



- CONFERENCE REPORT -

19th April saw the first BFA conference – 2020 Vision - take place in Leicester. Organised by Purple Spotted Media, publishers of theflorist.co.uk, the event saw more than 170 industry people join forces for a day of discussion, debate and plenty of networking.

Delegates left telling us they felt empowered and inspired, with plenty of positive feedback filtering through to social media over the following days. Comments from delegates and guests include:

"I think one of the best discussion meetings for our industry I have been to." - Mark Bennett, Flowers by Natrass, Darlington

"Being at #2020Vision was certainly an experience! I am overwhelmed at how some of our wonderful industry's biggest and best names are just as passionate about the core beliefs as a small independent florist." - Danielle Handsley, J van Vliet

"An amazing, eye opening & inspiring day." - Philip Holley, Willow Floristry, Verwood

"Such a good, thought provoking conference." - Joanna Eagelton, Eden Florists, Leatherhead

"A very well & efficiently organised event that was much needed by our industry." - Karen Holgate, Glenholme Florists, Beverley

"Brilliant day. Thank you. Now chomping at the bit to make changes." - Jo Newington, The Village Florist, Storrington

"Had a fab day at 2020 Vision. All in all a very productive day" - Karen Massey, Fleurtatious, Dublin

Below you'll find an outline of key points made in each presentation, however with an abundance of powerful voices and passionate energy in the room there was also much debate and discussion from the floor after each speech was made.



SESSION #1 – WHAT CUSTOMERS REALLY THINK ABOUT BUYING FLOWERS

Speaker: Caroline Marshall-Foster, Purple Spotted Media

The first session saw leading industry editor Caroline Marshall-Foster speak on stats, giving an insight into how the industry has evolved, what its current standing is and a strong base from which to make some predictions and give motivation.

After introducing herself as MD of The Florist magazine (theflorist.co.uk) and explaining why she is placed to give a birds-eye view on industry thanks to years of reporting and a number of key industry clients under her belt, Caroline began by telling delegates who took the time to attend the conference, **“You are already in the top 1%”**.

Using recent research figures from YouGov, Mintel and her own industry survey, Caroline explained that 45% of UK shops now see a turnover of £82k or less.

Between 1995 and 2015, the total market for flowers has increased to £1,826 billion - technically good news for those in the industry but with many more businesses grabbing at it Caroline looked deeper to see where that extra market share is going. In 1995 florists had 44% of market share, Supermarkets had 20% and the mysterious ‘others’ took 36%. Today **florists see just 30%, supermarkets take a whopping 60% while ‘others’ have 10%**.

Caroline also shared key consumer feelings alongside her stats with a large proportion of those surveyed claiming **they love to buy locally**. This trend is evidenced by the influx of ‘local’ supermarkets like Tesco Metro and Little Waitrose as they attempt to match local offerings but without the square footage to fit floral displays like florists can. The survey consensus was that **florists are great for a special gift but too expensive for everyday buying** and many consumers reckon **supermarkets are just as good as florists** – there’s opportunity here to prove them wrong.

Over half of consumers think flowers and plants brighten up the home however **only 15% of them say they buy flowers from a florist and nearly half of all adults surveyed haven't bought flowers at all this year**. With all this information in mind, Caroline looked at opportunities florists can and should be grabbing.

Self-purchase opportunity: People buy flowers for themselves **17 times a year** at an average spend of £8.20. That means you could be seeing the same regular customer 17 times in a year if you offer the right products and service.

Gift flowers opportunity: People buy flowers for other people **1 or 2 times a year** at an average spend of £12 - £25. Take advantage of these customers making sure they choose you for every recipient.

Weddings and funerals continue to be key florist opportunities backed up by stats showing an urge for ‘premiumisation’ of funeral ceremonies.

Caroline ended her speech by stressing the importance of **thinking globally but acting locally**. She noted that her survey showed florists claim that they need most help with marketing, citing Flowerona’s workshops and The Girls Mean Business as excellent tools for marketing advice. However she added that whilst social media is a brilliant platform for promotion, many florists spend far too long faffing on Facebook and not enough time concentrating on local people living nearby.



SESSION #2 – WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM SUPERMARKETS?

Speaker: Ian Finlayson, Practical Solutions International (previously Sainsbury's)

Ian began his speech by detailing the importance of **attractive displays and quality product** in supermarkets. In order to guarantee the best quality and prices, supermarkets **first identify the growers and key varieties** they want to work with.

Essential to supermarket flower supply is an **effective cool-chain**. Flowers will last half as long at 20°C than they will at 10°C. This **means rapid cooling and speed to market** are key.

He stressed that **clean water and good flower food** are incredibly important to supermarkets. Every flower has a **recommended post-harvest solution** for each stage of its journey: **after harvest at the grower, conditioning, display in the shop, and the customer's vase. Clean buckets are key!** Because of this incredibly strict care and cooling process from grower to consumer, supermarkets are able to increase their flowers **vase life guarantee from 10 days to 16 days**. This means they're able to market a guarantee label of at least 7 days for many products, and in some cases 10 days.

Another key to supermarket success is their **ethical trade with growers**. When supermarkets started buying directly from growers they were met by negative NGO campaigns targeting working conditions and environmental conditions. So in a bid to improve their reputation, supermarkets started buying **sustainable flowers and plants – switching growers or pressuring their growers into sustainability** thanks to campaigning and demand from consumers.

Ian went on to describe surprising findings about the way florist shop flower hygiene compares with the supermarkets. Test results showed that whilst **most florists thought hygiene was important their practises demonstrated the opposite**. Regular cleaning of buckets, replacing water, using solution and offering flower food to customers are all easily accessible and could and should be putting florists one step ahead.

Ian concluded by stating that supermarkets have shown that **attractive displays of quality flowers gain customer confidence**, however there are many areas where **they aren't perfect**. This is an opportunity for florists as **the link to great growers of good varieties** is becoming far more accessible for smaller businesses, which means with proper care and good buying practise florists **have the chance to further strengthen their customer offer**.

SESSION #3 – BUY BETTER... INCREASE PROFITABILITY

Speaker: Paul Poelstra, Flowerweb

Paul showed a graph detailing retail shares in cut flower sales across Europe, in which a large proportion of **UK market share held by supermarkets is distinctly larger than in any other country**. He went on to explain the effect the **internet and marketing** has in the flower industry, offering motivation and advice for saving money in order for florists to take back that market share.

The floriculture business chain is long and complex, including breeders, growers, exporters/importers, wholesalers, supermarkets, florist outlets and freelance designers. **Florists are vital for growers and breeders to survive.** He gave a prediction made ten years ago: “The internet will turn our floral industry upside-down and quickly”, as middle men are removed from the chain. Each part of the chain is adding real value. In the past **the only people able to change the system by cutting out middle man were supermarkets.**

Paul’s prediction from ten years ago reckoned “The internet will not cut out traders but will increase power at beginning and end of the floriculture chain.” Thanks to **new methods of online trading**, the development of the auction clock, and **changes in marketing methods** – for example grower groups forming in order to market themselves from the top of the chain – **florists and growers have more power than ever.**

Florists can market themselves by telling stories that supermarket can’t. Today, anyone, anywhere can see what’s available and being bought electronically, **so the whole order line has become transparent.** In the past, florists could see what an exporter had bought, now florists can see what exporters *could* buy. **More transparency means more power to the grower** as they know exactly where their flowers are going – they can now decide who they’re selling to and at what price.

Paul commented on growers, “These people are there with flowers in their hands and the same passion as you.” He added that **social media is a huge help** – you can now **get your act together and get to know these people.** “I think pretty soon you’ll be able to order their products from your iPhone!”

Demonstrating Paul’s point on the importance of the connection between grower and florist, growers **Wouter Duijvesteijn and Stef van Dam, Beyond Chrysanth** took to the stage to introduce themselves and give a brief outline of their company, saying, *“We drove from Holland for six hours here and six hours back because we think what’s happening here is really important.”*

Launch of FloraBritain

Speaker: James Cole, FloraBritain

Paul’s speech on new buying methods and transparency led neatly to the launch of FloraBritain, the **new British flower grower collective** which will enable more British flowers to reach local florists than ever before.

James is a flower grower based in Lincolnshire who has **joined forces with a number of other large-scale British flower farms to sell their products via online buying platform FloriSmart.** He began by explaining that the supermarkets offer farms like his a fair price throughout the season for all product grown. Many large growers in South England went down this route, with only a few remaining in the wholesale system.

He said, “It’s refreshing to see there are 7,000 flower shops. **To try to get our flowers to you guys is an exciting opportunity that’s never been open to us before. This sort of platform gets us to you,** and it’s reassuring to hear that you want British product. You want British flowers, and we want to see them. It’s strange that we’ve never been able to get together and do it before, but we hope you can support us and we can offer you something different.”



SESSION #4 – WHAT ROLE RELAY?

Rather than detail the order of conversation and identify names of those who spoke in this sensitive session, we've pulled out the **key points raised** throughout this presentation and categorised them below.

Websites

"For us, as an alternative to relay, the most important thing is to **have a good website**. You'd be surprised at how cheap and easy it is to do. Having our website is invaluable and means we get a **lot of online orders out of hours**, in fact 60% of our online orders are placed out of ours, and many of the calls we take begin with customers saying 'I'm looking at your website...'"

Advertising and PR

"Because we don't have the big whopper advertising relay offers we do have to rely on ourselves to do it, but **social media** is fantastic for this. We also do **PR**, for example promoting the Lonely Bouquet with local newspapers. **Competitions** and **window displays** are also great ways to promote yourself."

Order transfer

"The safest, easiest and most reliable way to **send flowers to another country** is via relay."

"By taking a few pounds in admin costs you can send orders across the country. Our reputation is still intact and we **use our knowledge as florists to entrust our customer in the hands of another florist** who's guaranteed to be good – we use the Good Florist Guide. It would be great to have a 'standard' of florists who can trust each other."

"I will ring anyone in this room today with an order. I will pick up the phone and give you guys the order, and we'll keep £3.50. I will **take a small amount of that money but send the maximum possible to you** for executing the order. That way we've kept a valued customer."

"We have a **courier company** to box and send flowers, it's very profitable."

"Relay is a massive part of our business, we were a big executer as well as a big sender, but then realised floristry by numbers (using online pictures) doesn't work, so we gave up the executing part because that's where we were losing money so **now we just send and it works**."

"I have a lot of elderly customers who don't have access to a website and don't care to. If they need to send an order afar I go online and find them a website for a good florist. I **ask them to give me £3 for my time** and give them the phone. I put time and effort into making sure their needs are met. **They then come back to me**... Make your business work for you."

“If the **BFA gets itself organised it could create something** that promotes that mark of quality needed for us to transfer orders to one another.”

“I recently installed Strelitzia software and now I can easily **store all the data I need** and can box and send them out without needing relay systems.”

“It’s about **educating the customers** not educating ourselves. I’m happy to do the legwork if my customers want to send flowers across the country. I support my community and my community support me and that’s what being independent is all about.”

Other benefits of relay

“We make a lot of good **net profit** with relay, especially **compared with weddings** which make a much lower profit, and internationally we need it.

“We don’t want the **extra admin work** with such high volume of orders, it’s too much to get people to pay bills etc. so we let relay do it for us.”

VAT Issues

“Transferring orders yourself using a standard of quality is a good idea BUT the caveat you’ve got to watch for is VAT. If you only take a few pounds for taking that order and then send to someone **who’s not VAT registered you’ve lost money.**”

“I do try to find florists I know to be VAT registered but sometimes I have to put those orders through the books and **swallow the VAT**. But even the little bit that I have to swallow is **worth it** because we need to keep each other going.”

“The VAT issue is a big problem. For just a couple of pounds after credit card fees, time on the phone and time placing the order **just doesn’t cut it.**”

Photography & Creativity

“We left relay and have a turnover in excess of £300K per year. We’re able to be creative, and we’re **not stifled by products laid out for us**. We’re in a very emotive business and everything we do is a part of us.”

“We see relay as **a service we provide to our customers**. I know the margins aren’t great but when a customer comes in to send to a faraway shop it’s great to be able to **show them a picture.**”

“Take your own pictures for your website. It’s **really important and not that hard** – you can even use your iPhone etc.”

“We **go to the woods** and take photos with an ordinary camera!”

“We have a blank background in the shop, we make a bouquet and leave it there to develop through week so its **flowers can open up and photograph it at its best.**”

SESSION #5 – WHAT CAN THE BFA DO TO HELP?

Speaker: Brian Wills-Pope, British Florist Association

Brian Wills-Pope, chair of the BFA, took to the stage and set out **his association's goals**. The BFA has **350 members out of 7000** florists - their goal is to take the florist market share to 40%, and to **bring BFA membership up to 2000**.

He explained that florists do have power – 7000 shops and studios makes us **twice the size of Tesco**s and its branches. The BFA have plans in place for further funding, e.g. Country Baskets are setting up a sundries shop for BFA members and FloriSmart are making a donation for every BFA florist who buys through their platform plus they will **employ a marketer**, not just for financial means but for legitimacy.

The current **BFA website** has a lot of SEO potential, so they **plan to monetise it for their members**. Brian said he wants to generate £1mil “to make consumers aware of the wonderful things we do.”

Brian finished by saying that he wants county ambassadors. “The tide is turning – proven by supermarkets opening so many small convenience stores. **We have to band together. We can be more profitable.**”

He also added that the BFA could receive **government funding if they could demonstrate that they can increase the profitability of florist businesses**. Therefore the BFA need funds AND legitimacy. They need clout and members in order to benefit all.

Speaker: Mike Bourguignon, Florint (International Florist Association)

Mike Bourguignon, Manager of Florint, gave a presentation on Florint, an umbrella organisation which encompasses the BFA along with many other **national associations** from around the world.

He showed **statistics on associations in the rest of Europe**, for example in Germany there are 12,000 florists and FDF has 3,000 members, in Italy there are 10,000 florists and Federfiori has 2,000 members, whereas in the Netherlands there are 2,500 florists and VBW, their association, has 1,200 members.

He gave three key areas which make up an association's DNA; **membership benefits/ networks, government relations and education**, adding that the role of education is essential for development of future florists, common national standards, added value for floristry and a supply of workforce.

Mike said, “Florint went **against harmonisation, but pro cooperation**. To become a stronger sector all florists must get together. Let's come together for 2020. Everyone in Europe is struggling. Like the musketeers, it's all for one and one for all, that's what we need to do.”

Speaker: Manfred Hoffman, FDF (German Florist Association)

Manfred Hoffman took to the stage to speak on behalf of his association, which has proven a success in Germany. He said, "It's interesting to see the amount of **powerful voices and the amount of energy** in this room. I feel a **powerful group here** and I believe you will redefine the BFA and the UK's flower shops successfully."

Manfred explained that Germany has the **largest consumer spend on flowers in the world**. Each year every German spends 37 EUR on average on cut flowers. The association - FDF - aims to **encourage the market with designs and inspiration**, this has contributed to the success of the flower market.

He said that **challenges for German florists are still extreme**, as they're also competing with food retailers etc. and there's a decreasing acceptance of flowers and floral design.

He added, "It's important to move away from traditional aesthetic perspectives. We should focus on **innovative trading strategies and new strategic marketing concepts**, and new techniques, combinations and designs. Each company is individual. Florists have a creative, professional level that is far away from the simplified mass product of supermarkets."

"Florists need to be **creative designers and good entrepreneurs**. We must offer the right products and become floral lighthouses in our industry. "