

# FILL YOUR DANCE CARD

by Lindsay Ulrich

WITH SALES

Are you working hard or working smart? Prom can wear you out or pad your bottom line, depending on how you approach the season.

We've chatted with veteran florist Betsy Hall who runs and owns Hall's Flower Shop and Garden Center in Stone Mountain, Georgia, along with her husband Ken. Hall has worked at the shop since 1980 and knows a thing or two about prom season.

"If you spend 30 minutes on a \$35 sale, you're going to lose money during prom season," Hall said. "Prom is often the first time many students have ever shopped with a florist. It's our responsibility to make the process fun, while working towards being profitable."

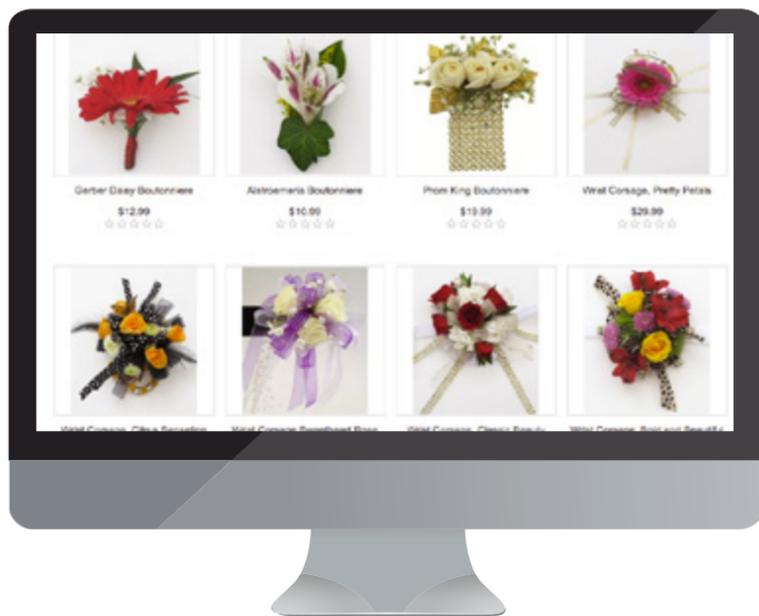
And Hall knows about profits. Prom sales count for 6.5% of her total sales from March to May, because she runs her shop like a well-oiled machine this time of year. Here are her best practices:

## Keep a Prom Calendar

"We have 18 to 20 high schools whose students shop with us for prom, so it's a long spring season starting in mid March and ending Mother's Day weekend," Hall said. "Early in the new year, we begin calling all our area high schools to find out when and where each prom is scheduled."

Hall lists all the proms on her website, along with the dates. While this does drive some traffic to her site, it's mainly used as a helpful tool for staff and customers.

"We create our work schedule for prom based on how many schools are scheduled for a particular week," Hall said, adding that "parents have thanked us many times for this info!"



## Use Last Year's Data

Hall keeps meticulous records of each year's sales and consults those stats to guide her efforts and anticipate resource allocation.

"We photograph each design, give it a name and a price, create a SKU, and then add it to our website collection," she said.

Hall reviews which corsages and boutonnieres sold well, and which did not. Because of the individual SKUs, this analysis is easy.

"The colour of ribbon and trim may vary, but we know what flower type and style sold," she said. "We base our sales targets off of this information."

## Push Buyers to the Website

Selling prom pieces in the store can take a long time, so Hall makes it easy to order online. Along with the calendar of prom dates and locations, she posts designs that customers can select with a click of a button.

"I can't tell you how much the online ordering process has lightened the sales load inside our store," Hall said. "If you make students call or come in, I think you're losing sales."

Why? Because a lot of students are most comfortable doing things digitally, she explained: "They're happy to purchase just as it is pictured online and pick it up or have it delivered."

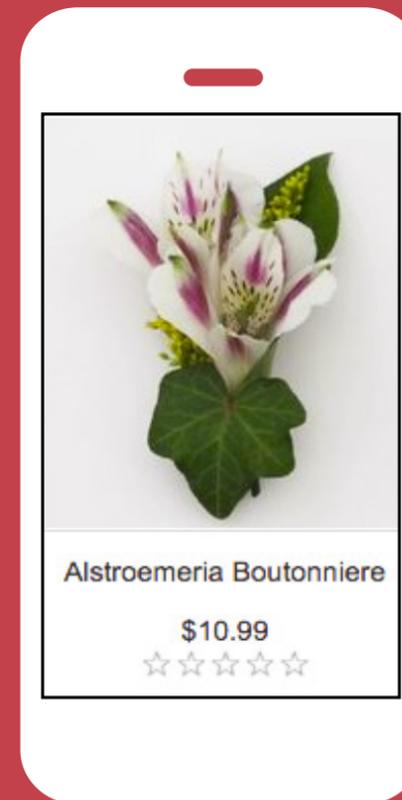
She does offer an in-store taste of what customers can find online though. "We don't create sample corsages, but on busy selling days we set up a display of the fresh flowers we're using for prom right next to our style board (a piece of large foam that sits on an easel and displays ribbon samples, bracelets, bling, leaves, feathers, etc.)," she said. "The inventory number is displayed with each product shown."

## Offer Customization (And Keep it Organized)

Hall knows the power of organization. She offers a variety of ways to personalize prom orders and keeps this process orderly.

"We give each style of ribbon, bling, feathers—any type of add on—its own inventory number," Hall said. "We then use the style board with a pretty frame to display them with their inventory numbers on the board."

During the order-taking process, employees include each inventory number for ribbons and add-ons in the SKU or description. "This way, the person making the corsage has no doubt if



the customer wants the sparkly gold ribbon or the matte gold ribbon," Hall said. "We hate re-dos caused by poor order-taking!"

## Purchase Google AdWords

Most of Hall's prom sales come from online traffic and she swears by targeting your audience through Google AdWords. "Teens are searching for you on their smartphones...I promise!" she said.

How does she know what keywords to use? She outsources the job. "I hire an expert to handle my AdWords on behalf of my shop and we work together for the best possible outcome," she said. "It's money well spent for the expertise and clicks."

She also starts early. "We get everything up on our site as soon we know the dates of proms," she said. "Our Adwords campaigns for prom start in late February."

## Educate and Energize Your Staff

It's easy to forget that even experienced floral staff might need a refresher when it comes to seasonal sales.

"We conduct staff sales training every year to remind our staff, and teach new staff members, how to quickly and accurately sell prom flowers," Hall said. "Knowing how to keep the conversation moving, working with indecisive customers, and reassuring the customer they have made a beautiful choice is key to keeping prom sales profitable."

And don't forget the rewards! "Prom season is tough," she said. "Be sure to celebrate with a special lunch for your staff when it's over. They've earned it!"

## Engage Your Audience with Email and Social Media

Hall reminds her followers on Instagram, Facebook, and email lists that prom season is approaching.

"We mention prom items in our weekly email marketing, but we don't do a specific prom campaign since every two years you have a completely new batch of customers," she said.

For any online orders, she also makes sure to keep tabs on her buyers. "We always get an email address, physical address, and phone number," she said. "All customers move into our database for future marketing. We do segment them out as prom customers."

## Take Inventory

Before you start, make sure you have enough of everything, from bling to corsage boxes, to get through the season. "Order these things in ahead of time, before the rush begins," Hall said.

For more examples of how she does it, follow Hall's Flower Shop and Garden Center on social media:



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