# Your Business Blooms with FloralProfitCenter™

Telephone Systems and Call Center Applications for Florists



# Florist Integrates Phone with Point of Sale to Compete in Changing Market

# Realizes Faster, Informed Sales and Boost to Bottom Line

# Case Study: Matlack Florist

#### Issues

- Inability to separate order calls from delivery and back office calls
- Designers interrupted from designing to take calls during peak times
- Inability to quickly identify and give priority service to key customers

## Solution

- ♦ IP-PBX
- ♦ MAS-Link<sup>™</sup> to integrate TeleVantage with MAS<sup>™</sup> point of sale application
- 'Floating' personnel to man call center
- VIP status for large customers
- ◆ Deliver Status Notification™
- ♦ Support contract with on-going consulting on ideas for process improvement

#### Results

- ♦ Increased order taking capacity 12%
- Flexibility to expand or contract number of agents taking calls on demand
- Reduced average wait-time for customers
- Segmented delivery inquiries from order taking queue
- Prioritize and connect calls for funeral orders more quickly
- Offloading designers from taking calls during busy design times
- Easier system management

Any retail florist knows that the Internet is changing the industry. Some larger companies are claiming more of the floral business. Add to that the abundance of "big box" businesses that are penetrating lower price points. What can the retail florist do to compete?

One West Chester, Pennsylvania florist asked that question and developed a plan to leverage innovative software to maintain a competitive edge. Bernie Ebersole, Matlack Florist CEO, and Director of Operations



Courtesy of K. Delaney

Kate Delaney knew they needed to provide their staff of 21 better tools to enhance both sales and customer service. After successfully installing the MAS<sup>™</sup> point of sale software, they researched the TeleVantage<sup>™</sup> IP-PBX system to crown their installation with integrated call center capability.

# Making the Choice

Matlack Florist already had an excellent reputation for customer service, but the staff thought they could still do better. The Matlack sales team consisted of 6 to 10 employees who pulled double duty, handling walk-in customers at the counter while also taking orders over the phone. Only during certain peak-time holidays was there a call center agent dedicated solely to phone orders.

Ebersole stated, "We didn't have sit-down agents 100 percent of the time, so we needed a system that we could configure to allow us to act like a call center – and get the advantages of a call center – while still enabling our people to move seamlessly across their areas of function."

The previous Matlack phone system provided a number of functions, but they needed even more function and flexibility. They needed the ability to customize and reconfigure their phone system quickly and in a costeffective manner. With the previous system, even the smallest changes, additions or modifications came with delays and at a lofty price.

And, they needed integration between MAS and the new phone system they selected, which drove them to phone system solution provider Alternate Access<sup>®</sup>. "I was doing a little bit of research on the Web, and found Alternate Access had developed the bridge between TeleVantage



and MAS," said Ebersole. "I really felt we would be in a position to utilize it."

Delaney added, "Alternate Access had worked with a lot of florists, so they were familiar with the floral industry. But, each shop is different. Alternate Access had to recognize our differences and cater to them, and they did a really good job of that."

"Alternate Access developed MAS-Link™ to integrate TeleVantage with MAS because we recognized the enormous potential this capability would offer the underserved florist market," said Kelly Lumpkin, Alternate Access CEO. "It raises customer care to a new level in an industry where emotional purchases are transacted every day."

When Ebersole and Delaney chose Alternate Access, they extensively discussed the company's needs and configured how they wanted to run things up front. With a great deal of groundwork in place, the Matlack system was installed smoothly with few changes made afterwards.

A self-described "computer guy," Ebersole was surprised at how seamlessly the installation went. "I kept asking are you sure this is going to work?" said Ebersole. "And they assured me it would...and they were right. With phones, once you get this stuff going, you don't like to touch those T1 lines. But Alternate Access made it happen."

### **Greater Flexibility and Faster Orders**

Immediately the Alternate Access solution enhanced day-to-day operations at Matlack. Managing incoming calls became a key advantage in how the florist used the system. Calls were managed more efficiently by using the queues to control which employees received specific calls at any given time. By doing so, each employee's strengths were best utilized, improving the customer's overall experience.

"During the holidays we have certain people who we want to stay on the phones," said Delaney. "They are good at getting those calls in quickly. We have other people who are great up at the front counter, and we have them take as few calls as possible."

Of course, when business gets hectic, back-up is always readily available. Employees can easily log



in and out of the system without being in the queue, and, because employees carry login information with them, they are not bound by designated seats. A staff member can sit in any seat, log in to the system via the desktop or telephone set, and assist with incoming calls.

"We have a kind of floating call center," explained Ebersole. "I think that is one of the great features. Being on the network, on the wire and being able to do everything from the desktop. I think that is a lot of sophistication for the little world that we live in."

Another immediate impact was the reduction of wait and order time to the customer. "Before, people would wait on hold with the rest of the calls coming into the queue to speak with somebody in the back," explained Delaney. "With TeleVantage, callers can opt to dial a direct extension or go into voicemail, and they are prompted to do so as they are waiting. So, calls are routed exactly where they need to go instead of piling up unnecessarily."

Ebersole estimates that the sales staff has shaved 30 seconds off order calls by using the tools now available, increasing order-taking capacity by 12 percent. Immediately, customer information is displayed on the desktop, including recent order history and, due to integration with the floral software, the price point at which the customer traditionally buys. "It makes for a faster order, as well as a more intelligent sale by our people," said Ebersole. "They can suggest something more in line with a customer's prior purchases. If you can add to the sales number, without using any more electricity or taking more customer time, then that is a big deal. That will drop to the bottom line faster than other things."

The Alternate Access phone system solution enables management to track these reductions. With the previous phone system, call and wait times had to be manually timed. Now the software provides a variety of statistics. Ebersole boasted, "Our sales team is very cognizant now of the longest wait time. We never had those tools before."

# **Better Training and Feedback**



Overall, the new phone system also raised customer service to the next level by providing better employee training. Delaney sees the customer service value in both the call monitoring and recording features of TeleVantage. "We take customer service very seriously, so we don't necessarily hire somebody and put them on the phone that same day," explained Delaney. "We go through extensive training. With call monitoring it's very easy to listen the first time our trainees are on the phone."

As for the call recording feature, Delaney values the ability to evaluate calls to ensure the best possible customer service was provided. On one occasion, an employee was not sure if she had handled a customer

correctly, and she requested that management listen to the call and provide feedback. Delaney recalled, "Being able to go back and hear how the conversation evolved, we were able to tell her 'Yes, you handled that perfectly' or 'Do you hear how a change in your tone would sound better? Try that in the future'."

Ebersole also remembers an instance when a customer claimed they couldn't get through. He explains, "We were able to look at the system and the call logs and find every level detail to see if there was no coverage or something was out. You could never do that before."

Ebersole's personal management time has been dramatically reduced by the reliability of the Alternate Access phone system solution and the abundance of features. For example, the call announce feature allows management to hear who is calling and choose whether to immediately take the call, send it to voicemail, transfer it to another extension, or let the caller choose voicemail or another extension.

### Continuing to Evolve

In the future, Ebersole would like to have skilled employees work from home during peak times when extra help is needed. "In the past, we have had people leave us to become stay-at-home parents or due to changes in their schedules," explained Ebersole. "It would be great to provide these people –

who know our environment and our industry – the ability to work remotely when needed. The TeleVantage software is the final piece in the technological puzzle to be able to make that happen."

Both Ebersole and Delaney agree that adding a few more desktop computers and training additional people to use the administrative functions are future steps in the continuous evolution of Matlack Florist.

"When we chose Alternate Access to integrate our phone system, our company changed," said Ebersole. "We now have the tools to compete as well as anyone within our market. We made the right decisions."



For more information on how Alternate Access solutions can benefit your retail florist business, visit <a href="https://www.FloralProfitCenter.com">www.FloralProfitCenter.com</a> or call 866-831-9277.



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