What a Difference a Year Makes
A refreshed logo and interior infuse Butera the Florist with a healthy dose of confidence — and a double-digit sales increase. BY KATIE HENDRICK
It was a chilly night Dec. 2 in York, Pa. But inside Butera the Florist, where more than 150 customers and friends gathered for the Christmas open house, the staff’s exuberance provided plenty of warmth. Going into the holiday season, one of the busiest times of the year, 2011 had already exceeded expectations. Sales were up 21 percent from 2010.

Though surprised by the size of that increase, the shop’s owners, Vince Butera, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, and wife, Carolyn, knew their commitment to improvement would pay off. The deeply religious couple may attribute some of that bounty to faith, but they know better than to call it a fluke. It involved hundreds of hours of creative thinking and an unwavering resolve to better the shop’s image, inside and out, no matter the obstacles along the way.

The shop’s success fostered an atmosphere of joy, palpable to everyone at the open house. While mingling with guests as they nibbled Moroccan-style hors d’oeuvres and browsed “Christmas around the world” vignettes, Carolyn met the husband of a long-time customer. He told her he detected, “something different and fresh”: the shop looked chicer, the staff seemed cheerier. The owner of a local jewelry store, he wanted to replicate the makeover — both in appearance and attitude — at his business and had one big question for Carolyn: “How did you do it?”

A Year Less Merry

A little more than a year ago, the Buteras worried about the shop’s survival.

“It was a discouraging time,” Vince said of 2010. Everyday orders dipped only slightly, but revenue from weddings — the shop’s mainstay business — plummeted nearly $50,000 from the year before (down 28 percent). Overall business was down 16 percent. Financially strapped and mentally drained, the Buteras’ confidence waned. Their outlook: “hunker down to weather the storm,” Vince said.

They froze wages for the five-member staff. They minimized their holiday giftware purchases, forgoing the typical menagerie of plush toys, mugs, picture frames and garland for “just a few” permanent botanicals. When organizers of garden clubs or botanical shows asked Vince, usually a regular on the speakers circuit, to give a presentation, he declined, deeming the cost of traveling, setting up and leaving his business too great a burden.

The one thing they clung to was the shop’s reputation as a florist with exotic flowers. While they reduced their overall inventory, they kept the selection broad. “We’ve built a reputation of having the widest variety of the finest flowers in the area and refused to lower that standard,” Vince said. Long-standing relationships with three wholesalers who each delivered three to five times weekly helped keep prices low.

“Beyond that, they were “just holding our own, instead of thinking creatively,” Carolyn said. “Our thinking centered on what we couldn’t do because of cash flow, rather than on what we could do.”
Coming Out of Hiding

The “fear mindset” persisted nearly six months, Carolyn said, until a vacation in late July to the family’s summer house in Maine brought some perspective. Finally, the Buteras were able to stop worrying how they’d recoup the sales loss of the past and start envisioning the future. Their paradigm shifted from “What are we doing wrong?” to “What have we been doing right?” They reflected on the shop’s 30 years in business, a tenure not achieved by chance. They noticed that, even in a sales slump, people hadn’t stopped approaching them to compliment the shop’s artistry.

“I heard lots of statements like, ‘Oh, I was at so-and-so’s wedding or funeral and I just knew the flowers had to be Butera the Florist’s,” Carolyn said. Taking stock of the adulations, the couple realized they hadn’t capitalized on the most prominent and valuable aspects of the shop’s brand: its high-end style, custom designs and talent.

Afraid of hemorrhaging money through marketing, “we’d been hiding in a trench ... just waiting and hoping for sales to come to us,” Vince said. “We needed to do a better job communicating the brand we had built.”

First step: Carolyn, an on-again, off-again part-time employee — but con-

WHO AM I?

“A brand is about defining the uniqueness of who you are,” said Ryan Martin, founder of Infantree, a graphic design studio in Lancaster, Pa., who helped the Buteras do just that for their flower shop. Though the physical elements — the logo, the website and signage — are most visually prominent, “a brand is also the voice on the phone taking an order, the knowledge of the sales staff, the entire experience of shopping at your business,” he said.

Martin had the Buteras do a little soul searching, leading them through a series of questions. Here are a few to ask yourself.

■ Why does your business exist?
■ What are your core values?
■ What are you passionate about?
■ What words do you want people to associate with your business?
■ What is your envisioned future?
■ How do you qualify success?
■ What’s your promise to customers?
■ Who is your ideal client?
■ What does your target audience care about?
■ How do people find your business?
■ Who is your toughest competitor?

COMMUNICATING HIGH STYLE Graphic designer Ryan Martin had Vince Butera select a dozen photos from a collection of 200 that illustrated the look of Butera the Florist.
Dream Sessions

Vince and Carolyn Butera, the shop’s “co-planners and dreamers,” schedule weekly business lunches to ensure Butera the Florist keeps focused on the future.

Custom Designed

Butera the Florist traded its template website for one with high-resolution, professional photos and an emphasis on its talent and custom designs.

Just Who Do We Think We Are?

Most Butera the Florist regulars could readily identify an arrangement from the shop: always chic, innovative and vibrant. “But what about the people who didn’t shop here?” Vince wondered. The Buteras began evaluating Butera the Florist’s appearance the way a stranger searching online or driving past the shop might. What they saw was a tired, antiquated and stale business. “The visual impression…simply didn’t match our brand,” Butera said.

That simple exercise made clear a reality: to stay in business another three decades, they would need new customers—especially younger ones—and that would require a cleaner, updated, attention-getting look.

For the brand’s cosmetic overhaul, the Buteras hired family friend Ryan Martin, a late 20s-something who had recently co-founded a graphic design studio. They showed him their logo, a maroon and forest green drawing (by Vince’s sister) of three callas, next to the name, handwritten (by Carolyn) in a loose cursive font. They told him, “Nothing is sacred! You can scrap everything but the name.”

The son of former florists, Martin knew enough about the industry. But to develop the shop’s logo, he needed to have a thorough grasp of Butera the Florist’s mission. “Creative types, like florists, often have very grand ideas in their heads how they want their designs to look,” Martin said, “but when they try to communicate it, the message can be a bit abstract.” To move clients from the conceptual to the concrete, he asks them to identify specific phrases and images that express the brand.

Martin began by asking: Who is Butera the Florist? What were you in the past? Where might you be going in the future? What’s the experience of Butera the Florist? What does Butera the Florist look like? “Some were very easy to answer; some were very hard,” Vince said. Among their responses: “We’re...”
"They all looked impressive," Carolyn said, "but some just seemed more appropriate for, say, a fine chocolate company rather than our flower shop."

The Buteras asked Martin to revisit the calla, a flower Vince says "conveys high-end style," and had become key to their brand recognition. Martin modernized the calla — two computer-generated, lime-green silhouettes. A new font, atop the graphic, would reinforce the business’ contemporary, upscale brand.

**Tear Down that Template**

With a logo chosen, the Buteras shifted to another facet of the brand projecting the wrong image: the website. The template wire service site the shop had used for years clashed with their prized designers’ “improvisational artistry,” Vince said. Custom design is what they do — and what customers are willing to pay for. If the website looked like every other shop, it was detracting from the brand instead of enhancing it.

Martin set out to create a website that tells how Butera the Florist provides artistic pieces for any occasion. Zeroing in on their appreciation for texture and color, he replaced the stark white background with weathered, cracked patches of ecru and espresso with shading and stippling to give the site a Mediterranean look. It’s no coincidence that it has the same feel, at least virtually, as the shop’s painted, textured plaster walls.

Gone are the thumbnail images of the old site. Now visitors are treated to a series of artistic, high-resolution photos of Butera the Florist’s work, flower bunches in the cooler and the staff. Employee photos and biographies underscore the shop’s emphasis on individuality.

Clearly labeled tabs — About Butera, Products, Weddings — give a full sense of the shop’s range of services, style and products offered. Conspicuously absent, however, is a shopping cart. And the Buteras don’t miss it one bit. They know their customers want customized design and they’re banking on the prospect of attracting many more with that same desire. The shop’s phone number is placed prominently on every page. And the website paints a hard-to-refuse picture of what a Butera the Florist experience entails: “Our coolers

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**MANAGE LIKE A MAESTRO**

Vince Butera eschews a hierarchical structure at his shop, in favor of one that puts employees in charge of the area in which they excel, like ensembles in an orchestra. Leaders from academia to religious institutions to small businesses have implemented this orchestra principle to their success.

Find a few resources below:

“Lead like the great conductors,” a video presentation by renowned Israeli conductor Itay Talgam: [http://www.ted.com/talks/itay_talgam_lead_like_the_great_conductors.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/itay_talgam_lead_like_the_great_conductors.html)


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a floral artistry business. We’re very Mediterranean. We love texture. We love intrigue. We love to be innovative.”

Martin then amassed an array of clips from magazines, stock images, product images and personal photography to create a collage of 200 images. The images conveyed texture, color, light, patterns, places and architecture. The Buteras’ job: Remove those that did not fit the image of Butera the Florist.

Over a few hours, they whittled the collection to 100, then 75, then 50, to eventually about a dozen most closely representing the Butera the Florist brand. From that, Martin presented six logo concepts in multiple color schemes, about 30 options, all for the Buteras to review a few days later — none of which included a calla.
What a Difference a Year Makes

The tagline and key facet of the Butera brand, “Internationally Inspired. Locally Designed,” get prime placement as wall art at a key focal point in the refreshed shop’s interior space.

A Shop in Harmony

As myriad self-improvement shows have proved, inner confidence often follows exterior alterations. Vince could see his employees’ pride in the shop’s new vibrant look and decided to build on that by offering them more freedom and responsibility. His mantra had always been that his designers are “floral artists,” not “flower arrangers,” but he questioned whether his management style nurtured or inhibited that philosophy.

The Buteras swapped their dated and diminutive logo for a more vibrant, streamlined version. The tagline and key facet of the Butera brand, “Internationally Inspired. Locally Designed,” get prime placement as wall art at a key focal point in the refreshed shop’s interior space.

SLEEKER STYLE The Buteras swapped their dated and diminutive logo for a more vibrant, streamlined version.
What a Difference a Year Makes

Internationally inspired
Designers at Butera the Florist enjoy incorporating foreign elements into their work. At their holiday open house, they made “Christmas around the world” vignettes, including this African display.

During a trip to the symphony, Vince observed the dynamics of the orchestra. He saw how the conductor leads — not manages — his musicians and saw a parallel to his business. He had carefully selected competent and mature employees who deserved the trust to perform as their training and intuition dictated. “My role should be to keep them on tempo, not tell them what to do,” he said.

He shared his epiphany with Carolyn, who found several sources about using the orchestra as a leadership model, including YouTube videos by internationally renowned Israeli conductor Itay Talgam, and a blog titled, “Leader as Conductor: Orchestrating the Creative Genius Throughout the Organization.”

The tenets of this philosophy include recognizing that every member of an organization can contribute good ideas and harnessing this collective creativity by involving the group in the idea process. At Butera the Florist, this translates to assigning employees as “first chair violin” (the instrument that leads in an orchestra) to the particular area of business (“ensemble”) in which they excel.

The shop’s orchestra essentially breaks down into four ensembles: events and weddings, daily orders, displays and customer service, said Megan Chronister, a designer who’s first chair for the daily-orders ensemble. Everyone plays in every ensemble, but to different degrees.

“We are all able to do a little of everything — we can all help with customers, designs, displays, weddings. But this structure recognizes individuals’ strengths and uses them to their full potential,” Chronister said. “It’s a good way to get us to collaborate and to encourage each other.” Employees get “a sense of satisfaction,” because it empowers them to hone tasks they most enjoy and then share that passion with their peers. Working in ensembles also encourages employees to bounce ideas off each other and share their own sources of inspiration, be it a photo in a magazine or a display table at Anthropologie, she said. “It’s always rewarding to watch a concept improve as each person throws in his or her two cents,” she added.
The Buteras, too, form their own duet and schedule weekly business lunches as their planning sessions. Carolyn shares organizational insight acquired in her former role as human resources director for a financial company, leadership advice she finds online, as well as trends and best practices she picks up at SAF conventions and in publications, such as Floral Management.

“Our business lunches aren’t the same format every week,” she said, explaining that some, particularly those in the weeks before big events, such as the Open House, involve running through checklists. “But we like to talk big picture,” she said. “The tendency for many people is to focus on the urgent things right in front of us, not the important things.”

An Encore-Worthy Performance

2011’s astounding increase in sales bolstered Vince’s epiphany that, to triumph, you cannot hide. Besides making the shop more physically attractive to the public, the Buteras invested time in charitable and educational activities, flaunting the shop’s expertise and generosity.

They designed flowers for the York Symphony Gala and offered free flowers for a year as an auction item. They opened their home, an 1880 farmhouse, for a fundraiser to create scholarships for American Association of University Women in York, which had more than 500 visitors. And with the shop’s continued sales growth, they’ve begun donating 1 percent of wedding sales to Fields of Hope, an organization their son, Dan, founded to help Ethiopian women.

At the Pennsylvania Garden Show of York, Vince led six presentations, set up a display of wedding flowers, distributed 5,000 $5 gift cards and gave away about 1,000 stems of fresh flowers, “which generated a lot of awareness for our business and drew people into the store,” Vince said. He followed this with a presentation at the esteemed Philadelphia International Flower Show.

The pinnacle moment that proved Butera the Florist’s brand effectively communicated high-end style came in June, when executives from the ABC television program “Extreme Home Makeover,” upon the York Chamber of Commerce’s recommendation, asked if the shop would provide flowers to decorate a local house on reveal day. This put the shop in the national spotlight, drawing attention to its artistry and compassion for those in need.

Vince and Carolyn describe 2011 as “a year of blessings, with abundant opportunities to flourish.” Many of these opportunities — from wedding installations to design show programs — have been captured on film for a lifestyle television program titled “Butera’s Way,” to be released on a local cable station in early 2012. The Buteras’ hope: that it will nurture an appreciation for the beauty of flowers and the artistry of designers, and that it will inspire florists and small business owners everywhere to trumpet their strengths, no matter what.

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