

BLOOMING MARVELLOUS

Starting out with a very small business a few years back, Sydney florist Jodie McGregor Flowers now enjoys a growing body of regular customers, has opened a second store, and runs an engaging ecommerce website to market the business beyond local boundaries. How did she do it? Interview by **Naomi Hulbert**

WHO'S TALKING?

Members of the Jodie McGregor Flowers' team, and their web developers from Connecting Space, share their secrets for combining business, personal and online success.

Jodie McGregor Flowers
www.jodiemcgregor.com
Jodie McGregor & Stuart White
Connecting Space
www.connectingspace.com
 Sek Mun Wong & Vivian Wong

CLICK ONTO THE JODIE MCGREGOR FLOWERS website and you won't find the usual clinical approach so common in ecommerce websites. A browse through the site is more like a stroll around your local florist, though without the heady perfume.

"We know there's a time and place for baby's breath, we just don't think that's very often," laughs Jodie on the home page. "We love unique arrangements, not some cookie-cutter bunch anyone could have flung together."

It's Jodie McGregor's bespoke approach to lovers that makes her arrangements so attractive. She and partner (in life and business) Stuart White have applied this same personal touch to their website, and the result is equally appealing.

Planting the seed: growing customer relationships

Jodie: It's really important to get a few simple things right before you start to build customer relationships. For us, the first and most important thing is that the flowers need to be fabulous, and that means having a variety of interesting and exotic flowers, as well as the more recognisable favourites. Of course, it's critical that we sell fresh flowers, and not ones past their best. We also need to ensure our team is skilled at putting the flowers together in a special way. If we get these things right then we're in a position where our clients trust and value us, and we're able to look at doing some things they'll really appreciate.

Stuart: We used to give our regulars a free bunch every so often to thank them. But since we've grown, we've found we've needed a more formal method of doing this, so we have a Flower Addicts club.

Customers accrue points when they shop with us, go in to the draw to win flowers each week, and once a month someone wins an amazing floral print by Warwick Orme, valued at \$795. We also send out birthday vouchers with special offers to all our customers if we know their birthdays.

Blooming together: successful partnerships

Stuart: Jodie and I live and work together, which can be a big strain on some couples. For us, probably the most important thing in our success is that we are both passionate about the business and want it to be the best it can be. So we're always working towards the same end result.

Jodie: And we have a strong level of trust with each other, which makes it easy to make decisions without having to second-guess each other. So we can concentrate on specific responsibilities that suit each other's strengths. Stu's driven, entrepreneurial and big-picture oriented, while I'm more creative, though I'm also good at making decisions on the spot to keep us heading in the right direction.

Stuart: And you're also very patient and understanding!

Tall poppies: standing out from the crowd

Jodie: A great florist will be able to get the customer excited about flowers, so they become a part of that person's life as something they really enjoy and value. It's amazing the number of people who tell us

"Probably the most important thing in our success is that we are both passionate about the business and want it to be the very best it can be"



Welcome

Order flowers here!

The McGregor Empire Expands (a fraction).

Late at night, when the flowers are asleep, we at Jodie McGregor have been drawing up plans to take on the world. New York, London, Paris? Too obvious! We've opened in CASTLECRAG and couldn't be happier. Now both sides of the bridge can enjoy our special approach to flowers. It's a bit old fashioned, as we have actual shops, with actual people inside. And we know there is a time and place for babies breath, we just don't think that's very often. We love unique arrangements that are specifically designed for you, not some cookie-cutter pre-prepared bunch anyone could have put together. We were proud to win NSW Florist of the Year in 2005 and we reckon that must mean we are on the right track. We look forward to seeing you in either Annandale or Castlecrag. Cheers, Jodie and Stu

Check out our Fairtrade market bags

Flower Addicts Club and Newsletter

Win Art valued at \$795!

The Jodie McGregor Flowers' website aims to keep its tone conversational and inviting

Jodie: We want to review our 'flower seasons' and include a photo for every flower, but I figure that's just something that will never get done! The idea of sending out our birthday bonus letters via email is pretty appealing, as we spend about \$500 a month at the moment doing it by snail mail.

Stuart: The other thing we've often thought about doing is including a daily special, based on what we see at the market that we think would appeal to our customers.

Jodie: Oh, and we really should update our home page more frequently, to give our customers a fresh story every now and then.

Digital blooms: the techies talk

Vivian: When Jodie and Stuart approached us about building the website, they already had a pretty strong idea of what they wanted. Visual design was easy because they already had a strong brand and a clear direction, so we focused on bringing that into the site. And as for navigation (information architecture), Stuart knew what he wanted, so we just ensured his ideas would fit well, and make sense.

Sek Mun: When it came to online orders, the

system had to be easy to use but also quite flexible, which made it complex underneath. We automated the delivery price calculations so the customer didn't have to enter extra information. The whole site, including the online order system, is built on COSM, our own content management system (CMS). What this means is that since the site's been launched, it needs little or no involvement from us to change content. Jodie and Stu can do everything themselves, which makes things very time efficient.

Vivian: Credit card security recently became a huge issue for another online florist, and one of the first things we recommended to Jodie and Stuart was to not store credit card numbers anywhere. It's just a risk that no small business should ever take. Another security issue is in storing passwords. Passwords can be reset if forgotten, but they should never be stored in the system.

Sek Mun: The ordering system is also quite different to other online florists, and reflects the way Jodie thinks about flowers, and the customised and personal service offered in the shops. We made the system more

NURTURE YOUR PEOPLE
(Jodie McGregor)

- **Employ the person rather than the florist:** skills can be taught, but you have to be the right sort of person to want to give customers a really wonderful experience
- **Take notice:** make sure your people are encouraged and rewarded for playing their part in giving the customer a great experience
- **Plan treats:** we arrange massages and facials for our florists, throw parties with limousine transport, sea planes and fabulous restaurants
- **Be generous:** our bonuses are given based on performance, and outstanding customer service is a requirement
- **Provide feedback:** we're constantly providing feedback, and evaluating everyone's performance in an informal way

VALUE ECOMMERCE
(Vivian Wong & Sek Mun Wong)

Launching an ecommerce presence created a new sales channel for Jodie McGregor Flowers, broadening their customer-base. In fact, to remain competitive, they really needed to have a web presence and in the end, they had to become one of the more innovative online florists. In a time when online florists abound with generic shopping cards, Jodie McGregor Flowers has successfully transferred their brand experience to the web.

user-friendly by using technologies such as AJAX, but also had to weigh up the benefits-versus-problems of some of the older browsers not being able to support javascript.

Vivian: For the future, there's the chance to get more creative. For example, it's possible we could look at re-integrating the site with their CRM/POS system. A more Web 2.0 idea would be to perhaps integrate with Facebook, such as a 'What Flower Am I?' application.