

Does Better Lighting Increase Floral Sales?

The quest for greater energy efficiency is causing some supermarkets to evaluate current lighting systems, and the take-away may be increased floral department sales.

BY HOWARD RIELL

Creating an inviting floral department involves many elements including strategic merchandising and offering an alluring product mix. With eyes on energy efficiency, savvy retailers are looking for – and finding – ways to use lighting to improve sales in their floral departments.

According to Sandy Jahnke, director of sales and marketing for Miami, FL-based Riverdale Farms, “UV lighting is both essential and detrimental to a floral department.” Essential, she says, because UV lighting provides a full-spectrum true-color light, which is necessary to show the flowers’ true colors. But it is detrimental “because UV heat and energy accelerates the release of ethylene gas and makes blooms open more quickly, thereby shortening shelf-life of your flowers.”

Lighting has become an integral part of the floral department design process, continues Jahnke. “As supermarkets continue to renovate older stores and go more upscale to provide a similar aesthetic shopping environment as shoppers experience in high-end stores, lighting re-design is a huge part of this renovation process,” she points out. Not only are elaborate lighting plans developed to further define each department throughout the store, but floral lighting trends are “moving to create an almost boutique-like space.”

To complete the boutique feel, retailers are using separate music, flooring, high-end fixtures and more that all create “a beautiful and separate space designed to draw shoppers in, make them feel relaxed and want to stay a bit and shop,” elaborates Jahnke. “This is very different from the days of overhead fluorescents and generic fixtures that made floral spaces indistinguishable from the rest of the store.”



The Hen House floral department in Lenexa, KS, is illuminated with BFL 100 watt high pressure sodium lamps with UV filters for fresh food.

What Jahnke calls “the key” to effective floral lighting is to install low UV-emitting lighting. “Some of these low-UV lights can reduce UV by more than 85 percent, thereby almost eliminating the harmful effects of UV lighting while keeping all the benefits,” she explains. “Installation of low-UV lighting will reduce shrink considerably while maintaining all the benefits of UV-lighting.”

“One mistake that I see supermarket floral people make is putting the same lighting in the floral department as they do in the aisles for toilet paper and frozen food,” says Lee Rhoades, sales and marketing manager for Baero North America, a lighting manufacturer headquartered in St. Louis, MO. “It’s bad because it doesn’t differentiate your product from something else,” Rhoades says. “If you’re trying to steal customers from the floral shop down the street, you want to set your department apart to gain customers’ attention. One very effective way to sepa-

rate floral from the rest of the store is with a different lighting design.” The best thing for floral and produce sales, says Rhoades, is high-quality High Intensity Discharge (HID) lighting. “Whether ceramic metal halide or our high-pressure sodium-based lamps, these new types of HID lighting are perfect choices for floral departments as they give superior color and sparkle to floral displays. If you have the typical flat fluorescent lighting in the rest of your store, quality HID lighting will provide the contrast and quality that will bring your department into focus and generate those impulse sales.”

Michael Schrader, director of floral for Schnuck Markets Inc., based in St. Louis, MO, says his stores “have been using high pressure sodium lights that give the warm tones to the product.” He adds, “I think in the stores where we’ve used those lights it’s improved the department.”

“While the lighting doesn’t make flowers

Photo courtesy of Baero North America

last longer," Schrader notes, "it's actually more true to color as far as what you actually see. It doesn't matter if you shine it on a pepper or a banana or green leaf lettuce. Fluorescent lights give things a dull color."

Schrader admits the high-pressure sodium spots are more expensive, "but it's driving business. I know we had an LED prototype that they used in one of our departments, but I didn't like it. It just doesn't provide the same pop to our products." The high pressure sodium lights are being installed in new and remodeled stores.

Ray Pruett, the owner of 4-unit Pruett Foods in Broken Bow, OK, says his stores are using high pressure sodium track lighting "that enhances the red and green colors. We also use a different warmth of lighting per department, which kind of moves the customer from department to department," he reveals. For example, Pruett says, cooler-temperature lights are used in the deli, warmer in produce, then cooler once again in meat. Displays, fixtures and different paints complement the lighting and floor colors, "which we use to actually direct the flow of traffic." The result, he adds, has been an increase in floral sales by one-third.

ON THE SPOT

"For years in the lighting world, incandescent light is the best colored light source for floral," notes Dan Hama, national accounts manager of supermarkets for Northbrook, IL-based Con-Tech Lighting. "It's been around forever and it brings out all the true colors in the flower displays. The trade off has been an excessive amount of heat introduction. This obviously shrivels and shrinks all the displays that much faster." Hama adds, "The latest in today's accent technology is LED track heads, which achieve the same color rendering as incandescent with a fraction of the energy and heat."

The most common lighting type in any commercial floral environment is fluorescent lighting, notes Joe Rey-Barreau, AIA, architect/lighting designer and education consultant for the American Lighting Association in Lexington, KY. "This has been the norm for years, but there are many changes that are occurring in fluorescent technology that should be considered."

Those changes in fluorescent are increased efficiency and increased color-rendering quality, Rey-Barreau notes. "Older fluorescent systems used what were called T12 bulbs. These are fluorescent tubes with a diameter of 1½. These bulbs were inefficient; they often made a humming sound due to the type of ballast that operated them; and they produced a poor quality of

light." The current technology consists of either T8 or T5 bulbs, which he says are "much better" in efficiency. "They produce more light for less electricity. Same for color rendering. They make objects such as plants and flowers look much better."

TRUE COLORS

Those who want to increase floral sales need only use lamps with UV protection, says Riverdale Farms' Jahnke. "Think of it as lighting in your home. Inexpensive incandescent bulbs can have a yellow hue to them, throwing the color of things in a room. Early compact fluorescent bulbs shifted colors terribly, and overhead fluorescents in bathrooms have sent many women screaming for the hills, as they looked overly red or yellow in the mirror. These lights are not our friends, and they're not a flower's friend, either."

"True color lighting does for flowers what it does for us," points out Jahnke. "It mimics natural light better than any other lighting, and shows the full spectrum of colors to the eye. And the flowers shine. Reds are a beautiful red; blues are electric and wonderful. Flowers will shine their natural colors and be much more attractive to look at... and in turn be that much more irresistible to the shopper in your store."

The benefit of all artificial lighting systems comes when it portrays color most accurately, according to Grant Grable, LEED, AP, vice president of sales and marketing for Sunoptics Prismatic Skylights, headquartered in Sacramento, CA. He says his company's skylights let retailers use natural light to illuminate products such as flowers and produce while cutting energy usage. "What better way to show the true colors of floral arrangements than what our minds are made to utilize — the 100 percent color rendition and temperature color of what the sun puts out?" The company has supplied its prismatic skylights to 2,900 Wal-Mart stores.

Samantha Criddle, Internet marketing manager for MGV Inc. — Promolux & Econo-Frost in Shawnigan Lake, British Columbia, Canada, says floral departments regularly use spot lighting. "It depends on if it is refrigerated cases or dry cases and displays, which often use halogen, metal halide and fluorescent lamps. Refrigerated displays are lighted with fluorescent lamps."

"Lamps that are designed for illuminating floral," Criddle explains, "are lamps that are engineered to reduce UV and heat, which cause discoloration, fading and wilting. Flowers are a highly perishable item, and the cost to bring them to market is quite high. By incorporating a low-radiation bal-

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MGV Inc. — Promolux & Econo-Frost**

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"Retailers can boost sales by using lighting that allows the true natural colors of floral to be seen by shoppers," Criddle adds. Bouquets of flowers are generally purchased for special occasions, "so retailers rely on the vibrant colors and freshness of bouquets to capture shoppers' attention." In successfully drawing the customers' attention to that display, retailers are providing their staffs with "even greater opportunity to make an impulse sale."

The daily challenges involved in selling perishables make it easy for floral retailers to neglect lighting. Retailers should consider asking lighting reps for in-store demonstrations. The in-store experience often seals the deal because retailers are wowed when they see their floral departments come alive under the correct lighting system. **pb**