

Flower Shop delivery concepts

by Jack Cross AAF TMFA

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Professional Certified Florist Program

PUBLISHED BY:
Texas State Florists' Association
PO Box 859 Leander, TX 78646
For Information: 512.528.0806

Acknowledgements

TSFA would like to express gratitude to the TSFA Education Co-Chairs
for their sincere dedication to education and to the success of the PCF program.

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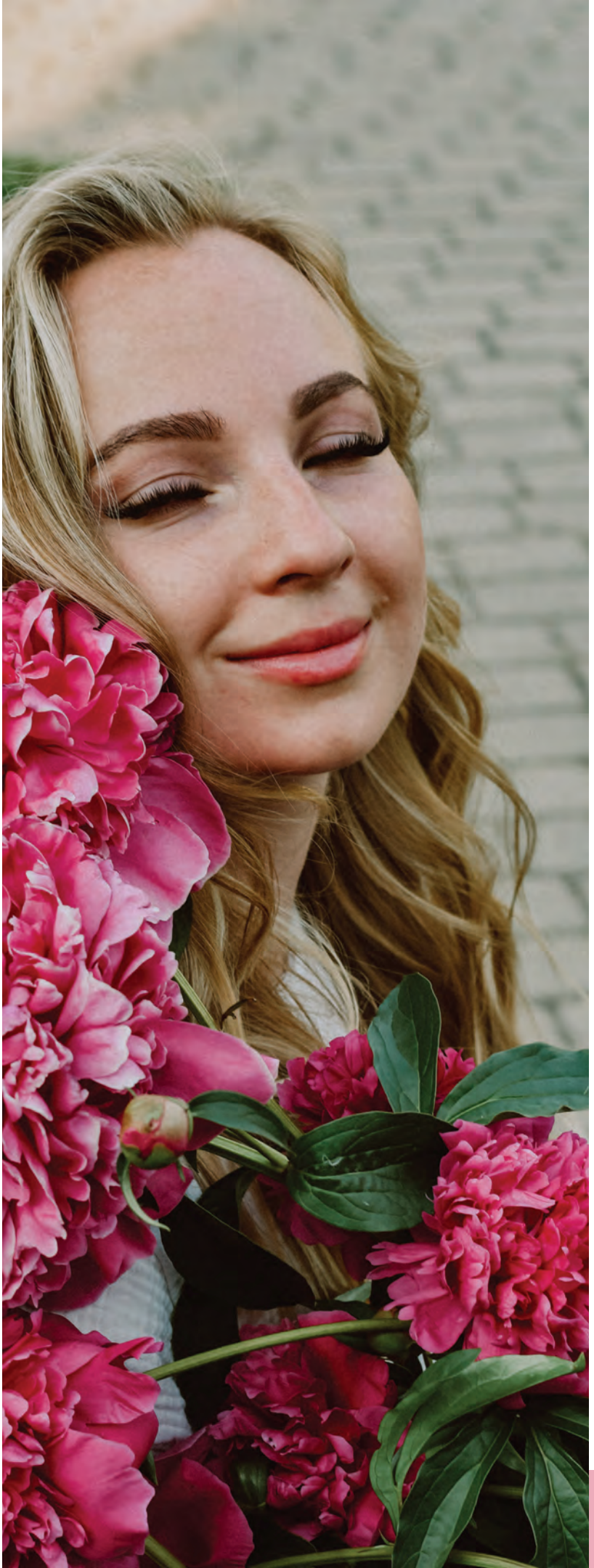
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I. Introduction

In the shear existence of business reality is, most businesses have dropped personalized services for the quicker, more efficient and profitable systems of automation. With technology, everything that has been automated has been done to streamline operations and increase profits. However, automation often comes at the expense of personalized customer service. Automation without personalized customer service can have the undesired effect of driving the consumer away or to the business down the street. The floral delivery process is no exception for the brick and mortar florist. Technology has made floral delivery much more efficient, smoother and, if done right, a true source of income as well as a service almost every purchaser of flowers has come to expect. The key to successful delivery and the ability to grow the business as well as the bottom-line profit depends on one's ability to implement modern delivery technology without losing sight of personalized customer service. The floral industry is one of the few remaining industries where technology can be integrated to streamline delivery operations and increase profits without having to sacrifice personalized customer service. The purpose of this course is to examine current delivery concepts along with the implementation of ongoing technology into the delivery process while continuing to maintain the highest level of personalized customer service.



II. The Delivery Order

Almost every floral order is being input into a computer to generate the invoice for billing, design and delivery. The most important step to achieving customer delivery satisfaction is correctly obtaining the delivery information from the customer. Not all customers have that information or have it correct and not every sales person takes down the delivery information from the customer accurately. Technology and software allow the knowledgeable florist to maintain accuracy. In many shops, phone and walk-in orders are often still taken by salespeople and floral designers who have little computer experience but help with the sales process by interacting in person with the customer. Therefore, cross training is important. In fact, this is often much more personalized service than having someone who knows very little about flowers and design answering the phone and just walking the customer through the blanks on a computer screen to be filled. When this happens, customer service is lost and more often than not, so is the sale and the customer. Technology is important for saving time and money by ensuring an accurate address and a delivery that can actually be completed.

A computerized POS system is important to ensure accuracy to your shop. Software can verify the following before the driver ever leaves the shop: address, zip code, suite, apartment and business name.
It can alert you in advance that critical delivery information is missing from the address before the driver gets there to find out that the address is missing a digit, a suite or apartment number is needed. This step will save the driver time and the shop money. In fact, it has often made the difference in whether or not the delivery could be completed on a timely basis. Software can also pull up an address from just imputing the customer's phone number or name, saving precious time if there is a mistake or missing information. Delivery software will flag timed deliveries and make suggestions as to the most efficient route based on the actual deliveries, time and road traffic conditions at the time of delivery. Just don't be afraid to use the address verification and routing software. It will save you money and make your delivering so much smoother and more efficient by eliminating careless address mistakes that cost time, money and often a missed delivery and unhappy customer.

In short, one does not have to sacrifice personalized customer service when introducing technology into the order taking and delivery process.






III. The Delivery Driver

The delivery driver is "the face" of your business. This person is often the only personal contact the consumer will have with your shop. Your shop and product will be judged on the image your driver puts forward when making the delivery. Many future customers are gained or forever lost based on the experience they had with the driver. For that reason, one must carefully select the delivery personnel.

Before You Ever Hire

Not only is the driver "the face" of your business, but this driver is also your greatest risk for an auto liability claim. Therefore, it is most important that you take the time to adequately screen the driver applicant before you ever hire your new driver. It takes more time and often means delays in hiring, but thorough screening saves you time, money, headache and potential legal liabilities in the long run. You just can't hire anyone who comes in off the streets.

You have a legal responsibility to hire wisely. The first step is to get a completely filled out and signed application from the prospective driver. Do not let someone take the application out of the shop to fill out and bring it back as you have no control over who actually filled out the application. Go over this with a fine-toothed comb. If spaces are left blank, any information missing, if there are questions on accuracy or things simply don't seem right, then go no further with this applicant. Take the time to call the place the applicant last worked to see if work dates and hourly wages actually match. If not, it is suggested that you go no further with this applicant. If one cannot be honest and accurate in filling out an application, it is only potential trouble down the road.

Once an application is received that has future potential, the next step is to get the applicant's driving record. This report can be obtained for a nominal cost. Visit the State Department of Motor Vehicles website. Once on their webpages, search driver records and follow the prompts to download a form to fill out and mail in or printing out the report immediately if you pay by credit card. Do not skip obtaining this report. It will give you a wealth of information that you can use to validate the application as well as a legal tool of due diligence should a negligent accident case ever arise. This report will list the type of license issued, expiration date, restrictions, moving violations, DWI, DUI, suspended, revoked or lapsed license as well as applicant's full name, date of birth (age) and address as of the time the license was issued. If all this seems in good order, then forward this applicant's information to your vehicle liability carrier to get them to sign off that they will cover and add this person to the shop's approved driver's list for full coverage. Another area of concern is drug testing. Many operators of delivery fleets will not hire a driver unless they can successfully pass a drug-screening test. This is well worth considering, but there are legal issues that you must first address before implementing a drug-testing program for delivery applicants. First, check with your attorney and/or insurance company on the steps to follow.

In conclusion, the hiring process is very complicated in our society where lawsuits are common practice. One can never be too careful. Take the necessary time and steps to wisely hire a driver.

The Contract Delivery Person

In an effort to control delivery costs, some shops will classify their delivery driver as a contract employee. If you truly contract out your delivery service, that's great. However, if a vehicle is owned by the shop, if a manager hires and fires the driver, sets their hours, or requests the driver to report to a business location, then the IRS will classify this person as an employee and your business must treat the driver as such. The main reason for hiring a person as a contract labor cost savings to avoid having to withhold the standard payroll taxes and pay workers comp insurance. It is advised you follow the IRS guidelines.

Once the contract laborer files an unemployment claim, gets hurt on the job or the business is audited there will be legal penalties. Don't mis-classify. The savings to the business is minimal and generally won't make a substantial difference to the bottom line. Please contact the State Labor Board or an attorney to further clarify Employee Statues versus contract labor.

After Hired, Training Can Begin

As with every new employee, proper training is important, perhaps moreso with the position of delivery.

Areas to train include:

- The company policy manual
- Dress Code should be inforced for security and professionalism. It is essential that the driver be in a uniform that clearly identifies the drivers as a representative of your business. Not only does this add professionalism to the business, but the floral recipients feel more secure in opening the door to a uniformed driver that clearly displays the name of the business
- Procedure to care for and handle the floral items during delivery
- Procedure for returning damaged or non-delivered floral items to the shop
- Routing and timed delivery procedures
- Personal attitude and acceptable/non-acceptable behavior when relating to customers and receiving personnel at businesses, hospitals and funeral homes
- Vehicle safety and driving policies- parking, backing, weather conditions, speed, vehicle maintenance and logs, drink and food stops, and eating/drinking while driving
- Personal cell phone use and texting procedures while driving on the job
- No rider policy and no personal business to be conducted while on company time
- What to do in the event there is an accident, refer to the company policy and follow the business's Procedures, no matter how minor it may seem at the time

As with each new employee, training is essential if the employee is to learn what the shop expects. It is highly recommended that the owner or manager, not another delivery driver, train the new delivery person. Concerning delivery, the new driver will benefit greatly by riding several days with the owner or manager on deliveries to learn firsthand how deliveries are made and how to represent the company. As an owner, remember the delivery driver does not have a second chance to make a good first impression. The impression the driver makes on the recipient ultimately depends on how well they were trained.



IV. *Preparing the Delivery Route*

The key to a successful and efficient delivery program is organization. The shop's delivery program is not only a service, but a marketing tool and an extension of the shop's public relations image. The driver can ensure a positive experience for each recipient. The driver is an ambassador for the shop. Let's look at how to prepare the delivery.



Organizing the Route for Delivery

Organizing the route for delivery is a responsibility that falls to the driver. Depending on how large the delivery area is, it maybe necessary to have delivery zone or geographical areas that the shop delivers to certain times of the day. These can be coded by zip code or quadrants of the city and the information entered into your computer system for seamless breakdown and routing of your deliveries for each run or each driver. Many shops still find it helpful to have a wall map or sheet with the city delivery zones and boundaries broken down for visual reference. It is advisable to keep the runs down to 8-10 stops per run if possible. By doing so, each run is manageable, and drivers are not out more than a couple of hours at a time. Deliveries should always be clustered in groups of close proximity, no matter the number, to keep fuel cost down and delivery time efficient.

Specific Delivery Issues

Deliveries to businesses, funeral homes and hospitals often require that you be familiar with their specific guidelines/terms for delivery. Some funeral homes and hospitals have flower rooms, and some hospitals have volunteers that will take the flower delivery to the patient's room but only during certain hours. Due to security issues, some businesses will only accept floral deliveries at shipping/receiving or security desks and then only during certain hours, while other businesses will gladly allow flower deliveries in through the front door at any time. Some apartment offices often will no longer accept flower deliveries for the residents unless the resident has notified them in advance that it is okay for them to accept and hold the delivery. Many neighborhoods are now behind gated entrances and require that the recipient be at home for the driver to be let in.

Some gated communities are accessible with a gate code and some guard houses will accept flower deliveries if the recipient is not home while others will not. Knowing these specific issues in advance will make the delivery run go much smoother and more efficiently.

Mapping Out the Route for Delivery

Each vehicle and driver should have a map of the overall zone or area where they are delivering. Cell phone mapping and GPS can assist with turn by turn directions, but the driver will still need an overall feel of the area where they are delivering. If delivery is done by zone or quadrants, it will increase overall delivery efficiency if you keep the same driver in the same zone. Over time, the driver will learn the traffic patterns, times and problem areas to avoid this greatly increasing delivery efficiency.

Once all the deliveries for a zone are ready, the actual routing can be done by computer software or manually by pinning the stops into a map of the area and then listing them in the actual order in which they will be delivered. Remember that smooth circular pattern will produce a more efficient delivery run. Often, drivers will take a computer-generated route and pin it into the map for a more efficient and overall feel of where they are and where they are going next. A delivery person should never load deliveries and leave without getting everything ready for that zone, making a list of the deliveries in order.

The Delivery Process

With efficient computer mapping software and address verification, there is no excuse for a driver to leave with a bad address. Should a problem arise while out on delivery, providing a cell phone for the driver will allow the driver to contact the recipient or sender for further information or the shop in case of a delivery question or problem. Most delivery problems can be solved quickly and efficiently while the driver is still in the area if a cell phone is available. It becomes very expensive to bring the delivery back to the shop just to have to take it all the way back out the same day. Use of a cell phone or smart phone with internet data access can solve many delivery problems right on the spot.

The delivery vehicle should be equipped with the means to secure all types of floral items for safe delivery. Properly packed and secured arrangements will arrive in good shape. No one really wants the driver to have to re-design the arrangement or bring it back to the shop to be redone. Once the route is established load the vehicle with the last delivery first. The vehicle should also include door tags that can be placed on the recipient's door when a delivery has to be brought back or left with a neighbor. A container of water is also helpful for assuring the arrangement is taken to the door full of water.

Each delivery driver should have a computer generated or handwritten route sheet with the recipient's name, address and any special instructions for the delivery as well as a signature and delivery timeline. Count the designs against your delivery log or delivery tickets prior to leaving the shop. It is not always necessary that the recipient "sign" for the delivery in person, but it is critical that the shop know the name of the person accepting the delivery and the time it was delivered. This information is far more helpful than a scribbled signature that no one can read if a delivery has to be left or to whom it was delivered. When a delivery has to be left, once back at the shop, follow up with a courtesy phone call to the recipient, even if you have to leave a message. This goes a long way in assuring the recipient gets the delivery and is satisfied with your service. Many people go into their home through a back driveway and often never venture out the front door to find that flowers have been left on the porch until the sender calls to see if they "like" the flowers.



To Call Ahead or Not

Many florists drive 20 or more miles in one direction to make a delivery only to find the subdivision is gated and they can't get in, no one is home and the delivery has to be left somewhere, the recipient did not come to work today, the patient has just been released or transferred to a different hospital or the employee is working at a different branch. All these examples are good reasons for calling ahead to confirm that the recipient will be available to accept the delivery. It is becoming more and more common for people who are actually home to not open the door because they are not expecting anyone to visit. If you call ahead, you generally operate much more efficiently and most people appreciate the advance notice that you are coming. If they are not going to be at home, then arrangements can be made for the delivery. This is a decision made by individual shops as an added service.

When the Driver Gets Back to the Shop

The completed delivery needs to be logged when the driver returns to the shop, and the paperwork must be completed. A lot of shops use email delivery confirmation. It is beneficial; however, if not done with consistency, some shops report it can create more trouble then it is worth by causing customers to assume their flowers were not delivered simply because someone failed to timely confirm the delivery with an email. Once a driver is back to the shop, they need to log in the delivery. This should include the time the delivery was completed, who accepted or signed for it and any special notations such as where it was left so that if the sender calls wanting delivery confirmation the information is in the computer and you're not having to track down the driver for the answer.

An added service many shops offer is following up with the recipient notifying them where the flowers were left. Even if the person is not home, this message can be left in a voicemail and if any questions about the delivery, how to get in touch with your shop. The shops that follow this procedure have reported it goes a long way in the recipient's mind that your shop goes above and beyond when it comes to providing personalized customer service.
If all these steps are followed or expanded upon the delivery process will be quick and efficient and save you many challenges down the road.





V. The Delivery Vehicle

It is more important than ever to put a professional appearance not only with the driver but the delivery vehicle. The vehicle is a marketing tool and reflection of the shop whether you acknowledge it or not. Vehicle wraps are very affordable, and you can have them customized to reflect the shop's image and logo. A properly designed and wrapped fleet of vehicles will turn heads in your community. And, there is no better way to market, advertise and promote. Just think, would you rather receive flowers delivered in an eye-catching vehicle wrapped or in a white, unmarked, often banged up and spewing smoke worn out looking delivery van? Remember, delivery vehicles, as well as the drivers, reflect your business. With a little care, a delivery vehicle should run 125,000-175,000 miles or more with no major engine trouble. Changing the oil and filter regularly as specified in the owner's manual and monitoring the tire pressure will go a long way in ensuring maximum life of your delivery vehicle. All vehicles will need the wear and tear items replaced- wiper blades, brake linings, tune ups, tires- but the engine and transmission should run trouble free for well over 125,000 miles if driven properly and the manufacturer's recommended service schedule is followed.

Vehicle operating costs need to be monitored. A lot of shops find it very easy and convenient to monitor what is going on with the vehicle and driver by putting their delivery vehicles on a gas fleet card account. Each vehicle will have it's own gas card, and each employee or driver will be assigned a driver number and a personal pin that allows them to purchase gasoline at any number of stations across the city. Each month the shop will receive a report on each vehicle that details such things as who bought the gas, at what time of day and which location the gas was purchased, gallons bought, miles driven between fill ups, cost per gallon and cost per mile and average miles per gallon both monthly and annually. The card can also be restricted as to how many times per day it is used, maximum amount of fuel that can be purchased and whether or not the driver can purchase other items other than gasoline. A gasoline fleet card is a very easy way to monitor and control what's going on with the shop's delivery vehicles.

VI. The Non - Owned Delivery Vehicle

One should exercise extreme care when asking an employee to deliver in their own vehicle, when hiring someone to deliver for you in their own vehicle or when anyone delivers or runs errands for you in any vehicle that the company does not own. In an accident, you will become a liable party if the employee was working for you even though they were in their own vehicle. Generally, their own personal vehicle insurance will not provide you with any coverage of any type. Check with your commercial insurance policy to be sure the shop has non-owned and hire liability coverage to protect you if there is an accident in a borrowed or rented vehicle. If their personal vehicle or rented vehicle suffers physical damage the shop will have to carry a rider to your commercial policy adding non-owned and hired physical damage before your policy will pay to repair their vehicle or a vehicle rented.

In many states, your personal auto policy will generally cover damage to a rental vehicle that is rented for personal use (not business use) if you carry physical damage coverage on your personal vehicle. However, this is not so with a commercial policy unless you specifically add that coverage to the policy. In short, to be on the safe side, if an employees is working for you, put them in one of your company insured vehicles. If not, make absolutely sure your own commercial policy will cover all liability and physical damage issues that may arise out of an accident to an employee's personal vehicle or a rented vehicle. Consult the shop's insurance agent for additional explanation.

VII. *Delivery Costs & Options*

There are costs to deliveries. The costs of the driver's wages and benefits, the vehicle cost, license and fee, insurance cost, gasoline cost, maintenance and repair cost.

WHAT DOES A DELIVERY COST THE SHOP?

Actual delivery costs vary. Annual per delivery cost can be computed over a year's time. It is a product of:

- The vehicle's cost and financing divided by the number of years of service expected
- Delivery driver's annual salary and benefits
- Annual insurance
- Gasoline, maintenance, license, fees and toll tags, etc. over a year all divided by the number of deliveries made in a year

This will provide the actual cost per delivery. This cost per delivery will vary widely depending on cost of vehicles , drivers' compensation, mileage driven and time. Delivery is a big expense to your bottom line. If delivery is calculated properly it should be a profit center.

DELIVERY ZONES.

Many shops that cover large areas of long distance find it beneficial to charge a sliding delivery fee based on the delivery distance from the shop. This type of delivery fee can be easily calculated by the shop's computer system simply by inputting the different delivery zones and the corresponding delivery fee or by zip codes and the corresponding delivery fee.

DELIVERY AND INCOMING WIRES.

Incoming wire orders are always heavily discounted work where the shop pays a commission of upwards of 27% along with associated fees to receive the order. On wire orders, be sure to deduct your delivery fee from the total you received for the order and fill the order to value based on what remains.

DEIVERY SERVICE OPTIONS

Many shops find it beneficial to offer an array of delivery service products for a fee. You can offer "rush" service or "guaranteed" delivery within 1 to 2 hours for and additional fee. Some shops charge and additional fee for deliveries outside their normal delivery area. Some shops offer "certified" delivery with a guarantee of written proof of delivery within a certain time frame. All of these services are fine and can be promoted and marketed as additional delivery services available from your shop.



VIII. *Conclusion*

Florists have the edge in retailing when it comes to same day delivery service. In fact, we are pros at it. When done correctly, it becomes an excellent advertising and marketing tool and can contribute nicely to the bottom profit line. However, all too often the delivery person, vehicle and whole process of delivery becomes a nightmare and a huge cost taking away precious profits from the bottom line. Delivery does not have to be that way. By understanding and putting into practice the discussed principles, one is well on their way to a profitable and cost-efficient delivery service.

NOTES:

References

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