



# Cutting edge con

**Alyssa Goodall** has worked in the industry from a young age under the guidance of industry stalwarts like Kevin O'Neill, and has managed many Melbourne businesses throughout her career. Her business, **Thrive Flowers & Events**, was the winner of the AFI magazine 2013 Small Florist Business of the Year Award, which she says has increased her customers' confidence in the business and has in turn given her more opportunity for creative licence.

Seven years ago, Alyssa saw a new business opportunity after meeting with various newly engaged friends and seeing a gap in the market for more personalised floristry. She started the boutique bridal business, From the Heart Flowers, to provide the type of service that would set her apart: home consultations for brides. She established her business at a time when after-hour appointments and elegant mixes of contemporary and traditional designs were not so widely available.

After growing the bridal business on referrals and a lot of blood, sweat and tears, Alyssa was offered the opportunity to purchase Thrive Flowers & Events, whose clientele was largely corporate based. Over



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*"Since winning AFI magazine's 2013 Small Florist Business of the Year Award and subsequently updating all relevant online marketing material, Alyssa and Rosie said the businesses had noticed an increase in sales. Especially with corporate clients who are less likely to buy emotionally and more likely to respond to industry accreditation..."*

Above and below: Thrive's pop-up etc etc etc etc



the last three years, the two businesses were successfully merged and a prosperous partnership was developed with Alyssa's best friend, Rosie Mackenzie. From the Heart Flowers remains as the boutique bridal design element in the company and continues to provide the services that set it apart from the beginning, placing it second in Victoria with the Australian Bridal Industry Academy (ABIA) for floral design for the past two consecutive years.

## Venturing into the industry

Alyssa has always been the creative type, but she said that landing her first junior florist job was "kind of a fluke!"

"Looking back now, I'm glad I was thrown head-first into such a fast-paced, high-end design business early on, because it was there that I learned the speed and attention to detail that our business now prides itself on," she explained.

However Alyssa admitted that "...it can often feel like your heart is on the line and, no matter how many times you've checked your notes and know you've done a brilliant job, you pray and pray the customer will be happy on the day.

"Regardless of always using the highest quality and knowing your design and technique is the best it can be, nothing beats the feeling of an honest testimonial or referral and those are the principles on which both Thrive Flowers & Events and From the Heart Flowers have been built."

# cepts for a thriving business

## Continually striving for best practice

Striving for best practice and keeping an eye on the big picture are concepts that are always at the top of Alyssa's mind.

"Even when completing the smallest of tasks, it enables our business to streamline its procedures," she explained.

By always assessing what is most appropriate and reviewing issues such as safety, time management and wastage, the business is constantly being tweaked and improved.

The principles that help the businesses thrive are basic, yet essential:

- Providing a fun workplace for the morale of all the staff.
- Always providing the highest quality flowers and service.
- Integrity and ingenuity when dealing with staff and clients.
- Working in a clean, inspiring and often changing work space.
- Keeping up-to-date with current trends.
- Complying with the latest OH&S regulations and keeping a safe workplace for staff and clients.

Since winning the AFI magazine's 2013 Small Florist Business of the Year Award and subsequently updating all relevant online marketing material, Alyssa and Rosie said the businesses had noticed an increase in sales.

"Especially with corporate clients who are less likely to buy emotionally and more likely to respond to industry accreditation," she added.

"By being recognised as leaders in our field, we know we're heading in the right direction and are able to promote our innovations and initiatives with confidence, like at the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show where we will be dressed head to toe in hand-made fresh flower costumes."

## Challenges experienced in running a retail florist

As a boutique business, Alyssa has chosen not to trade like a regular retail store, working instead from a private studio warehouse.

"While we are happy to have the occasional walk-in customer and still cater for phone orders and deliveries, we also enjoy not having the wastage and overheads created by a retail shop", she said.

However, one of the major challenges for both Thrive Flowers & Events and From the Heart Flowers is cash flow, which Alyssa explained is a two-pronged problem. Firstly, both businesses supply to large corporations, which are often bound by red tape. Regardless of the payment terms, payment will only be processed when it has been approved by the right person and wound its way through to the right department and back again, sometimes even interstate. Irrespective of the fact the businesses invoice fortnightly - the big players are always the last to pay.

Secondly, the process of bridal consultations can sometimes be a long and laborious one, and while Alyssa happily offers an initial complimentary consultation, the quotation and subsequent consultations can take up a lot of time. Not many florists in the industry charge per hour for their time for this process, which is a shame as they often have not only a qualification but also years of experience, and tend to take a low wage for their design skills.

## Marketing – an ongoing practice

"To ensure we're spending our marketing money in the right places, we are always researching our target audience and setting budgets," they added.

"It's about understanding where our prospective clientele will look for a business like ours and not wasting time and money where it won't work for us."



Top and above: Thrive's Mothers Day publicity shots.



Alyssa Goodall and Roise McKenzie.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE >

## Cutting edge concepts for a thriving business (continued)

Alyssa and Rosie shared some of their marketing tips:

- Always work towards gaining referrals, and never drop the ball with quality or the level of service - even if the client is painful or doesn't have a large budget.
- Nurture your relationships with affiliated businesses; if they know and trust you, they will always be happy to send work your way.
- Keep your website up-to-date with your latest awards, recent photos of your work and correct contact details.
- Readily supplying up-to-date pricelists to your clients easily sets a business apart, as it's not a common practice in the industry.
- The floral industry is a very visual one, so make sure you keep your social media up-to-date, remembering to not only promote yourself but also things that inspire you and to encourage others in the industry.
- Email campaigns are not only a great way to promote a business, but also to keep top-of-mind with your contacts.

- Our business is currently registered with over 20 online directories, both bridal and retail; some of these cost a lot and some are free. Do your research and make use of the free trials offered by some sites.
- Throughout the last year our business has spent a large portion of our advertising budget on magazine advertising.
- YouTube tutorials and blogs are going to be the businesses' next step.

### A vision of the future

Over the last few years, the industry has seen a focus on environmental friendliness and sustainability, in both flowers and sundries.

Alyssa explained, "As awareness about these factors spreads and more florists are taking the initiative to be recognised for it, we are expecting to see an increase in ethically-produced and locally-sourced flowers."

"Repurposed, recyclable products - we will be excited to see a shift in this direction!"

## Keeping up with industry change

ADVERTORIAL

**As Australia's largest wholesaler of floral supplies and designer accessories, Koch & Co is convinced close co-operation with its customers is helping them meet change head-on. Managing Director, Karl Papas said that since buying the business in 1996, the floristry industry has rapidly changed.**

Karl explained that: "Back then the company was focused on a relatively small range of products. Now our range has grown as the Australian industry has matured. We're always looking for ways we can support that growth and ambition."

He said believes one of the keys to their success has been working with suppliers to design products that customers can't find in the marketplace at the right price. After seeing a gap in the market for flower trolleys that were both durable and at a keen price point, the company was able to bring the cost down by 30 per cent.

"In the current climate, price has never been more important, and as a wholesaler we fight to pass on the savings to growers and florists," Karl said.

As well as working with Australian suppliers, the Company is experienced in sourcing products from all over the world. Customising products is also a rapidly growing area for the business.

"We were the first company in the industry to open-up the Australian market to such a wide range of international products and trends," he added, "...and now that more companies are valuing their profile in the marketplace, customising and branding items is definitely a growth area for us."

The company now stocks over 5000 items on its website, covering floral sundries, containers, packaging and "everything in between".



Karl said that getting to that position has meant many long hours, but being part of such a creative industry makes all the challenges worthwhile.

For more information about Koch & Co visit [www.koch.com.au](http://www.koch.com.au)

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