

## Counter Intuitive: Smart sales and service tactics

By Tim Huckabee



### The SCENARIO:

A customer says, “I don’t want to spend too much money BUT I want to get something nice!”

The standard response to this situation is to react to the roadblock the customer has placed in your path: I don’t want

to spend too much. Many sales people will automatically go into super-frugal mode and let the customer know what the starting point for an arrangement is or how bud vases are priced. But you need to listen closely to what your customer is expecting.

### The PSYCHOLOGY:

Did the customer ever say how much she wants to spend? Does anyone want to spend too much to get what he or she want or needs? No!

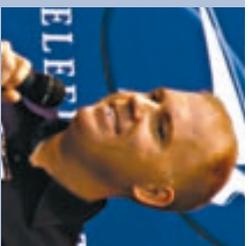
### The SMARTER RESPONSE:

Acknowledge what your customer has mentioned, “Yes, Ms. Customer, we can create a beautiful arrangement for you!” Then move directly to the delivery information and then the card message. If the card message says, “Happy 25th Anniversary, love all your children and grandchildren,” do you think your customer would be happy if a bud vase is sent? No, she would be upset and disappointed. Focus on the card message, make an appropriate suggestion and offer a price range based upon the occasion. “Ms. Customer, you may want to send one of our medium-sized spring vase arrangements, perfect for a coffee table, for this special anniversary. That design is priced between \$XXX and \$XXX.”

Since the customer did not volunteer a price, it’s your responsibility to suggest an appropriate price range. Once you make an educated recommendation, the customer will either choose the design and price you have described OR let you know exactly what she wants to spend (and you can then discuss items in that price range). Listen better and you can give smarter customer service!

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**Tim Huckabee** is president of Floral Strategies, a one-on-one sales and customer service training company exclusively for florists. Got a customer service challenge? Tell Tim about it and he’ll tackle it in an upcoming column. E-mail [tim@floralstrategies.com](mailto:tim@floralstrategies.com) or call (800) 983-6184.



# TIM TALKS

## Smarter Sales and Service Strategies

# A universal sales approach

The key to a shop's selling success is consistency among its sellers.

Do you let designers fill orders however they want? Not unless you want two customers who order a “£50 spring vase arrangement” to get something completely different. Recipes give designers guidelines that ensure consistency.

But what about your salespeople? They need guidelines too. The most successful shops have a set, written policy for dealing with sales and returns.

Before I train a shop, I have employees take a “sales test” to gauge how they operate individually and as a group.

Here are some of the questions I ask:

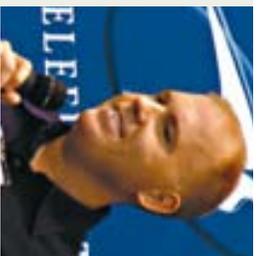
- How do you handle the customer who wants to spend £40 for “something showy”?
  - What do you tell the customer who says, “It better be nice because I’m going to see it!”?
  - What’s the quickest way to price a wire order for a gourmet basket?
- Give your staff a sales test several times a year. Keep it short — three to six questions — and give them a few days to complete it. Review the answers together and set some policies. You’ll find your staff and customers appreciate having sales handled a “standard” way.

This column shows just a taste of Tim’s extensive range of tips and techniques for better business. Tim is *F&WB’s* recommended in-store trainer and as florists around the UK and Ireland are finding out, a day with Tim in the shop (cost £595) can easily be recouped from increased sales and staff morale.

For details of Tim and his company **Floral Strategies**, log on to [www.floralstrategies.com](http://www.floralstrategies.com) or to book him for your shop ring *F&WB* on 020 8939 6495.

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# TIM



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## Smarter Sales and Service Strategies

# Perfect your phone pitches

Why is the average sale on your website almost always higher than a phone sale? Because salespeople in almost every shop I train tend to make the same mistakes: selling from their own pockets, not using their voice as a tool and not listening to customers. If you can get your staff to live and work by these three points, your average phone order will increase:

1. When employees take a card message containing the phrase “Happy Anniversary” (usually an occasion worthy of lavish design), they should automatically suggest a large arrangement. Preface the suggestion with, “*For your anniversary, I’d recommend or I’d suggest ...*” to automatically sell more large-size arrangements.

2. When I train employees on how to make a sale, they often say, “*You make it sound so easy!*” That’s because I’ve used and refined the process for more than a decade. Practice makes perfect. The real secret behind my sales strategy is that I sound confident. I use my voice as a tool. I place a full stop at the end of a price instead of a question mark. For example, I say, “*We’ll create that large design for £50*” not, “*We’ll do that for £50 — is that*

*OK?*” Hang reminder signs in the work area: “*Our prices end in full stops, not question marks!*”

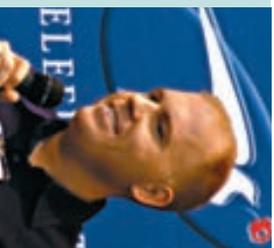
3. Few salespeople have good listening skills. When I make test calls to shops, I pretend I’m calling from New York and that my sister is turning 30 next week and she’s at her wit’s end. I mention that I have a business trip in China and can’t celebrate with her. I go on to ask if the salesperson has room to write 12 names on the card message. Even after this buildup, sadly, the standard response is “*Our arrangements start at...*” Did he or she not hear what I said? A dozen people are chipping in on this gift; it’s her 30th birthday — we’re talking big occasion, big gift.

Try this activity with your employees to get your message across: Grab a week’s worth of orders and pull out those with “big ticket” card messages but small price-point items. Write out the prices and hand copies of those orders to employees. Ask them to suggest an item and price based solely on the card message. Then show them the actual prices and discuss the importance of reading and reacting to the card message before talking product and prices.

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# TIM TALKS

## Smarter Sales and Service Strategies

### Target Price Ranges

When I visit flower shops, I usually see posters for relay service products, or flyers for the shop's own work displayed with a price scribbled in marker. However, by assigning a single price to an arrangement, florists miss an opportunity for additional revenue.

First, image is everything. Invest a few bucks in pre-printed number stickers from an office supply store to price the posters and/or any other marketing material. They'll look more professional and be easier to read.

Second, don't use a single price — offer a price range. For example, if the "Artist DuJour Limited-Edition Doodah" has a suggested retail of £30.00, price it £30.00 to £50.00. Think about it: Even if you mass-produce the design, you can easily add more flowers and foliage to bring the value up to the higher price, which means more revenue for your shop and ultimately more profit.

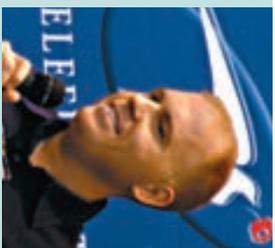
The additional money lets you embellish that design with your store's personal touch (such as glitter pine cones or signature ribbon) so it doesn't look like a "cookie-cutter" design. You also can use the additional money as "relay order insurance." Rather than automatically telling a customer, "You need to spend at least £10 more on that if you want it delivered to your Granddaughter in Big City," say, "We recommend the higher end of the price range when sending this design to Big City — as their flower prices tend to run higher than ours in Little Town." This could also be useful if you don't belong to a relay company.

Remember to give a second choice. By selling a generic design (using a size and colour scheme) as your second choice, you avoid wasting time sending additional messages over the networks and calling back customers.

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BY TIM HUCKABEE

## how to sell roses for Valentine's Day

Sure-fire tips for landing Valentine's Day shoppers, especially those who are comparing prices.

Hello, and Happy New Year! As *Florists' Review's* newest columnist, I'd like to begin by telling you about my role in the floral industry.

In 1993, I was looking for part-time work while I sought a permanent position in my field, marketing. I saw an ad in *The New York Times* for a telephone customer service sales representative in a flower shop and thought, "What an easy job. It will be like a vacation rather than work." Well, I was in for a surprise!

What started out as a temporary position quickly evolved into a full-time career. I had the benefit of working with a great group of people at **SURROUNDINGS FLOWERS**, a high-end flower shop in a tony residential area of Manhattan. From 1993 to 1997, I learned every aspect of the retail floral business, from design basics to how to give extraordinary customer service.

nology—so I decided to launch **FLORALSTRATEGIES** instead. During the past 10 years, I have had the opportunity to work in nearly every state, in several Canadian provinces and across Great Britain and Ireland, and Australia is in the plans this year.

### stop focusing on price

The underlying premise of my sales methodology is to make it easier for the customer to shop at the store. One of the quickest ways to do that is to break out of the old-fashioned mode of selling "prices."

I have called countless flower shops to place test orders and, upon asking for suggestions, have been told, "We can do something for \$50, \$60 and up." My argument is that customers don't know what a \$50 or a \$60 is. They are price points, and they mean nothing

**At Valentine's Day, consumers are shopping price more than ever, so you must sell in a way that sets your shop apart from your competitors ...**

As I was approaching my five-year anniversary at the shop, I began looking for more challenge. I considered opening or buying my own flower shop and spoke to many florists. Those conversations led me to realize that there was no one in the industry going into flower shops to offer training on three critical levels—sales, customer service and better use of tech-

to a customer, especially one who has never ordered from you before.

In my on-site training, I often draw on the similarities between the floral and the food industries. What would you think if, at dinner, a waiter came to your table, asked if you'd like to hear about the specials and then went on to say, "Tonight we have a \$15, \$19 and \$22. Which would you like?"

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 146)



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## success strategies

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 40)

Yes, it sounds ridiculous because you can't order by just a dollar amount; you need to know what you are getting. Now think how your customers must feel. If they were to ask the salesperson, "Well, how big is a \$60 arrangement?" they are often given this grammatical nightmare of a response, "It will be a nice size!" My question is, "Just how big is a 'nice' size?" In 10 years of travel, I have yet to see that elusive ruler that converts "nice" into inches.

## steps for selling roses

Before I go off on too much of a tangent about the finer points of communicating to customers, I want to share my idea with you about applying the process of *selling a description* rather than a price for your Valentine's Day roses.

**Step 1. Be prepared to offer your customers choices beyond the standard dozen roses in a vase.** You can upgrade that design with accent flowers (*not* filler flowers), a better vase, candy, etc.

**Step 2. Prepare samples for your staff.** Once they see and understand the designs, they will be better prepared to explain them to your customers. Also have samples—with signage—at the counter and/or in the cooler.

**Step 3. Script it for your staff.** Keep it simple. Bullet points work great; they allow each staff member to wrap his or her personality around the sale while ensuring that the key elements are mentioned. (To get a free, customized template for your shop, call or e-mail me.)

**Step 4. Reinforce it.** What will make this program work not just at Valentine's Day but year-round is that every staff member offers the choices to customers. Invariably I find that the person who sells the most balloons at a shop is not the most aggressive salesperson; he or she is simply the most consistent—always offering a balloon when appropriate.

## sample sales scenario

At Valentine's Day, consumers are shopping price more than ever, so you must sell in a way that sets your shop apart from your competitors, including the grocery store floral departments. You can do this by presenting shoppers with design options and vivid descriptions—with the price at the end. Here's how the dialogue should sound:

**SALESPERSON:** "Hello, Huckabee's

Flower Shop. This is Tim."

**Customer:** "I'd like to find out how much your Valentine roses cost."

**SALESPERSON:** "Of course. We have two rose arrangements this year. Our 'Classic Dozen Roses' is designed with baby's breath and foliage in a clear glass vase and is priced at \$75. We also offer our 'Premium Dozen Roses,' which includes fragrant Oriental lilies and special foliages and is presented in

an elegant clear glass vase. That design is priced at \$95."

Notice that I "painted a picture" for the customer and placed the price at the end, not up front. Customers will be going through the Yellow Pages calling every shop looking for the best price. When they hear this kind of sales presentation from your staff, they will stop and shop at your store—even if your roses are the same price or higher than the competition's. Why? Because they bought a design, not a price!

The silver lining: Once your customer sends the Premium Dozen Roses arrangement, he or she most likely won't (or shouldn't) ever send the "regular" Classic Dozen Roses arrangement again. ■

*Tim Huckabee is president of FloralStrategies, an on-site training organization for retail florists based in New York, N.Y. Contact him by phone at (800) 983-6184 or by e-mail at [contact@floralstrategies.com](mailto:contact@floralstrategies.com), or visit [www.floralstrategies.com](http://www.floralstrategies.com).*

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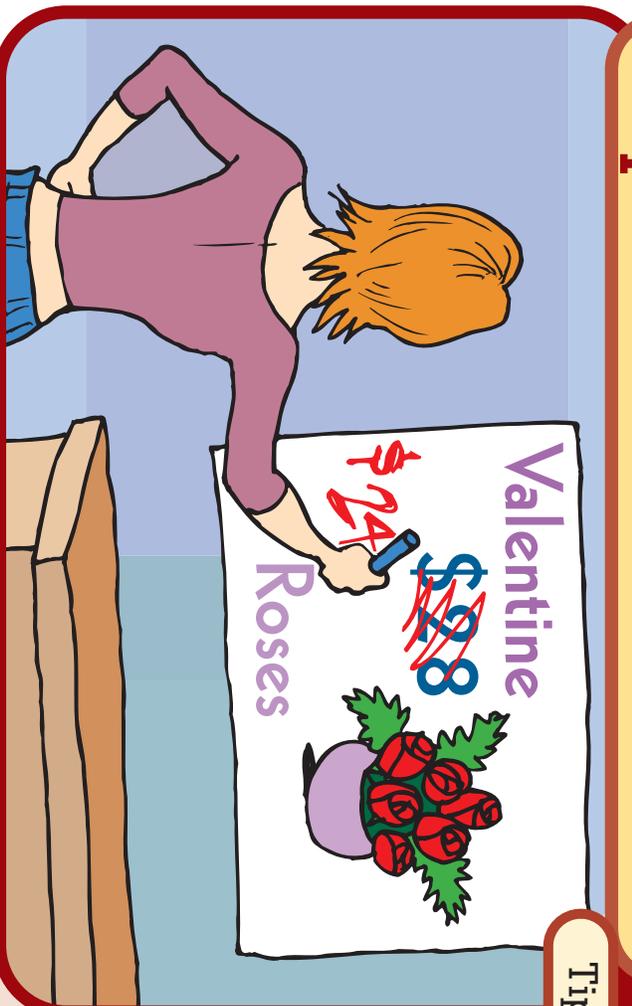
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# Operation Local Sales

By Tim Huckabee

## Tips for Luring Local Customers to your shop



## Target Price Ranges

**W**hen I visit flower shops at the holidays, I usually see posters for wire-service containers hung with a price scribbled in marker. By assigning a single price to an arrangement, florists miss an opportunity for additional revenue.

**First, image is everything.** Invest a few bucks in pre-printed number stickers from an office supply store to price the posters. They'll look more professional and be easier to read.

**Second, don't use a single price — offer a price range.** For example, if the “Artist DuJour Limited-Edition Doodad” has a suggested retail of \$49.99, price it \$50 to \$65. Think about it:

Even if you mass-produce the design, you can easily add

more flowers and foliage to bring the value up \$15, which means more revenue for your shop. The additional money lets you embellish that design with your store's personal touch (such as glitter pine cones or signature ribbon) so it doesn't look like a “cookie-cutter” design.

You also can use the additional money as “wire-order insurance.” Rather than automatically telling a customer, “You need to spend at least \$10 more on that if you want it delivered to your granddaughter in Big City,” say, “We recommend the higher end of the price range when sending this design to Big City — as their flower prices tend to run higher than ours in Little Town.”

**Remember to give a second choice.** By selling a generic design (using a size and color scheme) as your second choice, you avoid wasting time sending additional messages over the networks and calling back customers.

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*Editor's Note: We want to thank Tim Huckabee for the sales and customer service advice he's shared with Floral Management readers in this column for the past two years. Tim needs to dedicate more time to his on-site training company, Floral Strategies, so this is his last installment for Floral Management.*

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of seasonal fruit along with assorted cheeses and crackers, cookies and candies,” or whatever the core ingredients are at your shop.

■ When a customer asks how many pieces of fruit will be included or how much the basket weighs, say, “We don’t sell baskets by the number of items since each one is hand-crafted. I can, however, tell you how many people this basket will serve.”

**Sell by size, not price!** Make the customer tell you how much he needs to spend by asking, “How many people would you like that basket to serve?” Don’t just pick an arbitrary amount and say, “We can do something nice for about \$50 or \$60.”

Think about that concept for a moment ... A customer ordering for an office staff of eight will realize that he needs to choose a large basket at \$75 — and you didn’t have to do any upselling! Maybe he was considering spending the price of a small basket when he called, but your probing made him realize he needs to spend more. You also will have a much more satisfied customer since he’s getting a basket that is the appropriate size for his staff, as opposed to being unintentionally misled by, “Oh sure, that \$50 one will be a nice size.”

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## Sell Gift Baskets Better

**T**his is the season when many flower shops begin selling gift baskets. Here are some fresh approaches to simplify that sale:

■ Remind customers that they are paying for your design expertise. Anyone can go to the supermarket, buy fruit and put it in a basket. Customers call or visit you because they want your creative interpretation. When a customer wants to order a basket, volunteer, “Great, we’ll design a wonderful basket filled with our best gourmet items.” This immediately builds customer confidence.

■ Don’t name specific brands of gourmet foods or types of fruit. Say, “The basket will include a wonderful selection

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while selling a wire order. It usually went like this:

- Automatically pull out the books.
- Leave the customer to flip through page after page.
- Offer excuses about how the design they have chosen “may not look exactly like the photograph.”
- Get on the phone and call a few shops to track down a specific container or design.
- Volunteer — unsolicited — that “we have a \$XX minimum for wire orders.”

Direct shipping and easier access to foreign markets in the last 10 years has made flower selections less vulnerable to seasonal and regional restrictions — meaning I see the same basic flowers in shops from Connecticut to California. Therefore, encapsulating my sell-by-color-and-size methodology when selling a wire order, I pull a vase arrangement from the cooler, place it on the counter and tell the customer, “This is our medium-size arrangement (for example). We’ll work closely with the best florist in Anytown to have them create a similar design for you — with the same overall feeling using their best (seasonal) flowers.”

This approach makes most customers happy because you are offering realistic expectations without promising specifics — and you always have the books as a backup!

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## Another Way to Sell Wire Orders

Last month we talked about how to sell wire orders better using more polished language. To continue talks on handling that type of sale, I want to show you that you don’t need to sell from “the book.”

First, a little background: I worked in a flower shop for years, taking phone and counter sales before starting my on-site training business. The store belonged to the wire services, but we did not rely solely on their “counter books.” When a customer wanted to send flowers out-of-town, I sold that order using one of our own vase arrangements as a 3-D sales guide. The books can be helpful, but they often are used as a crutch instead of a sales tool.

Once I started visiting flower shops around the world, I was surprised to see the number of steps salespeople take

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what they're telling customers and teaching them to repackage the information into a shopper-friendly dialogue.

**FIRST:** If you've been following this column since last year, you know I advocate selling color and size instead of specifics. I comfortably promise a customer "a medium-size vase arrangement, perfect for a coffee table, filled with our best garden flowers in deep rich fall tones for \$XX to \$XX," whether it's going down the road or across the country. Every flower shop can fill an order according to a general size and color scheme. If you're in a small town and sending to a big city, adjust the budget accordingly.

**SECOND:** Did the customer ask about a fee? Then why start by telling him or her about it? Such an approach sabotages the sale because the salesperson is insinuating that the fee is too high or the customer doesn't want to pay "that much extra."

**THIRD:** Did the customer ask about a minimum? Probably not. Take the card message before the order and offer suggestions based on the greeting. This approach works well for local and out-of-town orders.

**Bottom line:** An order is an order — the zip code shouldn't matter.

## Too Much Information

**W**hy is taking a wire order such a production? Time and again I hear salespeople ask customers, "Is this local or out-of-town?" You want customers to know they'll get the same beautiful flowers for local and out-of-town orders, so why bring it up at the beginning of the call?

I've also heard these "offensive" comments one too many times while training:

- "I'm not really sure what that store is going to have..."
- "Oh, you need a wire order, well, we have a \$XX fee for that..."

■ "If you want to send flowers out of town, we require a minimum order of \$XX..."

Rid your shop of such remarks by helping your staff hear

**Tim Huckabee** is president of Floral Strategies, a one-on-one sales and customer-service training company exclusively for florists.

E-mail [tim@floralstrategies.com](mailto:tim@floralstrategies.com) or call (800) 983-6184.

## Operation Local Sales

By Tim Huckabee

### Tips for luring local customers to your shop



ten policy for dealing with sales and returns.

Before I train a shop, I have employees take a “sales test” to gauge how they operate individually and as a group. Here are some of the questions I ask:

- How do you handle the customer who wants to spend \$40 for “something showy”?
- What do you tell the customer who says, “It better be nice because I’m going to see it!”?
- What’s the quickest way to price a wire order for a gourmet basket?

Give your staff a sales test several times a year. Keep it short — three to six questions — and give them a few days to complete it. Review the answers together and set some policies. You’ll find your staff and customers appreciate having sales handled a “standard” way.

For free sample tests (and answer keys) or to schedule an on-site training, call Floral Strategies at (800) 983-6184 or visit [www.FloralStrategies.com](http://www.FloralStrategies.com).

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## A Universal Sales Approach

The key to a shop’s selling success is consistency among its sellers. Do you let designers fill orders however they want? Not unless you want two customers who order a “\$50 spring vase arrangement” to get something completely different. Recipes give designers guidelines that ensure consistency. But what about your salespeople? They need guidelines too. The most successful shops have a set, writ-

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**1. Greeting.** How strong was the first impression? Did the salesperson identify the store and herself or himself?

**2. Card Message Placement.** Did the salesperson ask about the card message before the actual order — an easy way to find out the occasion, so you can suggest an appropriate arrangement and price point?

**3. Pricing.** Are your prices in line with your market? Did the salesperson use antiquated prices ending in 99 or 95 cents or did she use even, easy-on-the-ear numbers? Saying \$39.99 involves six syllables, \$40 is only two — keep it simple for customers' sake.

**4. Computer Integration.** If the competition of it? I often hear keys clicking when I make a test call but rarely get a confirmation or account number.

**5. Relationship Building.** I always stress on test calls that I'm calling from out of town, yet I'm rarely offered a toll-free number or Web address. Make it easy for customers to shop with you again!

Don't just use this practice to eavesdrop on your competition. Gauging their weaknesses can help you gauge yours and your employees.

## Mind Your Own (And Others') Business

Ever snooped on your competition? I've found it an effective training tool. In my on-site training program, I routinely call a competing flower shop and put the phone on speaker while I place an order. This usually shows my trainees how easily most salespeople miss obvious cues from customers. These calls can be a window into how your competition operates and how you can use their weaknesses to your advantage.

When you place a test call, pay attention to these five points and think of how your staff handles similar situations.

**Tim Huckabee** is president of Floral Strategies, a one-on-one sales and

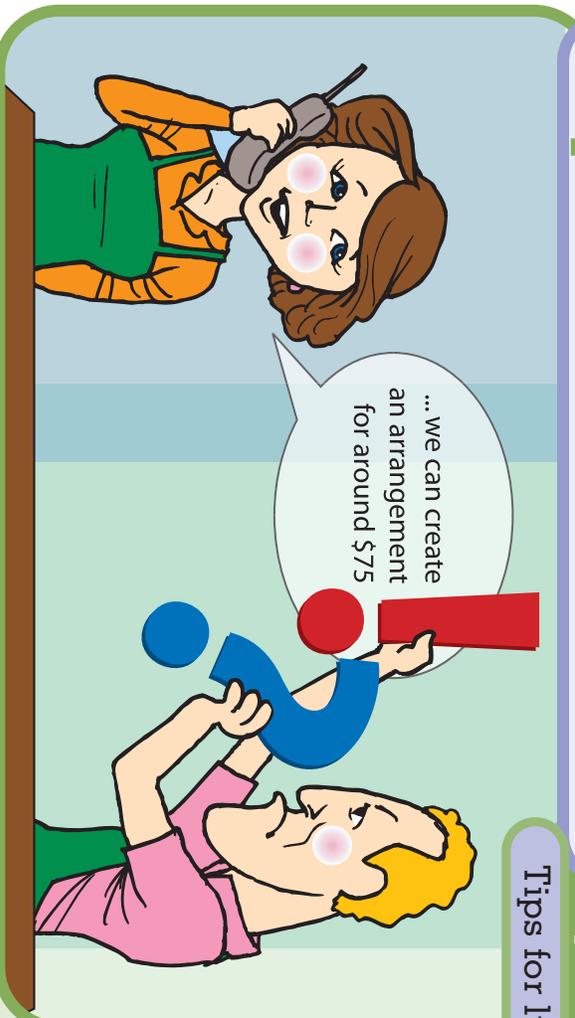
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# Operation Local Sales

By Tim Huckabee

Tips for luring local customers to your shop



## Perfect Your Phone Pitches

Why is the average sale on your business's Web site almost always higher than a phone sale? Because salespeople in almost every shop I train tend to make the same mistakes: selling from their own pockets, not using their voice as a tool and not listening to customers.

If you can get your staff to live and work by these three points, your average phone order will increase:

**1.** phrase “Happy Anniversary” (usually an occasion worthy of lavish design), they should automatically suggest a large arrangement. Preface the suggestion with, “For your anniversary, I’d recommend or I’d suggest ...” to automatically sell more large-size arrangements.

**2.** often say, “You make it sound so easy!” That’s because I’ve used and refined the process for more than a decade. Practice makes perfect. The real secret behind my

sales strategy is that I sound confident. I use my voice as a tool. I place a period at the end of a price instead of a question mark. For example, I say, “We’ll create that large design for \$75!” not, “We’ll do that for \$75 — is that OK?” Hang reminder signs in the work area: “Our prices end in periods, not question marks!”

**3.** Few salespeople have good listening skills. When I make test calls to shops, I pretend I’m calling from New York and that my sister is turning 30 next week and she’s at her wit’s end. I mention that I have a business trip in China and can’t celebrate with her. I go on to ask if the salesperson has room to write 12 names on the card message. Even after this buildup, sadly, the standard response is “Our arrangements start at...” Did he or she not hear what I said? A dozen people are chipping in on this gift; it’s her 30th birthday — we’re talking big occasion, big gift.

### Try this activity with your employees to get your message

**across:** Grab a week’s worth of orders and pull out those with “big ticket” card messages but small price-point items. Write out the prices and hand copies of those orders to employees. Ask them to suggest an item and price based solely on the card message. Then show them the actual prices and discuss the importance of reading and reacting to the card message before talking product and prices.

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# Operation Local Sales

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Tips for luring local customers to your shop



## Say it With Spunk!

The tone employees use when offering add-ons is critical. The teenager in the burger joint can get away with asking in a monotone voice, but flowers don't make customers' mouths water the way fries do. Enthusiasm is essential. There's a difference between, "Do you want to add a balloon, too?" and "Would you like to add a Happy Birthday balloon to your Mom's arrangement?" Make it easier

## Ask and You Shall Receive

I read recently that a major burger chain adds an astounding 15 percent to its annual sales simply by consistently asking customers if they'd like to "mega-size" meals. The florist's version of that question, "Would you like to add balloons, candy or a stuffed animal to your purchase?" might have the same impact, but often, customers don't hear it enough.

## Make it Mandatory

The burger chain achieves those impressive numbers because asking the "mega-size" question is mandatory. I often hear about a flower-shop employee who is a champ at selling add-ons because she or he always asks for that sale (when appropriate). Simple, right? Most of the shops I train don't catch on that quickly. When I ask owners why selling add-ons is not a standard part of the sales presentation for the entire staff, I usually get a shrug. Remember, it's your name on the paycheck — tell everyone on staff to offer add-ons.

for employees to sell add-ons by setting up a list of trigger words. Whenever they hear or write "Happy Birthday," "Happy Anniversary" or "Congratulations" on a card, they should automatically suggest an add-on.

## Simpler As Separates

Add-ons need to be treated as a separate sale. "OK, we'll send her a pretty arrangement and can include a few balloons for \$60" is a common approach. But, how much are those balloons? Since only one price was offered, the balloons have to be backed out of the total — impacting the size of the design. Instead, once you've sold the arrangement, offer an add-on as a separate sale. "OK, we'll send her a pretty arrangement for \$60 and include a bunch of balloons for an additional \$15."

**The bottom line:** Teach your staff to sell add-ons effectively, and watch profits rise.

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## Operation Local Sales

By Tim Huckabee

### Tips for luring local customers to your shop



### Making the Most of Your POS System

Nearly every flower shop I visit uses order-entry software. Several florists make the mistake of viewing the system as an electronic order pad rather than a powerful tool to help build sales.

#### System Capabilities

When was the last time you called the tech department to learn what you can do with your POS system's latest upgrades? For example, on some programs you can give the customer his order (or transaction) number at the end of the call and direct him to use that number on your Web site to track delivery status. Then he is "forced" to visit your Web site and will hopefully start shopping there, too.

#### Training Necessities

Call your POS vendor and ask about support materials for training. I've seen a great new coaching CD from Teleflora for RTI as well as laminated flip charts and interactive Web sites from other vendors. Your staff should learn how the system works so they can focus on helping customers instead of worrying about which key to hit next.

#### Make the Sale

Here are a few valuable pointers from my on-site training

program that you can implement immediately:

- Can you view your customers' spending patterns (i.e. average sale)? Use that information. When I see that someone spends \$75 on average and is asking for a "special arrangement," I start him in the \$100-plus range. If I didn't pay attention to that information, I might've volunteered, "We can do something nice for around \$60." (If you've read my columns every month, you know that "something nice" should be eliminated from your vocabulary since it's vague, ineffectual and costs you money. Instead, say, "A large arrangement, that's great for a dining room or kitchen table, in our most impressive design will be perfect and is priced \$100 to \$115.")

- What about viewing what your customer has sent before? With the FAS system, I can see the product category the customer usually sends, such as plants and flowers. Several POS programs let me view what was sent to a particular recipient. Either way, I integrate that information into my conversation so I can make a bigger sale. For example, "Mr. Jones, I see you usually send green plants, did you know that we also carry some exotic orchid plants?" or "Mrs. Smith, I see you sent your mom a dish garden for her birthday last year. We can create a beautiful vase arrangement in her favorite color this year (at \$10 to \$15 more)."

**The bottom line:** You invested in your software — make it help your business grow.

**Note:** *This month's column is based on my work with the RTI, Daisy, Eagle, Advantage, flowerSoft and FAS systems. Other systems also may have the features mentioned.*

**Tim Huckabee** is president of Floral Strategies, a one-on-one sales and customer-service training company exclusively for florists. E-mail [tim@floralstrategies.com](mailto:tim@floralstrategies.com) or call (800) 983-6184.

# Operation Local Sales

By Tim Huckabee

Hands On

## Tips for luring local customers to your shop

don't use that data. First, find that number on your order screen. Then, survey your staff to see if they use the feature. If they don't, point it out. The average sale can give the salesperson a rough idea of what the caller may — or in this case should — spend. If you see that Mega Corp has sent 125 orders and spends \$100 on average per order, you must educate the caller.

### School New Customers

When a caller chooses a smaller arrangement than the company normally sends, I remind the caller what we'll create for the given budget: "OK, for \$50 we'll design one of our beautiful small sympathy baskets, about 14 inches tall." Now, she has a clear description of what she's sending. Additionally, I mention, "According to my computer, Mega Corp usually sends a large design priced closer to \$100" (since she may be new to the firm and unaware of their buying patterns). Following these steps can help increase your average sale. Equally important, you'll raise the level of customer satisfaction. After all, what would Sally's boss have thought when he saw a \$50 basket — no matter how beautifully designed?



## Common Corporate Conundrum

Sally's boss told her to call your shop and order sympathy flowers since her business has a corporate account with you. Sally chooses a traditional basket design and spends \$50. Her \$24,000 annual salary makes that seem like a reasonable amount. The problem: The card says, "With deepest sympathy from management and the entire staff at Mega Corp." How should you tactfully help Sally buy from the company's pocket, not her own?

### If You've Got It, Use It

Most shops I have trained use order-entry software that can show the average sale. However, most salespeople

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Editor in Chief  
 Vice President of Publishing and Communications

Kate F. Penn  
 kpenn@safnow.org

Senior Editor  
 Julia Hoffman  
 jhoffman@safnow.org

Staff Writer  
 Rebecca Pollack  
 rpollack@safnow.org

Contributing Writer  
 Mary Westbrook  
 mary.westbrook@gmail.com

Advertising and Production Coordinator  
 Sheila S. Santiago  
 ssantiago@safnow.org

Production Director  
 Cheryl M. Burke

Art Direction and Design  
 Noodlebox Design, LLC

Publishing Advisors  
 Peter J. Moran, SAF Executive Vice President  
 Drew Gruenberg, SAF Senior Vice President

#### EDITORIAL OFFICES:

Society of American Florists  
 1601 Duke Street  
 Alexandria, VA 22314-3406  
 (800) 336-4743; (703) 836-8700  
 Fax: (800) 208-0078  
[www.safnow.org](http://www.safnow.org)

#### ADVERTISING SALES:

David Facinelli, E-mail: [dfacinelli@safnow.org](mailto:dfacinelli@safnow.org)  
 (727) 866-9647; Fax: (727) 866-9222

Donna Boatman-Riley,  
 E-mail: [dboatman@safnow.org](mailto:dboatman@safnow.org)  
 (815) 393-4624; Fax: (847) 699-8681

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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.

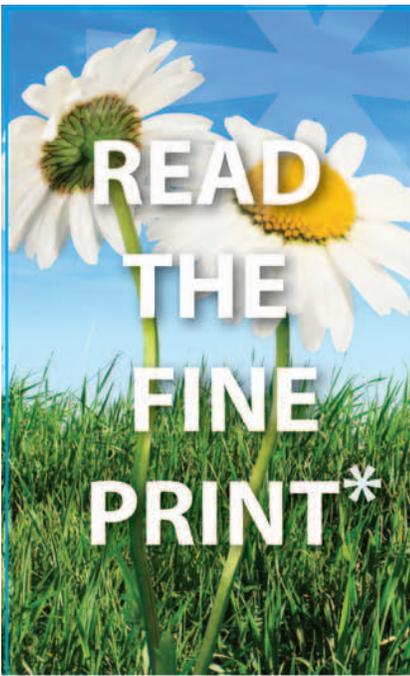
Before you say, “fat chance,” think about it. You could educate that recipient and, ultimately, persuade his or her loved one to deal directly with you on future orders.

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. 🍀

**Tim Huckabee** is president of Floral Strategies, an on-site customer-service and sales training program exclusively for florists, and a frequent contributor to Floral Management.

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BY TIM HUCKABEE, AIFSE

## motivating staff members

Tips for helping employees to work more efficiently, increasing their productivity and your bottom line.

If I see a dime on the street, I stop and pick it up—and you probably do too. Why? Because money motivates! This month, I want to talk about motivating your staff with money.

I think incentive plans are great. I always run the idea by shop owners when I am in shops to train staff members. The two most common responses I hear are: "I already pay them enough. Why should I pay them extra just to do their jobs?" and "Sure, I'd love to give them some kind of bonus plan, but I don't know where to start."

At the flower shop where I worked in New York City, we did not have an incentive plan. We took our jobs very seriously and really went above and beyond the call of duty. I think it was a combination of the pace of the city and the professional, corporate culture that the owner cultivated; however, a bonus plan probably would have made me hustle even more!

It's wonderful to visit a flower shop that offers insurance and sometimes even profit sharing or a 401(k) plan. Kudos to those owners capable of giving those types of plans to their staffs. But there are owners who complain—justifiably—that they are giving their staffs good benefits, and they still hear gripes about money. That's because the employees can't use their no-deductible dental insurance plan to pay their rent or make their car payments. Staff members often view these valuable extras as intangibles and not a true part of their earnings package.

I understand the hesitation to offer more money for doing the same job; however, here are three points for you to consider. First, the floral industry is not known for paying well, and that may prevent some strong candidates from applying to your business. That said, if you offered a bonus plan, you could state, "Competitive hourly rate to

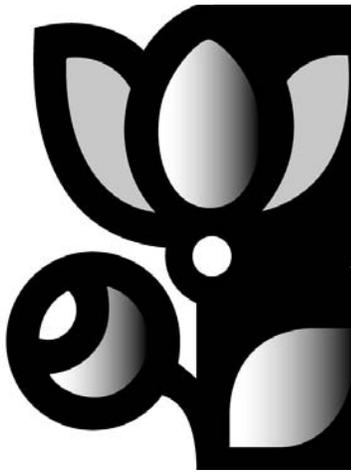
The idea behind offering an incentive plan ... is to get more performance from your staff. ... You will be sharing increased profits with them because their more efficient work will improve your bottom line.

#### employee benefits plans

Let's face it, you can pay only so much. Sometimes I get the feeling that some of the people I train are there just for a paycheck and, given the chance, would bolt out the door to work at Mega Discount for 50 cents an hour more!

\$XX, including incentives." Second, offering a bonus plan may help you to keep some staff who might be looking elsewhere for a better hourly wage. And you know how much time and money you need to invest in training a new hire. Third, you can boost morale by

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 132)



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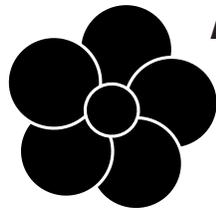
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### success strategies

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 46)

giving your staff members a chance to start earning more now rather than waiting for their annual reviews.

The idea behind offering an incentive plan—from your perspective—is to get more performance from your staff. On the most basic level, you will be sharing increased profits with them because their more efficient work will improve your bottom line. In other words, don't bemoan handing out bonuses; they will be funded by the staff.

### making it worth the cost

A critical first step is to determine what more you need from your staff. Here are some common goals, broken down by department.

**Sales.** Increase the average value of transactions, and take orders with fewer mistakes.

**Design.** Keep waste and cost-of-goods down, pay more attention to details and so on.

**Delivery.** Deliver orders by the times promised, and deliver all items to the recipients looking like they did when they left the store.

Obviously, you can create your own set of criteria. In addition, here are a few ideas for tracking the results.

**Tracking sales.** Use your point-of-sale (POS) system to check average increases by staff members against last month's figures. Alternately, using a group number, offer an incentive to the staff for a boost in the store's overall figures.

**Tracking design.** Spot-check each design for being on budget and accurate to the order. You can pay incentives per designer or, again, a group incentive.

**Tracking delivery.** Track customer/recipient complaints regarding delivery issues, and pay more for fewer complaints. Additionally, consider an incentive for fewer redeliveries (forcing drivers to take the initiative to leave flowers on a protected porch or with a neighbor, for example).

These suggestions may sound vague, but they're meant to get you thinking about how you can run your shop better and reward your staff for working smarter. I have developed detailed plans, down to the paperwork and computer reports to run. Contact me for further information.

Other questions that come up are when and how to pay the incentives.

Both questions should be directed to your accountant because the extra money may affect employees' tax status.

**other types of motivators**

Though I have talked money throughout this column, there are other smart ways to motivate your staff. To create some team spirit, you could provide a pizza lunch once a week or

month, giving the entire company a chance to congregate informally. When a customer or recipient sends a message of gratitude, give a gift certificate to the salesperson, designer and driver involved with the order. Finally, if a staff member goes above and beyond the call of duty, write a thank-you card, and include a note offering a half (or full) day off. People love time off. You can put parameters on it, such as "To be used during the summer months" or "Upon approval of your manager" because you want to make sure you are covered in each department.

The bottom line is that you can get a lot more from your staff by giving a little back! ■

*Tim Huckabee, AIFSE, is president of Floral Strategies, an on-site training organization for retail florists based in New York, N.Y. For help with improving your customer service, contact him by phone at (800) 983-6184 or by e-mail at [contact@floralstrategies.com](mailto:contact@floralstrategies.com), or visit [www.floralstrategies.com](http://www.floralstrategies.com).*

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BY TIM HUCKABEE, AIFSE

## become a gift basket pro

Tips for designing and selling baskets that will make you the go-to source for these items.

“How many oranges will be in that fruit basket?” That is just one of the questions that salespeople fear hearing when they take orders for fruit or gourmet baskets. But why has selling such a simple item become a major production, and why is it based just on price?

“Oh, you want to send a fruit basket? They start at \$35.”

Because many flower shops do more basket business during the holiday season, this is a good time to re-evaluate—and, perhaps, improve—how you design and sell gift baskets.

### design to win

When was the last time you took a critical look at the baskets you design? As I hear more florists complain about competition from grocery stores, I wonder how they differentiate their baskets from those of the supermarkets.

I see shops that create simple pyramids of fruit with green paper between the pieces, shrink-wrap the finished products and attach bows. OK, it works, but how exciting is it? Here’s a thought: Focus on fruit baskets more as “designed” items and less as bulk goods. In other words, anyone can go to the store, buy four pounds of fruit and stack it in a basket. A florist, however, can add creative flair.

Try using fewer pieces of fruit and arranging them by color and size or even nested in the basket. Worry less about the weight and more about mak-

ing the recipient say “Wow!” When using a basket with a handle, snip a long piece of ivy from a hanging plant in the store, put the stem in a water tube and nestle the tube inside the basket at the base of one side of the handle. Wind the ivy around the handle until you reach the other side, and tuck the end into the weave of the basket. Now you have added a florist’s design touch that your customers probably won’t get at a grocery store.

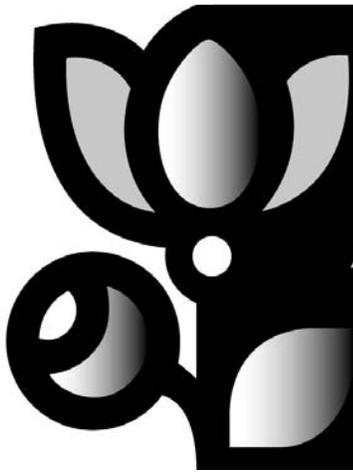
While you are thinking about baskets on a basic level, when was the last time you evaluated and/or raised your prices? Some chronic complaints are, “I’m barely making any money filling incoming basket orders,” and “I have to send someone out to shop for a \$35 basket, and we are so busy today.” You need to charge enough to cover your costs and make a healthy profit. Update your price lists now, before the holiday season starts.

### sell with confidence

Now let’s talk about how you sell baskets. Does your staff revert to prices and, even worse, automatically start at the minimum price?

First, here’s some phrasing to help make taking an out-of-town order easier. What customers frequently hear are frightening statements like this: “Oh, you want to send the basket out of town? Well, I’m not really sure what another florist will have since it proba-

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 128)



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## success strategies

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 42)

bly won't be the same as ours. And since it's going to a big city, you're probably gonna have to spend more."

If you've been reading my column all year, you know that I cringe whenever I hear that type of "apology sale" being made. Simply put, any florist in the country is going to do what you do: fill the basket, to budget, with fruit and gourmet items in stock or shop for the best ones. So put a positive twist on the scenario and tell your customers, "We'll work closely with the flower shop in that town. Just like us, they'll use their best fresh fruit and gourmet foods to create a wonderful basket for you." Just a little spin on the same idea makes all the difference!

Second, how do you determine how much customers should spend? If you sell in the old-fashioned way, saying, "Our baskets start at ...," you open yourself to a barrage of questions including, "What's in it?" and "How many pieces of this and that?"

As is always my doctrine, *sell by size*. Ask each customer, "How many people would you like this basket to serve?" Whoa! You just put that customer on a totally different path, forcing him now to think about how many people are going to share this basket. He probably is going to spend more because he knows he needs to, not because you have oversold him. (See the ad on Page 42 about my new SuperSales Program, which includes a "Sell Basket by Size" chart customized for your shop.)

Don't wait for the customer to ask what is going to be in the basket; instead, make a preemptive strike that will answer most questions. I say, "We will use a wonderful assortment of fresh fruit, cheese and crackers, jams and jellies, cookies and candies, presented in a handmade basket." That makes most customers say, "That sounds great!" Only when a customer tells me that he wants to send a basket to his kosher, diabetic, lactose-intoler-

ant grandmother with nut allergies do I tell him that I will have to do some checking on ingredients.

### check in with recipients

In the July column, I talked about making follow-up calls. They are important for basket sales, too. For example, if you shrink-wrap your

designs, the recipients will benefit from calls on the days after delivery reminding them to open and enjoy their baskets as soon as possible. Yes, that may sound like common sense, but I actually have heard recipients complaining that their unopened fruit baskets turned into a mold farm the following week.

Also, baskets can be more difficult to deliver than flowers. So, a quick follow-up call the next day may flush out a recipient who tells you that the basket looked like it had rolled around and come apart in the truck and then been put back together. A little quality control with your delivery drivers can go a long way.

Finally, you will sell more baskets if you remind your customers that you offer them. Design a beautiful fruit and gourmet basket using empty packages and faux fruit, and place it out on the counter with a sign that reads, "Ask about our Fruit and Gourmet Basket Collection." Good luck! ■

*Tim Huckabee, AIFSE, is president of Floral Strategies, an on-site training organization for retail florists based in New York, N.Y. For help with improving your customer service, contact him by phone at (800) 983-6184 or by e-mail at [contact@floralstrategies.com](mailto:contact@floralstrategies.com), or visit [www.floralstrategies.com](http://www.floralstrategies.com).*



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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.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 144)

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## success strategies

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 34)

**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. ■

*Tim Huckabee, AIFSE, is president of Floral Strategies, an on-site training organization for retail florists based in New York, N.Y. For help with improving your customer service, contact him by phone at (800) 983-6184 or by e-mail at [contact@floralstrategies.com](mailto:contact@floralstrategies.com), or visit [www.floralstrategies.com](http://www.floralstrategies.com).*



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BY TIM HUCKABEE, AIFSE

## breaking in new hires

A step-by-step plan for training new employees how to sell to and serve your customers.

I was thrown to the wolves. Metaphorically speaking, that's how I was trained at the flower shop where I used to work. I was told to sit, watch and listen to a coworker take orders. Once she felt I was "OK," I was let loose on customers—with no real formal training. Sadly, I was tremendously underprepared for many of the most basic questions and situations that arise daily in a flower shop. I'm sure I didn't instill much confidence in customers during those first few days I was on the phone.

Does this scenario sound familiar? As I have seen in my travels to shops large and small since 1997, it's more the rule than the exception. Expecting new hires to learn your business through osmosis is a scary way of tackling such an important process. This month I am going to give you a new perspective and outline for implementing a true customer-service and sales training program at your shop.

### Step 1: Review your materials.

What materials do you hand to your trainees? Just pointing out various lists posted on the walls is not enough. Create a workbook with printed prices for all your merchandise, computer codes, store policies, etc. The more information you can give to your new hires, the less likely you are to have mistakes because "No one ever told me that."

**Step 2: Set an agenda.** What does a new employee walk into on his or her first day? It's usually a hasty introduction to some of the key people and a "nickel" tour. Here's my advice: Really show him or her around, and explain your store policies and what is expected. Break this down into a simple list. It could read, for example, "Welcome to XYZ Flower Shop. We are happy to have you here, and we will spend the next [three] days teaching you all you need to know to start serving our customers. On Day One, you will .... On Day Two, you will ...."

### Step 3: Get the bigger picture.

Even if you are hiring someone who worked in another flower shop, give that person the most rounded training possible. Allocate time (even a few hours) for the new employee to work in the design department, watching how orders are filled, to help him or her make a visual correlation between size and price. Send the person out on at least one or two delivery runs. Some time devoted to helping process flowers is a great help, too. This "crash course" will quickly build the employee's product knowledge. What about processing orders—taking orders step by step from the printers to the design department? Don't forget to walk through your Web site, too, pointing out popular items and how to search for products.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 100)

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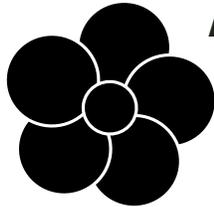
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## success strategies

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 32)

**Step 4: Play by the rules.** When I am training at a flower shop, I ask each employee: "If you are selling an arrangement to me on the phone and you start with a \$50 price, what's the next price you'd give me?" Sometimes in a group of six people, I get six different prices ranging from \$55 to \$85! That kind of response tells me that there is no real consistency at that store. Simply put, a customer could speak to a different staff member every time he or she calls and be given a totally different set of prices! My point here is to commit to paper all the critical prices and policies, eliminating as many gray areas as possible. Along with prices, you should outline your policies for handling complaints and replacements, handling inquiries about weddings or donations, sending copies of invoices, etc.

**Step 5: Discuss delivery.** The delivery aspect of your business can be daunting to new hires. Start by explaining where you deliver, what the cut-off times are and the fees. If you offer express delivery, go into detail about that extra service, as well: costs, time lines, protocol. Beyond understanding the logistics of delivery, someone new to the floral industry also needs to be educated about how long it takes to design an arrangement, how arrangements are sent out with other designs, and that a flower shop—contrary to popular belief—is not like a pizza parlor with a van always idling to immediately whisk away an order as soon as a customer hangs up. You also should address your wire-order procedures at this point: your fees, which service(s) you use, how the process works, how to take an incoming order, etc.

**Step 6: Hit the keys.** Your order-entry software should be "introduced" to new hires as an important part of your entire business, from taking orders to coordinating deliveries to creating

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invoices. Your responsibility is to make sure that new employees learn all the major functions of the system before they start taking orders. Otherwise, they will create problems with incomplete billing information, wrong product codes, etc. If you don't already have a training manual or DVD for your staff to view, *call the company that sold you the software!* Get your money's worth, and ask for all the training materials and tools they can send you. I recommend that you have new hires begin taking practice orders with a coworker acting like a customer and guiding them through which keys to press and fields to complete. Contact me regarding the order-entry flow charts I have created for all the major POS systems.

**Step 7: Take the test.** I hear owners and managers complain about new hires, often mentioning that they have been with the company for weeks and still are not doing what is expected. I wonder if they think the employees suddenly are going to "get it," or why they even get to that point—weeks of paying someone who they're not sure can cut it. Here's an easier alternative: Test new hires during training, and do not let them move to the next stage of training until they have passed. For example, role-play being a customer, and see how well they take orders on the system. Give a written quiz on your policies. When you let someone who is just mediocre join your team, you hurt customers and store morale.

Bottom line, the more guidance you can give your employees from the start, the better they will represent your business. I have seen how just a little training can go a long way to make new hires feel welcome, empowered and excited about working in our industry. ■

*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](mailto:contact@floralstrategies.com), or visit [www.floralstrategies.com](http://www.floralstrategies.com).*

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The good news is that there is a cure!

#### Symptoms include:

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- 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
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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

**If you send reminder cards that arrive late, your shop looks unorganized. Phone calls work because ... you can control exactly when you reach the customers.**

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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## success strategies

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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!"

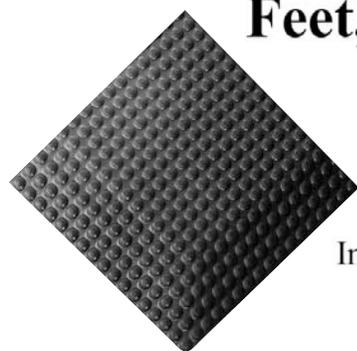
I was puzzled and asked, "Did you say anything, make any kind of stink about the rotten service, or did you just

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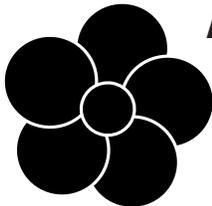
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reach people while the flowers are still fresh, for the reasons I mention below.

**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](mailto:contact@floralstrategies.com), or visit [www.floralstrategies.com](http://www.floralstrategies.com).*



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BY TIM HUCKABEE, AIFSE

## increasing average orders

Guilt-free techniques for getting customers to spend more money—while providing them more options.

I got quite a shock recently when I stopped in to see a well-established flower shop in southern Connecticut. While I was talking to the owner about my training program, he told me that he was a bit concerned because his average sale had already gone up more than \$7 since last year and that he was "worried about scaring customers away."

Whoa—worried about earning too much money? And we're talking about the "gold coast" of Connecticut—one of the wealthiest areas of the country! I doubt many CEOs worry about how much their profits have increased since last year. Can you imagine being concerned—bordering on feeling guilty—about the bigger sales your staff are making?

I know all the arguments about how florists are being driven out of business by price competitors; however, the reality is that customers will spend more if you give them the chance to do so. I prove that every

### it's a good thing

Let's start with the concept that an increased sale is a bad thing. In my experience, that type of thinking—which sometimes extends all the way to the owner—stems from the feeling endemic among many florists that they always have to negotiate on price and that if they say the slightest thing wrong, a customer will bolt out the door.

While there are many "entities" pushing \$24.99 (and worse) "deals" in front of consumers on the Web and in newspapers, magazines and other media, who is offering designs at the higher end? You have all the ingredients in your store to create \$100 or \$150 designs, so why not feature some in your coolers and offer them, when appropriate, to telephone customers?

Flower shop staffs (including the owners) often have a predetermined price threshold in their minds that they think customers won't cross. So, while I am in stores, I give the staff members some tough love and insist they place

**... customers will spend more if you give them  
the chance to do so.**

week while I am training in flower shops across the country.

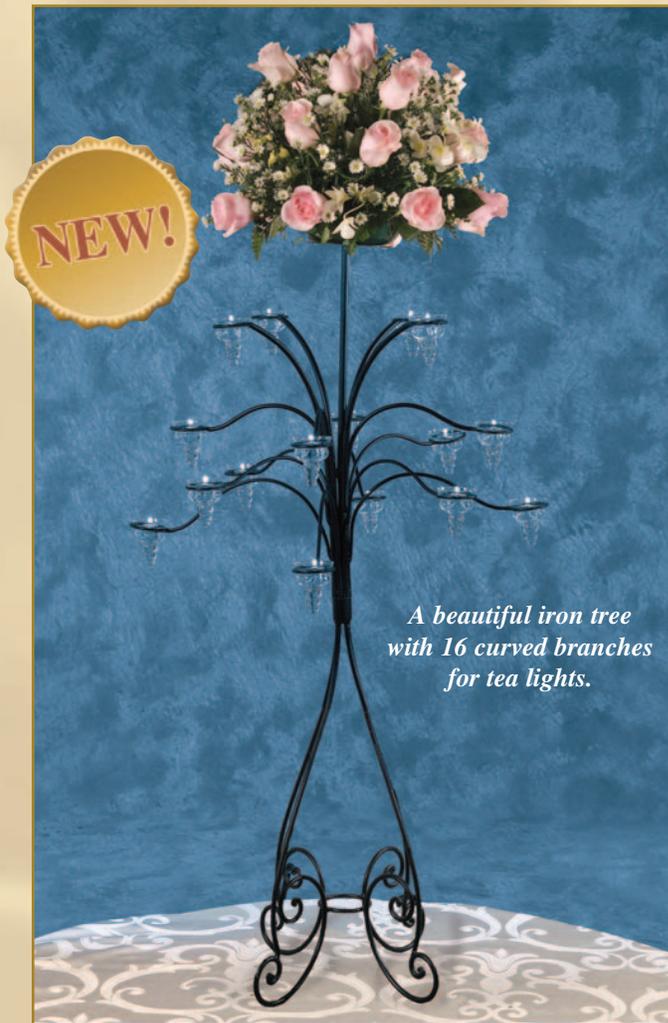
A second, more sinister element of the equation is that many florists believe the great myth that just because their staffs are friendly and polite that they are providing good customer service. I'll cover both issues this month.

some larger designs for sale. I also teach them how to sell upgraded roses (which I discussed in the January column; call or e-mail me for the sales template). I go on to take walk-in and phone orders with the staffs, having them hear me offer—not sell—these items to their customers. And the customers buy

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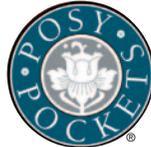
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them. Historically, my average sale is about \$15 higher than the store's when I spend a day there taking orders.

### it's about more than profit

Getting back to my point about increased sales: Why can't you raise your prices to keep up with costs? Or increase delivery fees to offset crazy gas prices? Every other company in the free world does this, so why not florists?

I hear from flower shop staffs, "Oh, she's a little old lady, and she's on a fixed income." Yeah, we'll she's not going to miss a meal because she bought flowers. Trust me!

That sounds harsh, but I am trying to emphasize that if what the lady sent for her daughter's birthday last year has gone up \$5, don't be afraid to tell her that—without apologizing. And what about suggesting a larger design, if appropriate? Maybe you offer a larger design because it's her daughter's 50th birthday (you know this because you have already taken the card message before talking about product). I bet most florists will agree that we have fewer complaints as budgets increase.

### prove the skeptics wrong

Offering higher-priced items can be easier said than done. I recently visited a large flower shop in New Mexico and was pleased to see some smart, modern cube and monochromatic designs in the cooler. The owner said he was happy with the new designs and that they were selling well. He went on to say, however, that it was still a struggle to get the designers to keep the new-style arrangements in the cooler and to get the salespeople to sell them because both groups had already psyched themselves into thinking customers would not buy them because they cost more.

On the contrary, when customers see these new and different arrangements, they buy them. Equally important, when these customers shop for special occasions that merit spending a bit more, they have more options.

Have your designers create a few arrangements valued at least \$25 more than what you offer now. Place them in the cooler, and educate your sales staff about them. Those designs will sell.

### friendly is nice, but ...

About that customer service myth I mentioned earlier: When I speak to florists about my program, I am sometimes told, "My staff is very friendly and helpful; we're known for that!"

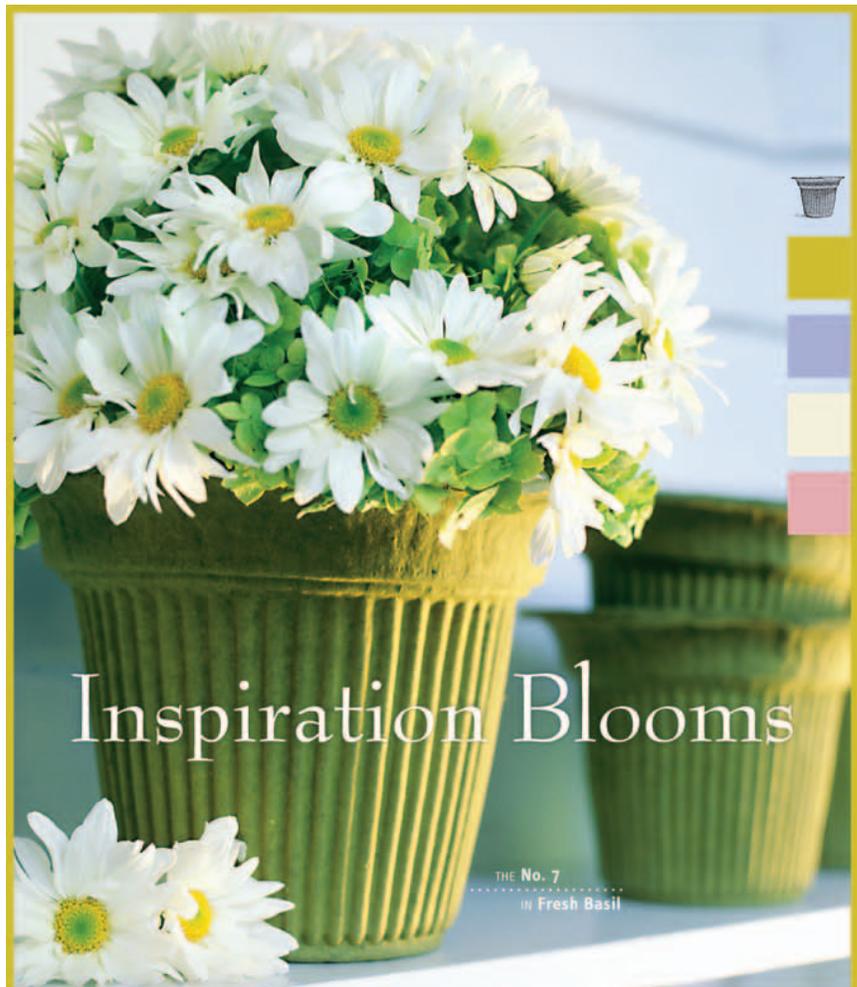
That's wonderful, but polite and friendly do not equal good customer service! By my definition, good customer service means being polite, friendly *and* really listening to customers (not being afraid to give them a realistic price for what they expect).

I've said in the past that order gatherers do a better job than many florists. Before you suggest I enter the witness protection program for making that statement, let me clarify. The people answering the phones at the average order gatherer do a better job of listening to the customers and offering upgrades—a birthday arrangement and a balloon, for example.

Most of the "friendly" people in flower shops handle calls by asking, "How much do you want to spend?" or saying, "Our arrangements start at ... ." That's not good service—that's just order taking, like at a fast-food joint!

To pull this all together, take a first step toward building sales and service simultaneously. Create higher-priced arrangements for your cooler, and give your staff bullet-pointed sales sheets on how to sell them (talk about the sizes, containers and color schemes). Instruct your staff to offer those designs for every special occasion: anniversary, milestone birthday, promotion, etc. Don't be afraid to sell and earn more! ■

*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](mailto:contact@floralstrategies.com), or visit [www.floralstrategies.com](http://www.floralstrategies.com).*



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## floral strategies

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BY TIM HUCKABEE

## maximizing your POS system

You've shelled out for a point-of-sale system. Now, are you using it to its full advantage?

Regardless of whether you buy a point-of-sale (POS) system from a wire service or an independent company, it is meant to be used as a shop management tool, not an expensive electronic order pad.

One of the scariest things I have seen frequently during the past 10 years is the shop that buys a POS system for all the right reasons but ends up using only a small portion of its capabilities. For example, allowing staff to take orders on paper and then enter them later, not paying attention to customers' shopping histories, still using paper slips to coordinate deliveries or not bothering to track replacements.

Why does this happen? The biggest culprit is the lack of extensive training from the very beginning in simple, easy-to-understand language. Your staff may not have been shown (or may never have understood) how to perform the critical functions that are the core reasons for which you bought the POS system.

needs to see and hear an expert actually using the system live in your store, taking orders and utilizing all of the program's features.

I have worked with every POS system on the market—big and small, wire-service-related and independent, Windows-based and text-driven. While I won't name names, I am going to discuss what is applicable to all of them. Feel free to contact me about the training tools I have created for your shop's specific system.

### no more excuses

At the start of a training session—once I have made it clear that we are going to cover service, sales and the computer—I get verbally pelted with, "I really don't know how to type, so I am not good at the system." I then ask the staff to hold up and wiggle their fingers; if I see five on every hand, I let them know they are in great shape and tell them to relax. I remind them that so much of what we type on orders is

**... insist that the company selling you the system send not just a technician to install the hardware but someone who can teach you how to use it.**

For those about to buy or change to a new POS system, insist that the company selling you the system send not just a technician to install the hardware but someone who can teach you how to use it. In other words, your staff

repetitive—hospital addresses, "Happy Birthday" on a card message, etc.

So, your first assignment this month is to make sure every staff member knows how to access the "shortcuts" in your system to type card

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## success strategies

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messages and addresses with just a few keystrokes instead of typing out entire words. With some systems, you can take it a step further and create shortcuts even for color schemes or design styles and use them on the product descriptions. Furthermore, visit [www.mavisbeacon.com](http://www.mavisbeacon.com) and get a

dynamic typing tutorial for those one-finger, hunt-and-peck typists on staff. They will be up to speed quickly (and left without an excuse not to use the system).

### access customer data

Consumers have grown to expect

automation as part of their shopping experiences. I hear frustration over the phone when I am working at a shop without a POS system when a customer, having to repeat critical information, asks, "I just sent flowers last month. Aren't I in your system?" A shop should use technology to make shopping even easier for the customer—and you may end up impressing him or her to boot!

Your next assignment is to remind staff (or show them for the first time) how to access a customer's history when taking an order. For example, as I ask for the recipient's name, I scan the list of that customer's prior orders. Seeing a match, I ask, "Does Ms. Jones still live at 944 Laurel Avenue?" I have taken many orders where customers have said that one of the main reasons they use that shop is that all their information is on file, and that makes shopping so effortless. Food for thought.

### create test orders

I commented earlier that I have seen a real lack of extensive training tools for use with most POS systems. And that's a problem, especially for new hires.

So, I have a plan for you. Go into your system and create an order laden with all the common problems that regularly frustrate you. Let me share examples from the pantheon of recurring mistakes: misspelled street names, improper card message punctuation, wrong delivery dates, poor product descriptions, and wrong account or billing information.

Add these items, along with your own personal gremlins, to the sample order you create. Once done, cancel or delete the order so it's not accidentally filled or delivered. Then put that order number on a lined sheet of paper, and ask your staff to pull up the order and locate the problems. Don't stop there; have your staff also tell you why those items are problems—like how a mis-

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 126)

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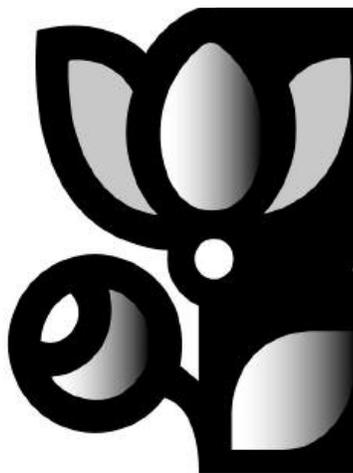
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spelled street name might prevent the order from zoning properly in your system, for example.

Once you create awareness of these problems, you should see them begin to diminish. Test your staff once a month with a new "problem order" you have created based on the most recent transgressions you have observed.

## track replacements

One of the questions I ask each training group at a store is how many replacements they do each month. Most people will think for a moment and then say that there are very few—maybe one or two. OK, great, but if each group of employees (usually three in a day) tells me the same thing, that indicates at least three to six monthly replacements.

Again, I see people revert to paper on this, scribbling the details on the original order and submitting that to the design department. Instead, use your system to do the math for you. Some programs will allow the creation of replacement orders while others can be adjusted to accept a unique product code for replacements. The important point is that at the end of the month, you can track that data. First, how much did those replacements cost you? Second, depending on your system, you can track the replacements by the reasons for the problems. In other words, if you see that five of your six replacements were for roses, that should alert you to a problem with your supplier or how they are being processed or delivered.

My strongest advice is to start looking at your POS system as a member of your team. Formally introduce your staff to this "team member," and make sure they know how to get the most help from this colleague, especially at Mother's Day! ■

*Tim Huckabee 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](mailto:contact@floralstrategies.com), or visit [www.floralstrategies.com](http://www.floralstrategies.com).*



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BY TIM HUCKABEE

## wire orders: the smart way

Tips for selling outgoing wire orders that will boost customers' confidence and ensure their satisfaction.

When I worked at a flower shop in New York City, I would frequently get comments like this from customers over the course of the summer: "I just want to thank you again for your help with my Mother's Day order. You sent it through the shop I always use, but they *never* sent anything for me like the arrangement you coordinated. I don't know what you did or said to make that happen, but good job!"

Though I'd like to lay claim to some sort of superhero powers, the reality is that I was (am) simply both a good listener and communicator. And those two factors are the core of taking good wire orders at Mother's Day and year-round.

### positive approaches

Mother's Day is a special holiday because so many of the orders you handle are sent to other shops across the country and don't get created in your store. Those orders can be far easier than most salespeople realize.

As is always my approach, I want to identify the problems and bad habits first, then give you a fresh perspective as well as new tools and approaches for dealing with Mother's Day wire orders.

Let's begin with how wire orders are sold to your customers. The standard opening salvo is a huge serving of negativity with a side dish of

uncertainty: "Well, we have a minimum of \$X for wire orders, and I will have to take a second choice since I am not really sure what that shop may or may not have."

Charming. Hearing that would make me want to enroll my mom in a book club, not send her flowers! Seriously, the customer just had such a bleak picture painted by the florist that he or she might feel that sending flowers is more a case of "potluck" rather than being confident that mom will receive something close to what was ordered.

Instead, start with an upbeat opening: "Of course I can have flowers delivered in [insert city]. I'll work closely with our favorite flower shop in that city."

If it happens to be a small town, the name of which you can barely pronounce, don't give the customer false expectations. Rather, truthfully offer that you'll "find the best shop in that town to handle the order."

The hundreds of stores I have visited either have a printed list of their preferred shops in most major urban markets or have those shops/towns flagged in their order-entry software. Barring that, I always pull out the directories and look for the shops with the highest minimum prices and/or more interesting names (i.e., European Flower Gallery versus Ted's Beer and Blossoms).

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 128)

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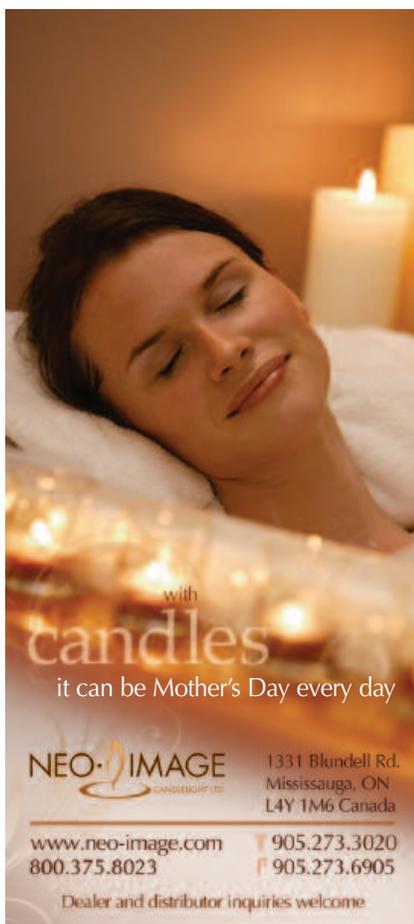
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## success strategies

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### handling with care

Listening to the customer is a vital part of this sale. Simply put, I hang on his or her every word and make sure to indicate those key points on the order so I can explain them to the filling shop. If the customer tells me that her mother has strong allergies, I will make a note specifying no fragrance. If she tells me that her grandmother is the president of the local garden club—or worse, is “artistic”—I will prod her a bit to find out if the recipient would appreciate a tight, more clustered style of design rather than a “light and fluffy” one. Those points will help the filling florist get that much closer to meeting the expectations of the customer.

The request for a “second choice” is by far the biggest source of problems. The usual approach, upon hearing that the customer wants to send a pink azalea, is to ask, “What’s your second choice in case they don’t have one?” Almost comically—from my perspective—I see orders that say “as close as possible.” Talk about planting the seeds of a potential problem! As close as possible how? To the type of plant? To the color of the plant? To the size?

While I have created a whole template on selling wire orders (call or e-mail me for further info), I do want to share a critical point: Don’t make the filling florist have to second-guess your order or spend time/money calling your shop or sending network messages. Just take a smarter second choice.

For example, in the case of the pink azalea, I would find out what the customer likes about the pink azalea, and that answer becomes the second choice. Here’s how I would phrase it with the customer: “I will request the pink azalea. On the outside chance that the shop does not have a pink azalea, or that their pink azaleas aren’t just perfect, shall we send another color azalea or perhaps another pink flowering plant?” By using

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## success strategies

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that approach, I accomplish the following goals with the customer:

- I let the customer know that I am paying close attention to her special order.
- I instill confidence in her by letting her know that I understand my products (that azaleas are available in other colors and that there are other pink plants besides azaleas).
- Most importantly, I let her know that I am watching out for her best interests. I am saying that I would rather have the filling florist understand that another type of pink flowering plant can be sent if the azalea is not pristine. After all, that order might be filled on a day or at a time when I'm not reachable, and the filling florist would have to decide whether to interpret the order literally or make a judgment call and substitute another plant or color.

Coming full circle to my experience with that thankful summertime customer, I was able to make her so happy because I really heard what she wanted and told the filling florist how to fill that order—design style, colors, types of foliage, vase, etc. The result likely is quite different from if the customer had called the florist on her own and said she wanted to "get something really nice."

So, this month's pearl of wisdom is to do some role playing with your staff—listening to customers, communicating important details and making realistic promises—all leading to a less stressful Mother's Day and properly filled outgoing wire orders year-round! ■

*Tim Huckabee 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](mailto:contact@floralstrategies.com), or visit [www.floralstrategies.com](http://www.floralstrategies.com).*

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## business / success strategies



BY TIM HUCKABEE

### you don't say

The language you use in your shop can affect your image. Here are several words and phrases to avoid.

I often hear that the retail flower business really is not about selling flowers but about selling feelings or emotions. It's our goal to make our customers feel "warm and fuzzy" about their purchases. While I agree with that concept, I think florists can go much further to impress customers.

The tool that you and your staff can use to achieve that goal is *professional language*. Whether you are selling a \$25 bouquet or booking a \$5,000 wedding, how you speak and the words you choose can make all the difference.

I am a big fan of using analogies to illustrate my points, and for this point, I have one about cars: Isn't it funny that if you buy a 2005 economy car from a dealer, it's referred to as "used," but if you choose a luxury brand 2005 model, you're given the privilege of purchasing a "pre-owned" vehicle? No matter what you call it, it's a car that someone else has previously owned and driven, but the language used by a savvy dealer can change your impression (and maybe help justify your purchase).

#### bad words/good words

I have developed a list of more than 40 critical words and phrases that florists can use to sound more polished and professional, and here are a few of my favorite bad terms and my suggestions for their replacements.

**1 Do/Create.** At the top of my list is that poor little two-letter word "do,"

which is beaten to death in flower shops every day. You *do* the laundry, but you *create* or *design* a flower arrangement. With just that one minor change, you will differentiate your shop from the competition. When you are booking weddings, it will be easier for a bride to spend hundreds of dollars on the special designs that you are going to *create* for her, rather than *do* for her.

#### 2 Filler flower/Accent flower.

Another term on my list is "filler," which, in my opinion, is what goes into meat loaf and hot dogs—not flower arrangements. Regardless of whether you are talking about baby's breath or Queen Anne's lace, telling customers you will finish their rose arrangements with "accent flowers" paints a much prettier picture. If you're asked "What's an accent flower?" you can say, "We'll add baby's breath [or waxflowers or *Limonium* or whatever] to complement the roses [or main flowers] in your design." Trust me, they'll get it.

**3 Nice/Beautiful.** "Nice" is a four-letter word. If you had a nickel for every time "nice" has been said in your store, you'd be reading this from your beachfront villa in the Caribbean. I advocate using "beautiful" as the new "nice." Here's my logic: Customer A calls and asks to have a \$25 bouquet ready for pickup. Customer B calls and orders a \$150 centerpiece for a dinner party she's having. Both A and

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Ask me at the end of their call, “Is that going to look *nice*?” My response to both is identical: “Of course, the flowers will be *beautiful*!”

“Beautiful” is so great because it doesn’t have to be tied to a price point; it makes every customer feel great about his or her purchase. When I do on-site training, I often am asked about other adjectives such as “glamorous,” “elegant” and so on. My answer is to definitely use them but do so cautiously. For example, I might refer to the \$150 centerpiece as “glamorous” but probably would not say that about the \$25 bouquet. The short answer: Stick to “beautiful”; it’s always appropriate, and customers are reassured by hearing it.

**4 Problem/Question.** You don’t have “problems” in your store any more. Here’s my example: “Mrs. Customer, may I have a number to reach you today in case I have any problems with your order?” Yikes! You already are planting a negative thought in her head even before she has hung up.

Play the ambiguity card instead, saying, “Mrs. Customer, may I have a number to reach you today in case I have a question about your order?” Yes, that question might be asking her for a new credit card because the first one was declined, but you are still keeping your conversation positive.

**5 Wire-service order verbiage.** When you go to the dry cleaner, do you expect to be told what chemicals and machines will be used on your sweater? No. You simply expect to be given a ticket and told when to collect your garment.

Now think what your staff is telling customers who want to send flowers out of town. “That’s a wire order, and we have a \$7.95 fee for that and a \$40 minimum. I can contact a florist in that town although I am not sure if they have that container.” Good grief. All she wants to do is send flowers to her aunt, not get a flow chart of the wire-out process.

Like the dry cleaner, I don’t want to confuse the customer with all the technical details and possible issues. Instead, I like to instill confidence in the customer by simply and truthfully saying, “We’ll work closely with our favorite flower shop in that city.” If the order is going to a small town, I modify my statement to, “We’ll find the best florist in that town for you.” Although I have not said that I am going to *call* the florist, I have implied that I am going to take the best order possible (proper budget, clear description and a second choice) and communicate it to that shop.

Remember, watch your language because it can affect your bottom line. For more samples of professional florists’ language, please contact me. ■

*Tim Huckabee 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](mailto:contact@floralstrategies.com), or visit [www.floralstrategies.com](http://www.floralstrategies.com).*

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BY TIM HUCKABEE

## finishing touches

Tips to help your staff increase “add-on” sales.

A request I receive frequently from flower shop owners is to train their staffs to sell more add-on items. Add-ons are an easy source of extra revenue—without having to attract additional customers—but there’s often some difficulty in getting all employees on board with selling them.

In my training sessions, I start by deconstructing the sales approaches that are currently being used by the sales staffs. The conversation always heats up when we get to selling add-ons. I hear a range of responses from “I just don’t like them, so I don’t sell them” to “We have a really crappy selection of balloons.”

Additionally, some salespeople are inconsistent (subtext, forgetful) about offering them to customers. And some designers and/or drivers are notorious

### sales: a numbers game

I have learned that selling add-ons, from balloons to stuffed animals, is simply a numbers game: The more often customers are offered the chance to purchase additional items, the more items are sold.

Recently I heard an interesting point about selling add-ons—sort of. Back when the major burger chains offered to let you “giganticize” your fries for just 39 cents more, they made a killing. Their secret was consistency. In other words, the edict came down from corporate that every cashier in every restaurant had to offer every customer the upgrade option. Though this line frequently was repeated with less than stellar enthusiasm, it was effective overall because it created awareness about an option for customers.

... selling add-ons is simply a numbers game: The more often customers are offered the chance to purchase additional items, the more items are sold.

for not attaching the items to the orders, leading the salespeople to avoid selling them for fear of customer reprisals.

Last, but not least, is the special “psychic” salesperson who tells me, “I can just tell when a customer will or won’t appreciate a balloon.” My response to that is always, “No one can truly determine that. If you really could, you wouldn’t be working here; you’d have your own TV show!”

### techniques that work

Often I am informed that a shop does a great job of selling add-ons at holidays but falters during the rest of the year. Why? Because the shop owner often makes it easier for the staff to sell those items during the hectic holidays through a variety of ways.

Read on for my 10 top ways to make selling add-ons an integral part of your sales process every day.

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**1. Start with a quality selection of balloons, stuffed animals, candy, etc.** If necessary, upgrade your offerings.

**2. Upgrade your language, too.** Instead of *asking* the tired question, “Do you want a balloon with that?” *say*, “As a ‘finishing touch,’ we can attach a Happy Birthday balloon to the flowers for just \$5!”

**3. Print a list of “trigger words” for your staff to follow.** Whenever I type Happy Birthday, Get Well Soon, Happy Anniversary, etc., on a card, I automatically offer an add-on (excuse me, “finishing touch”).

**4. Provide some additional verbal ammo to help in the sales process.** Statements like “A balloon will double the size of your gift” and “We can personalize the gift by arranging the flowers in a vase in her favorite color,” empower timid salespeople to sell better.

**5. Drill into your staff that taste is subjective, not objective.** A salesperson might not like stuffed animals and never send one on a personal order, but that should not prevent him or her from selling those items.

An add-on item doesn't have to be only a fraction of the cost of the arrangement. I frequently sell a \$25 vase to someone spending \$75 on an arrangement.

**6. Price all the items.** This may sound like a no-brainer, but I am forever searching for price points in a shop's computer or on the display stands. Clear pricing helps both the staff and the customers.

**7. Code all your add-on items in your system.** If all items are not coded, update the list. And while you are at it, print a “cheat sheet” to post by all the terminals.

**8. Offer incentives.** There are many options for sales incentives, such as offering a bonus to the salesperson who sells the most of a selected item during a specified period. I also have seen commissions paid for every add-on sale, even for containers or other items that you want to move out.

**9. Reinforce the process.** Keep your eyes and ears open to what your staff is doing, and let them know you are monitoring these extra sales. Print reports on your point-of-sale (POS) system, and hold the staff accountable.

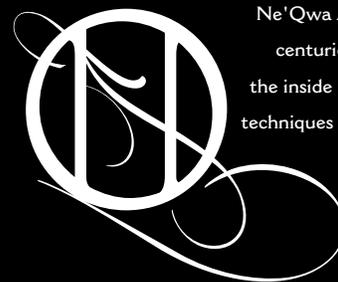
A few years ago, a flower shop owner in Virginia told me he was perplexed that one of his salespeople sold circles around the other two. I knew the problem immediately and confirmed it after sitting in the phone room for 30 minutes: The “star salesperson” simply offered some additional option (“finishing touch”) to nearly every customer. If one salesperson can sell add-ons successfully, all your salespeople can, too.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 120)

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## success strategies

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### **10. Finally, expand the range of items available for your staff to sell.**

I know that every flower shop is constantly striving to battle the competition, and product differentiation is one way to do that. Consider offering tickets to the multiplex (at a respectable markup). Gift certificates to local restaurants and day spas are excellent choices, too. What about a coupon book from a car wash? That's a gift nearly any man or woman, teen or grandparent would appreciate.

And don't get hung up on price points. There is no rule that says an add-on item has to be only a small fraction of the cost of the arrangement. I frequently sell a \$25 vase upgrade to someone spending \$75 on an arrangement. Why? Because I gave him or her the option to spend more. ■

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*Tim Huckabee 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](mailto:contact@floralstrategies.com), or visit [www.floralstrategies.com](http://www.floralstrategies.com).*

# Operation Local Sales

By Tim Huckabee

Hands On

## Tips for luring local customers to your shop



the minimum? If she's sending birthday flowers to her favorite aunt, a minimal fee isn't likely to send her storming out the front door.

### Spread the Word

You don't need billboards all over town to educate customers. A simple grass-roots approach can be equally effective. First, understand what you're up against.

Consumers are bombarded with inserts in credit card statements, e-mails, banner ads and radio pitches to use someone other than you, their local florist, for out-of-town orders.

The enticement is often convenience and a few dollars in savings — not necessarily better design or service.

Create a flier in-house or develop a postcard, showing images of your designs and telling customers you can help send flowers anywhere in the world through your own network of preferred florists. Let them know every order is backed by your guarantee. Consider offering a few bucks off customers' next outgoing order, but only if it is profitable for you and the receiving florist.

Hand out fliers and postcards in store, do a mailing, attach them to delivery orders — whatever it takes to get the word out and reclaim your outgoing wire business this year.

For a sample postcard template, e-mail [tim@floralstrategies.com](mailto:tim@floralstrategies.com) or call (800) 983-6184.

## Small Steps Secure Customers

Do customers give you all their business? Most don't realize the "mom and pop" florist around the corner can handle national and international floral orders. During my visits to shops around the country, I've often heard customers tentatively ask, "My aunt lives in Timbuktoo. Can you get flowers to her?" They're amazed to hear the answer is yes.

Two critical factors are at play in building and profiting from outgoing wire business: how you advertise the service, and how you sell it.

### Forget Fees

Don't let staff sabotage an outgoing order by starting with, "Yes, we can do that, but there will be an \$XX relay fee and the minimum price is \$XX." Did the customer ask for

**Tim Huckabee** is president of Floral Strategies, a one-on-one sales and customer service training company exclusively for florists. E-mail [tim@floralstrategies.com](mailto:tim@floralstrategies.com) or call (800) 983-6184.

## Counter Intuitive: Smart sales and service tactics

By Tim Huckabee



### Sales Speak

Everyday at the shop means opportunities for upselling, but during the holidays, those opportunities increase tenfold. Make sure you're primed and ready to maximize the sales potential of every customer. Did you know that you already have the most powerful tool to do so? Your voice! It's not only what you say, but also how you say it that influences your sales-counter success.

### Don't Ask

I often hear staff present price as a question, "That's going to be \$50, is that OK?" or "That'll be \$78.99 with delivery, is that OK?" Ouch! I don't think I've ever had a Macy's salesperson ring me up and ask, "If that's OK?" The price is a statement, not a question — otherwise you're subtly telling a customer she can negotiate the cost of an item.

When training flower-shop employees, I hold up a piece of paper, point to someone in the group and ask her name. I show trainees (by drawing) that the name — "Sally Jo Salesperson" — registers as three flat lines, followed by a period because it's a fact that it's her name.

When I repeat her name while raising my voice — turning it into a question — I ask the group if they'd believe that was her name if she was just introducing herself to them. I joke that if I only heard "Sally Jo Salesperson?" I'd wonder if she were in the witness protection program — since she asked her name instead of stating it! This is a good visual sales exercise to demonstrate to staff during your next meeting/training session.

### Powerful Phrases

In addition to using your voice as a tool, two powerful phrases can enhance your sales presentation: "I'd recommend choosing" or "I'd suggest spending \$XX." For example, if a customer orders flowers for her parents' 30th wedding anniversary, the salesperson might say, "Wow, 30 years — that's great! I'd suggest sending our larger arrangement, perfect for the kitchen or dining room table, for \$XX."

When you use these low-key, non-threatening lines, you position yourself as the educated expert, offering the appropriate item and price! The customer follows your lead — and if you sound confident and sure, the sales will be quicker and bigger — I know from 11 years of experience!

**The Bottom Line:** prepare your staff for the holiday rush by demonstrating that when they set the tone, customers will respond positively!

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## Counter Intuitive: Smart sales and service tactics

By Tim Huckabee



You're fired...

### 2. Make it Official

Prepare guidelines and review them with your staff. Include instructions for appropriate employee reaction to inappropriate customer behavior. Explain how an incident should be documented and to whose attention it should be brought.

### 3. Take Action

If it is impossible to deal with a customer reasonably, send a letter remedying the situation. A letter is more effective than confronting the customer in person or via the phone if you're dealing with an irrational person who argues when confronted. Your letter should say something to the effect: "Mrs. Jones, it has been brought to my attention that you've repeatedly berated my employees, using profanity, when requesting a replacement order four consecutive times. I have reviewed all the orders and know that my experienced sales staff did its best to find out exactly what you were expecting and took detailed notes for the designers. Unfortunately, we can't seem to meet your needs. We pride ourselves on giving wonderful service and beautiful design but, in light of this situation, I suggest you work with another flower shop in the future. Thank you."

**The Bottom Line:** If the situation is dire, let the abusive customer go. You'll save money in the long run and improve store morale.

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## Let Abusers Loose

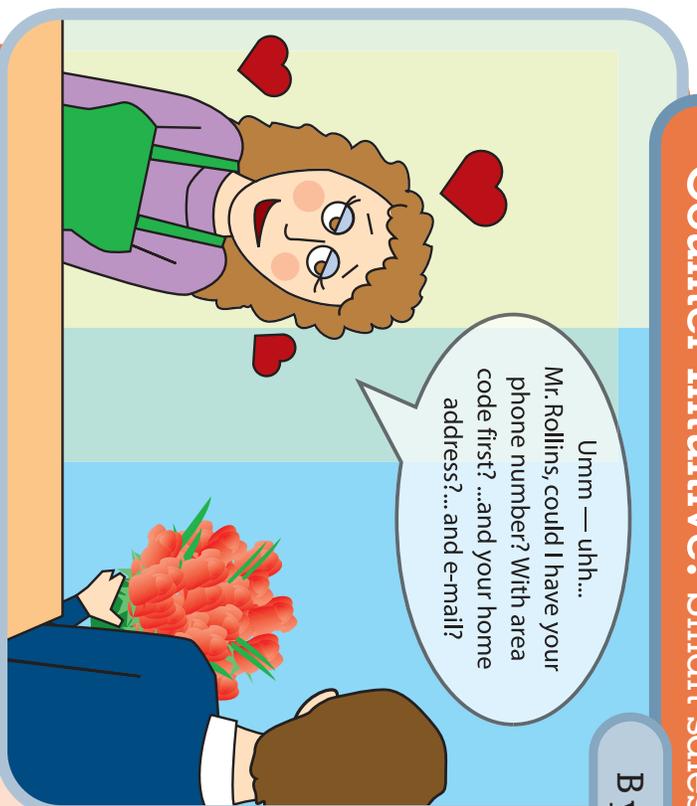
If a customer behaves inappropriately, using abusive language, threatening employees or consistently demanding order replacements on a regular basis, it may be time to fire that customer. Keep in mind, you should only do this in extreme situations — if a customer disrupts your shop or offends employees at least three consecutive times. During my five years at a New York florist, the owner only fired a customer twice, but in that rare situation, it's helpful to know how to handle it professionally.

### 1. Set the Criteria

I see many working environments in the shops I visit, from prim and proper to near locker-room familiarity. Decide what language and actions are unacceptable from customers. Set guidelines to guard against things such as profanity, shouting/yelling or verbal abuse.

## Counter Intuitive: Smart sales and service tactics

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Have they ever been given a chart of the accepted postal abbreviations, such as St. for Street and Rd. for road, so they are taking accurate information? Help them help you. Make sure employees understand that you actively reach out to customers via direct mail — or plan to do so soon.

### Train your staff

There is a huge difference between, “Can I have your address?” and, “Finally sir/madam, where is your credit card billed?” Teach your staff to sound confident, and customers won’t hesitate to give their information. If they do, simply explain, “It’s our company policy — and our bank requires it.” Capture e-mail addresses by asking, “Do you have an e-mail address you’d like to share so we can inform you about holiday specials?” If needed, I volunteer that “Ours is a closed system, and we do not sell our names to anyone.”

### Track the results

Run a report to scan orders, checking for addresses. Go back to employees still not getting customers’ info and re-emphasize why it’s important. Let them know you’re monitoring them.

**Next month we’ll talk about how to put customer contact information to work to help you earn more.**

## Capture Customers’ Vitals

So many shops I visit miss golden marketing opportunities because employees don’t get new customers’ contact information, whether it’s out of laziness, forgetfulness or shyness. Customers are used to sharing their name, address, phone number and e-mail address when they shop at the mall, on the phone or online, so why not at your store?

If you and your employees remember to ask all new customers for their vitals — with confidence — your customer list and marketing opportunities will grow significantly. Here are some hints to help.

### Educate your staff

Does your staff know your system doesn’t keep a customer’s profile without an address, phone number, etc.?

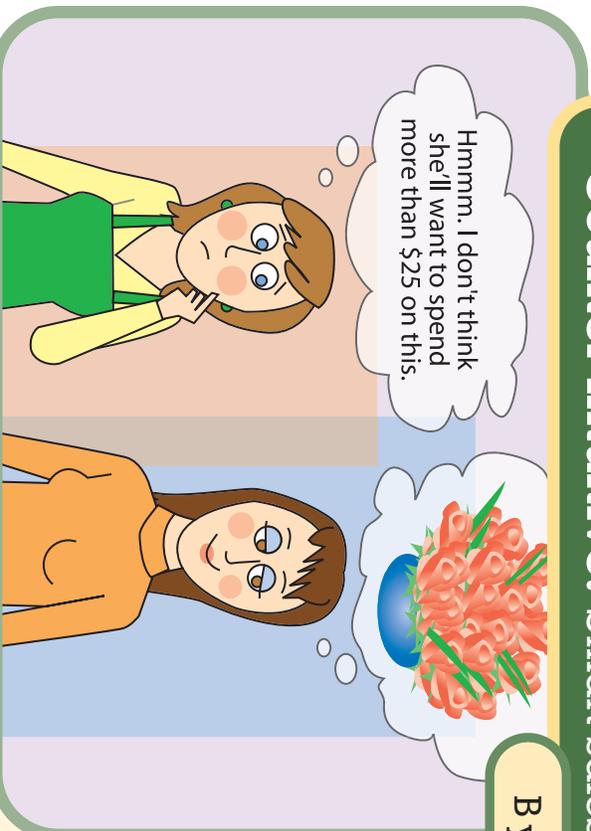
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## Counter Intuitive: Smart sales and service tactics

By Tim Huckabee



### Boost Your Average Buy

#### Problem: Average Sale Decreasing

Your newest salesperson is uncomfortable suggesting price to customers. She says she doesn't want to offend or embarrass a customer by suggesting something too high. The last time she suggested a \$50 arrangement — which she felt was appropriate for the occasion — the customer snapped, “Do I look like I’m made of money?” Consequently, she has retreated back to asking, “What would you like to spend?” and the average sale at the shop is trending downward (her predecessor was a successful up-seller). One customer, unhappy with the size of the arrangement, even commented, “If I had been told that I needed to spend more money, I would have.”

#### Solution: Paint a Picture of the Product

Re-train your staff not to sell from their own pockets —

based on what they think is affordable — but instead to provide options to the customer and paint a visual picture of each option. Here are references that customers will appreciate and your staff should feel comfortable using (the prices indicated are national averages; you’ll need to adjust them for your store):

- **A small arrangement** is perfect for a desk or bedside table. It’s priced between \$35 and \$50.
- **A medium arrangement** is perfect for a coffee table. It’s priced between \$50 and \$65.

- **A large arrangement** is perfect for a dining room or kitchen table — our most impressive design. It’s priced between \$65 and \$80.

*If the customer does not commit to a price, you need to do two things:*

- **Ask permission.** “Can I work with \$\$ (the highest price in the range) . . . ”
- **Justify.** “. . . so I can add more flowers for a fuller look!”

**The Bottom Line:** Paint a picture and your customers will be more satisfied — and may even spend more. Contact me for a color copy of my Sell by Color sales chart.

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## Counter Intuitive: Smart sales and service tactics

By Tim Huckabee



### Ward Off Discount Diggers

#### The SCENARIO:

A customer comes in demanding a discount because she wasn't satisfied with an order she placed three months ago. Clearly, this is a case of return-policy abuse. How will you deal with the situation without making the customer more upset or losing profit on her purchase?

#### The REALITY:

I am always asked in my sales training at flower shops, "Why do we let customers get away with these things?" My answer is simple: because you let them! Successful retail stores (small or large) have a set return policy. Why don't you?

#### Educate the staff

Walk around your store and ask employees what the store return policy is. The various (and maybe contradictory) answers may surprise you. At your next store meeting,

review policies and procedures with the entire sales staff. If every salesperson gives a consistent answer, customers will get the message. Also, post your policy in plain sight, at registers and other heavy-traffic areas.

#### Educate the customer

The old adage is true: there is always an exception to the rule, however, that decision should be left to the discretion of the owner or manager, not the rank and file. If a customer is making an unreasonable request, I always default to the policy, explaining it as written law: "Mrs. Customer, I'm sorry you didn't like the flowers you sent your daughter three months ago, HOWEVER, our policy (point to the sign) clearly states that refunds or replacements are happily given within 24 hours of delivery (or whatever your policy is)!"

#### Reason with the customer

Whenever customers attempt to return or complain about a (perishable) item weeks or months later, I tell them, "Mrs. Customer, I am sorry the flowers did not last as long as you wanted, HOWEVER, if you had called us the following day, I would have replaced them for you. Also, we could have seen the flowers to understand if there was a problem with the shipment from the wholesaler or some other issue."

**Bottom line:** Run your flower shop like the high-end retail business that it is!

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## Counter Intuitive: Smart sales and service tactics

By Tim Huckabee



### Capitalize on Second Chances

#### The SCENARIO:

While placing an order, the customer says that she was unhappy with the last arrangement she sent.

#### The GUT REACTION:

Many salespeople become either defensive or overly apologetic when they hear this statement. Neither is good. It's crucial to deal with the facts, and not the emotions, as you strive to give better customer service.

#### The SMARTER RESPONSE:

##### Step One — Set the tone

Tell the customer you're sorry she was disappointed and immediately ask for either an order number or the recipient or sender's last name. This way, you can acknowledge the problem but in the same breath start to seek out the details that will help you deal with the situation properly.

Reassure her that you're going to give extra special attention to the order she is placing today.

##### Step Two — Review the "Problem" Order

Confirm the details with the customer (making sure that she got the correct order in the first place.) For example, "According to the computer, we sent one of our medium-sized vase arrangements in spring colors to your sister last Wednesday — is that what you saw?" This simple approach makes it easy to identify the problem. The customer will come back and tell you exactly what disappointed her. For example, "But no one told me it would only be a medium, the 'girl' said it would be a 'nice size'" or, "It was filled with all purple and blue flowers, those are not what I call spring colors."

##### Step Three — Charm her

Sound professional — and earn her respect — by offering to deal with the problem pragmatically. For example, "I'm sorry that you didn't like the deeper colors we sent last time. Let's talk about the specific colors you'd like us to use on today's order." However, maybe there was another type of problem — the flowers died quickly, the design was created in the wrong container, etc. In those situations you should offer some compensation towards today's order. Each shop has its own policy and philosophy for the amount that should be offered, but I feel at least free delivery or a 20 percent discount is reasonable.

Every complaint is different. If you view handling them as a fact-finding mission and react to just the facts, you'll find customers tend to change their tone rather quickly.

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## Counter Intuitive: Smart sales and service tactics

By Tim Huckabee



"We have something for \$75. It's kind of big, you know...about yea-high."

### Sympathetic Selling

At almost every shop I visit, complaints about funeral flowers are an issue. The problem: Most employees sell by price, without properly describing a customer's options. Customers don't know how price translates into the size and overall look of an arrangement, so many are disappointed upon seeing the arrangement in the funeral home. To minimize complaints, be sure your employees know how to thoroughly describe funeral flowers, including sizes according to price points.

As I mentioned last month, asking for the card message before the product gives insight to the sender and recipient relationship. With funeral flowers, this approach helps you find out how many people are sending the arrangement and what the appropriate size should be.

The following is a list of descriptions for the funeral designs that I use in my on-site training. These are general prices and sizes that should be customized for your shop. If you'd like a copy of this template to customize accordingly, e-mail me at [tim@floralstrategies.com](mailto:tim@floralstrategies.com).

**Traditional (mache container):** This is our classic design, a one-sided, fan-shaped display of our best garden flowers. **Starting size** is approximately three feet tall and priced \$50 to \$75.

**Medium size** is a more impressive, fuller design, close to four feet tall and priced \$75 to \$100.

**Large size** is a truly elegant design, presented on a three-foot stand, and priced \$100 to at least \$150.

**Standing Spray** is a beautiful, one-sided display of garden flowers presented on an easel.

**The Basic** design, created with lovely flowers, is approximately two feet wide and three feet tall. It's priced \$100 to \$150.

**The Premium** version is designed on a four-foot easel and includes an even larger assortment of upscale flowers. It's priced \$150 to \$200.

**The Deluxe** version, presented on a five-foot easel, really makes a statement. It's priced \$200 to at least \$300.

**Fireside Basket** is a handmade basket that is open on both ends and overflowing with garden flowers.

**The Basic** design is presented in a 16-inch wide basket and priced \$75 to \$100.

**The Premium** version, designed in an 18-inch wide basket, includes roses and lilies. It's priced \$100 to \$150.

**The Deluxe** version, presented in a 20-inch wide basket, includes even more roses, lilies and other upscale flowers. The price is \$150 to \$200.

**Remind customers:** "We can personalize any design with a sash ribbon for an additional \$5." Suggest the appropriate size and price and immediately see your sympathy sales increase and complaints decrease.

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### Card Smarts

**Create a conversational transition from the recipient information to the card message.** Use the recipient's name as part of a leading question: "And what would you like to tell (Jennifer / Bill / Dr. Jones) on the card message?"

**Listen for cues to upsell.** Sentiments of Congratulations, Happy Birthday or Happy Anniversary indicate a special event and should be budgeted accordingly. If the customer signs the card with 10 names, 10 people may be splitting the cost. Make sure the arrangement has enough oomph to speak for a large group. By getting the card message before taking the order, you avoid the awkward question, "What occasion is this for?"

**Be prepared to make suggestions based upon the message.** Don't ask, "What do you want to send?" Instead, try, "Would you like a suggestion for your sister's birthday?" Then describe the lovely design you'll create just for her. Budget it at least \$15 above your average sale.

It all comes down to listening. Listen to your customer's tone of voice and what he or she is telling the recipient on the card. Pay attention, practice and see immediate profits.

### Play Your Cards Right

When do you ask your customer for the card message — before or after you discuss product? Waiting until after could cost you hundreds of dollars. Think how often you've sold a \$50 arrangement only to have the customer then give you a \$100 message.

I visit shops weekly that use order entry software from major and independent suppliers. Some automatically prompt for the card message before the product and others can be modified to do so. If you take orders on paper, you're in control of the flow of information. **The challenge:** Talk about the card's message before the flowers. Listen to your customer and you will see an immediate increase in your average order.

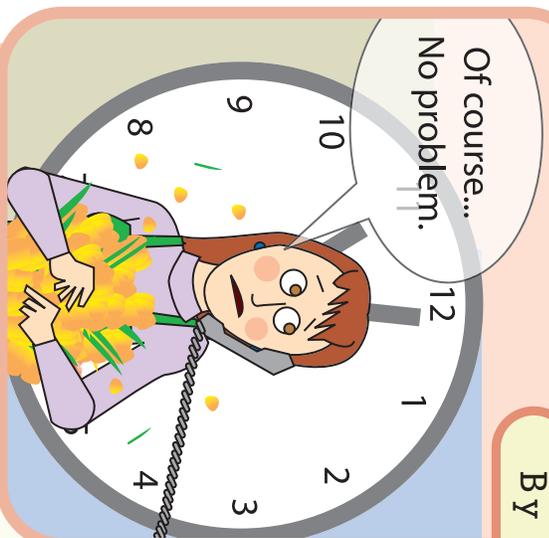
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## Counter Intuitive: Smart sales and service tactics

By Tim Huckabee



### The SCENARIO:

A customer calls at 11 a.m. and says, “I need flowers delivered by noon!” Many customers think florists are like pizzerias — with a van always idling, ready to whisk an order on its way. Here’s how to respond.

Upon hearing that there will be an extra charge for rush delivery some customers may suddenly no longer need that order delivered right away. Don’t be surprised to hear, “Oh, just as long as she gets the flowers by the end of the day.”

### Here are questions you may encounter:

#### “Why do I have to pay extra?”

The Express Delivery charge enables us to give your order priority treatment — so we can design and deliver your flowers within a short time.

#### “You never did this before! Why do I have to pay now?”

This modest fee enables us to maintain the high level of service that you expect from (Flower Shop name).

#### “The flowers are going just down the street. Why do I have to pay extra?”

Our vehicles are always on the road making deliveries. The Express Delivery fee covers the costs of scheduling a van just for your flowers.

#### The bottom line: Don’t be afraid to offer — and charge for — extra service!

\* This is just a guideline. You will need to adjust the time and price parameters for your store.

### The KNEE-JERK RESPONSE:

1. “I’m sorry sir, we just can’t get flowers there that quickly.”
- You may lose the sale because you told the customer that you can’t accommodate him.
2. “I will try my best.”
- All the customer remembers is you said you’d “try your best.” This answer is vague, sets the stage for potential problems and lessens your chances for repeat business.

### The SMART RESPONSE:

“Yes, I can deliver your flowers by noon with our Express Delivery Service for an additional \$10!\*

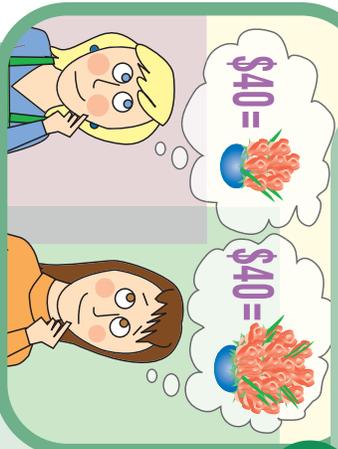
If you keep your voice **upbeat and confident**, the customer is more likely to pay to get the service he wants. Sound apologetic, and he’ll likely decline because he’ll sense he’s being overcharged.

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## Counter Intuitive: Smart sales and service tactics

By Tim Huckabee



### The SCENARIO:

A customer calls and says, “I was very disappointed by the flowers — they were much smaller than I expected.”

First, acknowledge and address your customer’s disappointment/anger. Don’t be defensive, be compassionate: “I’m sorry that you weren’t pleased. Let me locate your order and we’ll take care of this.” Depending on the situation, you may need to replace the order or issue a refund. But the bigger issue is knowing how to avoid similar unfulfilled expectations in the future.

### The PSYCHOLOGY:

The customer has an idea of how the flowers should look, specifically, in regards to size and visual impact. The two key factors to address are:

Are the customer’s expectations reasonable, considering the budget she has given?

What adjectives are being used by both the customer *and* salesperson to describe the arrangement?

### The SMART RESPONSE:

**1. Suggest a reasonable budget.** When asked why they took an under-budgeted order, salespeople sheepishly tell me, “Well, that’s what the customer said she wanted to spend!”

If you walked into a car dealership, chose a standard model and then told the salesperson that you want the upgraded engine and premium stereo, you’d expect the response to be something like, “Of course we can add those features for \$XX.” Why are we afraid to say that to our customers?

When a customer gives you a price range you know is out of sync with her expectations (and sure to cause a problem order), you must confidently tell her, “We would love to create that design for you. However, based on what you’ve described, I would suggest working within a budget of \$XX to \$XX so we can create exactly what you are expecting.” The customer will appreciate your feedback.

### Make sure you’re speaking the same language.

When the customer says *showy*, *impressive* and *special*, ask, “What exactly do you mean by showy?” The response will guide you to take down the description of the order and price it correctly. You could even show photos of arrangements you consider “showy” and “impressive” or refer to some online if it’s a telephone order.

The bottom line — don’t be afraid to tell your customer that she needs to spend more to get what she wants. That’s better customer service.

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## Counter Intuitive: Smart sales and service tactics

By Tim Huckabee

**“this fee, that fee  
and another fee.  
Fee, fee, fee fee”**

**fee fee  
fee fee  
fee fee**



### The SCENARIO:

A customer asks, “I want to send some flowers out of town — can you do that?” Many sales people change their demeanor when they hear mention of sending a wire order. I hear responses and comments such as: “Yes, but there is a \$XX service fee... Yes, but we have a minimum of \$XX... Yes, but it won’t look like our work... We’ll *try* to find someone in that area...”

### The PSYCHOLOGY:

The customer wants reassurance that you can help with a special order — he doesn’t want to hear about technical issues or a litany of fees. He decided to call his local florist for this order and should feel he made the correct choice!

### The SMARTER RESPONSE:

#### Step One — Build Confidence

Tell your customer, truthfully, “We have preferred/affili-

ate/associate florists all over the country. I can work with them to take great care of your order.”

#### Step Two — Make a Simple Sale

Generalities are the best, safest way to describe the design to your customer and the filling florist. “I will ask them to create a beautiful vase arrangement in bright spring colors...” or “Our florist will choose a beautiful green (or flowering plant) for you...”

#### Step Three — Price it Right

Don’t volunteer a minimum price unless a customer asks for it. I suggest using a simple pricing guide to cover arrangements and plants: SMALL (desk size) \$35 to \$50, MEDIUM (coffee-table size) \$50 to \$65, LARGE dining-room-table size) \$65 to \$80. Use whatever pricing structure fits your market; these are based on what I’ve seen in flowers shops of all sizes across the United States and Canada.)

Follow these steps and you’ll make easier, larger wire order sales and increase customer satisfaction.

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## Counter Intuitive: Smart sales and service tactics

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### The SCENARIO:

A customer says, “I don’t want to spend too much money BUT I want to get something nice!”

The standard response to this situation is to react to the roadblock the customer has placed in your path: I don’t want

to spend too much. Many sales people will automatically go into super-frugal mode and let the customer know what the starting point for an arrangement is or how bud vases are priced. But you need to listen closely to what your customer is expecting.

### The PSYCHOLOGY:

Did the customer ever say how much she wants to spend? Does anyone want to spend too much to get what he or she want or needs? No!

### The SMARTER RESPONSE:

Acknowledge what your customer has mentioned, “Yes, Ms. Customer, we can create a beautiful arrangement for you!” Then move directly to the delivery information and then the card message. If the card message says, “Happy 25th Anniversary, love all your children and grandchildren,” do you think your customer would be happy if a bud vase is sent? No, she would be upset and disappointed. Focus on the card message, make an appropriate suggestion and offer a price range based upon the occasion. “Ms. Customer, you may want to send one of our medium-sized spring vase arrangements, perfect for a coffee table, for this special anniversary. That design is priced between \$XXX and \$XXX.”

Since the customer did not volunteer a price, it’s your responsibility to suggest an appropriate price range. Once you make an educated recommendation, the customer will either choose the design and price you have described OR let you know exactly what she wants to spend (and you can then discuss items in that price range). Listen better and you can give smarter customer service!

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