



A Fresh Take

Jet Fresh Flower Distributors' unconventional marketing grew the small company into an internationally recognized brand, earning the Society of American Florists' Marketer of the Year title.

BY AMANDA JEDLINSKY

Jet Fresh Flower Distributors didn't do much marketing in its early years. There was a simple website that played music to an animation of Mike Black, who founded the Miami-based import and distributing company in 2008, riding a bi-plane. ("It was really crude, and really funny," Black recalls.) That was about it.

As a business-to-business company they didn't feel it made sense to do traditional advertising and very few — if any — of their competitors were using social media. At that time, most importers and distributors relied on flyers, websites and trade shows to market their products. What more could they possibly do?

"It's not a sexy scene to show, people in cubicles calling customers from an office attached to a warehouse," says Ryan Black, the third of Mike's sons, who held various jobs at Jet Fresh before taking over as the marketing and media director in 2012.

Yet Ryan, who earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in animation and multimedia and a minor in graphic design from Florida Atlantic University, looked at the company's day-to-day operations, its hard-working staff, its product and even the company's relationships with other floral businesses through the eyes of an artist.

He saw: a cast of characters among the staff who could be integral to the company's brand; fun, focused and unconventional campaigns to elevate products and drive revenue — not just for their company, but for other floral partners, too; and the promise of video and social media as a then-underutilized yet powerful and cost-effective medium.

His vision turned into a reality and propelled staffers to industry stardom, helped the company attract workers, and boosted its sales and profits.

The marketing efforts also catapulted the relatively small, family-owned business to an internationally recognized brand, earning them the Society of American Florists' 28th Marketer of the Year title. The award honors exemplary marketing with a \$5,000 cash prize from Design Master, a division of Smithers-Oasis, and recognition at SAF's annual convention.

"The marketing he's doing is just amazing, very professional," says Raya Ward, who was part of the team that won the 2016 Marketer of the Year title and was one of the six judges who reviewed entries for this year's contest. "The branding is not like anything I've seen in the floral industry."



Jet Fresh TV

The Campaign

Jet Fresh was an early user of YouTube, uploading its first video in 2011. They've been a success because they shine a spotlight on Jet Fresh employees and product. The videos show product unboxing, staff achievements, office pranks and more.

The Cost: Equipment, staff time and sweat equity.

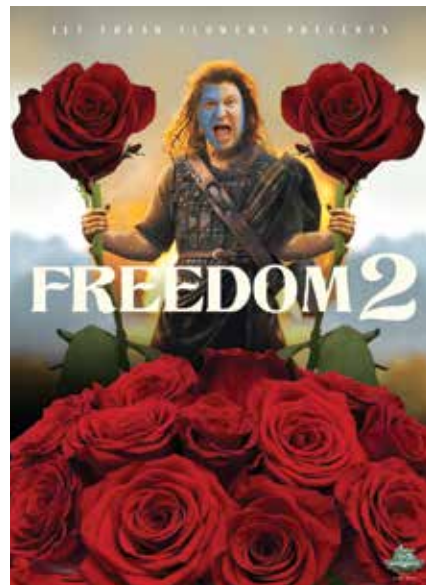
The Results: While it is difficult to measure the videos' direct impact on sales, Jet Fresh's sales and client base has grown year over year, the company says. The videos are driving that growth; Jet Fresh's YouTube channel has 2,300 subscribers and about 850 videos, which have been viewed more than 423,000 times. In addition, company founder Mike Black says the videos have helped them attract workers.



Spotlighting Talent

Ryan's early marketing entailed daily, emailed flyers advertising Jet Fresh's deal of the day. "We needed a gimmick — something to promote our daily specials and engage with buyers while encouraging regular readers," he says. He knew that static, daily flyers advertising the deal of the day wouldn't achieve that. He wanted to inject creativity into the flyers so that customers would look forward to seeing it hit their inbox every morning.

That's when the Jet Fresh staff first started showing up in the marketing. Flyers from that era feature General Manager Fernando Ortega with angel wings for Valentine's Day sales. In another flyer, Mike's face is imposed on Mel Gibson's character from Braveheart, in which he famously yells, "Freedom!" — as in Freedom roses.



The employee-driven marketing carried over into the informational videos Ryan made and posted to social media. While that may seem basic by today's standards, it wasn't being done in the industry in 2011. "At that time no one was using social media at all," Mike says. "All these companies in Miami thought we were a joke."

Mike knew they were on to something as the number of views increased. "It just kind of naturally happened," Mike says. "It wasn't even a planned marketing strategy."

As the videos evolved, the Blacks knew there was power in putting the Jet Fresh team front and center in their marketing. "We wanted everyone on

Jet Fresh Flower Growers

the team to be part of the face of the company," Mike says. "We kept building on that and building on that. Before we showed you the flowers, we showed you the person," Mike says of the marketing strategy, which reflects the company's people-first culture.

In a recent video, set to the Full House theme song, Ryan caught dozens of Jet Fresh employees waving to the camera as they moved boxes, logged orders, and unpacked flowers. Other videos capture Mike behind the camera talking with employees about varieties of flowers and foliage available. "What the hell is that?" Mike asks sales rep Kris "Pinky" Yllescas, who is filmed holding large bunches of variegated Calathea Wilson from Puerto Rico. "That is some new candy on a stick right there. That is spectacular!"

Showcasing the employees with the product helps build trust with customers and business partners in an industry that "is one of the few remaining 'handshake-style' businesses," Ryan says. "Employee-driven marketing simultaneously sells the product and the sales rep more effectively than a phone call alone."

Stars of the Show

Ryan helped develop and brand characters for staff members who were willing to star on camera. Take, for instance, Jimi "the Tulip" Santoli. He already had the nickname, which Black then branded into temporary tattoos, t-shirts and more for the top-selling salesperson (Santoli was also named the 2021 Florida State Florists Association's Salesperson of the Year). There's also Ortega, known as "The Fern

The Campaign

When Jet Fresh bought a boutique rose farm in Cotopaxi, Ecuador, in 2018, it required a large marketing effort to bring Jet Fresh Flower Growers under the Jet Fresh branding.

True to Jet Fresh's people-first marketing strategy, Jet Fresh Marketing and Media Director Ryan Black put the Ecuador team at the forefront of the marketing, promoting their skills, building trust and credibility with customers, and connecting them with flower buyers throughout the world.

"Promoting the fun lifestyle along with the hard work around the farm is part of the strategy and principles of how we market the farm," Black says. "Celebrating the people behind the flowers, the effort they put in, helps maintain the family mentality."

In addition to flyers and posters featuring the varieties of roses available through Jet Fresh Flower Growers, Black flies a drone in the greenhouses and around the farm to give customers a new perspective on the operation.

The Cost: Staff time and travel.

The Results: Sales increased 329 percent from 2018 to 2021.

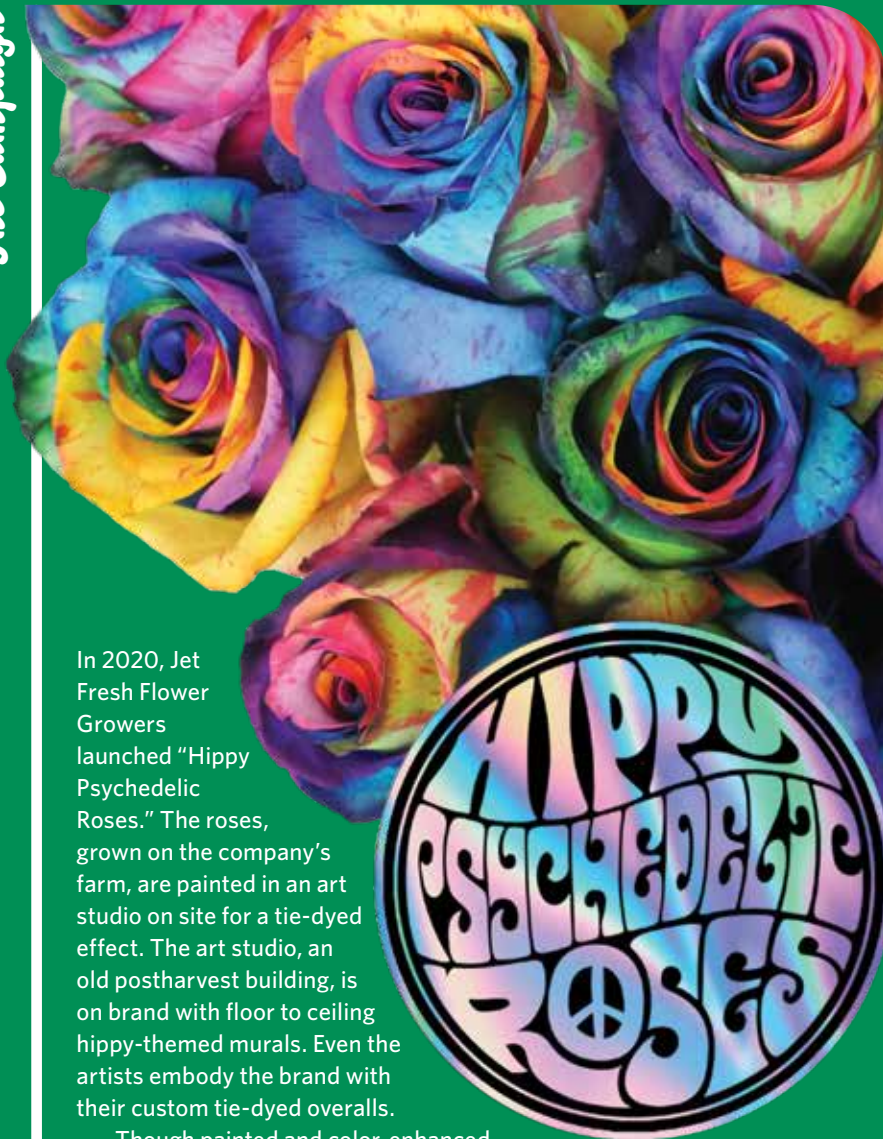


Show," whose vibrant personality is often caught on camera; Olga Ramirez, AIFD, who is known for her catchphrase, "Check it out!"; and Melisa "Mundial" Fuenmayor, whose social media influence earned her a spot in promotional videos for Volkswagen Ecuador.

Ramirez attended the AIFD Symposium in July and called Mike from the event. "I'm famous!" she exclaimed over the phone, explaining that attendees knew her from the videos and asked for pictures with her. Mike is proud of how her career has blossomed — she was working as a bouquet maker when he hired her — and says she's a natural

Hippy Psychedelic Roses

The Campaign



In 2020, Jet Fresh Flower Growers launched "Hippy Psychedelic Roses." The roses, grown on the company's farm, are painted in an art studio on site for a tie-dyed effect. The art studio, an old postharvest building, is on brand with floor to ceiling hippy-themed murals. Even the artists embody the brand with their custom tie-dyed overalls.

Though painted and color-enhanced flowers were not a new product (and "always come with mixed feelings from florists," says Ryan Black, Jet Fresh's marketing and media director), some in the industry credit Jet Fresh for bringing back the trend.

"The Hippy Psychedelic Roses are known all over the world now, and not only that, painted flowers are back in trend," says John Elstgeest, director of Flower Circus, a Holland-based group that connects florists with growers through flower exhibitions. "The sales of painted flowers skyrocketed, even in Europe. The way [Jet Fresh] launched it is a true example of marketing skills."

The line of painted roses expanded to more than 150 options that include collections of animal prints, healing stones and more.

The Cost: Marketing materials that include hats, shirts, flyers and stickers cost about \$5,000 a year.

The Results: Sales increased 287 percent from 2020 to 2021.

on camera. "Look where she is now," Mike says. "She's running a department. She's famous. People know her."

Other employees have had similar experiences, Mike says. Early on, the team was in Holland at a trade show where they were recognized. "The brand was known, and we didn't even know it," Mike says.

Low-Budget Blockbuster Hits

The videos, of which there are about 850, are done in a raw, uncut style that shows Jet Fresh's energetic, fun culture. There's no fancy studio, no scripts, just flowers and the people who supply them. Sometimes the videos include flower time-lapses, office pranks and milestone accomplishments of staff. Ryan also captures drone video of Jet Fresh's boutique rose farm and produces flower art videos.

What became clear: Viewers like the content. Nearly 2,300 people have subscribed to their YouTube channel, and collectively the videos have been viewed 423,000 times, according to YouTube analytics provided by Jet Fresh.

While it's hard to measure exactly how the videos have impacted sales, the company's sales and client base have grown year after year, and the videos have netted an additional return on investment, Mike says. People see the fun, they see the culture, and they see how Jet Fresh values its employees, making the videos an important tool to attract not just any worker but the right kind of worker. In fact, after Ryan posted a video of employees having a Nerf gun fight in the office, he received messages from several people asking about job openings. Ryan told them to send their resumes. They did.

Asked what the company's annual marketing budget is, Ryan chuckles. "There's no set budget," he says. "The budget is for me to spend as little as possible. It's why I do so much of the things in-house. It's always been a goal to save as much [money] as possible."

Mike acknowledges that in the early years money was tight, but he always made sure Ryan had the tools he needed to evolve. When Ryan asked for a Mac, Mike's reaction was, "'Oh God! We don't have the money for that! But we'll figure it out.' We just scraped it together."

International Gerbera Month

Cutting Deals

Not only does Ryan keep marketing expenses to a minimum but he also uses his skills to barter for discounts and deals with other floral companies.

In 2018, when Jet Fresh bought a boutique rose farm in Cotopaxi, Ecuador, Ryan negotiated to reduce, and in some cases, eliminate royalty fees to breeders for a set period in exchange for creating buzz on social media with videos and posts, blogging about new varieties of roses and the breeders, and featuring the roses in Jet Fresh's daily marketing emails. "Breeders saw value in our marketing and felt we could successfully generate industry buzz and demand for new or lesser-known varieties," Ryan says. The agreements saved the company tens of thousands of dollars. "Strategic partnerships that use our marketing have been very lucrative for Jet Fresh."

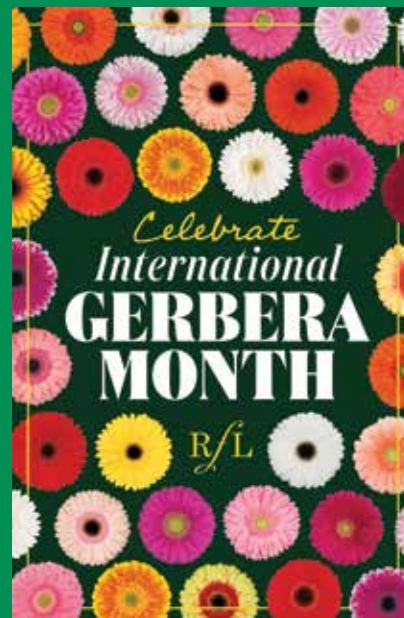
Ryan used the same approach when the company sought to enhance its packaging without using water. Jet Fresh promoted Chrysal's "Arrive Alive" hydrating foam with testing videos in exchange for a discount on the product. With a reach of more than 21,000 followers on Jet Fresh's Instagram and 8,000 on Facebook, the videos reached thousands of floral professionals. "We immediately saw an increase of sales in our Arrive Alive line," says Mimi Martinez Pacheco, marketing manager for Chrysal Americas. "Ryan has elevated the way suppliers reach the floral industry."



The Campaign

Ryan Black, Jet Fresh's marketing and media director, wanted to promote more gerbera daisy consumption to handle the flush of gerberas in the spring. He took it upon himself to declare March as National Gerbera Month. He designed buttons, stickers, videos, signs, sales promotions, social media material and more to spread the word. The campaign stuck, and last year, Dramm Echter Farm, a large grower of gerberas, also joined the movement. Due to its worldwide appeal, it's since been renamed International Gerbera Month.

Rosa Flora Canada, which grows gerberas and has a partnership with Jet Fresh, says this and other marketing campaigns have helped their bottom line. "The marketing efforts ... have been instrumental in promoting our company's position in the South Florida marketplace and beyond," says Arielle DeBoer, owner of Rosa Flora Limited.



The Cost: Print advertisements cost Jet Fresh about \$2,500 and other marketing materials, such as buttons, signs, flyers and stickers, plus staff time to make distribute those items, cost about \$2,000.

The Results: Rosa Flora, which sells gerberas in South Florida exclusively through Jet Fresh, saw sales from Jet Fresh increase 65 percent last year.

The marketing has also attracted the attention of other growers, who like what the company is doing and want to be part of it. "[Ryan has] helped Jet Fresh be known as a critical point of innovation and discovery and source for new products, which for us, has been a tremendously helpful channel to use when we want to launch new products and help convey the features and benefits," says Rodrigo Leiva, vice president of sales and marketing for Esmeralda Farms. "In an industry where marketing campaigns lack a 'newness,' [he] has succeeded in turning things upside down." 🌻

Amanda Jedlinsky is the senior content strategist for the Society of American Florists and editor in chief of Floral Management.

Learn More

For more about SAF's Marketer of the Year contest, including how it is judged, how to enter next year, and what qualifies as an entry, go online to safnow.org/moty.