



Don't let a weekend Valentine's Day turn your shop into a lonely heart's club. Steal these florists' ideas for making sure you get your fair share (and then some) of sales.

Saturday Night's All Right for Me

BY KATE F. PENN



ment, etc.," says Jim Phillip, of Phillip's Flowers in Westmont, Ill., who adds that the weekend holiday presents challenges for the expense side of the equation as well. "Florists will need to plan their purchases and labor very carefully."

We talked to several florists who, amidst the hustle of the holidays, had Valentine's Day in the not-too-far-back of their minds. Here's their game plan for getting the most out of the holiday.

Strong Weekday Sales

On a weekday Valentine's Day, giving customers bait to get their orders in early and, even better, take deliveries a day or two before the holiday helps spread out the labor and deliveries. But when the holiday is on a Saturday, it can be the difference between hitting your sales target and falling short. Florists are pulling every trick in the book to encourage customers to both order and send early.

Rich LoPresti of Lubin and Smalley Florists (www.lubinandsmalley.com) is considering two options for encouraging deliveries before the holiday: free delivery (which is "a chunk" of the order, at \$9 per delivery) or 10 percent off on Valentine office orders delivered on or before Thursday. But he's leaning toward the free delivery for his downtown Pittsburgh shop, "because these orders will be walked for the most part, which takes gas out of the equation."

Ken and Sandi Staudinger of Corona Rose Flowers & Gifts (www.coronaroseflowers.com) in Corona, Calif., are using the opportunity to drive store traffic in the summer months, by offering a coupon for a free dozen roses in July, August or September with each dozen rose order delivered Wednesday, Thursday or Friday for Valentine's Day.

Tim Feldis of Feldis Florists (www.feldis.com) in Garden City and Merrick on Long Island, N.Y., will offer discounts as an early-delivery incentive. Customers will save \$10 for Friday deliveries and \$20 for Thursday deliveries. Feldis will use every marketing tool at his disposal: reminder postcards to last year's customers, e-mails, in-store promotion, fliers, package stuffers and limited local advertising.

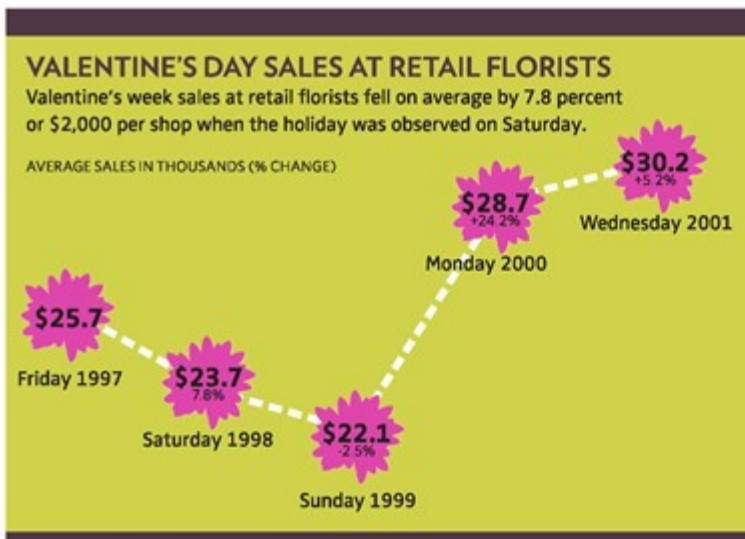


It doesn't take a trained statistician to see that a weekend Valentine's Day can have a negative impact on sales. A quick run of Valentine's Week sales figures between, say, 1996 and 2001 create a near-perfect "V," with Sunday as the low point and Wednesday as the high point. Based on retail florist sales figures between 1999, when the holiday was on a Sunday, and 2001, when it was on a Wednesday, the thrill of the office delivery (and perhaps the convenience of being at work for ordering purposes) is worth an additional \$8,000 in sales at the typical shop (see chart, p. 38).

It takes a fair amount of effort to close that gap, but plenty of florists say they're up to the task: 58 percent indicated on a recent SAF survey that they'll be somewhat or significantly more aggressive in their marketing efforts in light of the stiffer competition that comes with the weekend holiday.

"This year, there will not only be the impact of the calendar shift, but I expect there will be some dampening effect of the general economy, higher unemploy-

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SOURCE: Source: SAF Holiday Sales Surveys of Retail Florists, 1997-2001.

Tom Massingham suspects he'll do more business this year than if the holiday were on a weekday. The owner of Garrison Hill Florists doesn't base his prediction on starry-eyed romanticism, but on experience. The last time the holiday fell on the weekend, Garrison learned that while some customers of the Dover, N.H.-based shop want the flowers delivered on the actual holiday, others pine for the office delivery. "So, we anticipate that some customers will choose Friday while others choose Saturday," he says. "Voila! We aren't faced with the situation of everyone wanting delivery on Valentine's Day."

Of course, it'll take a force more powerful than cupid to battle this year's mood-killer: the economy. "I have no illusions about doing more than last year," he says. "Those years of double-digit increases are long gone ... if we even come close to last year we're happy."

Stand On Ceremony

For many brides, a Saturday Valentine's Day ensures an excess of lovey-dovey sentiment and anniversaries that will be hard for even the most scatterbrained husband to forget. For some florists, the weekend of weddings can offset the potential loss in sales.

Georgianne Vinicombe is one among several florists saying "I do" to more Valentine's weekend weddings than she otherwise would. The owner of Monday Morning Flowers & Balloons (www.mondaymorningflowers.com), with locations in Princeton, N.J., and Yardley, Pa., has two weddings scheduled for Valentine's Day and is hopeful that another one might come along. "We may get a last-minute one, it's been known to happen," she says. "I had an \$8,000 wedding come in three weeks before a wedding back in September and I was able to squeeze it in! I love those!"

Don't Go It Alone

Working with local businesses — a Valentine's Day standard for many florists — becomes that much more important on a Saturday one, when the competition is your most attractive partner. "Cross promotions are always a low-cost way to advertise and build goodwill with other businesses that continue to recommend us all year,"

says Helen Halloran of Concord Flower Shop (www.concordflowershop.net).

She's reviving several partnerships with local businesses sure to be in the romantic couple's path and developing a few new ones as well.

Her Concord, Mass., shop will again partner with a neighboring French café, providing a single red rose (with the shop's name attached of course) with take-out meals for two. This year, she's hoping to drive some of those take-out diners through her door before they head home (or to call in and order via phone), by offering a discount on Valentine's Day flowers at the time of purchase.

"This will hopefully get people in to order their flowers early," she says.

Halloran also is firming up plans to repeat a partnership with a nearby hair salon: Its gift packages for products and services include a small crystal vase from Concord Flower Shop, which the client brings to the shop to get filled. The salon pays for the vase and flowers at a discount and adds the cost to their gift package, she says.

She also may approach a few restaurants about adding a romantic centerpiece when a couple reserves a table.

"It can be hard to measure the direct results" she says. "but I am confident that the long term benefits are substantial."

Doug Fick at Broadway Floral (www.broadwayfloral.com) in Portland, Ore., also plays the field when it comes to business partnerships and wants to make sure everyone knows. The store's can't-miss counter cards and eye-catching postcards greet customers at two high-end salons, a wine store, a lingerie boutique, a locally owned coffee shop and several casual dining restaurants — all within two blocks of his flower shop. He's also partnering with several members of his local business association, including a five-star hotel and a day spa/salon. "This has got great potential," he says.

In-Store Mood-Makers

Who says sitting in front of the TV can't be romantic? Not Doug Fick.

The owner of Broadway Floral is capitalizing on the seemingly magnetic power of a TV screen to inspire shoppers to buy. A large, flat-panel screen will showcase Valentine's Day gifts, both flowers as well as personal care and apparel items.

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A second large-panel display is in the plans for the front window to stream to traffic waiting at the stoplight, he says. The 80-year-old shop is located on the boundary between an urban shopping district and two middle-class neighborhoods and benefits from sufficient pedestrian traffic.

He'll complement that with large, (24-inch by 36-inch), colorful posters advertising the shop's featured items, which he created on an Epson printer bought four years ago from a friend who worked for Macworld magazine. "This year we'll really put this to work," he says. In-store merchandising is a major focus at the shop, where one designer formerly was in charge of visual merchandising for the Neiman-Marcus stores in Houston, Dallas and Las Vegas.

Toomie Farris, AAF, AIFD, of McNamara/Enflora (www.mcnamara-florist.com), is likewise ramping up his in-store signage and banners and will also court the local media for some local coverage for the Fishers, Ind.-based shop.

"We usually are very good at media for Valentine's Day, getting at least two or three networks to do features on product and delivery," he says.

A few other ideas in the works for driving store traffic: a "Men's Shopping Night" early in the week and a free gift with any purchase made on Saturday.

LOVE NOTES

Wanna make your customers weak in the knees during the week — or at least get them to order early? Take a peek at the Valentine's Day messages florists are sending to spin the Saturday timing to their advantage.

- You don't just love her/him on Feb. 14.
- I couldn't wait to say Happy Valentine's!
- So her co-workers will see how thoughtful you are.
- Set the mood with Friday flowers.
- Deliver her from work with flowers.
- Friday Flowers: Passport to a Romantic Weekend
- Play Cubicle Cupid.

JUST HOW AGGRESSIVE WILL YOUR MARKETING BE?

Close to two-thirds of florists plan to intensify their marketing efforts in light of Valentine's Day falling on a Saturday.

SIGNIFICANTLY LESS AGGRESSIVE 3%

SOMEWHAT LESS AGGRESSIVE 6%

ABOUT THE SAME AS LAST YEAR 28%

SOMEWHAT MORE AGGRESSIVE 38%

SIGNIFICANTLY MORE AGGRESSIVE 20%

DON'T KNOW 6%

SOURCE: SAF online survey of retail florists, November 12 - 24, 2008. Based on 381 responses (response rate 10.2 percent)

He'll have express lanes for "standard" purchases and orders placed in advance, to ensure that the shop can handle what he hopes will be increased traffic.

Like Massingham, Farris sees the Saturday holiday as opening up more room for last-minute business. "We typically only do 20 percent of the delivery volume on the 13th, and we're hoping that's at least 40 percent," because of the heavier volume of office deliveries on Friday.

Targeted Promotions, More Advertising

More traditional marketing techniques, such as direct mail, e-mail marketing and, to a lesser extent, print advertising will be employed by the 58 percent of florists who indicated they'll be ramping up their promotional efforts for Valentine's Day this year.

Ship Shipman of Brenda's House of Flowers (www.brendashouseofflowers.com) in Woodstock, Ga., is going after the top customers among the 8,000 names in his "VIP" database, the loyalty card program that snagged him Floral Management's 2006 Marketer of the Year award. Using e-mail blasts and postcards, he's targeting higher frequency customers in his database

with an offer for a free bouquet of wrapped flowers with every dozen roses purchased.

Eric Shaw at Everyday Flowers in Tustin, Calif., (www.everydayflowers.net) sees his Web site and, more importantly, the floral offerings on it, as a critical component of his marketing strategy for Valentine's Day, regardless of the day of the week. He photographs his own arrangements, "so our customers see exactly what they are ordering ... and customers immediately notice that our Web site is different from (those that rely on photos provided by the wire services) and they are very excited." He has developed his Web offerings based on which types of arrangements sell best. "What we find amazing is that some of our simplest designs do well because of the color appeal of the arrangement," he says of the pleasant surprise that's always pleasant to the bottom line.

Given the economy and competition from national marketers, Shaw says florists should capitalize on their two main strengths: the quality of their designs and their customer service. "If every florist would just pretend that every order could be broadcast for everyone to see, they would see their business grow and not just survive," he says.

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Jetwrap II
Item# 604
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100 per case
Sleeve #603

Jetwrap Centerpiece
Item# 612
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100 per case

Jetwrap I Insert
Item# 614
Size: 8 1/4 x 16 1/4"
100 per case
Use with box #602

Jetwrap II Insert
Item# 615
Size: 9 1/2 x 16"
100 per case
Use with box #604

Jetwrap IIA
Item# 608
Size: 12 x 10 x 4"
100 per case
Sleeve #607

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Sleeves!!

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605C	Budvase - Clear	8 x 20 x 28
601	Frosted	12 x 23 x 28
601C	Clear	12 x 23 x 28
603	Frosted	14 x 28 x 32
603C	Clear	14 x 28 x 32
609	Rosevase - Frosted	12 x 23 x 36
609C	Rosevase - Clear	12 x 23 x 36
611C	Large Rosevase Clear	13 x 32 x 36
607	IIA - Frosted	20 x 36 x 36

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After an expensive TV ad campaign failed to deliver substantial results during the Christmas season, Italo Paris of Itai Florist in Toronto (www.itaiFlorist.com), is pulling the plug and harnessing the power of e-mail for Valentine's Day.

First, he'll send an e-mail blast to all clients telling them that the occasion is quickly approaching, "I remind them not to forget to make dinner reservations and buy flowers," he says of the soft-sell message. Three days later, another e-mail to that same list asks if they have made those reservations and ordered those flowers. A third and final e-mail blast will go to all customers — minus those that have ordered — telling them that it's not too late.

"We will not ignore the fact that it is on a Saturday," he says, but instead point out that "flowers make a perfect addition to a dinner reservation."

The shop also sends e-mails to last year's customers, detailing their order and encouraging them to place another. A similar message goes to customers who ordered as far back as 2004. His tip for ensuring e-mails get read: No graphics. "Short, simple messages work best for us," Paris says.

Another traffic driver will be hitting the streets just in time for Valentine's Day. The shop's five delivery vehicles will be covered in colorful full-wrap decals. "They will be the hottest vehicles in Toronto," Paris says.

Make It Last

Despite the fact that he's anticipating a 15 percent decline for Valentine's Day (5 percent due to the Saturday factor and the remainder due to the economy) Doug Fick says florists should be hopeful. "The one thing that is a fact," he says, "no matter what day of the week Valentine's Day falls on and no matter what the state of the economy is, men and women will still buy something for their significant other on that day, even if it's a just a single flower." Ultimately, his goal is to "charge a fair price, not gouge and convert that holiday customer to a regular buyer." ☺

Kate F. Penn is editor-in-chief of *Floral Management* and vice president of publishing and communications for the Society of American Florists. E-mail: kpenn@safnow.org.