

Everyone's

SCENE SAVERS Denver's nonprofit scene, a big source of Bouquets' event business, was not spared the blow of the recession. So owners BJ Dyer, AAF, AIFD, and Guenther Vogt, AAF, turned to social media to make the scene happen again.



a Fan

BY KATE F. PENN

Floral Management's
16th Annual
**MARKETER
OF THE YEAR**
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Bouquets has 342 fans



Faced with an event clientele that was watching attendance drop, this Denver shop vowed to help them turn Facebook into an attendee-getting machine.

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Would you replace a half-dead plant that was victim of pure neglect? Perhaps. Would you make a late-night delivery to a recipient of a key customer? Sure. Would you dress in a tuxedo to deliver flowers to a restaurant, just as the guy pops the question? More than likely.

Would you offer to do your client's job for them?

BJ Dyer, AAF, AIFD, and Guenther Vogt, AAF, would. When several of their clients indicated late in 2008 that attendance at their upcoming annual charity galas would be drastically reduced because of the recession, the co-owners of the 26-year-old business did what many might consider beyond the call of duty: They helped them round up patrons. And in doing so — successfully — they snagged Floral Management's 2009 Marketer of the Year Award. It's a repeat win for the Denver-based business, Bouquets: Their victory in 2002 came after building up the very category of business — large event work — that seven years later was threatened by the failing economy. They weren't about to let that happen.



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FACING FACTS When BJ Dyer and Guenther Vogt learned their event clients were watching their attendance drop, they went beyond their normal behind-the-scenes work to help to get more guests.



Bouquets is watching business drop like flies. Now what? 12 months ago

After eight years of fairly steady growth, business at Bouquets — like so many other businesses — began to drop in October 2008. Walk-in sales “plummeted,” long-time customers lowered their weekly standing-order budgets and even the shop’s well-heeled customers starting cutting back, Dyer said. So he and Vogt did what made the most sense

to their well-honed keen marketing instincts: they increased their annual advertising budget, from \$35,000 to \$45,000, launched an aggressive print and direct-mail campaign and, for the first time, tried billboard advertising.



Bouquets is wondering: Is the party over? 9 months ago

The additional investment, at best, staved off even deeper dips in business — sales for the first few months of 2009 were off by 15 percent compared to the shop’s five-year average, Dyer said.

Even more worrisome was the event side of the business. Since winning Floral Management’s Marketer of the Year Award in 2002, Bouquets had continued to grow its event-décor sales, from more than 13 percent of total sales in 2002 to 33 percent in 2008. But the party looked as if it were starting to wind down.

Checking in with community and nonprofit leaders in the fourth quarter of 2008, Bouquets heard the same story: The economy was keeping people at home and wallets snapped shut. Several clients who run community and philanthropic organizations that hold large, annual gala fundraisers “called to say they’d need 90 to 100 tables instead of 120,” Vogt said, which would mean a proportionate cut in the flower budget.

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Worse yet, some event clients were sending out requests for proposals for event decor, after years of automatically re-booking their events with Bouquets.

"After working so hard to build our reputation in the event market," Dyer said, "there was a lot of momentum to lose."

Dyer and Vogt were realistic about the slim chances of increasing sales in a recession. So they instead set out to "maintain our hard-fought investment in the event-planning and décor business," as Dyer put it, if not for 2009 events, then for the years that follow.

Bouquets knew it was fighting more than one battle: a real reining in of expenses and the perception that spending on parties is gauche. They wasted no time in tackling the perception problem. Vogt and Dyer mentioned the trend to the Denver Post's society page editor, Joanne Davidson, who wrote a column titled, "Recession a too-easy excuse to say no," admonishing Denver's deep-pocketed patrons of the arts and numerous charitable organizations for using the recession as "the best excuse they've had in a long time for weaseling out of things."

But they knew it would take more than a "tsk tsk" to make up for the penny-pinching trend. They turned to the very method that won them the event business to begin with: relationship building. Since 2001, they have bent over backward to show potential customers that they'd be not only an event décor company, but a partner in the company's success. Using that same innovative mindset, they — rather than pounding the pavement for new event clients — brainstormed ways they could help these philanthropic organizations maintain their event attendance.



Bouquets will do just about anything to cement relationships. 8 months ago

An idea hit them during a dinner with a long-time client, public relations firm MGA Communications. The client happened to mention that the company was increasing its social media staff to cater to the growing interest in it as a major marketing vehicle.

A light went off: Why not give social media workshops to their clients, to help them with fundraising and event attendance? "It was sort of like an epiphany," Vogt recalled.

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But having a third party expert such as MGA present the program would be key. Although Bouquets is no stranger to social media — they don't miss an opportunity to share photos of designs from the shop's event work on their Facebook page — Dyer said, "The whole idea that you're paying an expert to do it," makes it that much more valuable for attendees.

It was a deal: Bouquets would sponsor a social-media workshop, and MGA, with its new social-media staff, would develop and present the actual program.

"Our philosophy was to keep our nonprofit clients successful, so we could continue to benefit from their business," Dyer said. "When clients sell more tables for events, we sell more centerpieces."

Dyer especially liked the mentoring aspect of the approach. "A special bond develops when people learn a new skill," he said. "We think fondly of our teachers, professors and coaches, because they've helped us to develop and grow." If Bouquets could parlay that same dynamic into a learning experience with its clients, "we would be remembered as a partner, not just a vendor."



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FACES, BOOKED By helping their clients use Facebook to increase attendance, Bouquets has contracted for 85 percent of the annual events it had booked in 2008 and picked up several new clients.

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WHAT MAKES A MARKETER OF THE YEAR?

When Floral Management launched the Marketer of the Year Award in 1994, we hoped to draw attention to some of the industry's outstanding marketing efforts — and inspire the rest of the industry. Floral Management invites, retailers, wholesalers and growers to compete, luring them with the prospect of a \$5,000 cash prize. For the 16th year, that cash prize is sponsored by Design Master color tool, Inc.

The Criteria

The judges review and rate each entrant in the following four categories: effectiveness of campaign, originality, professionalism and overall excellence.

The Judges

Each year we choose a panel of seasoned professionals within and outside the floral industry.

- Marty Loppnow, president, Waukesha Floral & Greenhouses, 2004 Marketer of the Year
- Lynette McDougald, professor, Mississippi State University.
- Paul Bachman, president, Bachman's Inc.
- Tom Hofeditz, director of marketing at Baisch & Skinner in St. Louis, 2007 Marketer of the Year.
- Danielle Mackey, marketing director for Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide, the agency that handles the consumer relations campaign for the Society of American Florists.
- Rod Saline, AAF, Engwall Florist & Greenhouse, president of the Society of American Florists.

How to Enter

Call, fax or e-mail a request for an entry to Kate F. Penn, at Floral Management, (800) 336-4743; fax (800) 208-0078; kpenn@safnow.org

Past Winners

- 2008 Rick Canale Exotic Flowers, Boston, Mass.
- 2007 John Baisch, Baisch & Skinner, St. Louis
- 2006 Lyn and Skip Shipman, Brenda's House of Flowers, Woodstock, Ga.

- 2005 Frances Hopkins, Under A Foot Plant, Co., Salem, Ore.
- 2004 Marty & Jane Loppnow, Waukesha Floral & Greenhouse, Waukesha, Wis.
- 2003 Scott Carlson, Florabundance, Miami
- 2002 BJ Dyer, AAF, AIFD, and Guether Vogt, AAF, Bouquets, Denver
- 2001 Andrew Manton-Zamora and Rutger Borst, Apisis Group, Miami
- 2000 Southern California Plant Tour Days
- 1999 Greg and Heather Katz, Al Manning Florist, Kansas City, Mo.
- 1998 Bill Cutting, Kuhn Flowers, Jacksonville, Fla.
- 1997 Brooks Jacobs, Greenbrook Flowers, Jackson, Miss.
- 1996 Sylvia Nichols, AIFD, The Window Box, Cheshire, Conn. United Floral Exchange, Carlsbad, Calif., and Denver.
- 1995 Mary Dark, Broadmoor Florist, Shreveport, La., Greg Royer, Royer's, Lebanon, Pa.
- 1994 Mary Lore, McFarland Florist & Greenhouses, Inc., Detroit Tom Aykens, AAF, Memorial Florist & Greenhouses, Appleton, Wis.

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WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Find out how past Marketer of the Year winners are doing — whether their campaigns have withstood the test of time and what new innovations they've tried out, on www.safnow.org

If subsidizing a workshop about a topic that has nothing to do with buying flowers smacks of going overboard, it's helpful to know that this is the same duo that dressed up in cowboy attire and played the cowboy song, "I've got spurs that jingle jangle," when pitching a large event client that was having a Western-themed party. To Dyer and Vogt, helping their clients use social media to have a more successful event is all in a day's work. "It cements relationships, creates a tool a client can use that they normally wouldn't use, a tool that helps them be successful, to keep us successful," Vogt said.

"It all goes back to relationship building," Dyer said.



Bouquets is demystifying social media. 6 months ago

In April, Bouquets invited 45 nonprofit clients to attend one of three scheduled social media programs, and more than half (24) attended. Bouquets worked out a deal with MGA that would require little

to no out-of-pocket costs: They'd pay for MGA's \$50-per-attendee fee by crediting MGA's floral account.

The seminars took place on Thursday or Friday mornings and started with breakfast and networking, followed by a 45-minute presentation by the MGA staff designed to "demystify social media." Attendees learned how to use Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Linked In, YouTube and other social-media tools to attract new supporters, offer financial giving opportunities and disseminate info about upcoming fundraising events.

"An important message the MGA staff emphasized," said Vogt, "is that people get bombarded with the traditional event reminders: e-mails, e-blasts, save the date. If you find new ways to do the same thing, such as using Twitter and Facebook, you'll get a better turnout."

MGA knows this from firsthand experience: It used social media to drive turnout for a rally at the Denver capitol and won an award from the Public Relations Society of America for its successful effort.



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Based on the buzz in the room — the question-and-answer session went 45 minutes, until it finally had to be cut off — and feedback after the program, Vogt knew his “epiphany” was on target and that Bouquets would be credited with escorting its event-planning clients from the “thinking stage” of social media to actually executing it.

“The excitement in the room about the possibilities of social media for their organizations was obvious,” Vogt said. One attendee, who runs an organization that provides oral health care to people living with HIV/AIDS, wrote to Bouquets: “It provided a wealth of information and the timing was perfect. I have been reading up on social media and its impact on marketing, but could not grasp how to get started. (MGA) answered all of my questions. I’m ready to take the plunge!”



Bouquets’ event dance card is filling up. 5 months ago

Whether that excitement would vaporize after the event or have an impact on Bouquets’ event business became clear during the weeks and months after the workshop.

Denver Health Medical Foundation, a client that’s used Bouquets for its annual gala since 2005, had projected a 30 to 40 percent decrease in its event décor budget. Using its newly learned social media tools, Dyer said, they were able to maintain the same table count levels a 2008 for the late-April event and even increase the décor budget from \$17,500 to \$20,000.

LoDo District, an organization that promotes the lower downtown area of Denver and a four-year client of Bouquets, increased its annual awards dinner attendance from 300 to 350, a 17 percent increase. “We definitely gained a lot from the social media seminar,” said Jeannie Wert, the group’s communications and event coordinator. “It was the second-most successful awards dinners we’ve had in the 17 years of holding it.”

Six other organizations have told Bouquets that their events will be expanding as a result of their social media networking. And by September, Bouquets had contracted for 85 percent of the events it has booked in 2008 and picked up several new clients.

Bouquets even gained some brownie points from those who couldn’t attend the event. “They commented how timely, relevant and important these seminars were,” Dyer said. “Even among those who did not attend, the responses revealed that the reputation of Bouquets as a community leader had been enhanced by the invitation alone.”



Bouquets is enjoying the gift that keeps on giving (back). 1 month ago

There’s plenty of proof that reputation opens doors for Bouquets: They were the only event décor company invited to a kick-off party held in early September to the Denver Center for Performing Arts’ biggest fundraiser for 2010 — a good sign that they’ll get the event décor account. And a random flip through any recent issue of 5280, Denver’s city magazine, will show several non-profit organization ads that include the Bouquets logo as a sponsor of their organization.

“It’s funny,” Dyer said. “Our reputation seems to be that we’re among the most generous in town, in terms of giving back to nonprofits. And we are.” But he’s quick to add that it’s calculated generosity. “We don’t give anything away without making sure people know about it. We pick things that will be great for the charities and and great for us.”

Kate F. Penn is editor in chief of *Floral Management* and SAF’s vice president of communications.

Workshops 101

Now that Bouquets has added “hosting a social-media workshop” to its repertoire, they have some best practices that can apply to any workshop. Find their tips online, www.safnow.org/infotogo.

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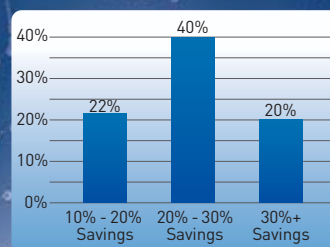


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