

Operation Local Sales

By Tim Huckabee

Tips for luring local customers to your shop

...and I'd like to know how your prices break down...



Tim, is that you?

Mind Your Own (And Others') Business

Ever snooped on your competition? I've found it an effective training tool. In my on-site training program, I routinely call a competing flower shop and put the phone on speaker while I place an order. This usually shows my trainees how easily most salespeople miss obvious cues from customers. These calls can be a window into how your competition operates and how you can use their weaknesses to your advantage.

When you place a test call, pay attention to these five points and think of how your staff handles similar situations.

1. Greeting. How strong was the first impression? Did the salesperson identify the store and herself or himself?

2. Card Message Placement. Did the salesperson ask about the card message before the actual order — an easy way to find out the occasion, so you can suggest an appropriate arrangement and price point?

3. Pricing. Are your prices in line with your market? Did the salesperson use antiquated prices ending in 99 or 95 cents or did she use even, easy-on-the-ear numbers? Saying \$39.99 involves six syllables, \$40 is only two — keep it simple for customers' sake.

4. Computer Integration. If the competition you're calling is computerized, did they make use of it? I often hear keys clicking when I make a test call but rarely get a confirmation or account number.

5. Relationship Building. I always stress on test calls that I'm calling from out of town, yet I'm rarely offered a toll-free number or Web address. Make it easy for customers to shop with you again!

Don't just use this practice to eavesdrop on your competition. Gauging their weaknesses can help you gauge yours and your employees.

Tim Huckabee is president of Floral Strategies, a one-on-one sales and customer-service training company exclusively for florists.

E-mail tim@floralstrategies.com or call (800) 983-6184.

Web Wise Smart Ways to Win Online Customers



www.NinthStreetFlowers.com

Ever wish you could explain the dynamics of the floral industry to customers? Ninth Street Flowers does just this in simple terms on its Web site's "About Us" section. Without sounding defensive, Ninth Street Flowers explains why its flowers are better than "grocery and department stores', quick marts' and gas stations."

"We buy our flowers and plants from quality growers and local distributors. We bring the freshest flora to our clientele," says Ninth Street's Web site. "But...we're still not finished at Ninth Street. We then inspect the flowers closely before we sell them."

Use the "About Us" section of your site to tout your business' strengths: "fresh, quality flowers," "third-generation family business," "been in business for more than a century," etc.