

shop profile

By Robin Dale Meyers

Photography by Faber Photography

Strong marketing and management have kept Bank of Memories and Flowers growing through tough times.

DURING A DECADE when banks in general have been getting a bad name, there's one establishment that has stood the test of time, providing its customers with beautiful, dependable products and services. Bank of Memories and Flowers boasts three decades as a flower shop. Its name is a tribute to the historic building that houses the shop in its original location. Built in 1901, it was the home of the first bank in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin.

With such longevity behind the name and the shop, the challenge a new owner must meet is to maintain its reputation while also creating his or her own unique business. Melissa Maas, the shop's current owner, stepped up to that challenge with gusto. Having worked in a flower shop throughout high school and college, Melissa's love of the industry grew to a steady passion that sent her straight to the Floral Design Institute in Seattle, Washington. In 2004, at 25 years old and with plenty of knowledge and experience under her belt, Melissa bought Bank of Memories and Flowers from a friend.

Buying a flower shop is a huge investment, which seemed appropriate, given the history of the building itself. So Melissa and her fiancé put their savings as well as a loan into the purchase and then invested plenty of passion and sweat to grow the business. The prior owner was a great resource of information and insight as well as a talented designer who stayed on as an employee.

Bank of Memories and Flowers takes its name from its original location in a historic bank building in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin. The shop now has a second location as well, in Pewaukee, Wisconsin.



Bank of Memories and Flowers

Making the old new again

At its original location in Menomonee Falls, Bank of Memories and Flowers is situated in the heart of the village center, right on a main corner of the thoroughfare. A true turn-of-the-century building designed in Romanesque Revival style, it boasts large windows, molded ceilings, several levels and the original bank floor. Entering the main level, customers see a series of vignettes, from blooming plants and green plants to giftware. The wedding section is housed in the loft, while the mid level is home to the shop's design space. Eight-door coolers line the wall with fresh cut flowers and arrangements. But the shop's most unique feature is unmistakably the walk-in cooler that resides within the original bank vault.

The shop's thirty-year history and prime lo-

cation allowed Melissa to learn the ropes with little threat of business loss. The challenge was to keep the historic charm of the business and yet still put her own stamp on it. She combined ambition, passion and marketing savvy to do just that. Her first step? Create a sister shop.

Bank of Memories and Flowers

Menomonee Falls and Pewaukee, Wisconsin

Owner: Melissa Maas

Menomonee Falls:
owner since 2004

Square footage: 1800

Number of employees: 12

Pewaukee: opened 2005

Square footage: 1600

Number of employees: 6



In Menomonee Falls, the shop maintains a vintage feel enhanced by the original bank floor. A work space at mid level benefits from windows that admit natural light.

Joint shops

Just one year after purchasing Bank of Memories and Flowers, Melissa opened a second location in Pewaukee, 25 minutes from Menomonee Falls. She speculates that this building was an old farmhouse that went through some add-ons and remodeling. In contrast to its sister shop, this structure was one large room with beautiful wood ceilings...and was completely unknown to the community. So Melissa had to work extra hard to create and market the new location.

With the historical strength of the first location established, Melissa knew creating a unique yet complementary personality for the second location was the way to go. Although she kept the same name as the original location for seamless marketing, the Pewaukee location was designed with eco-friendliness in mind. She cultivated a green space and garden, filled with perennial plants and flowers for cutting such as yarrows, tulips, hyacinths, hydrangeas, lilies, sedum and veronica. She uses



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a rain barrel to conserve water and uses only natural pesticides and eco-friendly fertilizers. Utilizing cooler doors and additional walls to divide up the space, Melissa created a giftware section in the front of the shop, a large design space in back and a wedding area nestled in the corner. A cozy and intimate space, this second shop exudes a warm, friendly welcome.

With all the basics in place, Melissa finally had a newly launched shop, albeit one that no one knew about. She says since they started it from scratch, "that phone didn't ring. We really had to get out and sell. It was a bit of a struggle, but we found creative ways to make that store busy." The bank location kept them afloat through the first bumps in the road. She used the second location as a production house for the bank location during busy times, just to get it on its feet. So Pewaukee was responsible for supplying the Menomonee location with extra flowers, arrangements, bows and other items during the holidays and busy seasons.

Good old-fashioned, door-to-door canvassing helped as well. Melissa and her team strived to become involved and connected within their new community. She joined the chamber of commerce and visited other businesses. Visiting the industrial district to meet

receptionists put her face in front of people and her card in their hands. She also made sure to contact the local high school to let them know the shop was available for prom and homecoming flowers. Equally important, Melissa kept strict notes of their visits in an Excel spreadsheet and followed up within a reasonable amount of time. Plus, at the Menomonee location, the team always mentioned the new place to customers, generating word-of-mouth for the new business.

Melissa also put efforts into mailings to the surrounding subdivisions. Coupons worked into simple, creative sell sheets. Posters were sent three times in one year. Communicating with other florists via the local delivery pool system actually also helped to spread the word about her signature touch.

After about two and a half years, Melissa's combined efforts resulted in the Pewaukee location finally standing on its own two feet.

Constant re-investment

Running two stores successfully is no small task, but with a distinctive, chic style and the same long-established name for both locations, Melissa began with a strong foundation.

From there her savvy business and marketing strategies kept both shops growing when times were good and afloat when the economy struggled.

Being a new business owner has its own challenges, no matter how many years one might have been in the industry. Melissa's first strategy was to wear as many hats as possible. "I really made the effort to educate myself about each facet of the business from that job's perspective," she explains. "I jumped in and learned everything, from customer service to designing, human resources, being a buyer and even a driver. This is the only way to improve. Respecting every position and understanding their issues gives me the leg up to improving the system. Once you have all that knowledge about the business in its entirety, challenges aren't as frustrating; you just fix it."

Making sure employees are happy and that morale is up is a high priority. Melissa believes learning how to delegate has a two-fold benefit: "Handing over responsibilities to trusted employees allows me to avoid burning out, and it gives them the joy of excelling in something related to the business. Employees can have the best ideas, so I always make sure to ask them what they think. If they want to run with something, I let them and support them in every way I can. They're excited and I'm freed up to attend to other aspects of the business."



When Chloe the cat, a long-time shop resident, went missing, staff tweeted and posted on Facebook about her. Melissa was working on a wedding that day, and three women Melissa had never met told her they hoped Chloe would be found. Chloe turned up—and Melissa took note of the power of social media.



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For instance, keeping costs down. From the start, Melissa has been detailed and organized, with formula sheets for almost every step of the business. With everything in writing, nothing slips through the cracks. She also trains her staff to wear many hats in order to create a strong, informed team. Each employee has a working knowledge of every aspect of the shop; if a designer needs to route a delivery, she can. From washing buckets to helping customers, a staff member is always available to lend a helping hand. Between detailed organization and an entire staff proficient in many aspects of the business, Melissa saves money by preventing critical errors.

This friendly, informed team and tight system translates to customer loyalty. Customers know their needs will be met and someone will always be available to help them. Melissa's formula sheets and data system enable the staff to know about a customer's preferences and upcoming special occasions. This sets them apart from the big box stores whose informality makes the shopping experience less pleasant for the consumer.

Building business in a bad economy

For long-time business owners, the recent economic downturn may have brought up memories and strategies from the last dip they experienced. But for Melissa, a business owner

of only five years in 2008, the decline was a huge challenge. With no prior experience of how to handle business in this kind of economy, Melissa had to be resourceful and innovative. She was still learning what was important, so she picked the brain of other business owners in the pool system and other associates.

With the encouragement of her peers, she took a close look at her business to see what was still bringing in profits and what made her shop different. At that time, weddings were her biggest profit. She was in her late 20s and could relate to the brides, so she focused on this element of her business and boosted all her wedding services.

She and her staff strived to make the brides feel special; they got on the phone immediately when the brides called and took care of every change without resistance: "I knew those six bridesmaids were going to get married too, so bridal customer service became extremely important." Melissa's shops kept busy through summer, usually a slow time. While her associates were closing their doors, Melissa managed to keep her staff on to help her with the weddings. They'd process all the materials and arrangements for the weddings during the week and then provide customized services during the bride's big day as well. Through persistence, professionalism and a thorough process, Melissa not only kept her shops open, she created services that she still uses today.

Bringing in the brides

Melissa picked up on a change happening in the industry and began to employ it in 2010. She started charging a pre-paid fee of \$25 for an in-depth consultation. She reviewed all the bride's ideas and offered ways to enhance those ideas while still fitting the bride's unique personality. Specific details about the flowers were included and brides left with a verbal estimate for the wedding. If the bride decided to work with Melissa, that \$25 went towards the cost of the wedding; if not, the bride walked away with a ton of great ideas. It's an affordable win-win for the bride, and Melissa eliminated no-shows for the consultation by enforcing the pre-paid fee. This strategy also brings in brides and grooms who are very serious and ready to talk. "Plus," Melissa adds, "It feels good to get paid for a little of my time. I believe it's a valuable service. And I get a good feel for the bride and groom—what kind of clients they're going to be." Her business also got a good boost from the strategy; her booking rate went from 70% to 98% since she began the paid, in-depth consultations.

For the women who want to move forward with Melissa, she offers several types of customized wedding services—ones she developed when the economy first began to slide, from pickup, drop-off and teardown of flowers and decorations to special packages for the brides that want even more assistance. Her Flower Girl Package, Bridesmaid Package and Bridal Package include services that might generally fall to a wedding planning team, such as checking the bride before she walks down the



An eight-door display cooler lines one side of the shop in Menomonee Falls, where the inventory sometimes includes cut flowers grown in the garden at the Pewaukee store.



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aisle, checking dressing rooms for forgotten articles, pre-decorating, touch-ups, collecting gifts, packing up leftover wedding cake, and placing vase arrangements in the wedding suite. By first landing a trusting client through her pre-paid consultation, Melissa paves the way to successful upsells to overwhelmed and appreciative brides. Weddings work out to be 22% of the business for both shops.

Cultivating customers

No matter the industry, reminding customers of your business is the number-one way you keep it running. Melissa reaches out in numerous ways, from old-school specials to the latest technology. One simple offer extended to customers is to exchange vases to be recycled for free flowers. She also leverages the corner location in Menomonee Falls with creative sayings on the marquee out front that people will see while waiting at a stoplight. An agreement with the local bridal store has them handing out each other's business cards to clients.

Melissa also entices new and current clients into her shop by turning floral classes into social events. She offers a Ladies Night for approximately \$35, a Little Seedlings class for youngsters at \$10 per person and a Go Green class for \$10 per person as well. Each class requires a minimum of five people and a maximum of 20, and the fees simply cover the cost

of the materials. But the idea is to create a fun, informative space that educates customers while reminding them of Melissa's friendly and professional service. Both the Ladies Night and the Little Seedlings participants receive a historical tour of the building, learn the basics about flowers and create a floral design to take home. The Ladies Night includes wine and cheese and current customers often bring in a friend, whom Melissa can turn into a client. The Go Green class, held only at the Pewaukee location, teaches adult participants about eco-friendly gardening for their home. By maintaining a fun, informative and professional connection to her community, Melissa keeps customers interested.

But when it comes to daily and weekly marketing, Melissa has deposited much of her efforts into email, social networking and blogging. She blogs once a week to spark interest and to continue to build SEO (search engine optimization). Blogs might cover upcoming events, holidays, planting tips or pictures from a recent wedding. With a presence on Facebook and Twitter, she's opened up a daily post and/or tweet to her entire staff. They keep it fun and interesting, from the definition of a particular flower to things happening in the shop: "Someone just bought 21 roses for 21 years of marriage!" Customer comments on their posts and tags of pictures from prom corsages are a testament to the success of this in-

teractive strategy. "It's basically a free campaign. Just one post can have a huge ripple effect," she explains.

Keeping people in the loop via email marketing has been beneficial and cost-effective as well. After the frustrating experience of spending \$300 on a news ad for little return as well as finding it hard to track, Melissa started using email blasts. A customer signs up on her website or the staff asks for their email during an order over the phone or in the shop. Email blasts are sent out seasonally, to remind people of holidays, sales or open houses. Pictures of featured arrangements are included in the emails and people will bring pictures of those emails into the store on their next visit. The cost is minimal; the marketing is targeted.

Growing older and stronger

In just seven years, Melissa maintained and grew one shop while opening and cultivating a second. She's continued to flourish during a poor economy and keeps her shop active in the community. Her efforts have not gone unnoticed by the industry. TheKnot.com awarded her the Best of Weddings for both 2010 and 2011 for her entire business, while the local Chamber of Commerce gave her Pewaukee location its Small Business of the Year award. She's also proud to have been Marketer of the Month for Teleflora twice. With this track record, Melissa and the Bank of Memories and Flowers will be around for years to come. You can bank on it! 🌿



The shop's original bank vault has been converted to a floral cooler. On the shop floor, the merchandising is enlivened with a variety of giftware items and decorative accessories, complemented by green and blooming plants.

