



BY TIM HUCKABEE, AIFSE

get ready for the holidays now

A step-by-step plan that will help you prepare for the coming Christmas/Hanukkah season.

How many days until Christmas? If you don't know, whip out your calendar because you need to start planning! Over the years, I have visited flower shops that were still not thinking about the holiday season even as late as November, so I am happy to share some ideas with you. This plan should serve as a rough guideline of when and how to prepare your shop to capitalize on all the season's sales opportunities.

Step 1: Set a decoration date.

Work backward from the day you want to have your store completely decked out for the holidays, including having your arrangement samples in the coolers. Once you have that date, adjust the work schedules so your "elves" will know when they're going to be pulling a long weekend to prep the store.

Step 2: Set a date for an open house. Many shops kick off a successful holiday season with Christmas open houses. Some offer discounts for orders placed on that day. Others simply keep the cider and cookies coming. Regardless of the *how*, the *when* is important. Prepare fliers for mailing, signage for your store and text for an e-mail campaign well in advance.

Step 3: Choose your specials and advertising plans. I did a project with a major floral printing company, and I was surprised to learn how many

shops (big and small) scramble to get holiday postcards and brochures printed in late November. Decide on your budget and your plan (print? radio? TV?), and order now. Most companies will give you better rates for booking in advance. If you are going to mail to your customers, pick the date(s) that you want the materials to be in their hands, and let the printing company know that so it all comes together in a timely fashion. It makes your shop look disorganized if Christmas fliers arrive on Dec. 23.

Step 4: Decide if you are going to carry "codified" products. If your shop offers wire-services' codified products for local delivery, think about boosting your profit margins on them. Most codified products leave room for extra flowers, so give your customers the chance to "supersize" their orders. For example, when you hang the poster for the "limited-edition whatchamacallit," don't give only the suggested price. If the wire service suggests selling it for \$54.99, change the prices. Skip the "barrier pricing," and round the amount to \$55. Next, give it a range—showing the design at \$55 to \$70. When you are asked what is the difference, explain, "Closer to \$70, we can add more beautiful holiday flowers for a fuller look." Even if you have the arrangements designed in advance, you can always add a few more stems.

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Step 5: Decide if you're going to hire extra help. If so, book them now. Write ads for the newspaper, submit them and ask for a run date of late October (or whatever your timeline). What's your plan for training holiday helpers? Remember, by the time they start, things probably will have "heated up," so have a crash course ready. Many

shops give helpers specific tasks like prepping gift baskets. Move simple, labor-intensive jobs away from permanent staff. If you are not computerized, have helpers write delivery tags.

Step 6: Set a meeting date for staff. Where I worked in New York City, we had a meeting every year in

early November to discuss the holidays. We were told, "Do your shopping soon because starting in December, we go to a six-day week, and only a ruptured appendix is going to get you time off on a Saturday!" Management went on to explain that we would go home when the day was done—not when the clock struck five. Though this may sound harsh, it was actually a good time for all of us. Those of us in the sales department helped the designers with simple prep work once our days were done. Management brought in dinner, and if we worked really late, we were sent home in taxis. It all added up to a healthy *esprit de corps* at a hectic time. So, choose a date for such a meeting, review the brochures that customers will receive and make general plans. The better prepared your staff is, the smoother the holiday will run.

Step 7: Dig out orders from last year. Take a look at who ordered big and who ordered late. Reach out to both groups. Call customers who placed wire orders in late November to get their orders early this year. Reducing last-minute stress will be appreciated by your customers, your staff and the filling florists of wire orders.

Step 8: Make selling easy. Many shops offer eight, 10 or even 15 designs at the holidays. Too many? Maybe. Ultimately, the sales staff will focus on three or four items. But how well do they sell them? My holiday gift to you is a template to which you can add photos and simple descriptions to make selling those three or four key designs much easier. Contact me for the file.

You know when the holidays will arrive; don't let them surprise you. ■

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