

by John Parkinson

A SHOP STEEPED IN TRADITION, BUT CONTEMPORARY TOO

Furst Florist's various business components and creative marketing strategies make it a viable industry model.

The Furst Florist and Garden Center in Dayton, Ohio is now in its fourth generation of family ownership. Its business includes a full-service retail shop, a seasonal garden center, a greenhouse, and a wholesale division. Creating a store Website and utilizing social networking sites are some of the methods Furst is employing to expand its customer base. "It's been tremendous," says General Manager Jeanna Furst, of using Facebook. "Within a few days of setting up the page, people were asking questions about what we were showing; it's a connection we didn't have before." With the economic downturn, Furst is trying to balance her budget, continue providing quality products and services, and keep her workforce going. *floriology* had an opportunity to talk with her to find out what she is doing to stay successful.

● **HOW DID YOU GET STARTED?** I finished my college career with a business degree, and found out I didn't want to sit behind a desk. I had a passion to work with flowers, so I started at a small shop. I participated in every aspect of the business, even mopping floors, cutting flowers, and running deliveries.



● **WHAT'S BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME IT?** Retaining our customers and encouraging them to buy flowers even though the economic climate in Dayton has been grim. We are working hard to keep our name in the public eye through involvement in community events with charitable organizations. We exchange our services for advertising—allowing us to remain visible to our customers. We also are monitoring our labor costs.

● **DISCUSS PARTICULAR BUSINESS STRATEGIES THAT HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL.** We are tracking our costs of goods sold on a weekly basis. This has helped us monitor our buying of fresh goods. The goal for our shop is for fresh purchases to be about 28%-30% of sales. By tracking this weekly, we can determine if we are operating profitably. If we are spending too much on fresh purchases, I look to the design to see if too many flowers are being used or are we throwing flowers away.

● **WHAT GOALS HAVE YOU ACCOMPLISHED, AND WHAT WOULD YOU STILL LIKE TO ACCOMPLISH?** We have worked at earning corporate business and have put together contracts where we are the preferred vendor. We have worked hard in remaining viable, and we still have a passion for what we are doing. We are looking for new flower buyers, and we believe it is going to be the younger generations. Although we have been challenged with all the new technology they use. We didn't have a Facebook page until a month ago, and we're trying to figure out Twitter. We are looking to make those updates and learn the technology.

● **WHAT MAKES YOUR BUSINESS UNIQUE?** We believe in making a custom design for each order. We get compliments from people that say, 'every one of your arrangements is different and beautiful, and we are not seeing that anywhere else.' The customer wants their piece to stand out and be the piece that they are proud they spent their money on. And although it takes more time on the design and sales ends, we have always been strong believers in giving that extra effort to our customers. 