

STABY

Where Are All the Flowers Going?

by Bridget K. Behe

PMA and the Ohio Florists' Foundation are co-sponsoring a study of floral products in supermarkets and the consumers who purchase them. This is the first part of that study.

They come to the store on a Friday after work to pick some up before an evening out. They buy a few on Sunday afternoon before visiting friends. They come in several times each week to buy groceries and may pause and pick up some for themselves. Who are they? Consumers who buy floral products in supermarkets. Why are produce and floral department managers, as well as many florists, interested in these people? Profits!

These supermarket floral purchasers are a group of consumers who are making the supermarkets' profit margin just a bit larger. Floral departments have been springing up in many supermarkets since the late 1950's. They have become an addition to the produce department, or even a separate department, in supers that recognize the average addition of .5% of weekly sales at a 50% gross margin. Unlike people who buy shampoo, colas, or cake mixes, floral purchasers have not been identified or profiled clearly. By understanding who the supermarket floral consumers are, their attitudes about floral products, and their purchase behavior, supermarket retailers can better market floral products to them.

The Produce Marketing Association and Ohio Florists' Foundation jointly funded research conducted at the Ohio State University. The purpose of the study was to identify individuals who buy flowers from supermarkets, and profile those people based on their demographics and their uses for and attitudes toward floral products. In December, 1984 and January, 1985, eight supermarkets from three chains

were selected to participate in the study. A 95 item questionnaire was developed and distributed in the supermarkets to nearly 1400 floral department browsers. The people were asked to complete the survey at home, and mail it to the university for analysis. The participants were asked questions about their floral purchases from supermarkets in the past year, their attitudes about floral products from retailers including supermarkets, and demographic information about themselves. For the study, a floral product was defined for them as a flowering plant or cut flower. Over 500 of the consumers responded, yielding a 37% response rate. Of these, 463 (92% of the sample) reported they had purchased a floral product from a supermarket within the past year. The following information is based upon the 463 supermarket floral product buyers.

Demographics

The analysis of the respondents showed 85% of the floral buyers are women, 15% are men. Most are married (69%) and many have dependents (45%). Surprisingly, they are not only from upper income households. Nearly 50% are from households with an income of less than \$30,000 per year. Their ages ranged from 18 to 80, although some children as young as six years old were observed buying flowers while their parents were shopping elsewhere in the store. The supermarket floral product consumer is highly educated with 53% of the respondents graduating from college or technical school. Nearly all were high school graduates (98%).

Floral Product Buying Habits

Purchase Purpose: Most consumers who had bought a floral product responded they had bought flowers for no special reason (Fig. 1 and 2), for

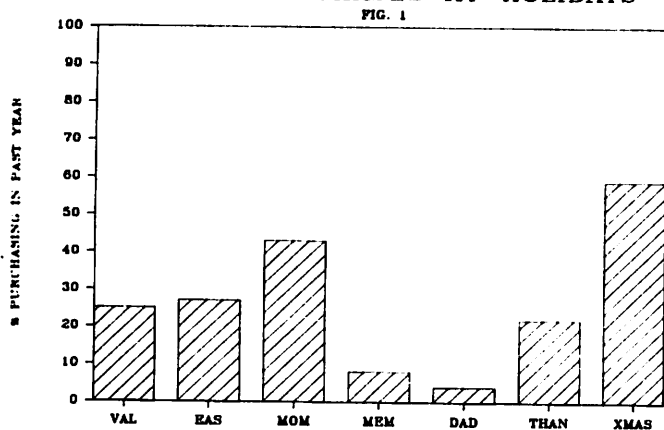
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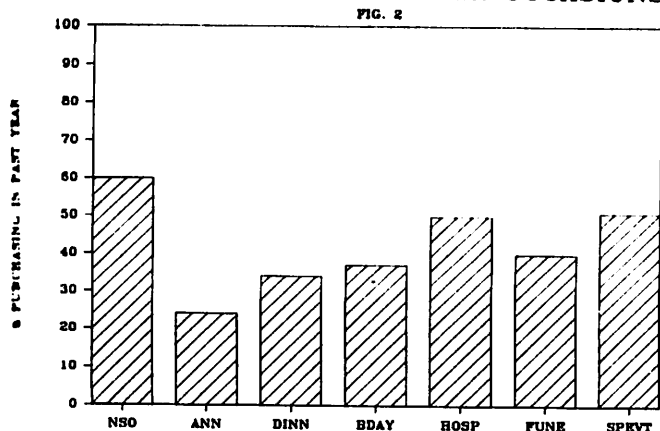
Flowers

Christmas, or for some special event for someone else. Mother's Day, gifts for someone in the hospital, funeral flowers, and birthdays were also popular reasons for buying flowers. Surprisingly, Valentine's Day was not reported by these consumers as a popular floral buying holiday. This may indicate that consumers who buy from the supermarkets in February do not necessarily buy in December or January. Events such as anniversaries, dinner parties, and weddings were somewhat popular times to buy flowers. Father's Day was the least likely holiday for flowers to be purchased. The response about when floral products are purchased indicates that events important to the consumer, and not holidays, are perceived as more vital flower buying times. The consumers want flowers for times or occasions significant in their own lives. Bouquets, plant sleeves, and care tags could be used in targeting products toward events such as these.

FLORAL PURCHASES AT HOLIDAYS



FLORAL PURCHASES AT OTHER OCCASIONS



Purchase Frequency: Supermarket floral consumers are like most other supermarket shoppers in that half of them shop in the store for groceries two to

three times a week, with 56% buying most of their groceries Monday through Thursday. Nearly 60% of the respondents reported that they bought a floral product one to four times in the past year, 35% bought a floral product five to ten times in the past year and 6% reported buying more than once per month during the past year.

The number of times a consumer buys a product is very important to the retailer who sells it. Although only 6% of the respondents reported buying flowers regularly in the past year (more than once per month), this group makes nearly the same number of purchases as the group purchasing four or fewer times per year (60% of the respondents). This group, comprised of six percent of the respondents, is referred to in marketing terms as the heavy users group. This group is the mainstay of many floral departments. Although the dollar value of their individual purchases may not be as high as the consumer who buys once or twice each year, their total purchases in dollars nearly equals purchases of light users.

Consumers are often seen in line at the check-out register with only a floral product in their hands. Consumers were asked about their intentional trips to the supermarket specifically to buy a floral product. Over 60% replied they had made a special trip to the supermarket just to buy flowers. This suggests that a large portion of floral sales are not impulse but rather planned purchases. If this is the case, a greater advertising and promotional effort would be more profitable than money spent on additional in-store displays.

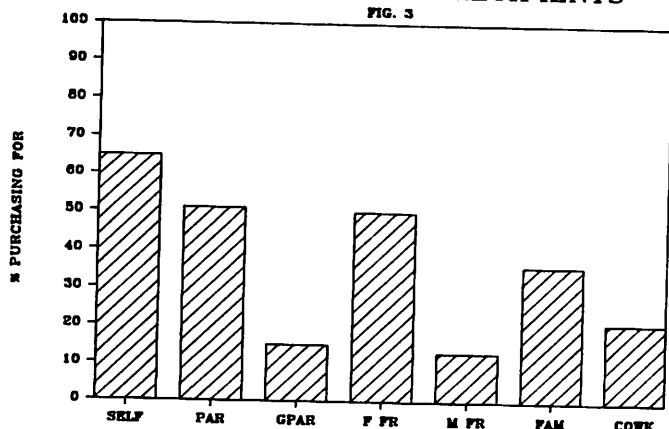
Product Use: The consumers were asked for whom and for which locations in and out of their home floral products were purchased. They were allowed to respond to more than one category (total percentages will not add up to 100%).

Sixty-five percent of the respondents reported they had bought flowers in a supermarket within the past year for themselves, and 36% reported they had purchased for their family (Fig. 3). The most popular individuals to receive flowers were the consumers' parents (51%) and grand parents (15%). Over half of the respondents said they had bought flowers for a female friend, while only 3% had bought flowers for a male friend. Co-workers were popular recipients of supermarket floral products. Over 20% of the consumers had bought flowers for someone with whom they worked.

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Flowers

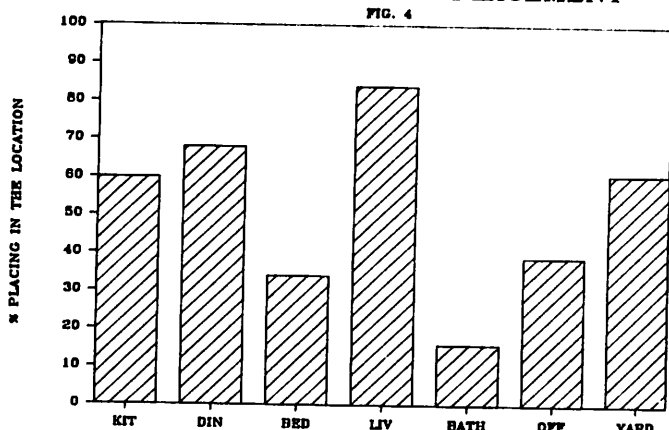
FLORAL PURCHASE RECIPIENTS



Floral products in the home were most often placed in the living area (85%), followed by the dining room (68%), and kitchen (60%). The bedroom was also a place in the house to have some floral products, with 34% of the respondents placing flowers there.

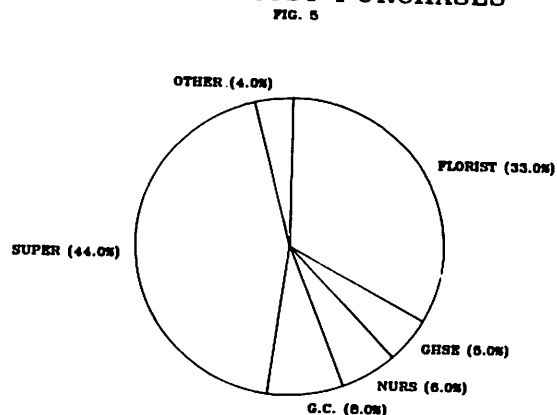
Outside the home, 61% responded that they bought flowers for their yards. Only 22% had bought flowers for their office or work place. Funeral flowers are important to those who buy flowers in supermarkets since 26% had purchased flowers in the past year for that reason.

FLORAL PURCHASE PLACEMENT



For 44% of the respondents, the supermarket was the number one place for floral purchases (Fig. 5). Florists were a strong second choice with 33% of the respondents claiming most of their floral purchases were made there. Garden centers (8%), nurseries (6%), greenhouses (5%) and other retail outlets (discount stores, mail order catalogs) accounted for the remaining locations. This challenges the idea that supermarket floral consumers are "converted" florist customers.

PLACE OF MOST PURCHASES



Consumer Attitudes

Often the consumer's buying behavior or purchasing pattern reflects the person's attitudes about the product in general and the place of purchase. This is important to the retailer because the image of the store and the image of the product are not much different in the consumer's mind. Once an attitude is formed, it is very difficult to change. The retailer and his competition should capitalize on the image the product or store have in the consumer's mind.

Nearly 50% of the respondents said they believed supermarket flowers were as fresh as a florist's. Over 60% say the supermarket is a more convenient place to buy flowers, indicating that convenience is not the most important reason to buy for nearly 40% of the purchasers. More than half said supermarket flowers were a better bargain than florist flowers.

Florists are perceived by the consumers as having more floral product information than supermarkets, according to 37% of the respondents. Information found on the floral package is used by 73% of the consumers. Only 32% of the respondents like to have help in choosing their floral products, but many are reluctant to admit their hesitation in choosing a floral product on their own. Thirty-one percent knew what kind of floral product they wanted when they entered the store. Almost 59% use an additive or preservative on their cut flowers, and 68% know that an additive can make their floral products last longer.

Nearly 70% had some flowers and plants in their homes as children. About 35% grow their own fresh flowers to use as cut flowers in their homes today. Wearing flowers is not as popular as it once

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Flowers

was, with only 16% responding that they like to wear flowers.

Product Attributes

The survey also included questions about the importance of nine product attributes. They were asked to rank the product qualities in order from most to least important. Consumers indicated the following characteristics as most important when selecting flowers for themselves:

1. Freshness (45%)
2. Price (28%)
3. Flower Color (17%)
4. Mix, variety, assortment (13%)
5. Size of bunch or arrangement (6%)
6. Longevity (6%)
7. Package, wrapping or container (3%)
8. Care and handling instructions (2%)
9. Fragrance (2%)

Some consumers indicated more than one top characteristic, so the percentages do not total 100%.

Comparison of Attitudes of Men and Women

The respondents were divided by sex and an analysis was conducted to determine if any differences in attitudes and purchase behavior existed between men and women. Surprisingly, few differences emerged in the analysis, but those differences help shed light on why men buy fewer flowers from supermarkets than women. For this comparison, 416 women and 73 men who had bought a floral product from a supermarket in the past year were used.

More men in the study had purchased flowers at Valentine's Day and for an anniversary than women (51%, 43% versus 19%, 20%). For Christmas, more women had purchased flowers than had men (58%, 46%). Men also reported they purchased flowers for "no special reason" more than women (69%, 56%). Men also buy floral products for birthdays and hospital visits more often than women.

When asked which floral product they most frequently purchase, men favored loose bunches and single stems, whereas women bought more arrangements and flowering houseplants. The number of purchases made by men and women also differed. Men reported that they didn't like to buy floral products for themselves, but women did (82% versus 70%). By far, more men (53%) purchased flowers for their spouse than did women (17%). For all other

people mentioned in the survey (parents, grandparents, friends), there were no differences in the purchasing and giving of flowers by men and women. Fewer men than women place floral products in the kitchen, bedroom and patio areas of the home.

More men felt fragrance was an important attribute in a floral product than did women. Men preferred brighter colors and traditional flower types, while women preferred pastel colors and liked to try new and different kinds of flowers. Nearly half of the men agreed with the statement, "Men like to receive flowers as much as women," while only 35% of the women agreed. This indicates a definite gap in the perceptions of men and women about the popularity of floral commodities among men. More women (67%) than men (48%) felt that supermarkets were a convenient place to buy flowers. Men did not tend to grow their own flowers for use in the home.

Demographically, the men were somewhat younger with 27% of them under age 25 as compared with 10% of the women. The men were also more educated with 66% having completed college or technical school as compared with 51% of the women. More men respondents were single than were women.

Conclusions and Implications

The marketing of a product will often make or break the successful sales of that product. Marketing means understanding the consumer and having the product the consumer wants in the location he or she wants it. An understanding of the supermarket floral consumer would better enable growers and wholesalers to grow and distribute products that retailers can sell.

Supermarket floral consumers are well educated people who want some beauty or nature or spice in their lives — or to give to someone else. They choose to do this with floral products. Buying floral products in supermarkets is convenient for them, but the most important factor in where they purchase is VALUE. Value is a combination of quality at a price the consumer feels is fair. The floral consumers want and use the information given to them concerning product care and handling, but often do not have time to talk with sales personnel. Male supermarket floral consumers prefer traditional flowers in bright colors. Their female counterparts want to try new and different floral products, but prefer them in softer colors. Both types of consumers recognize the importance of preservatives in extending the life of cut flowers.

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Flowers

Customer segmentation is the key. Not all consumers are alike, but many are similar in several respects and should have products targeted toward them to fit their needs. Segments uncovered in this study were the heavy user group, male supermarket floral purchasers, and purchasers of flowers as gifts for co-workers. The female supermarket floral purchaser is often the target for most of the floral product advertising. Although these other groups represent a small percentage of the number of people who buy floral products in supermarkets, their

purchases can mean real increments in the profit margins for many floral departments. By taking the information described here, and creating or modifying products to suit the needs of these groups, supermarkets can turn more floral products into profits.

Additional results from this study will be published in future PMA documents.

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