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Customer insights: Demographics, purpose of purchase important factors in floral transactions

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The floral department is unique within the grocery store landscape because the attributes of the product we are selling are extremely hard to quantify. Apples, for example, are very distinct in their attributes — some are sweet, some are tart, some are firm, some are tender, some are better for baking and some are better for eating. It's fairly easy to walk into any supermarket and decide what kind of apple you'd like, or any person in your family would like, based on any of those attributes. For flowers, on the other hand, consumer satisfaction is not gained through fulfilling a nutritional or taste need, but through the satisfaction that the purpose of the purchase has been fulfilled.



Denise McPartland and Karli NelsonBecause in a typical month less than 5 percent of the population buys flowers, it's important to try to understand

how consumers make the choice to purchase flowers (or not) and what the factors are that influence their purchasing decisions. Aside from seasonal or holiday purchases, two important factors influencing floral purchases are demographics and purpose of purchase.

The age of the purchaser is one very important demographic differentiating point. Baby boomers (born 1946-1964,) Generation X (1965-1980) and Generation Y (1981-1994) all have specific buying trends when it comes to flowers.

Each generation purchases and perceives different types of flowers in their own unique way.

Baby boomers purchase with the intent of gift giving and they have a propensity to purchase a mixed flower bouquet rather than a straight bunch. Of the three generations, baby boomers have the highest expectations of and most emotional connection to flowers. However, cost tends to be a purchasing barrier when this generation shops for flowers.

Generation X is the least likely to purchase flowers in person, as the Internet fits their tech-savvy and time-starved lifestyle. Members of this generation are more financially and societally established, thus making them more likely to purchase flowers on a regular basis. Generation X is also buying flowers for many purposes including traditional gifts, pick-me-ups and home decoration.

Generation Y is the generation most likely to purchase flowers in person and to deliver them themselves. This could be due to their financial instability but also from their gift-giving tendencies, which are more common in this generation compared to the rest. They are also more likely to buy individual flowers as opposed to mixed bouquets. However, this generation is the least emotionally attached to flowers of the three.

More broadly, women are far more likely to purchase flowers than men, with 65 percent of all fresh flower transactions conducted by women.

Consumers purchase flowers for two simple reasons —either for a gift or for self-use. About 75-80 percent of floral transactions are for gifts, with 20-25 percent of floral transactions accounting for self-use. Consumers who purchased floral products as gifts had a higher probability of patronizing traditional freestanding floral outlets, but those who bought floral products for themselves were more likely to purchase from a box store. Consumers shopping for self-use floral product emphasized price and longevity of flowers more than their symbolic meaning and situational value.

Understanding how and why customers buy helps retailers tailor its assortments to its current or target customer groups.

Supermarkets, in particular, have an opportunity to further capitalize on the gift-giving consumer.

Additionally, Generation Y's spending power will only increase and retailers will need to adjust accordingly to accommodate their unique purchasing behaviors.

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