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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
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WHO'S YOUR BEST SALESPERSON?

> Is it the designer who has worked for you for 15 years and is a real “people person”? Nope. Perhaps it's the perky new hire who always has a smile on her face when greeting customers? Think again. What about the phone-rep who methodically names the beautiful flowers in stock to every caller? Wrong again.

No one on your team matches the performance of your website. It's a startling but true statement.

I have spent the past 15 years traveling the globe to teach staff how to sell and serve better, often running into a thick wall of skepticism and reticence. “Our customers don't want to spend that much” and “Our customers won't buy that” are the common objections I hear. It's not just employees who are trapped in this misguided thinking; it's often the owners and managers, too. Changing that self-defeating mentality has been my one-man, upward battle. But your website continues to validate my theory every day: Your customers spend more when they're offered higher-priced options!

Yes, your website sells and serves better than anyone in your shop, and the numbers prove it, based on what I see in my weekly visits to flower shops. Owners show me that orders placed online typically have a higher average value, include more add-ons and contain more complete delivery and sender information than sales handled by the staff. They tell me repeatedly that their website average sale is higher than the store average sale, often by 20 percent or more.

You've been afraid to offer higher prices in your store and on the phone, yet your customers consistently spend more on your website, choosing the most interesting designs at higher price points. These are the same customers you thought you knew so well. Your staff's approach to selling add-ons is hit or miss at best (I hear in test calls I make to shops every month), yet customers continually choose “extras” online to personalize their purchases. Those same shoppers you prejudged as uninterested in extra items willingly spend more on finishing touches. Your team is inconsistent about gathering email addresses

— vital to your marketing efforts — yet the website manages to capture one without fail on every order.

Are you starting to see my point?

Florists are too often worried about what everyone else is doing: the cheap flowers at grocery stores, the discounted plants at big-box stores, the online direct shippers and order-gatherers. Nevertheless, customers continue to visit your site and choose higher price points than those offered face-to-face or on the phone with your team. Silly? Yes. Frustrating? For sure. Opportunity for change? Definitely.

With every new web order, you gain empirical evidence that your customers spend very differently than you thought they would. Now you have to leverage that fact to your advantage in 2014. Interpret those numbers as a direct request from your customers for more choices, new designs and options to spend more.

My best advice is to share those numbers with your entire team in your next store meeting to get them motivated. It's your job to empower them to break out of the cocoon of “safe prices” and “safe designs,” which have been artificially keeping your sales lower than they should be. Chat with your staff about how everyone, including you, needs to emulate the best “employee” and start making bigger, better sales every day. Customers want to spend more, so let them! 🌸

Tim Huckabee is founder and president of Floral Strategies Inc., and conducts sales and customer service training at flower shops in the U.S. and around the world. He is also the monthly author of Floral Management's CSI: Flower Shop column. tim@floralstrategies.com

