A dinner guest tightly grips the steering wheel, rushing to the party. As she pushes the limits of local speed regulations, she realizes she can’t arrive empty-handed and knows flowers would be the perfect gift for the host. Instead of chancing a visit to the first grocery store she sees on the way, she pulls over, grabs her iPhone, taps on an “app” that locates all florists within her immediate area and up comes your shop! With another tap on the phone number listed, she’s calling you. You take the order and get to work. She taps yet again — this time on your shop’s address. Instantly, her iPhone directs her to your door, using built-in global positioning satellite (GPS) technology.
While ours is hypothetical, this scenario is like hundreds of thousands that play out daily. Thanks to mobile smartphone technology, retailers are getting in front of consumers wherever they are. If you’re like 30 percent of SAF members who own a smartphone, according to a recent online poll, you may already be tapping your way through the day, locating local businesses, getting directions, ordering take-out. According to ComScore, more than 234 million Americans, or two-thirds of the U.S. population, have a regular cell phone. Of that total, more than 42.7 million — 18 percent — have smartphones, which are distinguished from “regular cell phones” by the fact that they have Internet access. ComScore contends this smartphone subset is the fastest-growing category of cell phone subscriptions.

And they’re doing much more than LOLing and checking Facebook statuses (Although there’s plenty of that going on). Smartphones are a shopper’s best friend. Wherever they are, users can search, price and order in a few clicks, or at least find the closest place to spend a few bucks. Last year, The Kelsey Group predicted a 130.5 percent growth rate for local mobile search and an 81 percent growth for overall mobile ad revenues by 2013. And that’s why florists can’t dismiss mobile marketing, location-based applications and all the other jargon that’s started to pop up just as “Twitter” and “blogging” did before them.

The tool that may revolutionize your business may already be in your pocket — and it’s definitely in the hands of your customers. The potential of mobile technology and its capacity for marketing, selling and advertising your shop are enormous. But you can’t tap into that power without a smartphone. So before we dive into geo-friendly applications and mobile marketing, let’s check out the gear needed to do so.

WHERE ARE YOUR CUSTOMERS COMING FROM?

You know Google Analytics can deliver rich Web stats, right? Well, the free service also gives you detailed information about the mobile devices used to access your site. Once you log in to your Analytics account, click the “Visitors” link on the left, then “Mobile” and finally “Mobile Devices.” Analytics distinguishes devices by operating system. Check out mobile visitors to aboutflowers.com in the graphic.

If your site, like aboutflowers.com, gets 80 percent of its visits from genius phones like iPhone and Android, you can put some richer content (a photo or two) on your mobile site, because these devices can handle it with slowing down or freezing up.

What’s So Smart about a Smartphone?
The base requirement for a higher mobile IQ is Internet access. Although a smartphone does not have the convenience of a PC-sized screen or full keyboard, consider this: Even the smallest laptop or netbook will not fit into your pocket or purse; a smartphone will hold a charge longer than a computer and you instinctively carry your phone with you wherever you go — as do your customers.

Among smartphones, a few are real geniuses, such as the aforementioned iPhone from Apple. It’s joined by Google’s Android OS-based phones, Palm’s Web OS devices, the BlackBerry Storm and the upcoming Windows Phone 7 Mobile devices. What sets these apart? Large touchscreens you can tap to search and zoom in and out, providing another level of interaction. Although some still include a tactile keyboard, you mostly interact with the device by typing on a virtual keyboard, touching icons on the screen and using other tactual gestures such as pinching or scrolling to manipulate data such as photos and lists.

The mobile menu just got juicier thanks to Apple’s latest introduction, the iPad. It axes the phone functionality but maintains Internet connectivity using Wi-Fi and/or a cellular Internet connection. Apple believes...
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**APP:** Short for applications specifically developed to run on the various smartphone operating system devices such as iPhone, Android and BlackBerry. Similar to applications that run on computers, these apps run specific tasks from the nuts and bolts (VideoCamera, Weather Channel) to the nutty (Werewolf Me and Drinking Buddy).

that **apps** are where it’s at, so the aim with the iPad is to provide an even larger screen to use the same apps as the iPhone.

Aside from the marvel of a touchscreen and Internet connectivity, the true hardware potential of these devices is the inclusion of different types of sensors. Most smartphones have GPS receivers that know where you are, even if you do not. Since smartphones are still phones, they include a microphone to detect and record sound and music. More sensors that gauge temperature and light are on the way. The benefit of including sensors is that they provide an incredibly expansive platform compared to any single gadget you may own.

Despite all the apps, sensors and other additions, e-mail still remains king. Among SAF members, 39 percent say they reach for the smartphone primarily to check and write e-mail. Texting comes in second at 31 percent, and location tools follow at 20 percent.

However the real potential for apps and smartphones lies in mobile marketing and location-based services. Mobile Internet use is set to take over PC Internet use in five years, according to analysts at Morgan Stanley. If you’re going to capture those mobile customers, you have to get moving now.

**Tap into Text**

Text may not be the sexiest of mobile services, but it’s the most effective and the most proven. (Just look around, at all those over-developed thumbs pecking into tiny screens.) And consider this: All regular cell phones and smartphones have texting capability, so you can tap into the entire mobile market of 234 million subscribers. But that’s only if you get the digits of your customers. While you may already have a campaign to capture e-mail addresses, capturing cell phone numbers is equally important.

**Text Best Thing** To tap into text marketing, you need customers’ cell phone numbers. One way to get them is to run a contest, as Phoenix Flower Shops did.

Ken Young, AAF, of Phoenix Flower Shops, managed to collect 150 cell phone numbers during prom season three years ago. The shop ran an ad in a free magazine distributed to high schools, offering the chance to win a free Nintendo Wii to anyone who sent the shop a text message (see ad, above). “It was an opt-in campaign,” Young said, “so they needed to send us a text and then confirm to opt-in when we sent a message back.” The shop did just one promo for prom corsages and got mediocre results, but Young suspects the campaign may have been “a bit ahead of its time” and plans to try text marketing again.

**Make Location Your Vocation**

**GPS technology** is key to **geo-location-aware apps.** This functionality is usually coupled with Internet search. For example, Google’s search app for iPhone and Android features a “Near me now” option, which provides results for

**GEOLOCATION APPS** Because every smartphone has GPS, apps can be developed to provide information about local restaurants, ATMs, gas stations and florists based on the user’s current location.

**APP-LY YOURSELF**

While there may be thousands of apps out there (Apple has 130,000; Android counts 50,000), that doesn’t mean you can’t tailor one to your specific flower-selling needs. If you build your own, it’s got to fight for some pretty precious real estate on those smartphones. iPhone’s limit is 148 total apps; Android has a 512mb maximum size limit.

You’re up against apps that turn off lights from far away, calculate calories burned at the gym and divide the bar tab for a large group — and pay the waitress! Even if you can get customers to download your app, you have to remind them to use it. Will you offer iPhone-only specials? Send mobile customers alerts for local-only deals?

Espirit Miami is putting itself at the intersection of app-building and mobile-marketing. It recently developed an app for for portable Apple devices (iPod, iTouch, iPad). Launching in August, the app will offer substitution and sorting capabilities for wholesalers and retailers. Its database of flower photos shows flowers at different stages of opening and includes varietal details.

If you’re ready to build your own, go to iPhone development: developer. apple.com/iphone or: developer. android.com/guide

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Sure, you can zoom in and click on links, but the view is hardly ideal, especially for those without 20/20 vision.

To banish squinting and clicking, businesses are increasingly offering a mobile version of their website. Top retailers with mobile sites include Amazon, Walmart, Target, QVC and 1-800-Flowers.com, but the list is growing rapidly and the size of businesses getting in the game is shrinking.

A mobile version is usually a stripped-down version where visitors see just the menu that allows visits to other sections of the site. Normally, no large photos or Adobe’s Flash technology are included on mobile versions, because connections are not as fast as broadband installed at your home or office. The point of having a mobile ready website is to bypass the hassle of developing your own app and to promote easy purchasing.

But do people really buy stuff on a phone? According ABI Research, $1.6 billion worth of goods and services was purchased in 2009 using mobile devices. That stat will only grow.

A new generation of apps, like FourSquare, is taking the location-aware functionality to a new level and demanding more of a strategy from businesses that want to appeal to users. FourSquare merges location-awareness with social networking and a city resource guide and makes hanging out in your city a social game. For example, when someone joins FourSquare, visits your shop and logs a visit, they can earn points and eventually badges to become the “mayor” of your shop. On the business side, you can offer perks to frequent visitors, such as discounts or specials.

**Get in the Mobile Zone**

Even the most advanced phones have screens that rival a Post-It note in tinniness. Do you know what your website would look like rendered that small?

**MOBILE-READY WEBSITE:**

A stripped-down version of your website revised for the sole purpose of rendering better on the small screens of mobile devices. These usually have vast tracts of text to ease mobile surfing, few (if any) images and no videos, frames or flash.
"You can either get in on that now or you can wait for your competitors to catch up," writes Lisa Barone, a social media marketing maven and columnist for Small Business Trends. "Taking the steps to ensure that your site not only renders, but that it’s optimized for mobile, will give you a big leg up on the competition."

That’s exactly why Greg Royer recently created a mobile website for Royer’s Flowers & Gifts in Lebanon, Pa. "We have to be in the game," he said. "Royer’s has a philosophy that we want to own the Internet in our service area, and if we don’t give them access, someone else will."

Royer launched the mobile site, a basic, less image-packed and more vertically laid-out version of the original, just before Mother’s Day. About 200 of the shop’s 8,000 online holiday orders came through the mobile site, he said.

Beyond the potential for more sales, another incentive to get a mobile site is the fact that few other florists have one (quick, they’re all reading this now!). And Google has a separate index for mobile content — meaning you’d likely get the highest search result if you developed a mobile website now.

Royer’s in-house developers created the site, an investment in tech personnel he considers worthwhile given the overall online push of the shop. But Royer’s is not the norm since most florists’ websites are hosted by the wire services and other private ISPs. Ask your website provider if it offers services to mobile-enable your website. Otherwise, check out services such as MoFuse at www.mofusepremium.com or Mobify at www.mobify.me and www.bmobilized.com. You’ll pay anywhere from $10 to $200 per month, depending on the size and complexity of your website.

**Ready To Go?**
If you’re not already part of that 30 percent of SAF members who use a smartphone, it’s time to join the crowd. You now have a valid business reason to buy the newest iPhone or Android, or even the iPad, for the sake of "research." The only way to truly appreciate the benefits of mobile technology is to use it.

And the first search you should do is for your own site. How does your shop’s site render on that tiny screen? You never know, it may look just fine, or you may see lots of blank space where you endlessly scroll down just to catch a link here or a piece of text there. If your patience is still intact, then try to buy something. This experience may scare you enough to get moving toward mobile or confirm that you’re in the right place … until the next big thing comes along.

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**BE A SOCIAL SAP FOR APPS**

To truly understand the app marketplace and the mobile customer, you have to become one. So get to window shopping at the following app stores:
- [www.android.com/market/](http://www.android.com/market/)

While the variety can be overwhelming, start with what you already know. Download the apps for all your social media sites. If you’ve taken time to develop your presence on social media, the same updates you’d be making to your Facebook fan page and/or Twitter stream also will be pushed to those who have app versions on their mobile devices.

Speaking of expanding your social media presence, check out [www.tweetdeck.com](http://www.tweetdeck.com). Originally developed to allow you to easily update a Twitter account, Tweetdeck now supports updates to Facebook, MySpace and LinkedIn. The Tweetdeck mobile version for iPhone complements the desktop application so you can monitor and make updates while on the road.

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