



Wedding WISDOM

Smart and savvy tips you can put to work
for your floral enterprise.

By **Debra Prinzing, PFCI**

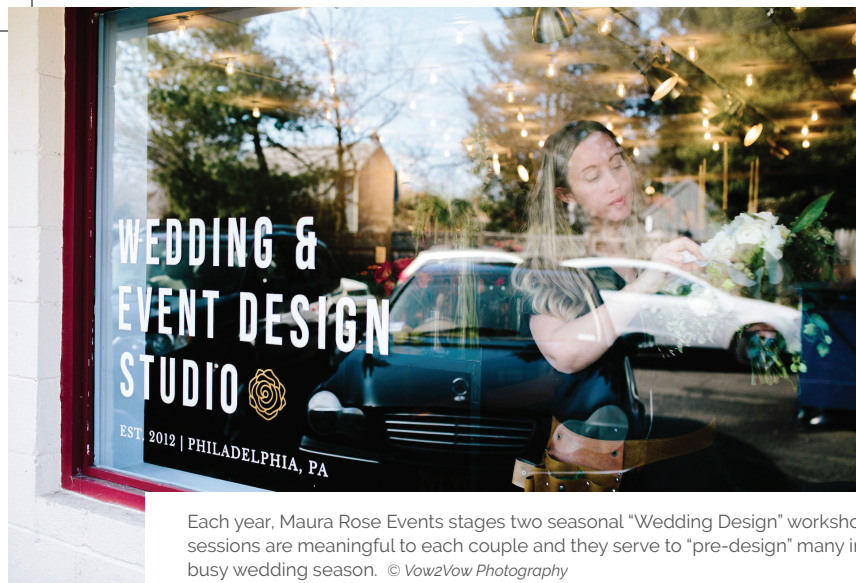
How do you build and nurture your wedding business? If you're like most studio or retail florists, the weddings and events niche offers both the potential to express your aesthetic and capture a nice influx of revenue. But weddings can also be stress inducing and less lucrative than one might think. In my recent conversations with wedding and event designers and farmer-florists who offer wedding packages, I discovered a wealth of great ideas you can employ immediately.

ENGAGING WITH BRIDAL CLIENTS

Maura Feeney, owner and principal designer at Philadelphia's **Maura Rose Floral Design & Events**, told me about her creative way to engage with wedding clients. "Two weeks each year, we bring in all our wedding clients for a custom 'Design Workshop,'" she explains. Clients who have spring and early summer ceremonies attend the "Design Workshop" each March, with late summer and fall wedding parties attending during July.

This program is a fully immersive floral experience for couples, she adds. "We order thousands of blooms – American or locally grown, as possible – for each one-week period, and we schedule each client for a one-hour time slot. During their hour, a couple meets the design team, sips champagne and views all our rental inventory, and we create mockups of their bouquets and centerpieces."

The complimentary session is offered to clients who have paid deposits to secure their dates. Typically, Maura Rose can accommodate three to five participants per meeting, so family and attendants often join in. "I started offering the 'Design Workshop' in 2017 because we were spending a lot of time designing [future] weddings in the midst of our busy wedding season," Feeney says. While the week of each "Design Workshop" is long (the studio sees five to six clients a day for seven days straight), and while there is a



Each year, Maura Rose Events stages two seasonal "Wedding Design" workshops for booked clients. The festive sessions are meaningful to each couple and they serve to "pre-design" many important features long before the busy wedding season. © Vow2Vow Photography



cost to running the two sessions each year, Feeney says it pays for itself. Often clients ask for add-ons to their original proposals, and other wedding vendors participate by bringing cake samples or providing take-home gifts, adding to the experience. "At the end of each of the weeks, everyone's designs are complete for the upcoming season," she adds.

ATTRACTING (AND NURTURING) COUPLES
Most of the designers I interviewed agree that Instagram is their top channel for attracting wedding clients. "It's all about Instagram," says Mary Coombs of A Garden Party floral and event design in Elmer, N.J. "Every day, new clients connect with us there, via our stories, referrals from friends and other vendors tagging us. They use Instagram to gauge our work instead of our website now. A professional website is still necessary, but [prospective clients] are making faster decisions by scrolling through the feeds."

Tobey Nelson of Tobey Nelson Events & Design in Langley, Wash., attracts target customers by connecting them to her business mission. "I speak about my values on my website and in my brochures," she explains. "I make it clear that I value sustainability as well as quality and customer service. Clients who work with me appreciate that they are investing in ecofriendly choices."

Pilar Zuniga of Oakland, Calif.-based Gorgeous and Green has learned not to put her own style at stake just to make a client happy. "That doesn't work for anyone. I book weddings because I have confidence in who I am as a florist and in my work. I am unwilling to compromise on my style and business practices, including being sustainable, using locally grown and seasonal flowers, and not using floral foam. It's not just about what I can do for the client but also about whether the work is going to make me happy as well."

Kirsten Gordon of Bloom Magic Weddings in Highland Park, Ill., has developed an ongoing communication stream to engage with clients who have booked with her. "I send two or three 'touch' emails leading up to their day, to communicate over long time periods, to keep the couple close to me and my flowering role, and to encourage them to use me as a valued consultant and refer me to others," Gordon says. The emails might include a note and picture about a fresh interpretation of a popular color scheme or trend, a note several months in advance letting them know Bloom Magic can help with showers or rehearsal dinners, and even sharing a behind-the-scenes photo while Gordon is sourcing their vases. Customers recognize that Bloom Magic Weddings goes the extra mile for them, making a deeper personal connection prior to the wedding date, the designer says.



Wedding florals by A Garden Party LLC
© Saltwater Studios



CONSULTATIONS

“We are diligent about keeping [web and online] content up to date and are mindful about response time once a client reaches out,” says **Jennifer Haf** of **Bloom Floral Design** in Charlevoix, Mich. “Once we get them hooked through our virtual floral galleries, we call to schedule a chat by phone or in person. During the first chat, we listen, take oodles of notes and make simple sketches as we get the creative wheels spinning. We give them full confidence that we are seasoned professionals who will deliver. After we wrap up the consultations, which usually take anywhere from 30 minutes to a few hours, we prepare proposals – whether they are ready to put down a deposit or not. We are also clear about our availability and reservation process.”

At A Garden Party, Coombs says it’s important to engage right away once you receive an inquiry. “We ask directly for a phone call in the first return email. We also utilize **Acuity Scheduling** as an online scheduler where clients can book video chats or in-person consultations. More of our clients are

utilizing video conferencing, and it is a timesaver. We screen-share our **BloomTrac** [event florist software] screen, our website and Pinterest, and we share ideas and save them right to the orders.”

Stacy Brenner of **Broadturn Farm**, a farmer-florist based in Scarborough, Maine, believes in offering a floral plan that focuses on colors and aesthetics rather than specific flowers. “Start by never promising that a design will have specific blooms,” she suggests. “This limits your flower choices and requires you to search for things that may not be available. Tell your clients you can meet their palette choices and the aesthetic of the conceived designs with what is available in the fields and forest locally.”

PRICING

Sarah Pabody of **Triple Wren Weddings** in Ferndale, Wash., says, “We recently stopped pricing each piece and, instead, quote an overall price.” As a farmer-florist (affiliated with Triple Wren Farms, a sister business), Pabody believes



Wedding florals by A Garden Party LLC
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Bouquet design by Triple Wren Weddings
© Segar Photography



Bouquet design by A Garden Party LLC
© John Barone Photography

her studio attracts “clients who are interested in purchasing our style and incorporating it into their whole wedding” and affirms that this approach has saved time in preparing estimates.

CLOSING THE SALE

Denisa Anderson of Merrily Along-Floral Design in Everson, Wash., is a boutique flower farmer-designer whose goals are to make a connection with the bride, provide the finest product and honor the budget. She closes each consultation by providing an estimate and emphasizing that locally grown and/or American-grown organic flowers are best options. “I ask them to let me know within two weeks, and I encourage them to check other sources during that time, to decide on the right fit for them. And I’ve never been turned away.”

To turn a prospect into a booking Feeney, of Maura Rose Floral Design & Events, creates detailed proposals in **HoneyBook** client management software and style boards using **Canva**, a graphic design platform. “We always send out within three days of our initial call and place an expiration date of 30 days on the proposal,” she says. “We follow up with clients throughout the 30 days to answer any questions they may have.”

PACKAGES

Three years ago, **Cassie Plummer**, a farmer-florist from **Jig-Bee Flower Farm** in Philadelphia, developed Jig-Bee’s “We Do” package, priced between \$600 and \$2,500. While Jig-Bee offers DIY florals at \$145 per bucket (with about 60 stems of mixed flowers and foliage), the “We Do” package offers similarly sized buckets with

the option to add on wedding personals and ceremony installations.

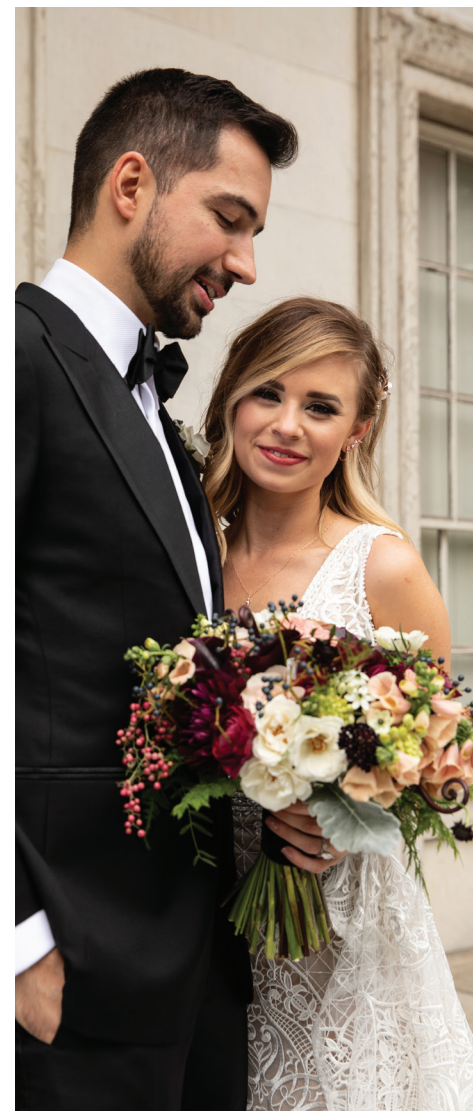
“We dive more deeply into the couples’ plans, including selecting their color palettes, stem counts and personal floral options. Once a couple books with us, we offer two additional consults, one that includes a farm tour right before the wedding,” she says. “Couples always say how exciting it is to tour the farm and see where their flowers are grown. We also give them a mini bouquet of the flowers they were drawn to during the tour.”

PARTNERSHIPS

Sarah Bruxvoort, owner and creative director of **Rose and Laurel** in Lakeville, Minn., views partnerships with photographers as key to building her portfolio. “I always bring a box of detail flowers on the wedding day for the photographer to style a couple’s stationary, shoes, etc., and sometimes I include an extra boutonniere. I let the photographers know that I’ll have flowers for them. They love it, and no one is tempted to snip blooms from the bouquets.”

Farmer-florist **Niki Irving** of **Flourish Flower Farm** in Asheville, N.C., says she has built a solid reputation with planners and venues over five years. “There are things we do consistently on wedding days,” Irving says. “We dress in matching Flourish T-shirts so that our team is easy to identify. Upon arrival, we check in with the planner or venue manager and find an out-of-the-way place to stage the flowers. We clean up our mess as we work, and we ask the planner or venue manager to make sure everything meets their approval before we depart.”

Martha White and **David Martin** of **Free**





Range Flowers at Martin Farm in Gracey, Ky., maintain a close relationship with a wedding venue owner in their rural community. “Many of our weddings come from her recommendations,” White says. “We don’t go after brides with big budgets; \$2,000 to \$3,000 floral budgets are our sweet spot.”

PINTEREST

Blair Roberts Lynn of Sweet Blossoms in Frederick, Md., manages her clients’ Pinterest expectations through direct communication. “If their requests are not in line with their budgets, we address that in our first conversation,” she says. “Another challenge with Pinterest is color because many photographers filter images, which changes the perceived color of flowers. So, I create my own mood boards with descriptions from my clients’ Pinterest boards so I can show what I took from their inspiration.”

A Garden Party asks clients to invite them as a collaborator on their Pinterest accounts, “so we can see the pins and add images from our website,” Coombs says. “Pins are saved, and those images are added to our BloomTrac proposals, which comforts the clients by assuring them we are aligned with their visions.” ■



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