boat and book your boats and containers ahead of time, you can program your crops and take a lot of the pressure off flowers for the peak seasons.”

While others emphasize that sea freight is most competitive at peak holiday times, Sanchez sees the current market for sea freight dominated by those who commit to it and use it on a regular basis: “It’s very structured: They crop, they plant ahead of time. Then they have value not only on cost, but also on taking control of the cycle of product and cycle of selling.

“The companies we work with that are successful with sea freight have a culture where everything adds up: planting, cropping, temperature con-

trol,” Sanchez continued. “They have the volume to fill a container one, two, or three times a week.”

With rare exceptions, he said, these are players in the mass market. It’s not only that these players can command much bigger volumes. It’s also in the nature of the mass market, with a higher focus on everyday, recurring sales and proactive marketing.

These same players, he observed, insist on purchasing flowers at low cost — effectively shutting off the option of raising prices as a way of responding to the rise in shipping costs. “The cost of landing flowers in the U.S. has gone up,” he noted. “You see farms struggling in Colombia, but they have to stick with the price that supermarkets demand. So people start looking for options.”

Indeed, over the issues surrounding sea transport looms the twinning relationship of high volume and low price. To receive flowers shipped by sea container requires a very large warehouse.

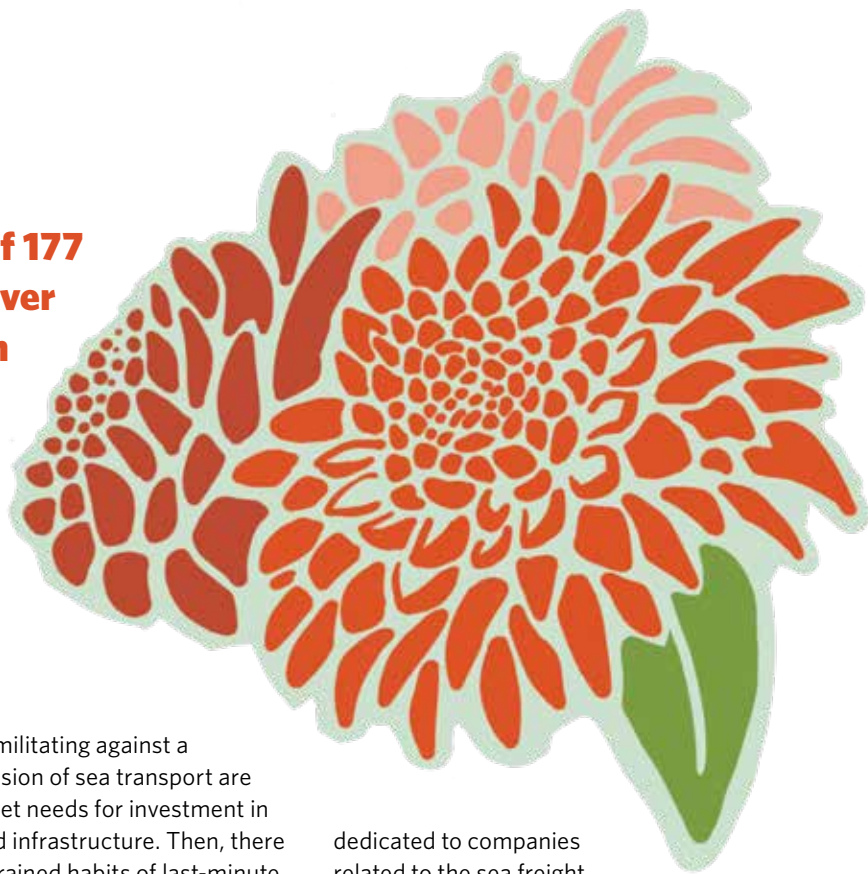
“Let’s say I’m a wholesaler bringing in gypsophila, and I already have a cooler filled with 300 boxes of gypsophila,” Daum theorized. “And now a container shows up with 900 more boxes. What does that do to the price of my gyp? Do I have to lower the price of my gyp to move now 1,200 boxes? Any savings that I have, did I just lose?”

WHAT ABOUT CARBON FOOTPRINT?

A third substantial difference between air freight and sea transport, along with the timeline and volumes required, is carbon footprint. Felipe Sanchez estimated the carbon footprint of air freight to be three or four times that of sea transport. Terril Nell, Ph.D., AAF, agreed that the carbon savings from shipping by sea could be in the neighborhood of 60 percent. Read more about this consideration at safnow.org/moreonline.



Asocolflores reports an increase of 177 percent in exports by sea freight over the past five years, as measured in tons of flowers, to all markets.



How Big Could It Get?

In 2018, CargoMaster shipped for Valentine's Day "maybe 10 containers, for Mother's Day 53," said Sanchez. "This year it was 154 for Valentine's, for Mother's Day 180. So, it's a huge growth, even though, when you compare those amounts to what the air freight does, it's not more than maybe 2 percent."

The recent, overall growth at Valentine's Day and Mother's Day is difficult to track, said Daum, but may have jumped by a factor of three to five: "Before you might get 70 containers for the holiday, now you're getting over 500. People are cautious. There's still a strange factor that some people don't like to admit their flowers are coming by ocean freight for the holiday.

"But we have noticed that some importers are now bragging about it," he continued. "Yes, we are shipping by ocean; we have the infrastructure; we have the coolers." They are also asking Floralife for help with the complex logistics of making sea transport work.

Cost being the driver, the future of sea transport could depend in part on what happens with air freight. It's at the peak holiday times, when air freight rates go up, that ocean freight really becomes a bargain, noted Daum, with savings between 30 percent and 50 percent, depending on the crop.

If the cost of shipping by air were to fall again — say, by 15 percent — interest in sea transport could likewise take a big dip, said Sanchez. "Some will want to ship for the holidays, but it will not stick for the daily or weekly progress."

Always militating against a major expansion of sea transport are the still unmet needs for investment in research and infrastructure. Then, there are long-ingrained habits of last-minute buying, and the difficult-to-overtake idea that faster always means fresher.

"As a wholesaler, we're basically taking orders today for delivery tomorrow," said Dewey. "The industry has evolved into a very last-minute business."

"Most perishables are shipped by boat," noted Sanchez — but not flowers. "Flowers are more fragile, but it's more the culture of how people buy flowers that makes the difference. Fifty years ago, probably all the flowers in North America were sold by wholesalers who sold to retailers. The supermarket industry has changed that, so you can program more than we did before" — but even within the mass market, standing orders can be subject to last-minute changes in the mix of colors or flowers.

"Once it breaks, [sea transport] may break in a big way," said Dewey. Measured against the recent increases in air freight and truck freight, "The cost savings are big. If it breaks, it will be good for the industry, but it takes a lot of change and planning."

It's clear there is a need for information and resources relating to sea transport. In response, the organizers of the Colombian trade fair Proflora have announced that this year's upcoming edition of the fair (October 2-4 in Bogotá) will include, for the first time, a booth

dedicated to companies related to the sea freight chain, including Panalpina.

Let's Talk

Sea transport may not get much bigger than it is today. "I don't think it will overtake air freight in the near future," said Daum. "But I think it will become part of how we do things."

What it does do, like any new technology or strategy, is challenge old assumptions and stimulate new conversations. Industry leaders concerned about the intensifying challenges of flower transport have expressed the need for industry education and awareness.

"The big challenge is that our industry is so segmented that nobody knows about what goes on outside their segment," said Boldt. Whether it's by air or by sea or by truck, the logistics of transporting flowers is changing — and costs are rising. Sea transport may help to alleviate some of that pressure, she said — but probably not enough: "Flower buyers need to understand that the prices we're selling for are not increasing enough to make up for all these added costs. There is no place to squeeze any more." 🌸

Bruce Wright is a contributing writer for *Floral Management*.
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A Look Back *at* Spring Sales

BY MARY WESTBROOK

An SAF member survey of spring holiday sales provides insight on how to better prep for 2020.

TITUS GROU AND SARSMIS/SHUTTERSTOCK

H

ard to believe, but summer is winding down — and that means your attention is probably turning to fall holidays, events and maybe even 2020 planning. While forecasting the future is tricky, industry data can help you benchmark your own business and spot potential sales trends. Enter the Society of American Florists.

SAF surveys its members after every major holiday (or holiday season) to get a sense for how sales panned out and how buying habits are shifting. This year's roundup of Spring 2019 holidays indicates a number of factors that are relevant to the industry's big picture (and your highly personalized planning): The strong economy is favorable to florists, consumers are waiting longer to place orders, and the industry still faces big challenges in how to compete with others and raise the overall profile for the gift of flowers and plants among consumers.

The SAF survey was emailed to the association's retailer members on May 20, 2019, and had a response rate of 5.9 percent. Want more detailed information on these findings? Read our full survey coverage at safnow.org/moreonline.

Mother's Day

Mother's Day 2019 proved to be another strong holiday for the floral industry, with 62 percent of respondents to the SAF survey saying sales were higher than their 2018 returns. Among those who saw sales rise, 42 percent said the increase was between 1 percent and 10 percent; another 25 percent saw gains between 11 percent and 20 percent.

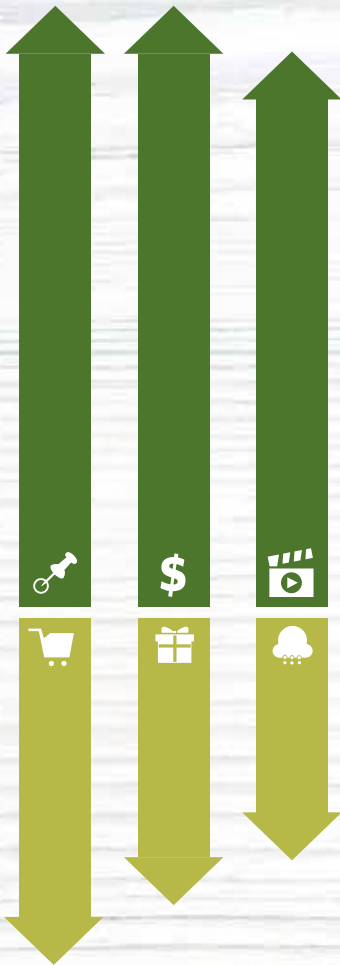
The positive take reflected in the SAF survey is consistent with previous years; in both 2018 and 2017, about 60 percent of SAF retailer members reported increased holiday sales for Mother's Day.

Increased
Sales **62%**

42%
of respondents
experienced a sales
increase from 1-10%
while **25%**
experienced increases
from 10-20%.



\$76 The average
Mother's Day 2019
transaction, compared
to **\$68** in 2018.



Mother's Day

Top 3 Days by Sales

Thursday

20 PERCENT

Friday

27 PERCENT

Saturday

35 PERCENT



APW

Thirty-seven percent of respondents said Administrative Professionals Week (April 22-26) sales decreased this year; 31 percent said they stayed the same. Among those who saw an increase, 18 percent said it was between 1 and 5 percent. In 2018, 39 percent said APW sales decreased; 25 percent said they increased.

Those who experienced an uptick this year were most likely to credit increased shop advertising and promotion (17 percent); fewer flower shops in the area (14 percent); and higher price points (13 percent). A number of anecdotal responses indicated florists feel their customers are still confused by the phrase “administrative professionals.”

Percentage of respondents who said their APW promotion level was comparable in 2019 to 2018. **60%**

Women's Day

While International Women's Day (March 8) is a big deal in parts of the world — and efforts to make it a bigger deal here in the United States snagged Floral Management's Marketer of the Year award in 2014 — respondents to the SAF survey say the holiday remains a tough sell — and many florists are choosing not to promote it at all.

Two-thirds of respondents did not promote Women's Day this year. (Last year, a similar number, about 64 percent of respondents, did not promote the day.) Among those who did promote Women's Day this spring, social media (35 percent), email (21 percent) and online advertising (13 percent) were the most popular platforms.

Easter/Passover

The survey found that Easter/Passover sales were flat for about 45 percent of respondents. About 32 percent saw an increase. Meanwhile, 16 percent saw a decrease. The rest of respondents were uncertain. Last year, respondents were evenly divided for this holiday pairing with about a third experiencing an increase, a third a decrease and the rest seeing flat sales.

A number of anecdotal responses highlighted the timing. This year, Easter Sunday was April 21; Passover was April 19 to April 27. Younger Americans are less likely to attend religious services — and some respondents noted that as a potential factor in sales declines for these holidays. 🌿

Mary Westbrook is the editor in chief of Floral Management. mwestbrook@safnow.org

Top Factors,
Sales Increases

19% Weather

15% Regional economy

13% Increased shop advertising/promotion



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, and we'll challenge the experts to tackle them in an upcoming article.*

EVACUATION PLAN

BE PREPARED

**ARE YOU READY IF
DISASTER STRIKES?**

**ONE OF OUR RESIDENT
ACCOUNTANTS OFFERS HIS
TIPS ON BEST PRACTICES.**

BY DERRICK P. MYERS, CPA, CFP, PFCI

In early July, millions of people in Southern California experienced two large earthquakes and 4,000-plus aftershocks. In spring, and into the summer, Midwestern residents and businesses experienced some of the most dramatic and damaging flooding in history. Meanwhile experts are predicting this year's Atlantic hurricane season, which extends from June 1 to Nov. 30, could produce 13 named storms.

I don't know about you, but it seems to me that every day I hear about a business getting hit by a natural disaster. These events are occurring with greater strength and frequency, and no part of the country seems to be immune. So, I ask you, are you prepared if your business is affected?

In the past few years, I have seen several of my clients get hit by disaster, and I've watched them engage in the hard work of rebuilding and recovering. Their experiences underline what the rest of us should be doing to get ready.

ARTSIOM ZAVADSKI, PHOTO VETEROK & JULIA POLEVA/SHUTTERSTOCK

Have a Plan

In the event of an emergency, taking care of ourselves, our family and staff is priority No. 1.

Make sure that you have an exit plan and a meet up point agreed on ahead of time. Make sure that everyone knows there is a plan and what it is. Have a list of what needs to be done, if there is time to implement, before the devastation arrives.

Hurricanes are a prime example of a pending disaster with some lead time. Use your time wisely by prioritizing tasks such as boarding up windows and sand-bagging doorways. Make sure you have a good supply of water and other necessities on hand, including resources such as a generator. Taking some time to work out the logistics before disaster strikes will make it that much easier to recover afterwards.

Make sure you have working — that means you didn't take out the batteries to stop the beeping — smoke detectors and well-serviced fire extinguishers. If possible, subscribe to an alarm system that monitors for fire, break-ins and even flooding. Keep several flashlights and fresh batteries on hand in the event of blackouts, and a well-stocked first aid kit for medical emergencies. Remember to train staff on where these supplies are located, and when applicable, how to operate them.

Invest in a Fireproof Safe

A good fireproof safe can keep important documents and other items safe. Here is a short list of what should be in that safe:

- Corporate documents and minutes
- Insurance policies
- Bank account and credit card numbers
- List of important passwords
- Emergency cash fund to cover expenses until the insurance money arrives
- Backups of important data
- Spare vehicle keys

Also, if your area is prone to hurricanes or flooding, consider keeping the safe on the second floor or some other high place.

Update Your Insurance

Review your insurance policies at least every couple of years to make sure that coverage amounts are still appropriate for your business and structures. Make sure that you are getting replacement cost on your assets. Be careful of terms such as "depreciation" or "adjusted replacement cost," which means your older assets are going to be worth very little.

Take the time to meet with your insurance professional and talk to them about all of the coverages you need, which ones they offer and who could cover any holes in your insurance plan. Riders such as flood insurance, for example, may not be offered by your insurance provider, but you still may need to have it, so seek out a company to cover that shortage in your plan.

Covering tangible assets such as buildings, coolers and equipment, and inventory is pretty straightforward; however, the situation gets much more complicated when insuring for "Loss of Business." This type of insurance helps you take care of your bills, such as mortgages, rent, utilities, paying employees, during the period of time the business is shut down, which depending on the type of disaster could be easily be weeks or even months. The cost may not seem worth it when you are operating under normal circumstances, but it can be a lifesaver in the aftermath of disaster, helping you to rebuild and keep your team.

Even if your insurance is perfect, with all of the necessary coverages, be prepared to fight for every penny you should get, and it's going to be a long process. (My advice: Document everything you can after the disaster, as thoroughly as you can.)

Back It Up

A disaster of any kind can reinforce how important it is to back up all of your data. The best strategy is to keep multiple backups, and at least one of them needs to be off site, or in the cloud. If you have additional programs such as QuickBooks residing on your POS server, make certain that those programs and data are included in the backup routine. (Frequently, these things are not included, and florists are shocked when they lose all of this data.)



Love reading advice from Floral Management's favorite accountants, Derrick Myers and Paul Goodman? Catch them in action next month at SAF Amelia Island 2019, the Society of American Florists' annual convention. Find out more at safnow.org.

Big Picture Effects

Maybe your next disaster won't be thrown at you by Mother Nature. Maybe the chemical plant down the street will have a spill, or maybe a passing train could derail with the crash releasing a poisonous gas. For most of us these are highly unlikely examples, but to some they are a very real possibility. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) recommends that where these events might be possible, you should have plenty of plastic and duct tape on hand to seal up windows and doors to ride out the disaster.

Another consideration is your supply chain. What if you aren't hit by the disaster, but your main supplier is and can't provide you with the product you need to run your business? Make sure you have alternative sources lined up and ready to go when you need them. Finally, when creating your disaster preparedness plan, seek out as much information as you can to make sure that you have not missed some vital aspect of your business. FEMA offers lots of ideas and help in this regard. Check out their website, fema.gov.

Derrick P. Myers, CPA, CFP, PFCI, is president of **Crockett, Myers & Associates**, a financial management and accounting firm that has been working with florists for more than 30 years. derrick@crockettmyers.com

CALIFORNIA FLOWER GROWER HONORED IN FLOWER NAMING CEREMONY

> What does Lane DeVries, president and CEO of The Sun Valley Group, have in common with Elizabeth Taylor, Freddie Mercury, Michelle Obama and Julia Child?

All have flowers named after them. At this year's International Floriculture Expo (IFE) in Miami Beach, a new light pink tulip (from breeder and distributor Vertuco BV) was baptized 'Dutch Lane.' It was the first time in the 10-year history of IFE's Flower Naming Ceremony that a flower grower was recognized with the honor.

The flower choice was particularly appropriate, given that DeVries was born in Holland and that The Sun Valley Group is famous for high-quality, soil-grown tulips, among other floral products. It also represented an especially rare honor, since the number of new tulip varieties introduced each year is usually quite small — in the neighborhood of two to four.

Borrowing from European tradition, IFE's Naming Ceremony event recognizes "floral industry pioneers who have made a significant impact over the course of their career."

That description certainly applies to DeVries, a fourth-generation tulip farmer who immigrated to the U.S. in 1983. His

work at Sun Valley began the following year. Rising quickly from grower to operation manager to general manager, in 1991 he bought the company, together with two partners from Holland.

In the ensuing years DeVries rose to prominence, not only as an expert and well-respected flower grower and marketer, but also as an industry leader and innovator. In 2014, he received Floral Management's Marketer of the Year award in recognition of his efforts to promote Women's Day as a flower-buying occasion for the entire industry.

In the speech he gave at the Society of American Florists' annual convention upon accepting that award, DeVries demonstrated his well-known skill with data-driven reasoning: He observed that U.S. flower consumption, according to figures available from the USDA, had increased 64 percent over the prior quarter century in absolute terms, but had actually shrunk by 43 percent as a percentage of GDP.

Cause for concern? No, for optimism: "The American flower industry is ripe for transformation," said DeVries — who also donated his \$5,000 award check,



NAMESAKE At this year's International Floriculture Expo (IFE) in Miami Beach, a new light pink tulip (from breeder and distributor Vertuco BV) was baptized 'Dutch Lane,' in honor of Lane DeVries, president and CEO of The Sun Valley Group.

sponsored by Design Master color tool, Inc., to the SAF Fund for Nationwide Public Relations.

A pioneer in sustainability, DeVries led Sun Valley to become the first U.S. farm certified by Veriflora, the first certified by the Rainforest Alliance, and the first farm certified by BloomCheck, the sustainability accreditation sponsored by Certified American Grown. 🌱

—B.W.

PUBLIC TV SHOW ON FLORAL INDUSTRY EXPANDS TO 59 MARKETS

> A fourth-generation florist and industry educator is shedding light on all of the work (and joy) that goes into breeding, growing, designing and selling flowers with a new public television show currently available in almost 60 U.S. markets.



BLOOM TUBE J Schwanke, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, debuted his "Life in Bloom" program earlier this spring after years of planning and prep.

J Schwanke, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, debuted his "Life in Bloom" program this spring after years of planning and prep — and a crash course in the inner workings of getting a public TV show off the ground. The goal of the show: "I want to get more people to buy more flowers," he said.

The idea for the show came about gradually as Schwanke — a well-known educator in the industry — began considering the prospect of a consumer-facing TV show after working on various projects with P. Allen Smith, the garden and lifestyle expert and TV host.

Schwanke's vision was to take viewers directly to the floral businesses that make up the industry — to educate them about flowers and the different supply chains and to get them excited about buying flowers. "I want them to be think-

ing about buying flowers throughout the week, not just for holidays and special occasions," he said.

Before getting the show on the air, Schwanke had to pitch it to individual public television stations; it's now set for staggered release on more than 200 stations around the country. (Each station makes its own decisions on when to air the episodes; currently the show has eleven 26-minute episodes available.)

Recent episodes have included a look at design trends, including designs with fresh fruit and the popularity of greens and foliage, along with information on the positive effect flowers can have on health and wellness. Find out more about university studies from the Society of American Florists that support such findings at safnow.org/moreonline. 🌱

—M.W.

EXECUTIVE ORDER BUILDS MOMENTUM FOR STREAMLINED BIOTECH REGULATIONS

> President Trump signed an executive order this summer in Iowa intended to streamline the regulatory process for genetically engineered agriculture. The move comes after the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced plans to deregulate many future genetically engineered crops in response to advances in scientific processes.

The Society of American Florists has long advocated for the government to update existing regulations, so that breeders can introduce more varieties and cultivars to the market faster — crops that could potentially be more

pest-, disease- and drought-resistant and that would require reduced use of certain pesticides and fertilizers, said Drew Gruenburg, SAF's chief operating officer.

"Our current regulations have not kept up with advances in science, particularly when it comes to processes like genome, or gene editing," Gruenburg said. "There is no sector of agriculture that develops more new varieties and cultivars than the floral industry. We're constantly looking to reach more customers with new, exciting flowers and to find ways to run industry businesses more efficiently."

By streamlining regulations, the industry would have the ability to create plants that require fewer pesticides and other costly inputs, including water, which could help growers faced with challenges posed by climate change, and create more sustainable products. The changes would also likely lower the cost of genetically engineered agriculture by reducing cumbersome regulatory requirements and removing barriers to entry for smaller companies. 🌿

—M.W.

FLORIDA STATE FLORISTS TURN SURPLUS FLOWERS INTO LOVE

> On June 12, 2016, a gunman opened fire in a gay nightclub, Pulse, in Orlando, Florida, killing 49 people and injuring 68 others. This year, to mark the terrible event, survivors and sympathizers attended a remembrance ceremony.

An annual tradition, the ceremony this year included bouquets of flowers from the Florida State Florists Association (FSFA) — created by a combination of top-tier designers and people who have rarely touched flowers before.

"Last year after things wrapped up at FSFA, I was heading to the airport listen-

ing to coverage of the anniversary of the shooting," remembered Mark Anderson of FloristWare, a provider of software for florists. "Suddenly, I was wishing I had thought to take the beautiful arrangement that Robbin Yelverton, AIFD, AAF, PFCI, made for my table and lay it at the memorial."

In early 2019, with the blessing of the FSFA board, Anderson began a dialogue with the board of onePULSE, a foundation created in the wake of the 2016 tragedy. Besides organizing the remembrance ceremony, the foundation offers support to survivors and victims' families. It has endowed scholarships in the names of each of the victims and is actively creating educational programs in pursuit of "amity among all segments of society."

This year's remembrance ceremony followed the conclusion of the FSFA convention by only three days. Like every other floral-industry event, the convention, which took place at a resort about an hour outside of Orlando, typically ends with perfectly fresh flowers left over from the design programs and venue decorations.

"During the convention I made several announcements," said Deborah De La Flor, AIFD, PFCI, of De La Flor Florist & Gardens in Cooper City, Florida, who served as one of the convention organizers. "And when the whole program was

done, I told everyone they needed to go to the design room right next door, because many hands make light work."

Convention attendees made hand-tied bouquets from the leftover flowers using wraps donated by Decowraps and clear plastic sleeves donated by Passion Growers, both at De La Flor's prior request. The wraps were lime green on one side and decked in rainbow colors on the other. Since the surplus flowers were miscellaneous, and the designers were allowed perfect freedom, the result was a collection of bouquets that were all different, yet given a unified look by the wrappings — a poignant way of representing the separate individuality of each of the victims and the philosophy of the foundation.

Those who made the bouquets ranged from floral-industry rock stars, like De La Flor and Jacob McCall, AIFD, AAF, to convention participants who had never designed before. "We wanted to encourage everyone who was in attendance to get together and do it," said outgoing FSFA president Christi Brown of Roses Are Red in Indialantic and Violets in Bloom in Melbourne, Florida. 🌿

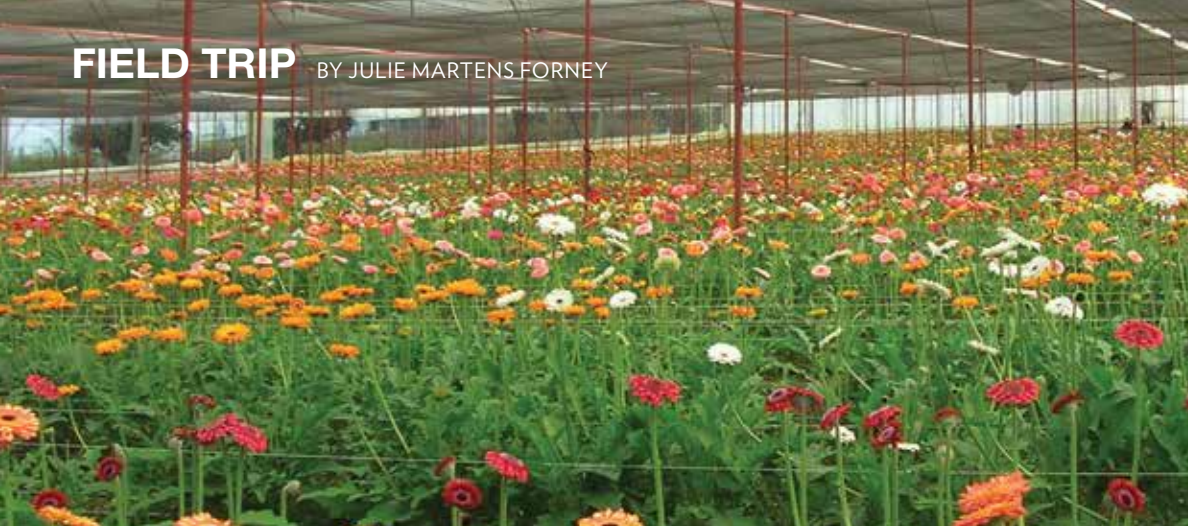
—B.W.

Mary Westbrook is the editor in chief of Floral Management and **Bruce Wright** is a contributing writer. fmeditor@safnow.org

FSFA Florida State Florist Association
June 9, 2019
Creating bouquets of flowers to be placed at the #pulsenightclub memorial on behalf of Florida State Florists Association. We remember the 49 lost in the Pulse nightclub massacre. #pulse #flowers #rememberingthelost



IN MEMORY Experienced and new designers came together to create floral tributes for the victims of the Pulse nightclub shooting, which occurred on June 12, 2016.



GERBS GALORE

Gerberas are one of the top crops at Flores Ixtapan, with growing locations in Villa Guerrero and the surrounding Ixtapan area.

IN MEXICO, SIX FARMS PARTNER UP

> One secret to business success is having the vision to make the most of every resource. That's the case with Mexican flower grower Flores Ixtapan. Located in Villa Guerrero, the flower capital of Mexico, Flores Ixtapan leverages its location and product volume to deliver top-quality flowers at competitive prices.

Steve Register, managing partner and member of SAF's Government Joint Council, sees Flores Ixtapan as having distinct advantages that set the company apart from other flower-growing regions in the Americas. "Some of these aspects can be found in a particular growing area, but only in Mexico can all be found together," he said.

A Diverse Product Mix

The first advantage is a very wide assortment of fresh flowers and foliage. "The assortment exists only because of Mexico's many different growing conditions," Register said. Flores Ixtapan operates six locations, with each farm boasting significantly different growing conditions.

The clearest example of the different growing conditions? Altitude. "Our farms range from 5,577 to 8,858 feet above sea level," said Register. That change in altitude means the company can offer a low altitude favorite like gerberas side by side with roses and alstroemeria, which thrive at higher altitudes. The wide

product range caters to Flores Ixtapan's client base, including wholesalers and bouquet makers.

Flores Ixtapan continually expands the product line, planting more diverse flowers such as snapdragon, bells of Ireland, kale, solidago, dusty miller, scabiosa pod, safflower and 'Green Goddess' callas. "Initially we planted these diverse crops to provide a nice assortment for our mixed bouquets, but the growing demand for novelty flowers quickly became apparent," Register said.

Shipping Is Key

The company's proximity to the U.S. market means a refrigerated truck can deliver to Texas in 16 hours, Los Angeles in 32 hours, Chicago in 34 hours and Washington, D.C. in 38 hours. "We combine a unique geographical advantage with unbroken cold chain. Flowers are loaded directly from coolers to refrigerated trucks that arrive at the customer's door," Register said.



QUICK TAKE

The company: Flores Ixtapan

Product: Tens of millions of stems harvested annually over 148 acres

Top sellers: Rose, gerbera, alstroemeria, Israeli ruscus and sunflower, along with hand-tied mixed bouquets, rose bouquets and arrangements

NELLA/SHUTTERSTOCK

Another advantage is wet pack shipping (perfect for flowers such as gerberas, which suffer with extended periods in dry pack) and upright shipping (which keeps geotropic bloomers like snapdragon standing straight).

"We have our own injection molding machines to manufacture three styles of bouquet buckets," Register said.

"Last year we increased our manufacturing capacity so we could export our buckets as stand-alone hardgoods."

Leveraging Product Volume

Sharing postharvest capacity between the six farms is another competitive advantage for Flores Ixtapan. The system diverts a portion of production from one farm, where a crop is at peak harvest, to another farm where that same crop has not yet peaked — or is coming down from its peak.

"Prior to developing this system, each farm processed its own crops. It was a real sink-or-swim scenario, because if a farm fell behind early in crop harvest, the problem snowballed

"By sharing production, our labor cost as a percentage of sales has gone down, and quality improvement has led to less shrink."

—Steve Register

until the end of harvest," Register said. The system also created intense stress, which would lead to rushed decision making. "With everyone hurrying to process flowers, mistakes in handling, grading and processing were inevitable," Register added.

The driving force to sharing production came during one particular holiday. "We were falling behind on rose orders, despite having enough roses," Register recalled. "One farm finished work at 4:30 p.m., while another worked until 10 p.m. It was inefficient and difficult to move workers from farm to farm, so we began to shuttle roses between farms to fill orders on time."

The system of sharing production wasn't a hit at first. "Each farm took great pride in handling their own flowers

and orders," Register said. The solution? "Shifting the priority to the customer. Once everyone understood that the customer was the entire group's customer, everyone pulled together to get the job done."

A shipping center with ample cooler space serves as a consolidation point for the farms, strategically located no more than 50 minutes from any one farm. "By sharing production, our labor cost as a percentage of sales has gone down, and quality improvement has led to less shrink," Register said. "From a sales viewpoint, we've earned more future orders from satisfied customers." 🌿

Julie Martens Forney is a contributing writer for *Floral Management*.
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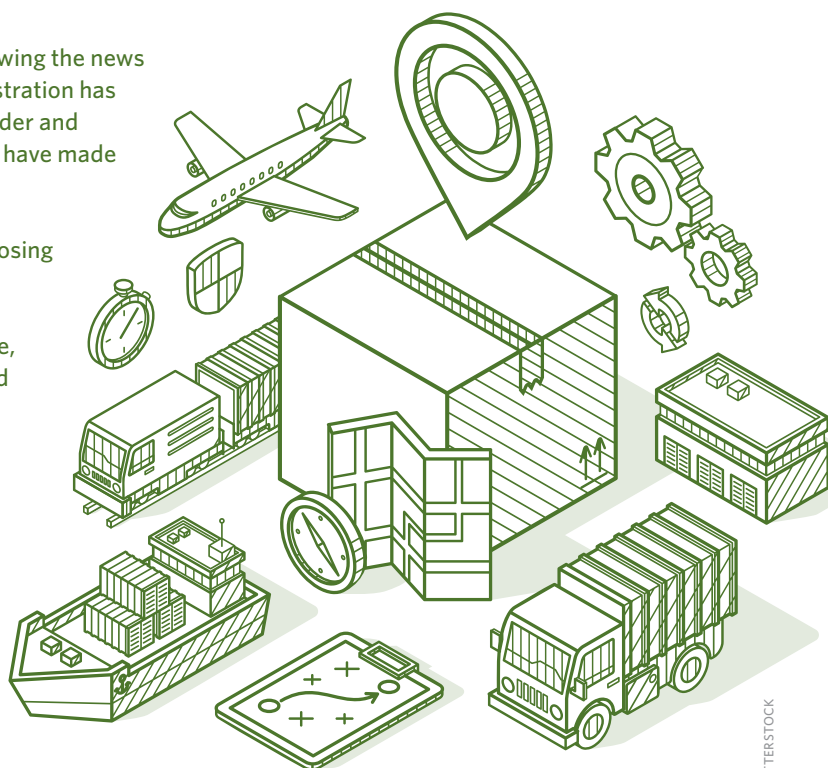
WHAT ABOUT TRADE ISSUES?

Being a flower grower in Mexico recently has meant following the news even more closely. Over the past year, the Trump administration has threatened several times to tighten the southern U.S. border and impose tariffs on Mexican goods — announcements that have made headlines and created some real-world effects.

In April, for instance, after President Trump suggested closing the border, Flores Ixtapan experienced delays of several hours crossing into the United States, a delay that was short-lived and "manageable," said Steve Register. In June, the president's announced intention to add tariffs created additional uncertainty for growers in the region. And, of course, during this period, the United States, Canada and Mexico have been renegotiating their trilateral trade agreement (USMCA).

Register said he and his company follow all of these developments closely and have been able to adapt to new challenges by keeping focused on their end goals. "If there are some short-term headaches due to the political maneuvering [on trade and border security], so be it," he said. "Everyone will do what they need to do to keep servicing the customers."

—Mary Westbrook



HILCH/SHUTTERSTOCK

HOW TO KEEP HACKERS OUT

> With the benefits that come along with computers, the Internet, and all they have to offer also comes the potential for fraud and data breaches. As a small business owner operating in the digital age, it is critical to be mindful of the risks associated with the use of technology, to establish cybersecurity, and to be careful about who has access to your information. Even the most prepared are still susceptible to hackers and theft; therefore, you should establish a plan if your data has been breached.

1. Respond Well

If you're reading this, you may have already experienced a data breach. Don't panic. The moment you acknowledge you have a breach, make a list of the customers and government officials in your state you must contact, and make the necessary calls. Simultaneously, begin any necessary recovery processes. If you don't have an in-house IT, a digital forensic firm can help you keep your business running. A data breach will not only result in damages, but also extended time without being able to run your business could potentially force you to close. The sooner you get your company back up and running, the better.

During this time, it's also good to take a look at privacy laws to understand your responsibility when it comes to informing your customers/clients that their private information — whether it's their contact info or payment details — has been compromised.

2. Be Informed

Small businesses are a prime target for hackers and thieves. While some see the cost of data security as a deterrent, small businesses are hit hardest when they are ill prepared. As of 2018, it is estimated that small businesses account for the majority of malware attack victims. The statistics are not due to the fact that small businesses are the most targeted but more because they don't often take adequate precautions. An example of this would be opening questionable email attachments or following links from unknown or unexpected senders. Knowing you and your business are susceptible is the first step to prevention.

3. Stay Ahead of the Game

So, your small business may be targeted and risk falling victim to data breaches — now what? Start by identifying your weaknesses. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What information needs to be protected?
- Who should have access to the information?
- What would happen if your data were disclosed?
- What would happen if your system is compromised?
- How could someone potentially access your information?
- Do you have a backup?
- Do you have policies to safeguard from easily preventable hacks?
- What is the plan if you are locked out of your network?

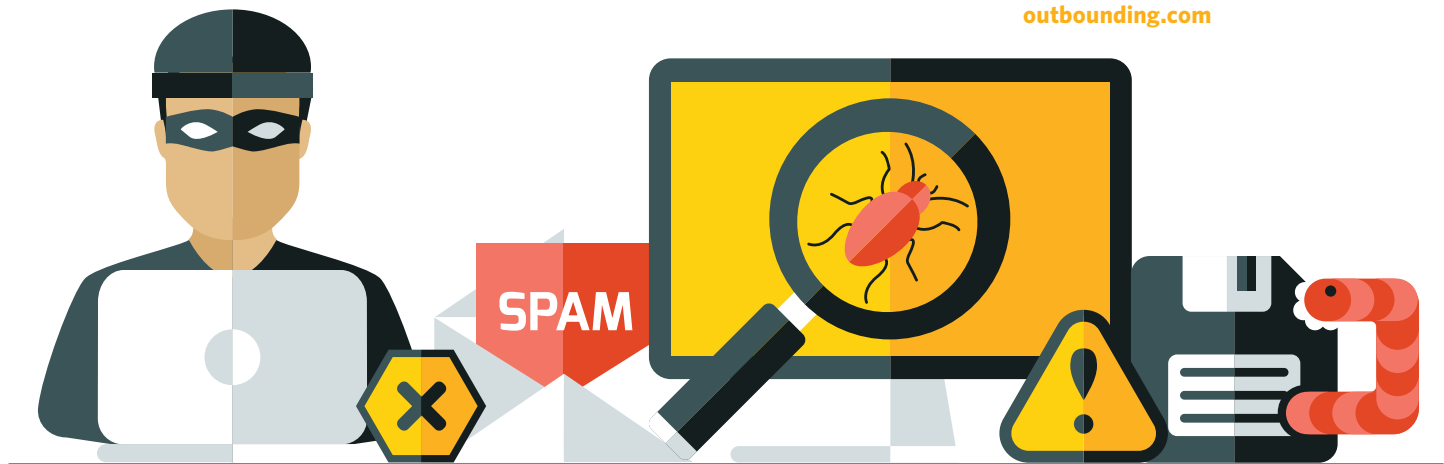
If you are not knowledgeable about IT matters and cybersecurity, hire an expert to evaluate your business and identify your weaknesses. It's also a good idea to have an expert train you and your employees in the best prevention methods.

4. Guard Your Castle

Another way to get the pros involved is to have them install firewalls, anti-viruses, encryption and detection devices in order to safeguard your data. You can't prevent all situations, but you can prevent likely scenarios. Failing to take the proper steps, even if a breach occurs, can cause lower sales and negatively affect customer trust. Guarding what you can helps reduce liability and shows your customer base how you value their privacy and security.

Fraud and data breaches can happen to anyone — even the most diligent of business owners. That's why responding the right way if you are breached is essential. Stay knowledgeable on current malware and hacking trends, and take the necessary steps to avoid them. Ask yourself and your company honest questions about what can make you susceptible to data breaches and what you can do to prevent them. Finally, bring professionals in to train your company on prevention methods and to install prevention technology. 🛡️

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SUAVE SELECTIONS

> The staff at Nielsen's Florist and Garden Shop in Darien, Connecticut, a two-time Floral Management Marketer of the Year Award-winning business, has homed in on locals' preference for premium flowers. "Our customers are pretty discerning," said lead designer Bob Sabia, AIFD. They recognize certain blooms as exclusive and gravitate to arrangements that include them, he explained. "A few high-end products instantly increase interest." Here are two customer favorites you can replicate in mere minutes. 🌿

CLASSIC ELEGANCE "This is our bread and butter," Sabia said. "We always have something like it ready in our cooler." Many shoppers swoon for this traditional and sophisticated style. Five lush garden roses pump up its perceived value. Design time: 10 minutes. Wholesale costs: \$30. Suggested retail price: \$125 to \$150.



GARDEN MAGIC Nielsen's regular clients often request something "a little different" during the summer, Sabia said. "They like flowers that look like they were just plucked from the garden, particularly if they're throwing a garden party," Sabia said. Pincushion proteas, dahlias, sunflowers, cockscomb celosia and various greenery provide incredible texture, dimension and visual interest. Design time: 15 minutes. Wholesale costs: \$25. Suggested retail price: \$100.

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Find complete recipes at safnow.org/moreonline.



'ULTIMUTT' PET PRODUCTS



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SOOTHING SOLUTION

KIN + KIND's organic CBD pet calming foam alleviates stress with a formula of lavender and sage, plus witch hazel to support absorption of the CBD. Available in 8-ounce bottles, it contains coconut and olive oils and glycerin to attract and lock in moisture. Kin-Kind.com



PICK ME UP FOR PUPS

Furry friends often have tummy trouble. Enter: these freeze-dried dog foods. Available in six flavors, they support digestive health and provide nutrients, with added electrolytes that help maintain healthy hydration levels. Manufactured in Vermont, these formulas contain no meat by-products, gluten, artificial flavors, dyes or chemicals and are shelf stable for up to three years. UnderTheWeatherPet.com



PICNIC PAL

My Pet Pail has everything your furry friend needs for a day out in one organized, easy-to-carry container. The retro-style design comes in six colors with removable bowls and two 20-ounce bottles. As an added bonus, the pail's handle doubles as a dog collar, the strap is a leash and there's a built-in poop-bag dispenser. MyPetPail.com



THE BUCK STOPS HERE

Made of Argentinian cowhide and stainless-steel hardware, these award-winning collars boast a wide array of tooled designs including hand carvings, inlay work, buck stitching, rawhide weaving and more. The hardy construction and stylish design will appeal to discerning customers. AngelPetSupplies.com



INDESTRUCTIBLE CONSTRUCTION

Inspired by the hardware, lawn and garden, and farm and feed industries, SodaPup's Industrial Dog line offers doggie wares that will stand up in even the most "rigorous" play sessions. Each dog toy features durable rubber in the shape of gears, lug nuts, anchor shackles and wire nuts.

SodaPup.com

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CARE AND HANDLING CHECKLIST FOR SUMMER

> Summer provides a time for retail and wholesale florists to plan for increased sales in the remaining months of this year and in the busy holiday seasons ahead. Use the opportunity to improve flower quality. Now is the moment to educate and train (or re-train) your staff about care and handling while conducting preventive maintenance and cleaning of your cooler(s) and store.

As a guide to all your efforts, you can rely upon the three simple “Pillars of Postharvest Success” established by the American Floral Endowment: cold, cleanliness and care. (Read more about those pillars at safnow.org/moreonline.)

Avoid Cooler Failures and Diseases

We often overlook the need to perform preventive maintenance on air conditioning systems in our homes and automobiles—until they break. The same is true for floral coolers. You can avoid the panic that can engulf your shop if a cooler breaks during a busy holiday or prior to a special event.

Hire a professional refrigeration technician to check the coolant level in your cooler system and to clean the coils, plus the drip pan under the coils. If the coils become dirty, the cooling system is less efficient (costs more money to operate!) and may not maintain the cold temperatures (34–36 F) needed for most flowers. Also, dirty coils and drip pans can be a collecting point for disease spores that contaminate the cooler.

Finally, ask the technician to calibrate your cooler thermostat.

Maintain a Clean Cooler and Shop

Start a monthly cleaning routine for your cooler this month. This is a job no one wants to do, but it is necessary to avoid costly and unsightly diseases on your flowers. The humidity in coolers

EASY TRAINING

Following strict care practices will add days to the life of your flowers. For more detailed advice on these and other practices, visit safnow.org/moreonline.



FUSIONSTUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK

is just right for the growth of diseases such as *Botrytis*, even though cold temperatures reduce the speed of growth. Each time flowers are picked up, spores are dispersed into the air and land on the walls, benches and floors, requiring that these surfaces (walls, floors and benches) be cleaned with cleaners that will kill the diseases.

Floral cleaners and disinfectants, such as Floralife DCD and Chrysal Professional Cleaner/Clean Touch, are recommended for cleaning, not just the cooler and buckets, but also design tables and clippers.

The spores that are released into the air from cooler surfaces and flowers land on other flowers. Once these flowers are removed from the cooler, the spores may begin to grow in warm temperatures and damage the flowers. Keeping your cooler clean is critical for the longevity of flowers.

Care for Flowers Properly

Summer is also the perfect time to review your care and handling practices. Companies providing care and handling products can assist in reviewing your practices. Consider the following aspects of flower care:

- Do you process flowers immediately upon arrival and place them in the cooler?
- Do you recut stems dry and place them into a hydration or flower food solution quickly?
- If you are not recutting stems, are you using a solution designed to hydrate stems without cutting?

- Are you using the proper hydration or flower food? Are you mixing your hydration and/or flower food solutions according to label instructions? If you are mixing each batch of solution by hand, consider adding an injector for efficiency and accuracy in the mixing of the solutions.
- Have you had your water checked for pH, alkalinity and hardness?
- Do you clean buckets before each use with one of the floral cleaners mentioned earlier?

Educate Every Employee

Every employee at a retail or wholesale florist should know the critical elements of flower care and handling and understand the importance they have in extending the life of flowers. A 30-minute education session on care and handling can highlight the importance of caring for flowers properly from arrival until the customer receives the flowers.

Summer is not a season to take a vacation from the basics: cold, cleanliness and care. Focus on these “Pillars of Postharvest Success” and you will extend flower life and avoid problems in the months ahead. 🌸

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