Last Valentine’s Day, Shelby Shy, co-owner of Shirley’s Flowers and Gifts in Rogers, Ark., and Shirley’s Flower Studio in Bentonville, Ark., wanted to use Facebook to get the attention of local fellas with sweethearts to impress, so she put together a photo album that showcased some of the shop’s best work. Shy posted the album to her page (1,447 followers at press time), but, convinced she wasn’t reaching all of her potential holiday customers, she also promoted the album.

Facebook allows you to promote any post created after June 2012, by clicking the promote tab underneath the item, for as little as $5. Users set a budget — Shy chose $200 — and then have the option to apply filters; for her Valentine’s Day post, Shy targeted men in her area. Promoted posts appear in news feeds as “sponsored posts” and as people like, share and comment on the posts, they’re seen by an even wider audience – friends of the people who already like your page. In Shy’s case, the Valentine’s Day album was shared 34 times, liked 457 times and generated 21 comments. Ultimately, Valentine’s Day sales were up by about 20 percent, compared to 2012, and Shy said she thinks the promoted album played a part in the increase.

Shelby also promoted an album for Mother’s Day 2013 and plans to try the tactic again this year; other florists have had less luck with promoted posts. “We’ve done it, without much success,” said Charles Ingrum of Dr. Delphinium in Dallas, Texas, who tried promoting posts to generate likes about two dozen times in 2012 before abandoning the practice, at least for now.

Ingrum, however, has run several Facebook ads – to attract new people to his page – with good results. “Facebook ads allow you to very specifically target customers,” he said. “One of my ads targets women in my area who are engaged and who have not already liked my page.” The ads, Ingrum said, have helped his shop move from about 1,700 likes in Dec. 2011 to 5,150 at press time. Facebook allows you to set a target audience (based on basic demographics) and set your own budget for ads; Ingrum said he generally starts with a daily budget of $5 per ad. “Now, we can expect responses to our posts, because our audience is large enough,” he said. “It’s become a real marketing option, just like email marketing.”
Hands On

SET YOUR SCHEDULE

> Not getting much traction on Pinterest? You may be updating your content at the wrong time; weekends are the best time to reach enthusiastic pinners. Social Media Today recently compiled a list of the best times to post (or schedule posts) to popular sites:
  - **Facebook** – between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., Monday-Thursday
  - **Twitter** – between 1 p.m. and 3 p.m., Monday-Thursday
  - **LinkedIn** – before and after business hours, 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday
  - **Google+** – 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., Monday-Friday
  - **Pinterest** – Weekday evenings (after 8 p.m.) and weekends. The best time to pin items is Saturday morning.

GIVE IT ANOTHER GO?

Florists who haven’t experimented with ad buying may want to revisit Facebook’s ad portal in 2014, said Elisabeth Diana, manager of corporate communications at Facebook. “One common misconception is that this takes a lot of time to set up and manage,” she said, adding that the company has tweaked the process significantly in the past year to make it easier for small-business owners to set clear goals and measure results. She also recommends two fairly new tools for expanding reach:
  - **Custom Audiences** — allows you to upload contact information on “real world customers” to Facebook to track down existing customers who haven’t yet liked your page.
  - **Lookalike Audiences** — helps you reach potential customers who are similar, in terms of demographics, to your existing base.

For more information on these tools visit https://www.facebook.com/facebookforbusiness.

SCROOGE? BAH HUMBUG

> Kind-hearted bosses, take note: A study in the Academy of Management journal recently found that “employees are no more loyal to ‘caring’ bosses who offer emotional support … than to bosses who run the other way when they hear a sniffle coming from a cubicle,” according to Inc. magazine.

The problem stems from “mismatched” expectations: Managers who show extra compassion to an employee who is in a pickle expect loyalty and more effort in return; employees tend to see kindness as part of the boss’s job. A separate study out of the University of Colorado reinforced the idea that kindness alone won’t create feelings of loyalty. But it did point to an effective motivator: money. That study found that employers who make loans to workers in financial crisis generally have overall “better luck retaining people” and building loyalty among team members.

DID YOU KNOW?

> Need some festive fodder for social media? Consider the following:

- Almost **51 million** poinsettias are grown annually in the U.S. California is the top producing state.
- The U.S. imports almost **1.5 million** poinsettias each year, mostly from Canada.
- Poinsettias are the **No.1** selling potted flowering plant.

Source: USDA Census of Horticultural Specialties, 2009, and USDA Foreign Agricultural Service