

WISTERIA FLOWERS & GIFTS

THRIVING VIA FOCUS ON CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

By Jim Negen
Associate Publisher

Jenni Ralph, owner of beautiful Wisteria Flowers and Gifts in Rochester, NY has been involved in retail for more than 30 years, so she's learned a few things about staying relevant and competing against the on-line shopping trend.

"As the bulk of retail has been assaulted and diminished by internet shopping our business continues to grow" she said. "Our belief is that customers respond to interaction and engagement with our staff. In the end we are a customer-driven, retail environment that relies upon traditional methods of satisfying our clients' needs."

The decision to go in to business was inspired by my mother (Rita Freling) who provided the creative beginnings of the shop," Ralph explained. "She is someone who will not accept the idea that you cannot do something. Her sense of resolve and decisiveness inspired us to take the plunge in 1992. Our history began as a hobby in the basement of my mother's house, and blossomed in to our first location of 500 square feet."

Wisteria Flowers and Gifts, which recently celebrated its 25th year in business, occupies 10,000 square feet (an increase of 3,000 square feet just this year) and has 21 employees with over 1,000 items in stock.

We asked Ralph to share some details about her business, as well as what is selling in her store, what advice she might offer fellow retailers. Here are her comments:

Describe some of the unique elements of your business"

- Physical size of store and depth of inventory that is constantly

changing to engage our customers and our staff.

- Extremely large selection of Silk

botanicals and artificial trees

- Staff retention – in some cases for 20 – 25 years, that allows for a

consistent experience for our valued customers.

- Making allowances for flexible scheduling and work hours for our employees
- 5 ongoing diversification of provided services, currently offering:
 - Fresh flowers for all occasions and holidays
 - Silk Arrangements
 - Furniture and home décor
 - Gifts and Holiday décor including "in home" consultation and decoration services featuring The Whitehurst Company ornaments.
 - Weddings
 - Corporate events
 - Corporate decorating services



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What are the top 5 selling items in your store:

- Artificial "custom made" wreaths & arrangements
- Artificial trees
- Corporate "fresh flowers" arrangements
- The Whitehurst Company ornaments
- General gifts

What advice might you offer fellow retailers:

- Steadfastly keep a focus on the customer in front of you, whether in the store or on the phone. Treasure and value EVERY customer no matter the size of the transaction.
- Retain a friendly and knowledgeable staff
- Maintain a positive work environment and encourage employees creativity.
- Utilize social media to stay in touch with customers constantly.
- Continual refresh of the stores appearance.
- Stay involved with the community through donations of time and services. 🌱