

Deceptive Lister – Your Partner?

Our customers, relatives, friends, and fellow community members are being deceived everyday. There are many companies advertising on the internet, in the yellow pages and white pages as being florists in our local cities, towns, or areas. They put themselves over as being a local company, with false local addresses (or real addresses that are hidden in the text). They sometimes have a “local” phone number that then gets redirected to a national phone bank of operators. They are crafty and clever at deceiving the public and grabbing our orders. They know how to manipulate the internet to appear authentic and thus get higher positioning for the search engines. Also, many order gatherers are taking customers who want to send flowers and selling them cheesecakes, candy or stuffed animals that then get shipped directly from the warehouse to the recipient, totally outside the floral network. Since the wire services provide a longtime, legitimate way to transfer orders, our industry is ripe for this illicit activity.

Let me share with you our experience here at Longmont Florist. Right before Valentines day a deceptive lister by the name of Longmont Bloom Fresh Florist appeared as the **top** florist on our MSN local internet listing. We had about 6 calls over the holiday from senders that thought they ordered from us, but we had no order. And those are only the people we heard from. So after valentines day, I sent a test order through them they charged my credit card over \$60 and a \$30 bouquet was delivered. I traced the order backward and found out that it was sent by Floravista out of Port Hueneme CA. Once when I test called this shop they gave me back **MY OWN ADDRESSES AS THEIRS!** The order was sent through Teleflora and when I asked for their assistance, they immediately contacted the sending shop and told them to stop. Within 3 days of calling Teleflora their “local” Longmont number had been disconnected – Yeah Teleflora. In my quick research I also identified 7 other Front Range cities from Ft Collins to Wheat Ridge that were affected by this same outfit and forwarded them to Teleflora. I am happy to report that 7 of the 8 deceptive phone numbers have been disconnected.

Have you noticed that there are more florists struggling, downsizing, selling or even going out of business. I have seen and heard of many shops that have just closed their doors without even selling their business. Our market and industry has changed and is changing very rapidly and we are under intense pressure from many angles and from many competitors.

I think we all need to ask ourselves a few questions.

Are the orders coming from order gatherers, and deceptive listers good for the purchasing customer, our industry, the receiving customer, or our shops? Is filling order gatherer orders good for the long term prospects of your business?

I would argue vehemently the answer to all of these questions is NO. You may argue that filling and delivering their orders is beneficial to your shop. What happens when the sender sees your hard work at a value of less than half of what they ordered and they think they ordered from your shop? I agree that we should fill orders for fellow florists, but not for deceptive listers and order gatherers.

The one benefactor of those orders is the deceptive lister or order gatherer.

What should we do?

First we should educate ourselves about this issue by researching websites like www.flowerdetectives.com. Did you know From You Flowers sends orders for Pro Flowers for same day delivery? Did you know that FTD.com has a huge percentage of it's home page items as direct ship from other vendors or flowers in a box from a farm delivered by UPS or the like? These companies are advertising through direct mail, emails, and many other channels, to people who used to be our customers. I received an email just before Mother's Day from FTD.com in which all 5 items pictured were drop ship gifts or flowers shipped in a box with a "free" vase. This is just to name a couple.

Then we need to educate our customers, friends, associates and everyone we know about this issue. This can be done by word of mouth, advertising, press releases, emails, etc.

We then need to decide if we are going to continue to support these gatherers by filling their orders. Without us the gatherers can't deliver same day orders. Why would we support the very companies that are taking business from us and quite often deceiving the public?

If applicable we also need to promote to and educate our customers that we can transfer orders nation and worldwide. Why are we letting go of this profitable business so easily?

Order by order and customer by customer we are losing business to the order gatherers and deceptive listers. Will you continue to be their partner?