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Florists' Review

MAY 2024 | VOL. 215, NO. 5

FLORISTSREVIEW.COM

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Using Gift & Home Markets to Enrich Your Flower Business

By ANDMORE
(formerly International Market Centers)



As you know, the flowers aren't the only things that make an arrangement special. The vessel and accouterments add distinguishing qualities to a design. However, finding truly unique and unusual accents can be difficult, and large-scale buying events can be the difference-maker for florists looking to elevate their offerings. For many florists, gift and home markets—like ANDMORE's semiannual "Atlanta Market" at AmericasMart Atlanta and "Las Vegas Market" at World Market Center Las Vegas—are must-attend sourcing opportunities.

Held each July and January at AmericasMart in downtown Atlanta and World Market Center in downtown Las Vegas, the Atlanta Market and Las Vegas Market host retailers and designers from every U.S. state and around the world looking to discover and buy new resources for their businesses. The Atlanta campus spans three integrated buildings and is the nation's largest product mix for gifts, complemented by a broad selection of home décor, furnishings and apparel, and the nation's largest outdoor living presentation. In Las Vegas, four state-of-the-art buildings host the premier sourcing destination on the West Coast, including a wealth of complementary gift, décor and furniture resources.

These multiday wholesale shopping events showcase brands in a combination of permanent showrooms and temporary exhibits on easy-to-navigate, amenity-

filled campuses. Florists, in particular, shop these marketplaces to find containers and accessories to accentuate their arrangements and sell in accompaniment to their floral creations.

Toomie Farris, AIFD, AAF, president and CEO of *McNamara Florist* in Indianapolis, Ind., has been attending Atlanta Market for more than 30 years. He's become an Atlanta Market expert and has utilized this event to grow his store into Indiana's top full-service florist. Here are his top tips for florists looking to leverage gift and home markets to extend sales opportunities.

Plan Your Buying

Probably the most important step when planning to attend a gift market is knowing what you need to buy while you are there. You would not leave for vacation without an itinerary, and a trip to market is no exception. Because the Atlanta Market and the Las Vegas Market occur twice a year, vendors work on six- and 12-month cycles. This means placing orders in January for fall and winter merchandise and ordering spring and summer items in July.

"Our goals are to make merchandising decisions for a six-to-12-month period that is 9 to 12 months out at each market," Farris explains. "We use the market to identify trends and new products; to evaluate our pre-market thoughts and plans to be on trend, current

and viable; and then to buy products that fit into the plan and seasonality of our business.”

Knowing your buying schedule will focus your at-market activities and help you plan your trip before heading to Atlanta or Las Vegas. With so many floors of permanent showrooms and temporary exhibits, the campuses can be daunting landscapes. There are acres of space with thousands of product lines to browse, and preparing for a gift market is vital to successfully shopping all the products, lines and brands during your visit.

“We accumulate information about trends and what we see in shelter magazines all the time,” Farris notes. “We usually start planning in more detail about a month before market, which includes feedback from our retail store managers and an inventory analysis.”

The Atlanta Markets and the Las Vegas Markets last for multiple days, giving you flexibility to visit for the days that work best for your business and travel schedule. Consider spending the first day just browsing to either narrow down or add to your shopping list. While you’re browsing, ANDMORE’s “@Market App” lets you track your stops by scanning a QR code outside of each showroom or booth. It also allows you to take photos and make notes to keep you organized and remind you of products you want to purchase. Of course, if you have extra time, consider staying an extra day in Atlanta and Las Vegas to sightsee or visit local retail florists and other stores for added inspiration.

“While we end up going to market with some general ideas of what trends and colors we are going to focus on, we finalize the merchandising plan as we make buying decisions on the trip, trying to remain focused on creating cohesive merchandising themes in our stores seasonally,” Farris elaborates.

ANDMORE’s “@Market App” and Market websites are useful tools for the planning and preparation that will help you to be organized rather than overwhelmed and to be focused rather than frantic. In addition to a complete directory of vendors on each campus, the app allows you to select showrooms and brands that you want to visit and save to your personal shopping list, called your “Market Plan.” The websites (*atlantamarket.com* and *lasvegasmarket.com*)—which include exhibitor

directories that are searchable by product category, exhibit location and keyword, as well as schedules of events and at-market activities—walk you through pre-market preparation plans and offer tips to help you maximize your time at market.

For first-time attendees, the websites also have tools to help you prepare for your shopping visit. Atlanta’s “Market 101” page includes tips on how to budget for buying and credit information needed to open



new accounts. Las Vegas’s “Attend” page provides an overview of each product category as well as complementary cross-category connections.

Look Beyond Garden and Gift Resources

As a florist, you may be tempted to spend all your time shopping gift, garden and seasonal resources, but that would be a mistake. In addition to the expansive selection of floral-related gift products, many florists love attending gift markets to source the expansive selection of top-of-the-line complementary home décor, accessories and even furnishings. Farris, like fellow flower shop owners, comes to Atlanta Market with a long list of home décor and outdoor furnishings products to buy for McNamara Florist.



“We look for home accessories such as lamps, art, home fragrances and candles, holiday decorations, and even artificial flowers,” he details. A great destination for florists is “The Gardens,” located on the 9th Floor of Building 2 in Atlanta. More than 60 brands fill this redeveloped space and showcase outdoor décor and garden gift products. Here, you can find sturdy containers for exterior spaces, birdhouses and bird feeders, and adorable ornamental pieces. Even florists who create only interior designs can find useful items in “The Gardens.”

In Las Vegas, Building C, floors 5 through 7 are chock-full of pottery, containers and more products that florists will love. These floors also boast a large selection of seasonal gifts and décor for you to browse, for those special-occasion flower arrangements.

Other products found at Atlanta and Las Vegas Markets that pair well for flower businesses include candles, ribbon, stationery, and a wide variety of décor and accessories for holidays throughout the year. Furthermore, both of these marketplaces feature handmade products and gourmet food offerings that can add excitement to flower shops’ merchandise mixes.

“Over the years, I’ve witnessed the immense value that florists gain from attending markets like Atlanta or Las Vegas,” shares **Angélique Witcher**, marketing and content manager for *Accent Decor*, based in Chamblee, Ga., and one of the many exhibitors with showrooms in both Atlanta and Las Vegas. “These shows offer a treasure trove of innovative products, exclusive show specials, and invaluable opportunities to engage directly with vendors and appreciate products in person,” she assures. “Whether exploring new trends or forging relationships with suppliers, attending these markets is a strategic investment for florists seeking to stay ahead in a competitive industry.”

Find Your Inspiration

More than just sourcing product, gift markets offer opportunities for florists to find inspiration for their art. With meticulously crafted merchandising in showrooms on every floor, aisles and aisles of trade-show booths, and multifaceted displays in lobbies around the buildings,

florists can view new trends and creative design ideas in person. “You have to keep it fresh,” Farris states, “and seeing new on-trend merchandise opens our eyes to new ideas for our floral designs.”

Gift markets also offer full slates of education seminars and networking opportunities that can help take your business to the next level and enrich your at-market experience. These seminars feature experts from a variety of industries offering new insights and perspectives. Celebrity appearances, book signings and meet-the-artist events are all a part of the market experience. In Atlanta, you can even sit in on a cooking demonstration and enjoy sample bites from a leading chef. The Atlanta and Las Vegas Markets’ websites feature schedules of market happenings so you can build these activities into your plans.

Spending time at gift and home markets is a great way to get your creative juices flowing and stock up on unique and distinctive products that will level-up your flower business. Understanding your retail needs and customer demands, researching the product lines and brands available, and creating a buying plan before going to a market will lead you to a successful sourcing experience. With the right preparation and open eyes, a trip to a gift market, particularly the Atlanta Market or the Las Vegas Market, will unquestionably enrich your flower business.

Atlanta Market is a dynamic and immersive wholesale sourcing destination housing the nation’s largest product mix for gift complemented by a broad selection of home décor, furnishings, apparel and the nation’s largest outdoor living presentation. It features three buildings with 51 floors of showrooms and temporary exhibits, with thousands of brands that attract retailers and designers from every U.S. state and more than 50 countries.

The next edition runs July 16-22, 2024, at AmericasMart Atlanta. (atlantamarket.com)

Las Vegas Market is the leading home furnishings and gift market in the western U.S., presenting thousands of gift, home décor and furniture resources in an unrivaled market destination. Las Vegas Market’s diverse product offerings allow for cross-category commerce among these industries. The Summer 2024 Las Vegas Market is July 28-Aug. 1, at World Market Center Las Vegas. (lasvegasmarket.com)





Tips for Planning Buying Trips

By Nita Robertson, AIFD

BEFORE YOU GO

• Research the Market

Before attending a gift market, research the event to understand its vendors and product offerings; for example, some markets (and vendors) specialize in regional goods, home décor and furniture, jewelry and apparel, resort and souvenir merchandise, and so on. (See a list of upcoming gift markets in our “Coming Soon” events listing at right, which we feature in each issue.) Comb through exhibitor lists to identify the best sources for the products you intend to buy, and then plan which exhibitors to visit and in what order (based on either showroom/booth location or product importance). This will save you a lot of time once you arrive at the gift market.

• Identify Trends and Themes

Research current gift and retail trends before you go, to identify popular looks, styles, themes and products that are in demand, as well as those that conform with your store’s brand and clientele. You will also discover similar information while at market. Look for unique, distinctive and/or niche products that will differentiate your store and attract customers.

• Set Buying Goals and Budgets

Define your buying goals and budgets for the gift market. Determine the types of products you’re looking to source, the quantities you need and the price ranges you’re willing to pay for each. Having clear goals will help you stay focused while shopping the market. Allot a small percentage of your budget (say, 10 percent to 20 percent) for exciting new must-have items

and impulse purchases—items you find that you may not have planned to buy.

• Be Credit Ready

Prepare a “trade reference” listing of your business—banking and credit information, including credit references (existing open accounts)—that you can give to new vendors to expedite establishing open accounts with them. Also, to gain access to short-term funding for purchasing new inventory, consider opening a business “Line of Credit” (LOC), which will enable you to borrow cash on an as-needed basis instead of taking out a loan for a fixed amount. Depending on your business situation, another option could be securing a Letter of Credit (L/C) from a financial institution, whereby the financial institution guarantees payment to suppliers on your behalf.

• Schedule an Appropriate Amount of Time

Determine how many days you need (and can afford) to allot for attending a gift show (be sure to factor in travel days). Most major winter and summer gift markets run from four to seven days while midseason, regional and specialty gift markets typically span two to four days—some are even one-day events. Make sure to build in time to explore new vendors and products (it would be a shame to visit only your regular suppliers) and to attend a few of the myriad education, networking and social events hosted by many gift markets (who says you can’t mix business with pleasure?).

• Plan Travel and Accommodations

Research hotels for prices and proximity to the gift market, and

schedule travel arrangements. If you will drive, investigate parking availability and cost at the gift market; if you fly, check out shuttles or other transportation to and from the gift market. Most major gift markets will assist with and provide information on all these details, and many of them arrange for discounted air fares and lodging prices for market attendees with various airlines and hotels.

AT THE MARKET

• Source from Diverse Vendors

Explore a variety of vendors to discover a wide range of products and suppliers, including handmade, artisanal and/or locally crafted items, that will appeal to customers seeking unique gifts and décor. Consider spending the first day (or two) of your buying trip just browsing the market to identify products and vendors you’re interested in, and then go back and buy later, after you’ve seen everything that’s available.

• Evaluate Product Quality and Provenance

Assess the quality, craftsmanship and provenance of the products you’re considering. Look for well-made items that meet your standards for quality and value. Ask vendors about materials used, production processes and any relevant certifications, in order to provide product “stories” to customers and appeal to those who are concerned with eco-friendliness and broader sustainability issues.

• Consider Merchandising and Display

Visualize how the products you’re buying will fit into your store’s merchandising and

display strategy. Choose items that complement your existing inventory and can be showcased effectively to attract customers.

• Negotiate Prices and Terms

Don’t hesitate to negotiate with vendors on terms and pricing, especially if you’re placing bulk orders or making significant purchases. Ask about show specials and other promotions and incentives, including payment terms.

• Stay Organized

Keep track of the vendors you visit, the products you’re interested in, and any relevant pricing or terms negotiated. Take notes, collect business cards or catalogs, and maintain a record of your interactions for future reference.

AFTER THE MARKET

• Follow Up After the Event

Follow up with vendors after the gift market to finalize orders and to confirm shipping, delivery, terms and any additional details. Keep communication open to ensure a smooth process.

• Plan for Product Arrival

Schedule time in the weeks and months ahead to handle the arrival of your new merchandise. This can include unpacking; pricing; marketing and promotion of new items; assimilating new merchandise into existing inventory; storage; and making plans for dealing with items that arrive damaged, are unavailable and/or were not shipped.

By following these tips, you can navigate gift markets successfully, source appealing products for your store, and delight your customers with unique and desirable offerings.