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Viewpoint

On Learning from Order Gatherers

By Tim Huckabee



ABOUT 10 YEARS AGO, A MAJOR order gatherer hired me to do some training. When I entered the business, I was surprised to see an inordinate number of representatives calling outgoing orders. The company operated under the premise that if one shop refused an order, eventually, another shop would accept it. The company was right.

Florists have a strong reaction to wire orders. Some view them as “just discounted business,” and others go to great lengths to procure them. But, the general trend I’ve observed, based on visits to more than 150 flower shops in the last year, is a drop in incoming and outgoing business. And by far, the most frequently cited culprits are order gatherers. In reality, however, florists are creating and perpetuating part of the problem. And — let me duck before you read this — I honestly think some traditional florists could learn something from order gatherers. (I’m not in cahoots with the order gatherers, by the way. My company is completely independent.)

When I test-call order gatherers, the representatives often are, to be polite, lacking polish — but they are consistent. They offer suggestions, give different price points, sell add-ons, capture e-mail addresses and make full use of their order-entry software.

What happens when a customer calls your store? How does your staff react when he or she needs to send flowers out of town? Do these responses sound familiar? “Oh ... that’s going to be a wire order (casting a tone of gloom over the call)” or, “We do have a minimum of \$50” and, “I’m not sure what that florist will have ...” I’ve actually heard customers ask if they should just find a florist in that town themselves. It shouldn’t be that hard to order flowers, especially when the order gatherers make it so easy.

I am in at least three different flower

shops — of all sizes — every week. It’s not unusual to see a list of order gatherers next to the order printer, advising staff to refuse orders from those shops/organizations. That could be a bad move. While I do not advocate the less-than-reputable practices of the order gatherers, if you refuse them, they will find another florist in your area willing to fill the order. Order gatherers aren’t going away.

So, I pose a challenge: If that incoming order — from an *ethical* (by your own definition) order gatherer — is properly budgeted and within your delivery area, take it. The sweetest revenge would be converting him or her into your customer.

Before you say, “fat chance,” think about it. You could educate that recipient and, ultimately, persuade his or her loved one to deal directly with you on future orders.

Education is a critical element in rebuilding your incoming and outgoing wire business. Until our industry can get organized enough to take out full-page ads in national periodicals, showing customers how much better off they are dealing with their local shop for all their orders, the responsibility falls into your hands. Place a sign in a frame on your counter saying, “We can help with all your orders, here or anywhere in the world.”

Also, train your staff to remind customers calling from out of town that your store can help them with orders in your town, the sender’s town or anywhere in the world. While not a cure-all, these two ideas are small steps toward reclaiming your local and long-distance orders. 🌸

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