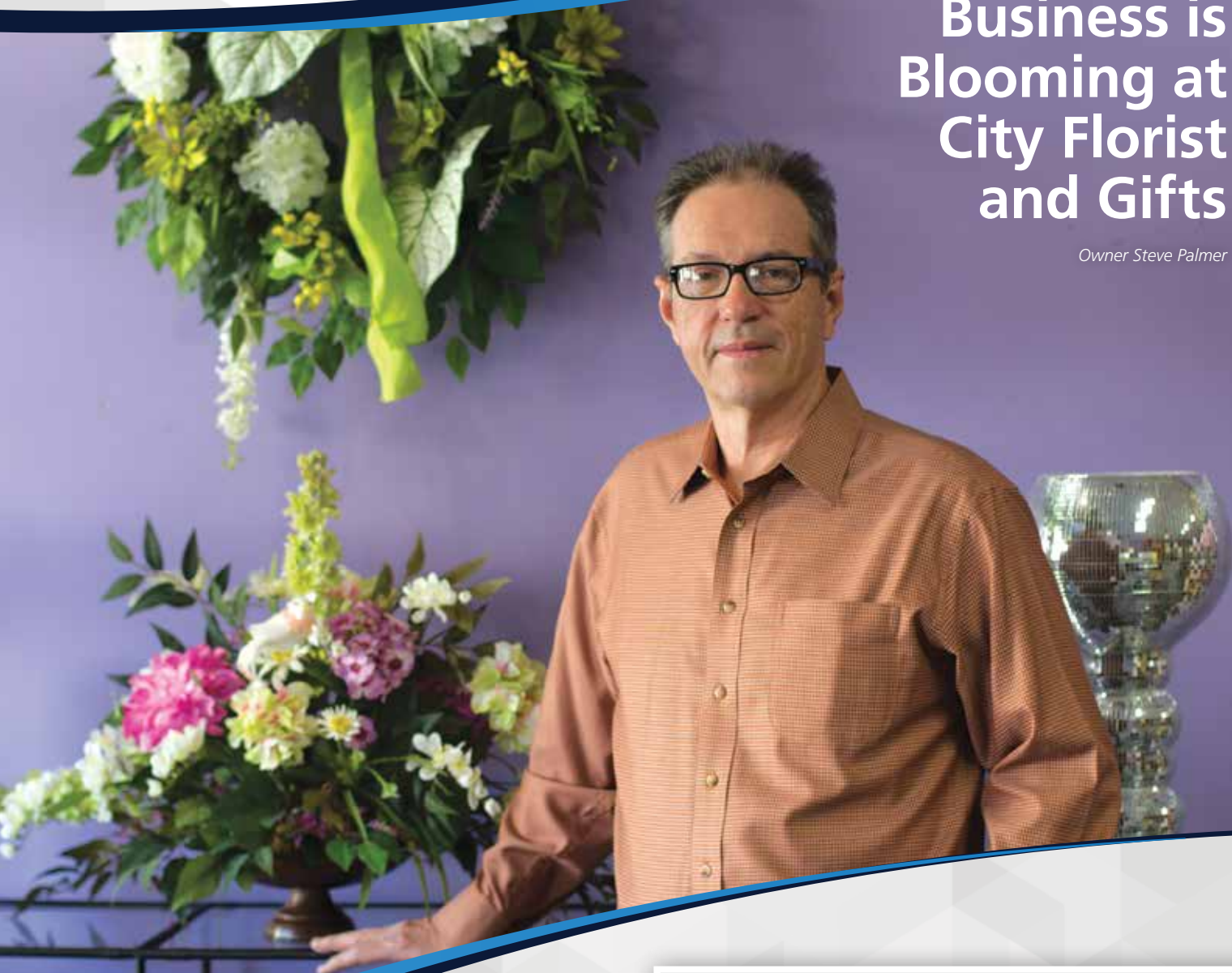


# Business

## CONNECTIONS

### Business is Blooming at City Florist and Gifts

*Owner Steve Palmer*



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# BUSINESS connections

**Undergoing change can be challenging.** Whether it's growing to meet customer demand, adding or subtracting services, or creating processes to increase efficiency, every business must learn to shift gears. This issue of *Business Connections* offers some perspectives on different types of change.

On page 3, you'll read about Wilkes Communications' Marketing Department and how **New Team Members Help Connect With the Community**. After many accomplishments during the past year, this department is looking forward to more in 2017.

**City Florist and Gifts** has been open since 1939, and the Business Spotlight on pages 4 and 5 focuses on this well-respected company, which Wilkes Communications is proud to serve. While its locations have changed over the decades, the store's commitment to outstanding service has remained the same.

Next, on page 6, are you **Guilty of Not Returning Calls?** Though it's become more accepted to not return phone calls, you would do better to return them promptly. Good etiquette is good for business.

Finally, read about **Sound Strategies for Email Management** on page 7. You're likely receiving more emails than ever before, and you need a process for dealing with them all. Setting aside time each week for inbox management is just one great strategy for taming the email beast.

Whatever changes your company is experiencing, we're here to help.

Sincerely,

Eric Cramer  
CEO





(L to R) Adam Foster, Ben Farmer, Tamara Blackburn, Crystyle Caviness, and Wendy Scott

**W**ilkes Communications' Marketing Department is looking back on 2016 as a time of growth and change — members were added and responsibilities were shifted. This team is now in the process of learning new skills to help reach its goals of getting more involved in Wilkes and the surrounding communities as well as expanding its services.

Led by PR Supervisor Tamara Blackburn, the team also includes PR/Marketing Rep Wendy Scott, PR/Marketing Rep Crystyle Caviness, Video Support Rep Adam Foster, and Video Support Rep Ben Farmer. Caviness states, "Our team works very closely together. Wendy and I do a lot of the writing and graphics work, and we all participate in video projects and community PR events."

The Marketing Department has participated in many successful events in recent months:

- Wilkes Communications is the primary sponsor for the annual Carolina in the Fall festival. In 2016, the Marketing Department worked closely with event organizers for press events and social media advertising. In conjunction with RiverStreet Productions, the team also created a promotional video for the event and filmed the entire festival.
- Merlefest is another event benefitting from Wilkes Communications' sponsorship. Our company provides Wi-Fi for the entire event, including for use by vendors. The Marketing Department set up and staffed a booth at the festival to interact with the guests and tell them about our services.
- The Wilkes Communications Hall of Fame is an annual event honoring local heroes. For 2016, the RiverStreet Production staff made videos about all those nominated for awards, which included interviews with family members of the nominees.
- The Marketing Department also films high school sporting events and contributes to the local newspaper, the *Wilkes Journal Patriot*.

**Go team! We're excited to see the Marketing Department accomplish even more in 2017.**

## WHO'S MINDING YOUR BUSINESS?

### TAMARA BLACKBURN MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS SUPERVISOR

Since the beginning of her career, Tamara Blackburn has had a passion for marketing and client relations. She started as an account executive and program manager for global brands. In April 2016, she began working at Wilkes Communications as Marketing & Public Relations Supervisor.

In this position, Blackburn creates brand awareness for Wilkes Communications, drives revenue, and develops content for current and potential customers. She notes, "I also represent the company in community involvement and public relations activities."

Blackburn likes the diversity of the products and services offered by Wilkes Communications. In addition, she says, "I appreciate the hardworking folks that make up this company, especially my excellent marketing and video production team."

In her spare time, Blackburn likes to farm, travel, hike, read, and enjoy entertainment. After some years away from the area, she comments, "I'm so blessed to be back home in Wilkes and representing a company like Wilkes Communications."







Owner Steve Palmer



(L to R) Employees Pat Holbrook, Casey Palmer, and Judy Rayborn

# City Florist and Gifts

*Providing the personal touch in flowers for three generations*

City Florist and Gifts began in 1939 and has since offered high-quality floral arrangements with prompt and caring service to help people mark the important occasions in their lives. With a large inventory of fresh flowers and live plants, as well as silk and dried arrangements, City Florist can meet a wide range of needs for holidays, birthdays, weddings, get-well gifts, funerals, and church services.

## Long Family History

Three generations of the Palmer family have owned and run City Florist and Gifts, serving Wilkesboro, North Carolina, and the surrounding area. Current owner Steve Palmer's grandmother began as an employee and enjoyed it so much that she bought the business from its retiring owner. "At its peak during the 1950s through 1970s, City Florist had 13 greenhouses and five store locations, growing about half of its own flowers," reports Palmer.

Palmer's father, who ran City Florist with his wife from the late 1940s until the early 2000s, worked up to 80 hours a week but told Palmer, "I've never worked a day in my life," because he loved the business so much. Palmer worked there during high school and college, and then ran it with his wife, Ann, as a side business, in addition to his career at Lowe's and her local beauty salon. He, Ann, and their kids can all do floral design; Steve can create any arrangement from just a picture.

Currently, Palmer's sister-in-law and brother-in-law run the daily operations. Palmer hopes that City Florist will continue into the future as a fourth generation family business with one of his children at the helm.

## Commitment to Customers

A strong commitment to customers sets City Florist apart. A group of 10 in-house floral designers do their best to understand exactly what the customer is looking for, and then create a unique floral arrangement that meets those specific needs. Palmer comments, "Offering a great product at a great price, combined with really good customer service and a can-do attitude, is what built our business." City Florist's customer service is so good that Palmer can remember some Christmas mornings when the family went into the store to fill a few orders for people who had forgotten to buy gifts.

The multi-generational nature of this florist carries over to its customers. City Florist has provided flower arrange-

ments for several generations of local weddings, starting with the contemporaries of Palmer's grandparents in the 1940s and 1950s, followed by the children of those customers in the 1970s, the grandchildren in the 1990s and 2000s, and now the great-grandchildren in the present.

City Florist's commitment to its customers also extends to the wider Wilkesboro community. Palmer's father used to provide Sunday flowers to all the churches in town for just the cost of the gas it took him to deliver them. The florist currently provides flowers to schools and churches for fundraisers and raffles, gives veterans 10 percent off for cash purchases, and will donate a casket spray to anyone who doesn't have the money to pay for it.

### Expanding the Customer Base

While City Florist is strongly rooted in its local community, it now offers online and phone ordering, which dramatically expands its potential customer base. This is made possible by the unlimited phone lines and high speed internet provided since 2013 by Wilkes Communications. "Having reliable phone and internet service they can count on allows City Florist and Gifts to receive orders from all over the United States," notes Sherrie Joines, Account Executive at Wilkes Communications.

Palmer says, "We've developed a web presence and hope to expand into social media." Both of these efforts are made easier by Wilkes Communications' solid internet service.

Wilkes Communications and City Florist have a great working relationship. Joines observes, "The owners and employees of City Florist are a wonderful group of people to work with. They always remain positive about Wilkes Communications and our employees."

City Florist Customer Specialist Pat Holbrook adds, "Phone service is one of our most valuable assets. With Wilkes Communications we get impeccable quality, terrific savings, and the ability to do business with a local company. We always know they will take care of us."



*With Wilkes Communications we get impeccable quality, terrific savings, and the ability to do business with a local company. We always know they will take care of us."*

— PAT HOLBROOK, CUSTOMER SPECIALIST,  
CITY FLORIST AND GIFTS

### UNLIMITED PHONE LINE IS LIFELINE FOR SOME BUSINESSES

Wilkes Communications' Unlimited Phone Line service offers multiple features to help companies effectively and flexibly manage communications with customers, vendors, and coworkers. Companies can choose which features they use based on how they work. Features include caller ID, to identify where calls are coming in from; voice mail, to prevent missing business after hours; and a rotary on each line that rolls calls to a different number if the main one is busy when called.

In addition, the Unlimited Phone Line service includes unlimited long distance so professionals can make as many calls to as many locations as they need to without worrying about additional charges. Customers also get Wilkes Communications' excellent customer service and access to a range of affordable solutions for businesses of any size. **For more information or a quote, call our Business Development Team at 336-973-3103.**



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# Guilty of Not Returning Calls?

*Rethink your excuses—good etiquette is good for business*

**H**ave you noticed that returning phone calls is becoming a lost piece of etiquette in today's business world? Granted, we all have a lot on our plates. You may even think you have perfectly legitimate reasons for not returning calls. But think again. Failure to respond promptly—or respond at all—to phone messages could end up costing you in terms of lost sales or damage to your professional reputation.

Why don't people call back? Here are some common excuses for not returning business calls along with cautionary "food for thought" for each:

## **"I'm too busy."**

Any given call could end up being a chance to strengthen a business relationship, learn something valuable, or reinforce your image. Given this fact, are you really too busy to return those calls? Look at it this way: Whenever you ignore a phone message, you run the risk of missing a hidden opportunity that could benefit your business. So make the time to return calls, even if it's only with very brief messages or conversations.

## **"If it's really a big deal, the caller will try me again. I don't need to call back."**

This belief can backfire on you, particularly in time-sensitive situations. For example, if a reporter calls to get your insights about a development in your industry and you don't return that call promptly, he or she may move on to the next contact on the list in order to meet the publication deadline. By not responding to the call, you've missed your chance to get publicity for your business and enhance your reputation as an expert.

## **"I only return the important calls."**

This strategy makes sense at first glance, but how can you know for sure which calls are important and which aren't? Say a caller simply leaves a message such as, "This is John Smith at ABC Company. Please call me at such and such phone number." What you may not realize is that John Smith was referred to you by one of your customers and is interested in doing business with you. By blowing off the call, you not only run the risk of offending the caller (a potential customer) but you could also adversely affect your relationship with the customer that made the referral.

While it can be challenging to respond to all phone messages, it's worth the effort. After all, when you don't return a call, you're communicating that the caller is unimportant to you. Is that really the message you want to send?







## Sound Strategies for **Email Management**

When you're getting buried in emails each day, it may seem like an impossible dream to keep up with all the filing, deleting, forwarding, and responding. You know you should reply to that customer's request or that supplier's question, but you can't seem to find the time.

A good place to start is by studying what's typically found in your inbox. If there are hundreds (or thousands) of emails in your inbox right now, you could have an issue that needs to be addressed. Consider the following strategies:

- Take a close look at your spam filter. Does it need to be upgraded or the settings changed?
- Are there newsletters you receive regularly that are no longer of value to you? Unsubscribe to them.
- Are you being copied in on communications unnecessarily? Be clear with colleagues about which projects require emails to be sent to you and which do not.
- Do you fail to designate adequate time for email management? Set aside time each day or week to organize emails, and create a reminder on your computer or mobile device.

Your approach to dealing with each email is also vitally important. Efficiency experts generally recommend you check emails periodically, but not constantly, during the workday. Scan them quickly to determine which are most urgent/important, then read them in order of priority. The goal is to read each email once and act on it—either by replying, filing, or deleting. If you can't immediately act on a particular email, use the time you've set aside for email management to complete this task.

The bottom line is this: Don't let email reduce your productivity. Instead, manage it more carefully so that you have the time to effectively communicate with those people most critical to your business success.



### RULES OF THUMB FOR TIMELY RESPONSES

In the business world, how quickly you should reply to an email or return a phone call depends on the nature of the communication. But it's never acceptable to not respond at all to people:

- You are doing business with
- You want to do business with
- That can refer business to you
- Who were referred

Conventional wisdom says to respond in a timely manner, often defined as 24 to 48 hours, to emails and calls. If you don't have an immediate answer to a question, reply to acknowledge receipt of the email or phone message and give a time frame of when you'll be able to respond completely.

What's in it for you if you get back to people promptly? It fosters a reputation of reliability, and paints you as a professional who's considerate of others. In fact, since ignoring emails and calls is now so commonplace, simply responding in a timely way can put you way ahead of your competition.



*Our new video production studio can produce sales-boosting TV commercials for your business*

You can now come to Wilkes Communications when you need a commercial written, filmed, and edited. We'll help you capture what's special about your business and put it on the TV screens of your current and prospective customers. **Ask us how you can get FREE commercial air time!**



For details on our video production studio's services, call 336-973-3103.