

WHAT'S NEXT?

> In light of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on our industry, I am taking a detour from my usual column to share some feedback, inspiration and deep thoughts based on what I have heard from my floral contacts across the globe.

Focus on Customer Experience

Under your current operating conditions, you might have employees doing different jobs. While you probably freak out at the idea of drivers filling daily orders, you should feel equally panicky about letting *anyone* untrained take phone orders. As I have been preaching since 1997, selling flowers is as much of an art and skill as designing them! Please don't instantly deputize designers who normally don't wait on customers to "grab an order pad and answer the phone." If you do, sales will suffer, you won't meet your profit potential, and customers will get a less than stellar experience.

My advice — which will help whether or not my prediction comes true — is to finally get proactive about reaching out to your customers. If you have not used email marketing on a regular basis, start doing so now.

With so few shopping options currently available, customers really do appreciate that they can still count on us to get flowers delivered on their behalf. And I speak from personal experience. I attended a huge floral conference right before the pandemic broke out. My mom's birthday was on March 28, but since I could not get tested, I decided to skip visiting her. Luckily, the local florist was still open, providing safe, contact-less delivery. It made me very happy that I could get a special birthday gift sent to my mom after one quick phone call. When I spoke with the owner, she politely told me that my only option was a designer's choice arrangement. That was fine with me, and honestly, I would have settled for a blue carnation poodle! My point, however, is that in this time of limited selection and uncer-

tain availability of flowers, do not be afraid to simply tell customers, "Right now we're only featuring our signature collection of assorted spring colors." More power to the open order!

Forecast the Future

While I don't have a crystal ball (still waiting for *that* Amazon delivery!), I'll share my "guess-timate" as to what the retail environment *might* be like once we are back to normal. I think many consumers will be preoccupied with getting caught up on paying bills and seeking services they have missed (i.e., a trip to the barber, gym, nail salon or dentist) before they rush to buy flowers. I hope I am wrong, but I ask you to consider possible *temporary* hurdles that we may have to overcome. My advice — which will help whether or not my prediction comes true — is to finally get proactive about reaching out to your customers. If you have not used email marketing on a regular basis, start doing so now. If you have not been active on social media, learn how and jump onboard!



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Have you worried about competing against grocery stores on price? Lose that mindset! Remember, the grocery store is the *only* place your customers have seen flowers all spring long. This is your chance to *dazzle* them with your creativity, variety of product, and yes, *premium* designs at *premium* prices. Your actions will determine what's next for your shop.

Stay safe, stay healthy, and here's looking forward to an exciting rebound for our industry. 🌸

THE TIME IS NOW

For years, florists have told me, "We're too busy to schedule training for our employees." Well... now, thanks to the crisis, you finally have that time. Whether you're partially operational or totally closed down, consider staff education as a smart and constructive way to get your business in the best possible shape. And in the spirit of community, we'll happily share free training resources and samples to those who email tim@floralstrategies.com with the subject line "Free."

And make plans to join us for the next **Tim's Calling... Live** session on May 13 at 3:30 EDT. Find out more about that session and additional dates at safnow.org.



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