NO MORE EXCUSES: PIN IT!

Pining to win customers with Pinterest? Like all other social media sites, using it yourself is the only way to understand how it will help your business. If you’ve yet to “get pinned,” make October the month you get on board. We’ll make it easy with step-by-step directions in a two-part series. For now, let’s start by signing up and using Pinterest as a personal site — just as your customer would. Then, you’ll have the skills to launch a business Pinterest page — which we’ll cover in next month’s column, just in time to do some strategic pinning for the holidays.

Why Use Pinterest?

Ever tear out a photo you liked from a magazine or newspaper for later use? Perhaps you filed it in a “merchandising” or “wish list” folder? That’s essentially what Pinterest does — just electronically. As you surf the Internet and find images you like, you “pin” them (with the embedded link to the source site) to your Pinterest boards, which you categorize by interest or topic.

It’s a great tool for visually organizing your projects and hobbies, but why is it such a fast-growing social activity? If Facebook is for posting all the stuff you have or do now, think of Pinterest as the place for stuff you (and your customers) wish you had or want to do. Pinterest lets people save these dreams as reference for when they have the cash and time!

Before You Pin

Visit www.pinterest.com. Click “Join Pinterest.” The next page will ask you to create your account using Facebook, Twitter or email. Choose carefully. If your Facebook account is the same as your business’s Facebook fan page, don’t use this option. Play it safe and use a personal email address not associated with Facebook or Twitter so if you mess something up, the business’ online brand will not be harmed. Need a new email? Check gmail.com or hotmail.com for free options.

You’ll then see a page of photos. Scroll down and choose five that interest you. As you click, five boxes fill at the bottom of the page. I know, as florists you may feel obliged to click on all the flower pictures, but remember, this is your personal account, so click on non work-related stuff too. Click “Continue” when the button appears.

Click “Create Account,” check your email, and click “Verify Email.” Go back to Pinterest.com and log back in. One more thing to do: Add the “Pin It” button in your browser. (Go to “About” in the upper left corner, then click “Pin It Button.” Follow the instructions.) Adding this button is essential to effectively use Pinterest as you browse the Web.

VIRTUAL SCRAPBOOK Pinterest lets you store, sort and share images and ideas you like.

Get On Board

Boards are where you collect and categorize all your pins and repins. (See my boards at pinterest.com/renatosogueco.) Log back in and click “Add+” menu, then click “Create a Board.” Give it a name (for example, “delicious dinners”) and choose a category. Start with only one or two boards; you can create new ones as you pin and repin.

An interesting feature: you can “add another pinner” to a board that you create. Reference my Pinterest page again and you’ll see “DelCor Sweet Spot Challenge.” I did not create this; I was invited. No biggie — I can hit “Edit” and remove myself anytime.

Pins vs. Repins

Let’s talk pins first. Let’s say you eye a photo of a crafty-looking vase on a blog. Click “Pin It.” Every photo on that page pops up as a choice; select the one you want to represent the pin. Another box pops up asking which board you’d like to place it on and if you’d like to leave a quick description. Pins are not restricted to just what’s on the Web, though. Take lots of photos? Log back into Pinterest, click “Add+,” then “Upload a Pin” and follow someone’s pin catches your eye, this is the opportunity to “repin” it onto your own board. Hover over it and you’ll see the option to “repin,” “like” or “comment.” Although it’s someone else’s find, you can add your own description and place it in your own boards. To explore more of Pinterest, click “Categories” in the center of the screen, or you try the search box in the upper left corner.

Find Pinterest Pals

Now it’s time to find friends to see what they’re doing on Pinterest. Click your username in the upper right corner and then “Find Friends.” You’ll have the option to scour your email or Facebook account. Select some friends and browse their boards; choose a few that interest you most to follow. (Consider following a few other florists’ followers to see how they use Pinterest for business — a precursor to what we’ll learn next month.)

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PROFESSIONAL PINNING

After last month’s column, you’ve mastered basic Pinterest skills. Now, let’s put the hottest social media platform to work for your business.

Get Started
Log out of your personal account and click “Join Pinterest.” Sign up again, this time using the business email you use to manage your shop’s Facebook page.

Next, create a username. Because this is your professional site, choose something simple and easy to remember. Ideally, you can coordinate usernames across social media platforms, so you have a strong, consistent brand, not to mention fewer usernames to memorize. I recommend using your business name, as one word without spaces (renatosflorist). Your username will be your Pinterest URL (www.pinterest.com/renatosflorist).

Build Up Your Page
As you start to populate your Pinterest page, pay attention to your website’s existing subsections or taxonomy: “Get well,” “Anniversary,” “Wedding,” etc. To ensure your website and Pinterest page complement each other, create boards that reflect these business categories and position these boards as a product catalog on Pinterest.

Once you have solid (and highly searchable) categories, how about a board for daily specials? Seasonal sales? Wedding themes and colors? Some florists also add boards with non-floral themes (home décor, fashion). These give your page a personalized touch, show users where you find inspiration, and position your page as a place to linger and explore.

If you want to drive serious buyers to your website, you can add a price to pins by typing the dollar sign ($) followed by the numerical price in the description area. (Remember, people can’t buy products directly from Pinterest.)

As a general rule regarding descriptions, keep them short but loaded with strong keywords (flower variety, color, arrangement description and venue). If you get comments, add more detail about the product in a reply.

Collaborate on Boards
As you found out last month you don’t have to go at Pinterest alone. You can allow contributors to post pins on a board. Doing so is easy: Choose the “+Contributors” option.

Your staff members — particularly those who are already familiar with Pinterest — are obvious candidates to help build your Pinterest catalogs, but you really want pins from other users. Why not create topical boards such as “favorite wedding bouquets,” and ask favorite customers or brides to contribute content? Your board will immediately go from professional to collaborative — and the spirit of sharing is what Pinterest is all about.

The obvious risk is that someone might post a gorgeous arrangement from a competitor’s website; but, remember, you have creative control. Ask customers to post from the wedding section of your website.

Cross Post and Engage
If you have a vibrant Facebook fan page, promote Pinterest by adding it as an application. As with most things, there’s an app for that. Recall we wanted you to create the Pinterest account with the same username you used for Facebook? Log into Facebook with that account and visit www.woobox.com/pinterest. Click “Install Pinterest Tab” and follow the prompts. The next time you visit your Fan page, you’ll see your Pinterest Boards.

For savvy florists, Pinterest is a powerful tool to separate your business from the competition. Good luck and happy pinning.

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PIN-WORTHY PHOTOS
What draws your eye to pins? Beautiful photos. When you take your own, you don’t have to worry about copyright infringement and you know that your photos will be unique to your shop. Find out the five key items in your photography toolkit, at safnow.org/moreonline.