Companies such as Uber and Lyft already are disrupting taxi and black car services across the country ... with their growing network of contract drivers and heaps of transportation data, could they become the next big thing in delivery services, too?

Maybe not for the floral industry, says one florist who has experience in courier services. In 2009, a friend visiting Michael Pugh eyed the florist’s fleet of full-size vans with astonishment. At the time, Pugh, who owns three retail florist shops in metro Memphis, routinely sent drivers 30 to 40 miles, sometimes with only a handful of deliveries. He chalked the inefficiency up to the nature of the floral industry, but his friend, who worked for a courier company in Pennsylvania had other ideas: “With all that space, you should be delivering for other people, too.”

Turns out, that friend was onto something. Today, Pugh’s courier service, Lickety-Split Couriers, provides delivery service not only for Pugh’s Flowers but also about 30 businesses in Memphis, including a wholesale seed broker, auto parts distributor and area food companies and restaurants. The business began as Pugh’s Express, part of Pugh’s Flowers, and spun off in January 2014, after non-floral deliveries began to outnumber floral deliveries; today it’s helped increase the company’s revenue (by about 25 percent since 2010) and diversified its customer base.

“The major advantage is that we’ve made each vehicle so much more useful,” Pugh said, noting that while Memphis once had a delivery pool, no such service exists in the sprawling metro today. “When we added in the courier service, we had [about] the same labor and costs but could generate more revenue.”

Other companies are interested in those kinds of returns, too: This spring, Uber tried out a pilot courier service in Manhattan. Pugh said those efforts could prove successful in the so-called “hot shot” courier segment, where a contract driver is making a one-time pick up and delivery (e.g., a real estate agent needs to get documents to a client across town.)

But that isn’t the model he’s embraced with Lickety Split. Instead, all of Pugh’s drivers are employees (with corresponding benefits and worker’s comp coverage) and all of the late model trucks and vans are company property; many of them have been customized with refrigeration units to accommodate the food service clients (and, as a perk, flowers). Rather than running on a “call as needed” basis, as hot shot operators do, Lickety Split maintains scheduled pick-ups and can use Pugh Flowers’ three locations as hubs (in addition to the company’s headquarters, a building that Pugh owns).

Those added costs mean that Pugh has more control over the service he provides and, ultimately, he said that’s a good thing for his courier clients, who need reliability and quality control over speed.

In fact, over the years, Pugh has found that delivery drivers first trained in the floral industry are among the best. “They’re used to dealing with a relatively fragile product and going into sensitive areas” including hospitals and funeral homes, he said. “When we’ve hired [new drivers] from the hot shot industry, that’s when we’ve had to do more training.”

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**Firsthand Account**

**HOT SHOT TAKE OVER?**

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**Grab and Go** Since 2010, Michael Pugh, of Pugh’s Flowers in Memphis, has grown revenue by 25 percent thanks to Lickety-Split Couriers, a delivery service that began under the florist’s umbrella.
Visual Impact
Christmas in September


In a mid-summer SAF webinar with sales trainer and Floral Management contributor Tim Huckabee, Gregory Nato, former creative director for companies such as Macy’s and Ralph Lauren, said big-time retailers plan their holiday displays at least two years in advance.

It isn’t too late to stockpile attractive goodies for your 2014 Christmas window. On a slow afternoon, take Nato’s suggestions:

Visit your local mall or shopping district. Snap photos of window designs you like, so you can study them and mimic their qualities.

Check out local yard sales for furniture and pottery pieces you can use to upgrade your displays.

If you missed the original webinar, don’t worry. Get special discounted pricing through Oct. 10 at VMwebinar.eventbrite.com.

Social Media
Less You. More Them

> Not getting the results you want on your blog? You may be posting too much about yourself, says Marko Saric of How to Make My Blog. He recently told Business2Community.com readers “one of the biggest mistakes bloggers make is that they create content about themselves and not about their target audience.”

Unless you’re Gwyneth Paltrow, don’t expect visitors to fall immediately in love with your “you-ness,” Saric said. Instead, people want information that they can use. They want to be educated and entertained. They “want to get answers to their questions. Think of your posts as products that fill the need in the market.”

Before you write your next post, try reaching out to a few VIP customers, to find out what they want more of, from you. Saric suggests:

- Ask open-ended questions (“What is making your life difficult now?” or “How can I help you?”)
- Make sure people get the answers to their questions through your content. Start basic. Explain why they need to know what you are telling them, for instance care and handling tips for long lasting home décor designs.
- Guide readers through large topics — ahem, holiday event planning — and help them understand what the information means, where it fits, and how they can use it.

Best Practices
Engage Your Inner Entrepreneur

> When Sun Valley Floral Farms — winner of this year’s Marketer of the Year — set out to make Women’s Day a buzzed-about floral event, the venerable flower grower didn’t wait for people to come to them. Instead, they set about convincing others to believe in their idea.

That kind of energy is easy to come by when you’re just starting out, but keeping the fire alive requires a little bit of discipline, said Todd Ebert, Fast Company contributor, who recently shared three tips on how to keep the entrepreneurial spirit alive:

Listen to Your Front Line. You have to listen to people who interact with customers daily.” Make sure sales team members know you have an open-door policy when it comes to communication — and truly listen to their feedback.

Challenge Assumptions. “Surround yourself with ... people who are willing to question what you and the company are doing.” Don’t allow yourself, or your team, to all into the “we’ve always done it this way” trap; recruit, encourage and reward out-of-the-box thinking.

Stand for Something. “Money will motivate people to do decent work, but it won’t motivate them to listen, question, and reinvent a company.” Help your team understand the emotional value flowers bring to customers’ lives, often at vulnerable moments. Train them to be true customer service pros, not order-takers.

New Energy
Read how Sun Valley Floral Farms injected energy into operations with an award-winning campaign on p. 20.

Talk to Me
Style Me Pretty is known for its detailed tips that speak directly to brides’ concerns, including this July 2014 post with practical ideas on creating a wedding style.