Early Birds

By “aggressively” pushing Feb. 13 deliveries and offering a $10 discount, Brad Parker can complete about 40 percent of his deliveries the day before Valentine’s Day. “You have to offer something to customers,” he said. “It works, but it’s just not going to happen” on its own.

Every year, Brad Parker of My Florist in McLean, Va., makes Valentine’s Day a two-day affair for customers. “We promote delivery on Feb. 13 aggressively,” he said. As a result, he regularly delivers 40 percent of his holiday orders the day before Valentine’s Day. (The number fluctuates depending on the day of the week, but in recent years it’s been as high as 43 percent.) “It makes the holiday more manageable, and you can do more volume,” he said.

Parker’s hard work has put him in an enviable spot: 65 percent of respondents to SAF’s 2013 Valentine’s Day survey said they stopped taking orders last year, or turned them away. Here are some of Parker’s tips on how you can convince your customers to get into the spirit of Valentine’s Day a day early.

Sweeten the Deal. Only about 34 percent of respondents to SAF’s survey said they offered discounts for early delivery, and Parker said that’s a mistake. “We give them $10 off for delivery on the thirteenth,” he said. Customers love the discount, and Parker easily makes up for the small giveaway in increased volume.

Accentuate the Positive. “We tell people, ‘look it’s going to be obvious that you didn’t forget about (Valentine’s Day),’” or wait until the last moment, Parker said. Because the shop can spread out its deliveries, Parker also has the ability to make sure recipients get their flowers early on Feb. 13 and 14 (instead of knocking on doors at 8:30 p.m. or rushing into offices at 4:55 p.m.). “Nobody wants to get flowers at the end of the day,” he said. “That’s bad service.”

Train Your Staff. In addition to including early-delivery offers and incentives on your website, social media pages and in your promotional materials, you have to train your staff to offer the option to every customer, according to Parker. To keep team members motivated, he gives salespeople $1 for each order they move from Feb. 14 to Feb. 13, and he keeps a running tally of early deliveries in the sales room. If the team hits its goal for the year, he buys everyone lunch.
How were sales of mixed flower arrangements this year versus last year?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
<td>Significant decrease</td>
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<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Modest decrease</td>
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<td>40%</td>
<td>About the same</td>
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<tr>
<td>60%</td>
<td>Modest increase</td>
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<tr>
<td>80%</td>
<td>Significant increase</td>
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Best Practices

Give ‘Em Options (Just Not Too Many)

What do you do with last-minute customers on Valentine’s Day? It’s a category that comprises 85 percent of orders, according to SAF’s post-Valentine’s Day survey last year: 44 percent on Feb. 13 and 41 percent of Feb. 14.

At Conklyn’s Florist in Arlington and Alexandria, Va., customers who visit the store on Feb. 13 or Feb. 14 are greeted with a smile and a menu of gifting options. “If customers give us a few days’ notice, we’ll make anything they want,” laughed Paul Brockway, “but if they come in on Valentine’s Day, or the day before, they have to choose” from the menu, which includes about 15 options, from a single, rose to 24 roses paired with a teddy bear, a balloon and a box of chocolates. The approach helps Brockway control production and distribution costs, ensuring more profit per order.

Visual Impact

Low Cost, High Impact Visuals for Valentine’s Day

Last year, David Boulton, AAF, PFCl, gathered together old clipboards ($1 each) from secondhand stores for some of his Valentine’s Day displays at Flowers By George in Arlington, Wash. “We cut out a piece of burlap and then hung necklaces from the clipboards,” with matching earrings where applicable, he said. To show off bracelets, Boulton turned an old door into a backdrop, filling the window areas with generic (cheap!) black beans. “It was a fun display and we got a number of comments from customers coming in,” he said. Read more about Boulton’s dynamic displays on p. 27.

Pr Notebook

From Design Room to Newsroom

The hectic pace at your flower shop might be the last thing you’d want to broadcast locally – but it makes for a pretty alluring story for the media as well as fans and followers on social media.

For several years running, a local news station in Minneapolis has broadcast live from Bachman’s on Valentine’s Day. Last year’s early morning newscast featured Dale Bachman cheerfully detailing the many options still available to customers, including express lanes in stores and ready-made arrangements (roses, orchids, tulips, and more). Later in the day, a reporter and a photojournalist faced off in the design room for the station’s second annual “Valentine’s Day Floral Arrangement Battle.”

Photos from the news team’s visits, and early morning shots of the shop’s vans prepped and ready to go, appeared on Facebook throughout the day. The not-so-subtle message throughout: We’re here, we’re the pros, and we’re ready to help customers with just about anything they need.

Benchmark

Mix It Up

Not convinced Valentine’s Day buyers will buy anything but a dozen red roses? On average, respondents to SAF’s post-Valentine’s Day survey last year said 39 percent of orders were for mixed flowers. About 44 percent of respondents said sales of mixed flowers on Valentine’s Day were about the same. About 29 percent reported a modest increase and about 10 percent showed a significant increase. About 8 percent saw a significant decrease and almost 9 percent saw a modest drop. Get some inspiration for mixed designs sure to allure, in Business of Design, p. 42.