



More than 95% of all florists are suffering from acute PSGCS!



PSGCS is caused by the common misconception that a **P**olite **S**taff automatically gives **G**ood **C**ustomer **S**ervice. The good news is that there is a cure!

Symptoms include:

- repeated use of the phrase, "How much do you want to spend?"
- beginning orders with, "Our arrangements start at ..."
- selling from their own pockets
- not charging accurate prices
- underusing your order-entry software
- not consistently offering add-ons
- failing to capture e-mail addresses

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BY TIM HUCKABEE, AIFSE

reach out and touch

Build customer loyalty and sales by making reminder calls to clients and follow-up calls to recipients.

You made it to the summer, and the rush of the spring holidays is just a memory, right? Well, they will be back before you know it, and if you're one of the florists for whom business slows during the summer months, I want to speed up your thinking about getting in shape for the second half of the year and beyond. Learn new habits now, and they will become part of your store culture by autumn.

Just like you, I run a small business and am always thinking about customers: keeping the current ones happy and finding new ones. This month, I will touch on how you can address both issues using the resources you already have in your store.

reminder calls

In the May issue, I discussed several ideas for getting more use from your order-entry system. Here's another way to get more benefits from your system: You (and/or your staff) are going to start making reminder calls. Yes, calling

out reminder postcards, and I commend them for doing some proactive marketing; however, I have a stack of postcards from florists sitting on my desk that I received just one day before the event for which I was being reminded (and sometimes the day after). Blame the post office, blame the printer; it doesn't matter. If you send reminder cards that arrive late, your shop looks unorganized.

To avoid having to rely on the postal system—and to save the postage—phone calls are a sure bet. Phone calls work because they are personal touches that will help differentiate your shop from the competition. An added benefit of phone calls is that you can control exactly when you reach the customers to remind them about their special events.

step 1: Run the report. Pull a list of orders that were delivered eight to 12 days from today's date last year. The logic behind that timing—again, based on my own experience—is that

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customers to solicit more business. The process I am going to share with you is based on personal experience; I made these calls myself for five years, so I know they work.

Every week I visit shops that send

if you call too far in advance, customers won't be ready to shop and simply will ask to be called back later. If you call too close to the event, you run the risk that the customers already have shopped elsewhere.

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step 2: Sort the list. Don't kid yourself into thinking that every birthday, anniversary and holiday order gets marked or coded correctly by your staff. The best approach is to pull up each order on your list, read the card message and then make the appropriate calls. I have caught many orders with card messages that say, for example, "Happy 29th. Love, Tim" but were not coded as birthday orders.

step 3: Make the calls. Call each sender at home or the office—whichever contact number was supplied when the order was placed. Remind him or her of the event and date, and offer some options. If you get voicemail, cover the same details, then give last year's order number for the customer to mention when he or she calls back. And remember to leave your phone number! I will send you a point-by-point script if you call my office.

The reminder calls will help to keep

your existing customers happy. Now let's talk about how to build your customer base with follow-up calls.

follow-up calls

I don't want to sound like a broken record, but trust me on the value of this call program, too, because I made these calls every day as part of work in a flower shop.

First, a story: A few years ago, I was with a friend who needed to pick up a suit for a business trip from the new dry cleaner near her home. I waited in the car while she ran inside. When she came out empty-handed, I asked what happened. She said, "They told me my suit would be ready today but forgot to mark the date, so it won't be back until Monday. I need to find something else to wear. I'll never use them again!"

I was puzzled and asked, "Did you say anything, make any kind of stink about the rotten service, or did you just

walk out?" She just walked out—fuming but silent. She acted out the statistic that I have read over and over—that nearly 70 percent of unhappy customers don't complain; they disappear!

If that dry cleaner had made a follow-up call and given my friend a chance to explain her dissatisfaction, he might have saved her as a customer. *How the problem was settled is what she would have remembered, not the problem itself.*

Think about your customers and the recipients of your flowers. Sometimes you hear when someone is unhappy or disappointed with the product or service received, but what about those who don't complain, who just use another shop or "floral service" for their next order? Follow-up calls help address those customers and convert recipients into customers.

step 1: Run the report. Create a list of all deliveries from the previous day. The timing is critical because you want to



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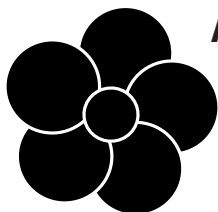
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reach people while the flowers are still fresh, for the reasons I mention below.

step 2: Sort the list. You can quickly eliminate many orders. You won't call senders or recipients of flowers delivered to funeral homes (duh!); hospitals (I don't know if they had bunion surgery or a double lung transplant, so I leave them alone); schools (no one is going to get yanked from seventh-period geometry class to take a phone call in the office); and hotels (it can be difficult to reach those recipients, and they're often there for just a day). Everyone else is fair game (essentially all the happy orders: birthdays, anniversaries and so on).

step 3: Make the calls. First, identify your store and yourself, then state that you are calling to confirm that the recipient received the flowers that were delivered to that address yesterday. You also should tell the recipient how to care for his or her gift (water the flowers, feed the plant, etc.).

Be prepared to hear, “Well, I wasn't going to say anything, but ...” That's a golden opportunity to convert an unhappy recipient (and, ultimately, customer) into a happy one. Furthermore, you are advertising your store's focus on customer service with this call.

I repeatedly heard, “Thank you so much. No other florist has ever called me like this before.”

Good customer service is both memorable and infectious. That recipient most likely will use your shop after that call *and* tell others about the great follow-up service to the beautiful flower arrangement. Once again, to help you to make these calls, call my office, and I will send you a point-by-point script.

Enjoy your summer, and work on your tan—but also work on building your business! ■

Tim Huckabee, AIFSE, is president of FloralStrategies, an on-site training organization for retail florists based in New York, N.Y. For further help with selling, contact him by phone at (800) 983-6184 or by e-mail at contact@floralstrategies.com, or visit www.floralstrategies.com.