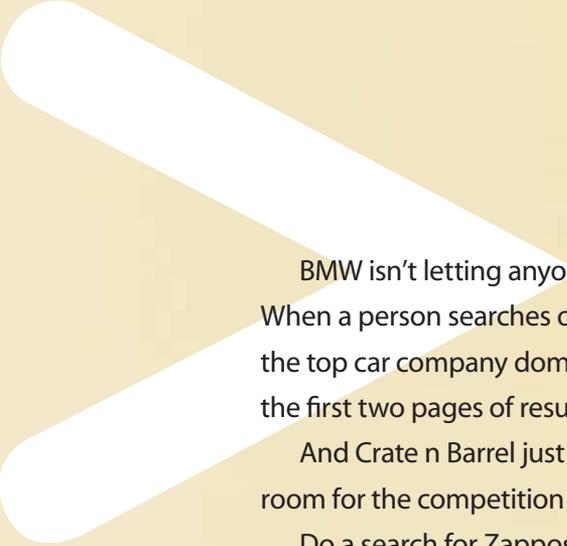


# DEFY YOUR SIZE ONLINE

BY RENATO SOGUECO

**Flex your online marketing muscle like the big guys  
— without depleting your resources**





BMW isn't letting anyone into its lane. When a person searches online for "BMW," the top car company dominates, owning the first two pages of results.

And Crate n Barrel just doesn't have any room for the competition in search results.

Do a search for Zappos, and not a single other shoe company gets even a toe into the territory for several pages.

It's no surprise that big companies loom large online, flexing their marketing muscle, beefing up the brand and sweating the details. But here's what they're not doing: wasting energy, blowing through cash or depleting human resources to do it. They're playing lean and mean — using low-cost and free platforms to stay large and in charge.

The Internet didn't change the world (or how people search for and buy flowers) overnight; neither did the desktop computer or mobile devices. These technologies developed and gained

strength at different times over the last 20 years. As a small-business owner, you've probably dealt with each new innovation as a singular challenge when the technology went from trend to norm — hustling to get a website up in the '90s, and then a Facebook page together back in the mid-2000s, and, more recently, scratching your head about how to make your site more responsive for mobile users.

Through no fault of your own, you were conditioned to deal with the next great, shiny thing, which made it easy to miss the larger technology picture. This month, we're going to take a step back and strategically review the mature landscape of technologies and offer some strategic advice on where to focus your efforts and resources.

With a little sweat equity, you can hang with the heavy hitters. (You can't afford to ignore them.) What are you waiting for? It's time to get started.

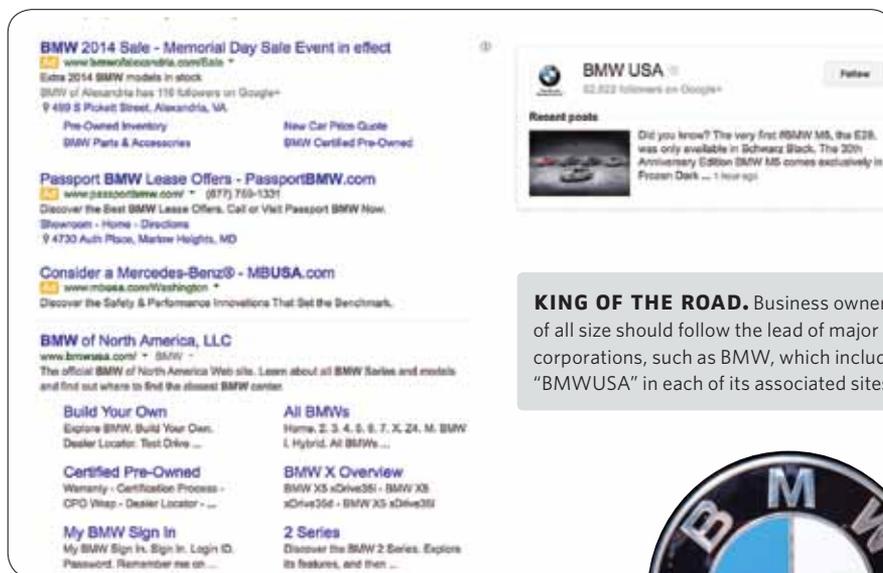
## SOCIAL MEDIA: CROSS TRAIN

Many florists are still struggling with picking a site. Twitter? Facebook? Instagram? Google+. There's not a bad pick among the top three: Facebook with more than 1 billion users, Twitter with more than 250 million active users and Google+, the social platform being pushed from the world's largest, most influential search engine responsible for getting potential new customers to your website.

So, why not cross train, people! We recommended being on all three. If you can't manage that, don't sweat it. It's better to do one well than several with poor form. Think quality over quantity, and you'll get more qualified traffic to your site.

The secret is to let staff with social media skills show 'em off. Got a Google+ genius? Unleash her there. A Facebook fiend who loves to take pix? Get him in your cooler, taking photos of what's new. Need to win brides? Focus your social media where they are: Pinterest.

**JUST DO IT.** If you have no expertise on staff, quickly develop or hire skills for at least Facebook (first) and then Google+. Maintaining a steady presence shouldn't be a time suck. Small shops, with up to three employees, can shoot to post several times a week to Facebook. Medium shops (seven to 10 employees) might be able to task one staff member with posting several times a day to Facebook, Twitter and Google+. Bigger operations can likely as-



**KING OF THE ROAD.** Business owners of all size should follow the lead of major corporations, such as BMW, which includes "BMWUSA" in each of its associated sites.



GYUSZKO-PHOTO/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

sign one person to tackle those sites, and some of the smaller social media outlets, every day. Services such as HootSuite can help you schedule and manage posts efficiently. To further streamline the job, consider creating one work email (**social@yourshopdomain.com**) that's forwarded to all employees who are involved with social media upkeep.

## URLS: OWN YOUR TERRITORY

Let's return for a moment to the BMW search results. Take a close look at all the associated URLs (**Facebook.com/bmwusa**, **Twitter.com/bmwusa**). Notice that

"BMWUSA" is part of each name.

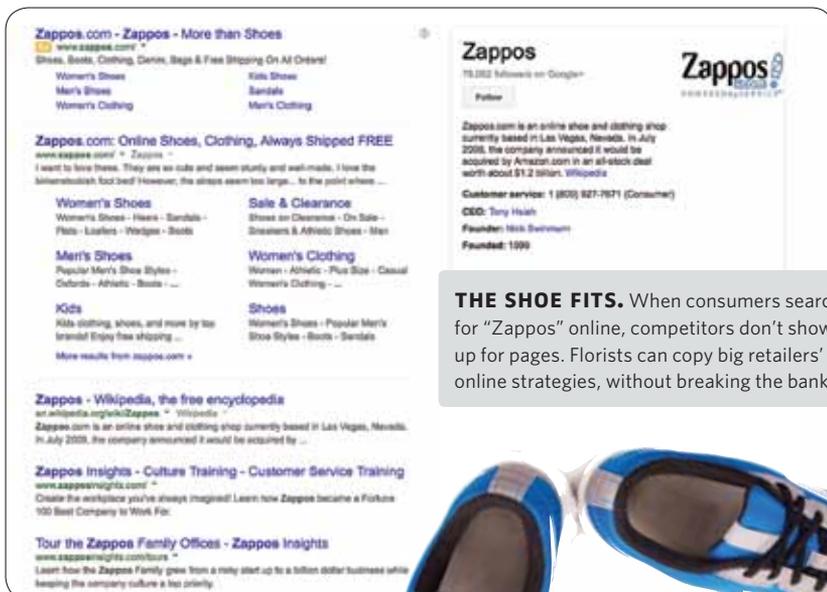
Business owners of all sizes should immediately secure accounts using their business name as a username. You may not even use these accounts; that's fine. It's important, though, that no other company grabs up that valuable resource. Think of the continuing scourge of URL squatters that hold branded URLs hostage. And keep an eye out for new opportunities: In November, ICANN started offering \*.florist, vs .com, as a top-level domain. Just as with typical URLs, the financial investment is small — about \$12 to \$15 a domain each year.

**JUST DO IT.** If you set aside two hours on a slow afternoon, you can grab accounts on all social media. With any time left over, you can research the hot new social media platform (whatever it may be.)

## YOUR WEBSITE: DON'T SKIMP. DON'T SKIP.

Websites remain the only place where you can communicate directly to customers and convert sales at the same spot. Blogs, Facebook or Pinterest may one day be sale endpoints, but, until that time comes, your website must fill the role.

Given its role in your performance, you must invest in your website — continuously fueling its growth and performance. Don't think of the investment in spurts or cycles, but as a continuous evolutionary tool. Forget about launch-



**THE SHOE FITS.** When consumers search for "Zappos" online, competitors don't show up for pages. Florists can copy big retailers' online strategies, without breaking the bank.



# YOUR TECH GYMBAG

Tools for better managing the tech side of your business abound (check out this month's Hands On, p.13, for more ideas), but here are a few of the resources that complement the advice in this month's story. Stock up and get started.



**GOOGLE ANALYTICS.** Google Analytics provides so much information. Use it! Regularly review your Analytics reports to see how many users and which devices they are using to visit your website. If you're in a situation where you do not have a mobile responsive website, then you'll need to choose two pathways: temporarily make a mobile-web ready version of your website in the short term or rehaul the whole thing to make it natively mobile responsive.

[safnow.org/moreonline](http://safnow.org/moreonline)

**GOOGLE+.** There's no denying this no-longer-new social platform as a major player. Get a step-by-step guide on how to leverage it. [safnow.org/moreonline](http://safnow.org/moreonline)

**HOOTSUITE PRO.** This timesaving program will help you manage social media posts efficiently. Smaller shops may not need it yet, but larger shops will likely see a benefit to freeing up employee time for a relatively small investment (about \$10 a month.)

**OPEN SOURCE-BASED WEBSITES.** These content management systems (WordPress, Drupal, Joomla, etc.) are much cheaper — and can be more nimble — than custom or template options.

**MAKING PAY PER CLICK PAY.** Check out a two-part series detailing everything you need to know about pay per click (PPC) advertising, from what it is to how to launch and monitor a PPC campaign. [safnow.org/moreonline](http://safnow.org/moreonline)

**RESPONSIVE WEB DESIGN.** Find out how to start thinking about making your online storefront mobile friendly, via an emerging trend known as responsive web design.

[safnow.org/moreonline](http://safnow.org/moreonline)

**SMARTPHONES.** It's a significant investment but consider arming key staff with a smartphone if you're serious about improving your social media presences. He or she can document events, weddings and design work (about \$200 to purchase the device, plus the monthly contract, usually around \$100 a month). Before you hand over the device, read about how to craft a companywide policy on mobile devices. [safnow.org/moreonline](http://safnow.org/moreonline)

**TECH PUBLICATIONS AND SITES.** Schedule a few hours every month to read up on tech news. Within the floral industry, we like Floral Management (of course), but when you cast a wider net there's also [websitemagazine.com](http://www.websitemagazine.com) and the more technical [smashingmagazine.com](http://www.smashingmagazine.com).

**WEBSITE SOS.** Get the lowdown on must-have (and must-destroy) features for any website that stands a chance of converting clicks to purchases. [safnow.org/moreonline](http://safnow.org/moreonline)

**YEXT.COM** and **MOZ.COM/LOCAL.** When it comes to online listings, the absolute best practice is to confirm shop information is accurate and consistent across listings. Either of these sites can help you tackle all listings, all at once. —R.S.

# FELLOW GYM RATS

These are just pretty faces. Here are some of the people who can help your shop flex serious muscle online.



**HELPERS.** The social media rules that make you pull your hair out in frustration are second nature to most college students. Recruit a youngster from your local university or community college to help you expand your reach. Former employees, your own kids, that techie nephew, friends or even customers may also be able to help out since much of the work can be done off-site and (if you're using a schedule poster such as HootSuite) outside of business hours.



**WEB DEVELOPERS.** Developers can help make your site more responsive and robust. They do come with a hefty price tag — \$150 or more an hour — but sometimes you need a pro. —R.S.

ing a new website every couple years — you'll be breathlessly playing catch up, launching a site that's almost obsolete by the time it's live.

**JUST DO IT.** Tweak your site constantly with upgrades that cater to customer preferences — think of how Amazon allows customers to review history, print out invoices of past orders, put things in wish lists and more. Amazon is huge and you probably share the same customer, so (fair or not) they expect the same level of service from you.

## MUSCLE INTO MOBILE

Half your customers have the ability to view your website with either their tablet or smartphone, and about a third of them usually do. (Your Google Analytics reveals about 20 percent to 30 percent of visitors use mobile devices.)

A few years ago, everyone was talking about making websites "mobile-ready," which is usually a separate version of your website specific to a device. It's the path of least resistance, but websites designed specifically for an iPhone look horrible on a tablet, so in the long run you'll spend more time recreating mobile-web versions of your websites and then maintaining a separate version on a weekly or monthly basis. What you ultimately want is a site that's "mobile responsive," meaning that it adjusts the amount and type of content provided to fit the screen size. Be clear with your website vendor about this distinction.

**JUST DO IT.** Mobile web services such as [dudamobile.com](http://dudamobile.com) and [mobilizetoday.com](http://mobilizetoday.com) will show you how your site renders on a mobile device

— and will convert your website to a mobile friendly version for \$50 to \$100 monthly. If you want to achieve true mobile responsiveness, replacing your website may be the only answer. Open source systems (see "Your Tech Gymbag") provide the option to install mobile responsive native themes from the get-go, so be sure to ask this of the developer. Check out [themeforest.net](http://themeforest.net), [rockettheme.com](http://rockettheme.com) and [cyberchimps.com](http://cyberchimps.com) for mobile responsive themes you can install for around \$40 to \$80 per theme.

## PPC: PERFECT YOUR MARKETING FORM

Remember the good ol' days — working with a graphic designer to create various sizes of print ads to appear in the local newspaper, phone directories, local magazines and circulars? If your budget

allowed for it, maybe you dabbled in radio or TV. Well, forget all that.

Along came the Internet, and your status with marketing and branding through advertising probably went from “in a relationship” to “it’s complicated.” Customers gradually started spending more time surfing and searching rather than reading print, listening to radio or watching TV. This shift will only get more pronounced and even skew more away from desktops as customers use, perhaps exclusively in the near future, only mobile devices or Google’s Glass.

Online engagement is the goal. So, how do you get it? Again, social media is where your customers live today, and it’s where they’re most likely to experience your brand. Make this the frontline of your engagement.

As you may have discovered, quality posts featuring photos and videos garner the most comments and shares, so you need to keep people entertained. Posts should reflect the vibrant activity of your core businesses (everyday, wedding, events and more).

**Pay-per-click** advertising (PPC) is a critical component of any marketing strategy, and a natural complement to social media. Business owners and Web developers used to focus on search engine optimization (SEO) in order to rank high in organic search results. The idea was customers relied more on these results than on paid advertising. If you were taking care of business, you were ranked high on that first page.

Today, it’s a different story. (Although SEO is still important — more on that later.) Ad space above organic search results is prime real estate. If you aren’t jockeying to be there, you can bet your competitors are, and they’re probably paying pennies to be there (even using your business name as a keyword.) Stop the madness (and deception) and invest even a few bucks a day for the crucial clicks that capture customers while protecting your brand.

**JUST DO IT.** Developing a PPC campaign requires three separate time commitments: developing the right keywords or taxonomy (which I cover later), developing the actual campaign, which will take about a couple of hours



**TO PLANT A GARDEN  
IS TO BELIEVE IN TOMORROW.**

*— Audrey Hepburn*



800.747.0396 www.tsvg.com

once you know your keyword set, and monitoring the campaign at least once a week for an hour.

The amount you spend on PPC depends on how much you want to invest a day bidding for clicks. You may not want to invest in clicks for general, highly competitive keywords such as “Fairfax VA flowers florist”; medium- to low-cost clicks such as “wedding flower florist Fairfax VA” could represent a good value to a targeted audience.

### ONLINE REVIEWS: DO THE GRUNT WORK

Listing services — Google Places, Yahoo Local, Bing, Yelp, The Knot, WeddingWire, etc. — are not as sexy as social media or as precise and trackable as PPC campaign investments, but they are important in maintaining the consistency of your brand. Some services are stronger than others but they all serve as online references for your business. How do you put your best face forward?

Even if you shamelessly ask customers for reviews, it’s still a stretch to rely on customers to have the intent, initiative and time to write a thoughtful, positive (you hope) review for your shop. Help them help you. Check out [moderncomment.com](http://moderncomment.com), a new service that makes creating reviews for your business as easy as answering a questionnaire.

If you make it easy for happy customers to post positive reviews, this service could pump out glowing reviews to bury the bad ones. Speaking of those

## REPS. LATS. HIIT. THE GYM WORLD HAS A JARGON, AND KNOWING IT MEANS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FAKING IT AND FLEXING IT.

bad ones, though, always respond ASAP. Be professional, offer to fix the problem and include someone’s name and direct contact information. Most shoppers will ignore a few bad reviews if they see a ton of good ones. And if they see you took the time to respond to the bad ones, it’ll just reassure them they’ll be taken care of if things do go sour.

**JUST DO IT.** Build time for managing and monitoring your various listings into your weekly calendar. You’ll need a few hours to initially review and correct misinformation in current directories. If you change your hours, open a new location or update your URL, remember to update the listings. [Yext.com](http://Yext.com) and [Moz.com/local](http://Moz.com/local) confirm shop information is accurate and consistent across listings.

### CORE STRENGTH: SEO

The good news: Major search engines place greater emphasis on featuring local businesses in search results, and that

puts many floral businesses on page one. But this isn’t just magic. It takes hard work to make it look easy. You still must do your part developing social media presences, registering with local search directories and delivering compelling content.

**JUST DO IT.** Core SEO practices will always need to be in place when tweaking or redeveloping your website such, as logically segmenting your website into specific sections (think “birthdays, sympathy, get well, anniversaries” etc.) and placing all right keywords in the right places, such as the title of your page, descriptions, headers and of course content.

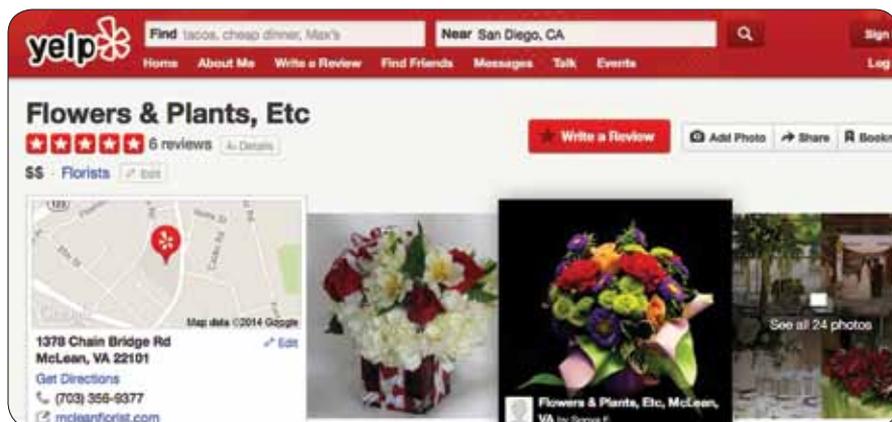
### TAXONOMY: LEARN THE LINGO

Reps. Lats. HIIT. The gym world has a jargon, and knowing it means the difference between faking it and flexing it. To hold your own with the big brands, florists need that same kind of taxonomy — not just a bucket filled with random words but specific terms that are logically ordered to make sense for your customers and, equally important, for the search engines.

Consider taxonomy as your unique, online fingerprint. Although fingerprints are generally similar with whorls, arches and loops, no two are exactly the same. (Think about the vast number of competitors after the customers who want to purchase that “get-well” bouquet and you begin to recognize the value of this exercise.)

Start with core terms, which are easy to determine since you’ve been using them in your previous SEO practice. Be practical. Think like a consumer. When sending flowers to a funeral in Madison, Wisc., few consumers will simply type in “funeral flowers.” They’ll get more specific. With those parameters in mind, you now have your first core set of keywords based on geography: city or cities, state, counties, zip codes, towns etc. Now your other set of core keywords are all those floral gift-giving occasions and type of flowers that may be associated with them: Easter, Mother’s Day, lilies, Valentine’s Day, roses, sympathy, anniversary, etc.

To build on the geography core, get specific: names of venues, funeral homes, country clubs, hospitals, office buildings and more. For the floral-



**RAVE REVIEWS.** On Yelp, five-star reviews, beautiful pictures and updated contact information help Flowers & Plants Etc. in McLean, Va., optimize the store’s web presence and give potential customers the best possible first impression.



## SWEAT NOW! SLEEP LATER

What are you waiting for? An invitation to improve? Now that you have the routine, we expect these items to be done by tomorrow. Just kidding. We've been talking mostly strategy, so the ideas we convey will require a long-term and thoughtful exercise. Haste makes waste. Don't be the weekend warrior of Web power training. Think about these tips for a few days, and how you want to apply them. How and when you try out these strategies depend on your business. For instance, although taxonomy doesn't come up until about midway into this article, you and your team may want to tackle this conversation first, since you'll find that everything else will fall into place once taxonomy is set.

Remember, you don't have to do it all. Quality trumps quantity. Do what you can, and do it very well. As you find more time after you hammer down and then master the new business processes and methodology, that's the time to add more. —R.S.

focused set, think of your design style and preferences, businesses outside the everyday. Are you a studio catering to business events? Aligned with specific country clubs and venues to supply all their floral artistry? Name these places and specific services that you provide.

**JUST DO IT.** Remember, as your business grows organically, taxonomy should reflect this growth. So dust off that whiteboard and start drafting the hierarchy — but keep that eraser handy.

### SUBPAGES: STRENGTHEN THE STRUCTURE

Now that you've determined taxonomy, it's time to integrate this language into your website structure so it reflects the taxonomy hierarchy. Have multiple locations? What used to be a challenge is now a great opportunity to tout your coverage with a URL and webpage that reflects [www.flowershopname.com/Fairfax\\_VA](http://www.flowershopname.com/Fairfax_VA) or [www.flowershopname.com/Vienna\\_VA](http://www.flowershopname.com/Vienna_VA). Have lots of business at a specific venue? Consider [www.flowershopname.com/westwoodcountryclub](http://www.flowershopname.com/westwoodcountryclub).

Think of these new subpages as destinations that could stand on their own. Search engines will certainly feature a subpage as an authoritative page, especially if it has unique content specific to location or venue or topic.

Now that you have all these potent mini websites within your own website, draw from the next level in your taxonomy to develop content unique to those core businesses. All your core business should be creating business activity, so all you're really doing is reporting the activity. The benefit of this is now you can easily create blogs within each new section of the website.

**JUST DO IT.** Creating new sections and subpages that match taxonomy is relatively straightforward. Have the new content ready before you call your developer; otherwise, you'll lose time (and potentially money) writing and rewriting the content.

### FLEX WITH FRIENDS

You've invested so much in your fitness, don't waste it when you're out with friends and fans. Extend your structure, taxonomy

and URL heft to your social media presence. Talk the same talk no matter the context.

**JUST DO IT.** Extend this process to your social media. When writing for the web, be thinking how to adapt that same concept in text, photos, posts and tweets that's tweaked for each audience.

For example, you just finished a wedding at Our Lady of Good Counsel Catholic Church in Vienna, Va. On your Facebook page, you've posted all the photos. That post sends brides on your Facebook page to [www.flowershopname.com/weddingflowers/OLGC/](http://www.flowershopname.com/weddingflowers/OLGC/) which features even more detail and more photos of the event. Search engines (and brides) will love this as you've laid out the specifics in a logical, hierarchical manner. After several weeks, try searching for "wedding flowers Vienna, Va., OLGC" and see what comes up. 🌸

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