

The Main Event

7 ways to
build your
event business

With 32 years of experience under her belt, floral artist and designer Lea Romanowski, AIFD, CAFA, CAFD, CFD knows a thing or two about building an event business. Through her company, Designing on the Edge in Calgary, Canada, Lea offers a full range of design services, from structural floral art to small and large-scale event design and décor. Here are some helpful tips to consider:

BRING MORE TO THE TABLE. In addition to floral design, it's important to provide other services, such as custom décor or staging and propping. "There are only so many centerpieces needed for an event," Lea explains. "At a Christmas party, if you are providing the centerpieces, why not offer tree decorating for the event as well as the corporate office?" As companies become more focused on being eco friendly, it has created even more opportunities for floral designers to expand their offerings, she adds.

BE A CHAMELEON. Just like the color trends forecast changes year to year, businesses also need to stay fresh and current. "It's important to change and grow with the times," Lea says. "If you're not moving forward, your business is falling behind." With every new skill set designers learn, they become even more marketable to potential clients. "Like the local supermarket, companies are looking for florists that provide a one-stop shopping opportunity, saving them time and money."

DIVERSIFY YOUR CLIENT BASE. While some florists prefer to focus on one customer segment, it can be lucrative to take on a healthy mix of corporate events, weddings, and charity events. That way, florists can stay busy and turn a profit all year long, Lea says. "I believe a florist can work with both corporate and private clients, as long as they have the right staff to time manage both."

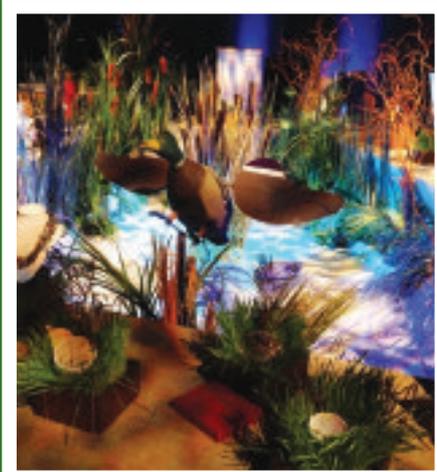
GET YOUR NAME OUT THERE. Many florists would agree that referrals are better than paid advertising.

Lea says 80 percent of her event work has come from referrals. "The best place to start is with your wedding clients," Lea suggests. "Most brides and grooms work for companies who at some point host events or parties. Start marketing your company to event planners, hotels, and meeting professionals." If you have a company you'd really like to work with, drop off a signature floral design with a business card, Lea says. While exhibiting at a wedding show, approach other vendors and offer to do their booth florals at cost. In return, they will promote your business to brides and corporate clients.

MAXIMIZE RETURN ON EVENT SPONSORSHIP. When aligning your company with a certain event or charity—in kind for marketing or advertising—there are a number of factors to consider, Lea advises. Consider whether attendees could turn into potential future clients, and whether your company name will have great visual impact. The pay back may not be worth the time and money invested, especially if the event falls during a busy floral holiday where your shop already generates a healthy profit. "Let's say you want to sponsor a certain event but are unable to commit the time. Giving a financial donation may be a better idea, as long as your company gets recognition in signage at the event," Lea advises.

START SMALL. Large-scale events can be great for the resume, but they involve smart time management and budgeting. "Work on small events before going after big events," Lea suggests. "The more people you have, the more cats you have to herd."

MAKE A GOOD IMPRESSION. To show you are invested in your business, professional photography, a navigable website, and strong social media presence will help you gain credibility. "If you don't have a professional website, corporations won't look at you as a legitimate business," Lea says. 📌



FAST FACTS

Designer: Lea Romanowski, AIFD, CAFA, CAFD, CFD

Experience: More than 30 years

Exposure/Achievements: Instructor for Floral Design Program at The Mount Royal University; 2016 Juno Awards designer; 2015 Best Dining Table Design at Special Events Magazine Gala Awards; Top 5 Finalist, Inspired Design Contest at Garden & Floral Expo Toronto 2014; featured in *Canadian Florist*, *floriology*, and *Canadian Special Events* magazines.