They don’t realize it, but customers of Freytag’s Florist in Austin, Texas, have more than 300 ways to get in touch over the phone with the business.

Since around 2011, Chad Freytag has been buying blocks of local phone numbers through a service called Direct Inward Dial (DID). Usually offered through a local phone company, DID has become a popular service with larger companies that need to be able to handle simultaneous calls without a switchboard operator. But smaller companies, wise to the marketing potential, are getting in on the game, too.

While attaching a unique product code or different phone number to marketing pieces has long been a strategy of savvy florists, Freytag said the low cost of DID, a relatively recent phenomenon, has allowed him to buy up dozens of numbers for as little as $10 a month and then attach them to just about everything that goes out of the shop (exceptions include TV and radio; Freytag has found that phone numbers don’t work well with those mediums).

“Our ads have different phone numbers now, and so do our emails, our pay-per-clicks” and much more, Freytag said. “It’s like a tracking link; we know exactly how much money we’ve made off of any individual marketing piece. When you have cold hard numbers it takes the emotion out of it.”

The results helped Freytag realize (as other florists have) that printed phone directory ads yielded very little return; he scaled back on those and then cut them out entirely. In fact, DID tracking results have helped Freytag see that most of his print marketing materials fell short. In the past three years, he’s reduced his print advertising “to very little” (all of it strategically placed in high-profile publications) and is instead investing in online efforts that yield higher returns, including pay-per-click.

“[DID] is wonderful for pay-per-click,” he said. “I find that almost half of the clicks come in as phone calls. I thought people were clicking and not buying, but they’re actually calling in.”
SALES BUILDERS
MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR POS

Want to drive Tim Huckabee of Floral Strategies nuts? Post a cheat sheet of product codes on your wall — next to your computer. “Those can be saved in your POS system... any POS system,” said Huckabee, who has been visiting about 300 shops a year for the past 16 years, giving him a unique perspective on the most misunderstood and underused POS functions.

A few examples of missed (or misunderstood) POS features:

• Most POS systems automatically populate delivery information for local hospitals, funeral homes and schools. “You wouldn’t believe how many salespeople I hear asking customers to provide that information,” Huckabee said. “There’s no reason for that.”

• Order history provides a telling window into a buyer’s tastes and budget — worth a quick look before suggesting an arrangement. “If you’ve been using your POS for a few years, you’ll have good information even on customers who only order once a year,” including transaction amounts and previous recipient names and addresses. That info will help you provide better service and, often, it will help generate a higher sale.

• Product codes are only as helpful as your system for assigning them: Many shops have way too many codes and a “hodge-podge system” for assigning them, Huckabee said. “If your staff has 20 codes to look through, instead of 200, and those codes make sense,” each sale will be closed faster.

The good news is that help is available, much of it low-cost or free, Huckabee said. “Call whoever supplies your system and demand training” online, in-person or via videos, he said. “Do this whether you’ve been in the floral industry two months or two decades. All of the suppliers make updates constantly” and they don’t always make announcements about those changes. Each time you’ve learned a new feature, Huckabee said, “schedule a formal staff meeting to discuss and demonstrate it. Then, test your staff.”

OPERATIONS
LOW COST TECH SOLUTIONS

Low on cash? Don’t worry. Plenty of services are available online to improve your site and shop operations — and many of these tools are low cost or even free. If you want to:

Test the Responsiveness of Your Website on Mobile Devices.

You can’t appeal to on-the-go customers if your website looks bad on mobile devices (text that’s hard to read, over-sized graphics, etc.). Jennifer Swanson of Kaber Floral Company in La Porte, Ind., used Responsive.is to evaluate just how mobile responsive her previous website could be (the verdict: not very). In January, she launched her new site shown here, which is much better; in less than a month, her web orders have quadrupled.

Hire an Expert for a Small Project.

If you have $5, Fiverr.com can connect you with people offering myriad services, from graphic design and photo retouching to blog editing and much more. “We have used it to generate direct mail advertisements, new logos and blog postings,” said Skip Paal, AAF, of Rutland Beard Floral Group in Baltimore, Md. Other services available through the site (for around $5): Upgraded Dropbox accounts, expert Photoshop work, answering machine messages, voiceover work, animation and website banners. For $5 an experienced writer can also take your blog post and spin it into multiple “original” versions for posting in different places, or write a press release and submit it to local media outlets. You can also have custom QR codes created or get several hours of virtual assistant or data entry work.

Streamline Communication and Stay in Touch, Even on the Road

At Austin-based Lone Star Bloom, Kyle Brown uses Google Drive as the company’s shared drive. “This allows us to have version control and share documents amongst several people at different locations,” he said. “Google Drive also has an app, so I can pull up an Excel spreadsheet on my iPhone to check out an edit someone else made to that sheet 5 minutes before that — no matter where they physically are.”