In Bloom Florist moved two years ago to a renovated 1920s warehouse and former Coca-Cola bottling plant in downtown Orlando, Fla., a location that’s visible from the interstate but not known for high-volume foot traffic. Owner John Kobylinski knew he needed a way to get people in to fully appreciate the shop’s inviting, open space where customers can see designers working and its 1,000-square-foot retail area.

His solution? A monthly “Wine & Design” class, where up to 20 attendees mingle, browse and enjoy appetizers and a glass of wine — and then get Kobylinski’s grand tour of the coolers and wedding consultation area. Kobylinski also seizes the opportunity to describe other services he provides such as plant maintenance and custom silk arrangements. For the hands-on part of the event, a designer shows how to make a pavé arrangement, topiary, wreath or another house décor item, which they take home.

He charges $49.95 for a class (or $39.95 in advance), which covers the cost of design materials and wine. He partners with restaurants, caterers and some non-food-related merchants to provide or pay for the food in exchange for the opportunity to introduce their business to the group. Since Kobylinski doesn’t sell wine at the event, he doesn’t need a liquor license. (Check with your state’s alcohol beverage control board to see if laws are different: www.ttb.gov/wine/state-ABC.shtml.)

To promote the event, In Bloom emails invitations to all customers two to three weeks in advance for the classes. He gets some repeat attendees — many of whom bring a friend who’s new to the shop — and plenty of first-timers, too. Sometimes a private group, such as a birthday party or friends on a girls’ night out, reserves the whole class.

Kobylinski also talks up “Wine & Design” at his weekly “leads” meeting with other local business owners and during event consultations. While consulting with two hospital administrators for an event, he told them about the class and they signed up. They liked the class so much, they decided to book it as a gift for their assistants during Administrative Professionals Week, giving some employees the afternoon off to attend the event — and they sponsored the lunch.

During a consultation with the organizer from Friends of the Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra, Kobylinski mentioned “Wine & Design” and was delighted when 10 members of the group attended. They invited local artist Thomas Thorspecken, who enjoyed the class enough to post his drawing of it to his blog and online sketchbook of area happenings.

The event has created new customer relationships where none existed, Kobylinski said. People from the orchestra group and hospital “now come back and order flowers from me,” he said, or refer others to his shop.

In Bloom Florist designer Jody Greene (left) poses with a participant showing off the wreath she made at the shop’s fall “Wine & Design” class.
CHILD LABOR OF LOVE
>
Kids of all ages in Wakefield, Neb., will surprise their mothers this May with bouquets they arranged themselves at a Lazy Acres Décor and Floral workshop. And owner Sarah Ekberg will get some additional revenue, and a slew of new email addresses and potential customers as a result.

Ekberg started “Build-a-Bouquet” the day before Mother’s Day in 2010, after one of her daughters, then 7, suggested the shop try the “Build-A-Bear” concept. Turnout was good enough — about 15 kids — that she realized with a few tweaks, the workshop could be a money-maker in 2011. And it was.

She changed the format the following year from by-appointment to open house: Kids could come anytime between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. She also added higher price options for materials: Kids could choose from $15, $25 and $35 sleeves of flowers bunched by color, with optional add-on roses available. And she ramped up her Facebook promotions and bought newspaper and radio ads.

PUT WORDS IN THEIR MOUTHS
>
“What would you like to say on the card?” When that seemingly simple question results in silence on the other end of the phone, you can fast become the customer’s hero by rescuing him (yes, more than likely a guy who’s stumped) with some suggestions.

Easter:
■ Happy Easter! Happy Spring!
■ Thanks for all the joy you bring!
■ Easter Greetings — Warmest wishes for a season of sweet discoveries.

Administrative Professionals Week:
■ They say a combined effort can break down the wall of impossibility. Thanks for helping break down the walls!
■ Dedication is the fuel for progress and growth. Thanks for your dedication!
■ Someone once said that ingenuity plus work equals miracles.

Thanks for all the miracles you perform everyday!

Mother’s Day:
■ Thanks for always helping me remember what’s important in life ... and today, it’s you!
■ If there were a day for everything you have given to me as a mother, it would be Mother’s Day every day.
■ There’s never been a minute I wasn’t glad you were my Mom. (Except when you goofed up my bangs!)
■ Thank you for the gift of life!
■ Thanks for giving me the best things in life: your time, your care, and your love. Happy Mother’s Day!
■ I got all my good qualities from you, Mom. Isn’t it lucky you had more than enough for both of us?

If you try it:
■ Collect parent email addresses so you can send a photo of the child making the bouquet — and later, notices about other events and offers.
■ Ask that an adult stay with children 10 and under (Some dads mistook the workshop for daycare.) If the adult leaves, ask if there’s a limit on how much the child can spend.
■ Offer a family discount for siblings.

Benchmark
MEASURE TWICE, ORDER ONCE
>
More than twice as many consumers who bought flowers or plants for Mother’s Day last year chose fresh flowers over bedding plants or flowering and green houseplants. But since nearly a third gave Mom plants for outside, and 43 percent presented her with houseplants, it’s best to have some of everything on hand.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fresh Flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedding/Garden Plants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowering Houseplants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Houseplants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Results based on an SAF-funded survey of 1,000 adult consumers, conducted by Synovate using eNation polling, 2011.
THE CALL

SHOP: A Seattle florist
SCENARIO: Tim calls to order a corsage.

EMPLOYEE: Good morning, XYZ Flowers.
TIM: Hello. I need to order a corsage.
EMPLOYEE: Sure. When do you need it?
TIM: It’s for a Father/Daughter dance this Saturday.
EMPLOYEE: OK. Do you know what kind of corsage you want?
TIM: Absolutely not! I need your help; I have not done this since high school!
EMPLOYEE: (giggles) No problem. Our corsages start at $18 with carnations and $30 with roses. Did you want to pick this up or have it delivered?
TIM: Umm. What do they look like?
EMPLOYEE: We can make them in any color you want and add pretty ribbons. Do you know what color her dress is?
TIM: Pink.
EMPLOYEE: Then let’s go with pink flowers. Do you want roses or carnations? What color ribbon do you want?
TIM: I guess roses are fine. What color ribbon should I choose?

Linda (I finally had to ask her name) continued to bombard me with questions for another five minutes.

THE ANALYSIS

Linda was chipper, friendly and eager. She definitely covered every possible option for this corsage.

Clearly, Linda had taken many orders for this event; yet she still didn’t make it any easier for me to buy my daughter’s corsage. For starters, she did not LISTEN to me; I stated that I hadn’t ordered a corsage in decades and was clueless about the process. She continued to ask me the same roster of questions she asks every customer. Linda didn’t position herself as the expert to guide me smoothly through the order. Her litany of rapid-fire questions made me feel uncomfortable and awkward.

THE FIX

Let’s get you started on the road to better corsage sales with the tips below. For more in-depth guidance, tune into the next SAF-sponsored webinar, “Corsage Boot Camp: Proms and Beyond!” on April 10. (See details below to register.)

UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE.
The typical customer placing a corsage order is a guy already feeling awkward, so don’t make matters worse by asking him question after question. Instead, position yourself as the knowledgeable expert and guide him. “Roses are really popular this year” and/or “Most men are ordering wristlet corsages for their dates.” Of course, you may also encounter the other extreme, the “TyrannoMom” who will want to micro-manage the order. Take a deep breath and explain the options.

COLOR HIS WORLD.
I often talk to guys who don’t know what color dress their date is wearing or what shade (Hot pink? Light pink? Who knows?) When in doubt, guide them toward a neutral combination of flowers and ribbons so you can close the sale now. For example, “Then I recommend going with cream or ivory flowers and ribbons — which looks wonderful and is a perfect complement to any dress.”

GIVE A RANGE.
Does your customer know his options to ‘bling up’ the corsage? Don’t follow that insane, tired old path of simply stating, “Our corsages start at…” Give him a chance to splurge. Say: “We can design that corsage from $XX to $YY by adding (beads/ribbons/gems/bling) for a stylized look.”

POINT THEM IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.
Don’t assume customers know where you’re located. Whenever I take a pick-up order for a corsage, I check to make sure the person has the address (especially if the store has more than one location). Take it a step further and tell him a nearby landmark or intersection and the store phone number.

BOTTOM LINE: Bigger, better corsage orders are up to you!

Tim Huckabee, an international flower shop sales and customer service mentor, is founder and president of Floral Strategies LLC and the American Institute of Floral Sales Experts (AI FSE), a retail floral sales certification program. If you would like Tim to test call your shop for this column, contact him at 800 983-6184 or tim@floralstrategies.com.

LEARN HOW TO SIMPLIFY AND INCREASE THE PRICE FOR CORSAGE SALES IN TIM’S NEXT WEBINAR, “CORSAGE BOOT CAMP: PROMS AND BEYOND!” Register at www.FSW1204.eventbrite.com at a special SAF members-only rate.
### Celebrate: Gifts from the Garden Month, International Business Image Improvement Month

- **1 May Day**
  - FB: May Day basket special
  - E-Blast: corporate clients: How Blooms Boost Your Business Image
- **2**
  - Team meeting: Q2 goals
  - Graduation strategy: Confirm dates, school colors
- **3**
  - Check Mother’s Day supplies
  - Confirm extra holiday help
- **4**
  - Promote DIY class as gift for mom
  - Service vans
  - Eblast: Teachers deserve a floral pick-me-up
- **5**
  - Cinco de Mayo special: Five flowers for $5
  - Change website: “Not too late for Mother’s Day delivery”

#### National Wildflower Week (see www.wildflower.org/nww/) and Teacher Appreciation Week

- **6**
  - FB: Wildflowers special
  - Team meeting: Mother’s Day goals
  - Pitch Mother’s Day preparation story to media
  - FB: Business lobby of the week
- **7**
  - E-blast: Flowers that evoke memories for mom
  - Fb: Photos of Mother’s Day prep
  - Install graduation display
  - Email prom customers: graduation specials
- **8**
  - Check Mother’s Day supplies
  - Confirm extra holiday help
- **9**
  - Promote DIY class on container gardening.
  - It’s a perfect Mother’s Day gift — even better if marketed as a “Mom and Me” class. (For guidance and best practices on holding classes, look for “Class Acts” on www.safnow.org/moreonline.) Nancy Witte-Dycus, AAF, of Fantasy Flowers will conduct a small arranging class for six participants, charging $15 plus materials, up to $40.
  - Propose shop gift cards as an add-on to Mother’s Day deliveries. Some moms will come in to find something they like during the slow months. Include a card listing or showing pictures of your giftware lines.
- **10**
  - FB: Memorial Day special
  - Blog: How flowers transform a conference room
  - FB: Business lobby of the week
  - FB: Photos of Mother’s Day prep
- **11**
  - FB: Photos of Mother’s Day prep
  - Install Bridal and/or summer display windows
- **12**
  - E- Blast: Free flower for Moms buying for other Moms

#### Mother’s Day

- **13**
  - Cater staff lunch
- **14**
  - FB: Best looking business bathroom
- **15**
  - Team meeting: Mother’s Day debriefing
- **16**
  - Reorder plants depleted by Mother’s Day
- **17**
  - Promote DIY Dish Garden class
- **18**
  - National Pizza Party Day
  - Order pizza for staff
- **19**
  - Armed Forces Day

#### Neighbor Day

- **20**
  - Give flowers to shop’s neighbors
- **21**
  - FB: Memorial Day special
  - Blog: How flowers transform a conference room
- **22**
  - Webinar: “Weddings 102: Less Stress, More Profit” (floralstrategies.eventbrite.com)
- **23**
  - Update website for Father’s Day
- **24**
  - Blog: Garden shows, tours to see on vacation
- **25**
  - Add an “Our Customers’ Pins” board to Pinterest
- **26**
  - Put up red, white and blue bunting outside

#### Memorial Day

- **27**
  - FB: Holiday facts
- **28**
  - Plan summer rose promotion (June is National Rose Month)
- **29**
  - Send anniversary, birthday reminder cards
- **30**
  - Send anniversary, birthday reminder cards
- **31**
  - Install Bridal and/or summer display windows

**WHY DON’T YOU...**

- **Make May Day Payday.** Celebrate the official end of the “unfarmable” season, better known as May Day. Deliver complimentary baskets to good clients and high-exposure locations. Share the lore of the holiday (a Google search away) in Facebook posts, and urge customers to come to the shop for their May Day flower basket, ready to leave as a surprise on the doorstep of a neighbor or loved one.

- **Make a video.** Consumers will be clicking away, seeking a florist to send flowers to mom. Give those unfamiliar with your shop a virtual tour: Post the video trek around your shop to YouTube, Facebook and your website. Show the behind-the-scenes excitement of preparing for a holiday or the emotional reactions after deliveries.

- **Market a “kitchen dish garden” for Mother’s Day.** Combine basil, rosemary and mint from a local nursery in an attractive ceramic pot (with drainage), along with care tips. Add fresh pasta and sauce (locally made, ideally) as an add-on surprise.

- **Plan a DIY class on container gardening.** It’s a perfect Mother’s Day gift — even better if marketed as a “Mom and Me” class. (For guidance and best practices on holding classes, look for “Class Acts” on www.safnow.org/moreonline.) Nancy Witte-Dycus, AAF, of Fantasy Flowers will conduct a small arranging class for six participants, charging $15 plus materials, up to $40.

- **Propose shop gift cards as an add-on to Mother’s Day deliveries.** Some moms will come in to find something they like during the slow months. Include a card listing or showing pictures of your giftware lines.