Feeling friendless, unheard and uninspired on Facebook? Take a page from the social media strategies of some of the most “social” celebrities.

BY MARY WESTBROOK

Do you get a sinking feeling when you post a Facebook update that you thought was a guaranteed homerun, only to hear the social media equivalent of crickets chirping (no likes, no comments, no shares)? At Expressions Unlimited in Greenville, S.C., Staci Bryant feels your pain. “We try all kinds of things to get people involved,” said Bryant. Her page has 460-plus likes and a four-person staff team shares posting responsibilities.

Still, even with a group effort, figuring out which posts will take hold can be a frustrating challenge. “I have the prettiest shots from photographers, (but) when I post them, (they get) no response,” said Bryant. “Post a silly picture of us in the store and people love it.”

This reaction initially puzzled Bryant, but now she understands. “(It works) I think because it shows the ‘realness’ of what we do,” she said.
According to Karla Campos, founder and COO of Social Media Sass, Bryant and her team are onto something with the idea of “realness.”

“I encourage people to be their authentic selves online,” she said. “Facebook is first and foremost a social network (not a sales platform).” When she consults with small businesses, Campos often reminds them that, to be successful, they have to ease up on hard sells and keep posts conversational. In the context of Facebook, she explained, “your customer is your friend.”

But...you do want that friend to take action, to share your news, promote your business, come to your events and buy your flowers, and you should see every Facebook user as a potential customer, said Ian Lurie, CEO of Portent Inc., who suggested that the most effective Facebook posts “use images or video, are very easy to digest ... and include a basic call to action, such as ‘Thumbs up or thumbs down?’” (The best messages are also tweaked and shared across social media platforms — YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, not just on Facebook.)

Coming up with ideas for posts, promos and campaigns on Facebook can be daunting, the job, never-ending. More than ever, however, it’s critically important: Experian Marketing Services estimates that Americans now spend an average of 16 minutes out of every hour on a social media site. Competition for consumers’ attention has never been stiffer. It’s not enough to have a Facebook page anymore; you have to know how to use the site to connect and make a lasting impression — all while, you know, keeping it light and casual.

Because celebrities and their teams of consultants are experts at making social media seem intimate, even while they sell out concert venues and clothing lines, this month, we turned to the Facebook pages of pop stars, media moguls and athletes for inspiration. Star power has a lot to do with the success of many celebrities on social media, but the content of their updates also offers insight for business owners on what users want. We’ve also turned to the thriving pages of independent local florists for real-world application of some of the star-studded posting strategies. Consider this our holiday gift to you — a collection of Facebook and social media strategies ready and waiting for the new year.

When singer-songwriter Bruno Mars hits the road for his concert circuit, he and his team of social media experts often engage the star’s 43 million followers with easy-breezy questions. Pre-concert at Red Rocks Amphitheater outside of Denver, Colo., Mars posted a photo of the venue and asked, “How awesome is this?” The answer, of course: Pretty darn awesome...95,000 people liked the post and more than 1,000 shared it.

Because they invite a response from followers, questions — even simple ones — have a powerful pull on Facebook. “Posts with great pictures and direct questions” tend to perform well, said Christina Stembel of Farmgirl Flowers in San Francisco, who was recently singled out by Facebook in a “Success Story” on the site for the robust activity on her page. (With more than 11,000 fans, posts that generate less than 100 likes are low-performers for Stembel.) Questions also give your fans a look into the details of your shop and a peak at what’s to come. “We get the most messages, likes and comments when we post photos or ask questions,” agreed Kristen Graves, of Gainan’s Flowers in Billings, Mont.; Gainan’s posts often generate 15 to 20 likes and shares from the shop’s 1,492 followers. “The biggest responses come when I ask people what their favorite rose color, flower, annual, etc., is.”

**ASK A QUESTION IN ACTION**

“Don’t you love fall? It gives our designers an excuse to sneak sweet little pumpkins into custom arrangements. What’s your favorite part of this design?”

**Dr. Delphinium, Dallas**

163 likes  11 shares  14 comments

“Such a fan of these Free Spirit garden roses! What do you all think?”

**Dr. Delphinium, Dallas**

163 likes  11 shares  14 comments
To drum up interest in her latest song, bubblegum queen Katy Perry and her team often post “sneak peeks” of upcoming videos, making the pop star’s followers feel as if they have special, VIP access, even though they are one of 60 million. In a similar, if less glittery, fashion, posts that show a “behind-the-scenes” look at your shop provide interesting content and reinforce your position as a professional, local florist rather than a nondescript order-gatherer.

Event and wedding pictures are a popular show-and-tell opportunity among florists with strong Facebook pages; if you take a set-up shot, remember that details (a centerpiece, an entryway table) can have more impact than an overview shot of an empty room — even one with gorgeous flowers. Don’t forget to tag the venue and/or your client in your posts.

“Social marketing is about the inner workings with your company,” said Art Conforti, PFCI, of Beneva Flowers and Gifts in Sarasota, Fla. (8,188 likes; Conforti posts at least once a day.) “When you are setting up a wedding, you will see that more people are interested in the sprinkling of rose petals down the aisle than the finished floral design. People want to get to know you and feel connected.”

Borrow a line from Shelby Shy of Shirley’s Flowers and Gifts in Rogers, Ark. and Shirley’s Flower Studio in Bentonville, Ark. (1,447 likes and 216 likes respectively, and at least one post a day), who likes to put up detail shots and ask: “Can you guess what we’re setting up for?”

Pictures that show your staff hard at work on the day’s orders can also be effective, said several of the florists Floral Management queried. Use first names, clear, pretty pictures and short, detailed descriptions of the flowers. And when you get in some particularly gorgeous flowers — for the holidays, at the start of a new season (“tulips are in!”) or for every day orders — consider posting a picture and tagging your wholesaler or supplier.

At Monday Morning Flower and Balloon Co. in Princeton, N.J., and Yardley, Pa. (3,317 likes), “some of our best posts have been photos of our staff working,” said Georgianne Vinicombe. At press time, more than 50 people had liked or shared an album of staff members at work.

**INSIDER’S VIEW IN ACTION**

“Roses awaiting their debut in our many, many daily arrangements (might be another record day - thank you lovely customers)!

Farmgirl Flowers, San Francisco, Calif.

#308 likes #13 shares #7 comments

“Prepping centerpieces and floral designs for a wedding in Dallas! So Texas-chic with the succulents. And the colors are unbelievably romantic. #love”

Dr. Delphinium, Dallas

#81 likes #2 shares

“I was at our Garden Center today and saw strawberry plants 6 inches tall and producing fruit already. 18-36” tall tomato plants already in blossom and a canopy of hanging gardens!”

Gainan’s Flowers, Billings, Mont.

#24 likes

“Santa and his reindeer-pulled sleigh arrive a week from today! The Southwest Marching Band is practicing their serenade, and the scene is set at Lyndale…”

Bachman’s, Minneapolis

#22 likes #2 shares

“We’re preparing our showroom for the holidays. We’ll be showing off the complete transformation by the end of the week. For now enjoy this preview. #HolidaySeason”

Beneva Flowers and Gifts, Sarasota, Fla.

#29 likes #1 share

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*Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project*
Her daytime show may be over, but Oprah still has things to promote: her network, her magazine, her philanthropic work. But you won’t often find a hard-sell approach on her page. Instead, when she and her team post to Facebook, they remind Winfrey’s 9 million followers that Oprah is still a lifestyle queen by sharing advice and insights. (Her latest love: meditation.) The approach pays off. Winfrey’s 2013 “Favorite Things” list of Christmas gifts generated 16,200-plus comments in the first two weeks of November.

Florists have an opportunity to position themselves as lifestyle experts, too, and Facebook provides the ideal platform to educate your customers on, well, just about everything. At Gainan’s, Graves said her shop gets likes and shares when they post “tips and DIY projects” that appeal to customers. Other florists recommended care and handling tips, which are best offered as a tie-in to seasonal offerings (no 7-Up for those Valentine’s Day flowers!). You can also post information about décor trends, new container options and gifting tips year-round, including advice on the best card messages.

**EXPERTISE IN ACTION**

“Did you know that different color Roses have different meaning? Red= love and respect; Orange= fascination; Dark Pink= thankfulness; Pale Pink= grace and joy; Coral = desire; Pale Peach=modesty; Yellow= Joy and Friendship; White= innocence and pace.”

Billy Heroman’s, Baton Rouge, La.

“Just arrived ‘Tacca Bat’ plant - botanical name is tacca intergifolia. Pretty cool plant, available in black or white flower...Very limited so order now.”

Gainan’s Flowers, Billings, Mont.

“Indoor plants are good for your physical and mental health! If you’re looking to buy some, now’s the time: Get 30% off all indoor green plants with Web promo code GreenPlant30 through Nov. 19.”

Bachman’s, Minneapolis

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The outrageous pop star has created some outstanding Facebook competitions for her 60 million-plus followers, often for the benefit of others. Two years ago, fans who liked the Robin Hood Foundation, a New York-based charity Gaga supports, were entered into a sweepstakes for concert tickets. The contest helped raise awareness for the charity (and added to Gaga’s public relations image as a philanthropically-minded star).

Competitions can be a great conversation starter. At Billy Heroman’s in Baton Rouge, La. (1,228 likes and posts up three to five times a week), the staff takes advantage of its proximity to Louisiana State University, asking fans to guess the score of the week (the winner gets free flowers). After installing new wraps on their 33 trucks, the shop also challenged fans to find the trucks around town with a “Spot Our Van” contest.

“Fans were encouraged to take a picture of our recently updated vans with a new logo and look,” said Kelsey Rome, a college student who manages the store’s Facebook page. “Then if they posted their picture to our Facebook wall, they were to come to our store and draw a gift card from a bowl. This not only encouraged interaction with our page, but also allowed us to let people become familiar with our new look!”

Comforti is also a big fan of contests — but he said follow-through matters. “It’s not just posting the contest,” he said. “You have to cross-promote the contests on other social media sites and through emails. Once you have your winners, post the news to Facebook and ask the winners to help along your marketing efforts by commenting or re-posting the win on their page. “If the winner comes in, take a photo with them and post it on your page,” he said. “You have to let people know that the contest is real and that they could actually win.”

**CONTESTS IN ACTION**

“Tell us your score predictions for the #LSU vs Ole Miss game! The closest score—without overestimating—wins a FREE bouquet of purple and gold flowers! Play to win! #GeauxTigers”

Billy Heroman’s, Baton Rouge, La.
8 likes 1 share 31 comments

“Congratulations to Melissa Kukk, our winner today in our YES WE CAN contest. Enter today and you could be our winner tomorrow!”

Beneva Flowers and Gifts, Sarasota, Fla.
31 likes 6 comments
Soccer superstar and international hubba-hubba hunk Cristiano Ronaldo has game tickets to sell — and a new underwear line to promote. He’s constantly telling his 65 million followers where they can go to see him and his skivvies. He’s also been able to propel Facebook users into action to support his favorite charities, including Save the Children.

Facebook can do more than generate chatter on your Facebook page, it can also get people off the site, into your store and onto your website, with product specials and promos, along with events. That approach is a mainstay at Gainan’s, said Graves. “We have annual events like our Tent Sale, Christmas Open House, etc., that people look forward to and will respond to by posting or sending messages to us on Facebook,” she explained. Pack your post with specific details about time, location and cost — and if a promo has an expiration date or time, be sure to make that clear.

**Reel in Action**

“Looking for a great deal on flowers? Stop in tomorrow and see these beautiful bunches of BLUE orchids!”

*Beneva Flowers and Gifts, Sarasota, Fla.*

9 likes 1 share

“The Kingfield Farmers Market and Fulton Farmers Market are coming to our house for their holiday market this Sunday! Shop a long list of their usual great vendors while enjoying local beer, organic wine, live music, and other activities.”

*Bachman’s, Minneapolis*

11 likes 3 shares 1 comment

“It’s back to school season, but not just for kids! Don’t miss our fun, inspiring, and educational classes and events this September, like the Miniature Garden Workshop Sept. 15.”

*Bachman’s, Minneapolis*

20 likes 5 comments

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**THE STRATEGY**

**Reel People In**

**CELEB ROLE MODEL Cristiano Ronaldo**

**STRENGTH POSTS IN THREE STEPS**


2. **ORGANIZE THEM.** Posts don’t have to run chronologically on your page, strictly speaking. Instead, pin important posts so that they stay at the top of your page for up to seven days. Highlight stories to make them larger and more visible. Hide posts that are no longer relevant, or are simply duds.

3. **MANAGE THEM.** You can schedule Facebook posts through the site’s sharing tool. Many florists also recommend tools such as HootSuite, which allow you to manage multiple social media networks through a single dashboard.
The actor-singer knows what her nearly 49 million followers want: pictures of Gomez. When the young star travels the country on tour, she updates her page with shout-outs to each city — “Seattle...One of my FAVORITES. So cozy.” In every post, Gomez makes a point to compliment the city... but she also makes sure that her image is front and center.

Florists have something people want to see, too, and it’s sitting right in your cooler. “Post photos of the product,” Portent Inc’s Lurie said. “They’re flowers, after all! Don’t just post stock product images... Get some really unusual, great-looking shots. Show ideas for unusual arrangements. Show your flowers in ‘real life’ settings, instead of the store.”

Stembel agreed. “People love gorgeous pictures of flowers — we’re florists, that’s what they want to see,” she said, adding that’s she’s watched — sometimes in amazement — as pics of people go (relatively) unnoticed, while a tight, beautiful close-up shot of an arrangement gets liked and shared like crazy. “Sometimes the posts with the fewest words are the most successful.”

At Dr. Delphinium in Dallas (5,150 likes, new posts up three times a week), “we find the brighter, the prettier the picture, the more liked the post,” said Charles Ingrum. Many of the shop’s Facebook pictures come from staff members’ smartphones, though they also take advantage of good working relationships with area photographers and vendors.

**Strutting it in Action**

“Simple, elegant, sophisticated. The perfect pair: pale hydrangea and sweet apple. #hellogorgeous”

Dr. Delphinium, Dallas  
97 likes  15 shares  3 comments

Some beautiful centerpieces in golden hues today...#cagrown #farmgirlflowers  
Farmgirl Flowers, San Francisco  
176 likes  11 shares  3 comments

“Like Peonies? We love them. Take a look at our new arrivals!”

Beneva Flowers and Gifts, Sarasota, Fla.  
65 likes  2 shares  1 comment

**TAKE BETTER PHOTOS**

Beautiful photos matter on Facebook. We asked Raya Ward, a professional photographer and the office manager of Nielsen’s Florist and Garden Shop in Darien, Conn., to share her tips on taking great photos. Try this:

- **Focus on Location and Composition.** Make sure whatever you’re shooting has a great background and that everything in the image is important to the story you are trying to convey. If it doesn’t, add something to the picture, crop it out, move it, take the picture later, whatever you need to do.

- **Create a Focal Point.** What it is you are really trying to showcase? Is it the vase? The flowers? The mood?

- **Be Creative.** Think about the image you are creating. How can you make it different from what everyone else has snapped before?

A final tip: Put away the smartphone, Ward said. “Get yourself a nice, easy consumer camera and reap the benefits of more professional looking images!” Ward recommends the Canon Powershot (around $200, though at press time we found them on Amazon for as low as $129) to the Rebel ($400 and up, depending on accessories).
The English indie band, headed by singer Florence Welch, taps into its 4.8 million followers’ appetite for all things quirky with pictures from band mates’ childhoods, favorite books and original art sent in by fans. Likewise, independent local florists can use their Facebook pages to show personality and their community ties. Pictures of team members out and about in the community show your customers just how homegrown you are.

“If you just won an award in the community, post it,” Conforti said. “If you’ve just done a big event in your community, post it. Build trust through engagement.”

Don’t forget to trumpet your partnerships with nonprofits (and tag the non-profit!) before and after events or donations. If you cater to the prom crowd, shout out to the girls’ softball team when they make it to regionals. When a team member has a baby, celebrates a milestone birthday or gets married, share the news. These are the posts where your personality can shine. Been around for a while? Post pictures of your shop from 10 years ago, alongside new pictures.

**INDIE CRED IN ACTION**

“Thanks to everyone for making us the Best of the Best Florist of NWA! We are so proud to be a part of this community!”

Shirley’s Flowers and Gifts, Rogers, Ark.

18 likes 1 share

“A big THANK YOU to all our customers and ‘fans’ for voting us #1 florist in Sarasota for the 15th consecutive year.”

Beneva Flowers and Gifts, Sarasota, Fla.

16 likes 1 comment

“One of last Saturday’s wedding couples asked us to send any leftover flowers from their wedding to nursing homes. Our designers had fun taking the big pieces apart and making these adorable table size pieces and our drivers dropped them off to very grateful nursing facilities. Such a generous thing for a bridal couple to do. Thank you, Elizabeth and Bryan!”


40 likes 2 comments

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