On the first day of Christmas my florist gave to me ... a 20 percent discount on my favorite candle! The melody may sound off, but a Christmas-themed promotion at Broadway Floral Home and Garden in Portland, Ore., has customers clicking, purchasing and making an extra stop at the store during one of the florist’s busiest seasons.

Five years ago Doug Fick and his team started their “12 Days of Christmas” promo, and the initiative is going stronger than ever. Here’s how it works: On the first day of December, Fick uploads an advent calendar-style graphic online, with interactive buttons on Dec. 1 to Dec. 12. When customers click on a date, the day’s special is revealed. Customers can’t click ahead, and while they can click on past dates, those promos show up as “expired” and create an immediate “Oh damn, I missed it!” reaction.

The time constraint creates a sense of urgency and excitement — that critical “call to action,” Fick said — and that’s important to his overarching goal of increasing in-store business during the homestretch of the year, which accounts for about 18 percent of total sales. The promos themselves are critical to the success of the effort, and Fick has found that gift items work best (candles, accessories, jewelry, etc.) discounted by at least 20 percent (“10 percent really isn’t worth a customer’s time to stop in,” he said). Buy one or two items, and get one free deals also are popular selections.

The appeal of the program from Fick’s perspective is two-fold: He’s able to promote his many non-floral offerings to customers and get shoppers into his store. (This year, some daily promos will be redeemable online, but in the past almost all of them have been good for in-store purchase only.) It’s also a flexible effort; Fick generally plans the promos in 10-day batches and can adjust them to better reflect what he wants to push as the end of the year draws closer.

“It’s hard to say definitively that any particular item drove sales that day,” Fick said, “but I know people are coming in, and it resonates with our key demographic,” which is women 18 years old and up. Some of his less tech-savvy customers even call in daily to find out what the featured deal will be. This year, Fick and his team also will be adding a tease-element to the annual special, with a week’s worth of sneak peeks to customers on the store’s mailing list — all the better to build excitement and put that twinkle in holiday shoppers’ eyes.
SOCIAL MEDIA
‘NEW’ HOLIDAY RAISES THE BAR

Thanks to some last-minute thinking, and even later tweeting, last fall the team at Starbright Floral Design in New York City created a new holiday event: “Pass the Bar.”

On a Tuesday morning in late October, an eagle-eyed staff member noticed that the first six Internet orders of the day were congratulatory gifts for newly married florists. Senior Partner Nic Falito promptly took to Twitter with a simple (and thoroughly tagged) message that read in part, “Congratulations to all the new florists in New York State for passing the bar!”

By day’s end, the shop had received a total of 20 bar-related orders, with an average price of $100, a welcome spike that far surpassed the results for other lackluster holiday events (we’re looking at you, Boss’s Day). “I plan on doing a major marketing campaign the day before the next set of scheduled results come out,” said early 2015. Falito said.

VISUAL IMPACT
FREE WHEELING DISPLAYS

When Lauren Anderson spotted a vintage cart at an antique market, her mind spun with possibilities—all of them related to visual merchandising. The co-owner of Sweet Roost in Alexandria, Va., knew the cart would look just right with French-style galvanized pails for a nostalgic “flower market feel,” and equally at home on the wedding and event studio’s side patio or at a wedding show, where the cart makes other vendors’ standard white tablecloths look downright boring.

The versatility of the cart means that Anderson and co-owner Rachel Bridgewood can play with their displays quickly—in a bucket here or there—and create a sophisticated look in minutes. “Our general philosophy is, the simpler, the better,” Anderson said. Plus, the wheeled cart is portable and fits easily into Anderson’s SoNo CT, making it all the easier to show off a blast of beautiful, colorful flowers, even in the depth of winter.

BEST PRACTICES
BANISH! “NO PROBLEM!”

If your team thinks that “no problem” and “sure thing” are perfectly acceptable responses to a customer who says “thank you,” guess again. Public opinion firm Rasmussen Reports indicates that three-quarters of Americans feel the country has shown a general decline in manners, and topping the list of annoying behaviors is the disappearance of once-common courtesies, including “you’re welcome” and “thank you.”

The trend cuts across age but younger employees may be particularly guilty—and unaware of the teeth-grashing, their easy-breezy responses cause your customers.

The Solution: Train your staff to substitute “no problem” and its ilk with “you’re welcome,” “my pleasure” or even “I’m so glad we could help!” And, make sure you model the behavior you want to see. I had means saying “thank you” every time you ask for the floral foam or scissors across a crowded design table.