

# **Collabs That Crush!**

**Three Times  
I Boosted My Business  
With Partnerships**

## Partnering for The Total Package

I was a fan of farmer florist Jennie Love of Love 'n Fresh Flowers from reading her blog years before we collaborated on any projects. I admired her designs and shared her work with my staff. Jennie's farm is in Philadelphia, a reasonable drive from my flower shop in Baltimore, so I got up the nerve to invite myself over for corsage making tutorial. She agreed!

Although my business, Local Color Flowers, and Jennie's, Love 'n Fresh Flowers, are different types of businesses, we had a lot in common: We founded our companies around the same time, our business goals and values are similar, and we share a commitment to local flowers. We became fast friends.

As our businesses matured, we took different paths: Jennie pursued high-end weddings and her designs got national attention. I focused on creating experiences for our customers at our shop. But, we both offered classes. Ironically, Jennie, the artist who was featured in Martha Stewart, tailored her classes to the business aspects of farming and the wedding industry while I, the former development professional with an MBA, taught design.



*Jennie Love and I at her farm in Philadelphia*



*Jennie Love and I doing serious work*

We were both responding to customer demand and opportunities in our market, but not playing to our strengths. Jennie proposed we join forces to offer a business class for aspiring farmer florists. This tag-team approach allowed us to focus and market the class on our own expertise, credentials, and experience. Together we taught a masterclass called, The Business of Local Flowers. We offered it for several years leading to many new businesses being started including Cut Flowers by Clear Ridge from class graduate, and now friend, Jessica Todd.

This collaboration brought Jennie's and my skills together to create something more valuable than we could make individually. The class was a great success for us and for our customers.

*A Bramble Baking Co Cake with local flowers  
from Local Color Flowers*



Icing on the Cake

My only dreaded job on a wedding installation is decorating the cake with flowers. I try not to do it, opting to give flowers to the baker. Don't get me wrong, fresh, local flowers add color, beauty and enhance the presentation. But, there are so many hazards. Walking around the cake stand. Leaning over the table. Touching the delicate icing. It's a disaster waiting to happen!

I first met Allie Smith of Bramble Baking Co. at a wedding. (She had no problem decorating her cake with my flowers.) The wedding couple was committed to buying local so hiring both me and Allie made sense. Allie and I started to find ourselves working many of the same events where vendors like us, (small, woman-owned, locally based) were preferred.

When realizing we had so many customers in common, we decided to partner for our own events. The first was a 4<sup>th</sup> of July holiday. Allie took orders for pies and used my flower shop as the pick-up location. I offered holiday themed flower arrangements including an explosion of red, white and blue blooms in Natty Boh cans (so cute). We were able to cross-promote the event and introduce our customers to each other's business. It was also an effective way to give my regulars something new and exciting to experience at the shop.

We expanded on success of that collaboration with classes. We host Allie's cake and cookie decorating classes and provided the flowers for ornamentation. It's another opportunity to get new customers into my shop, market our services, and spread the word about local flowers.

Allie and I have been partnering on events, especially holidays, for years and plan on continuing our collaboration. It's a win-win.



*Allie, from Bramble Bakes and I teaching a local flower cake decorating class together at Local Color Flowers*

## Taking The Show On The Road

I have been teaching floral design classes at my shop ever since we moved into our space in 2012. The classes are fun, introduce customers to our other business services, and generate revenue. But they have their limitations. They are pricy, and there is not a huge pool of potential customers willing and able to pay for a floral design class. We get returning customers, but once you learn how to do something, you don't need to learn it again.

After teaching floral design classes for nearly ten years, attendance slowed. We tried ways to reinvigorate our class offerings such as skills-based classes and different topics. Some worked. Some didn't. One way we really boosted interest was collaborating with one of our growers and taking the class to the farm.



*Laura Beth Resnick of Butterbee Farm and I teaching a design class at her farm*



*Laura Beth Resnick of Butterbee Farm and I teaching a Ranunculus design class in her new greenhouse*

Our Spotlight classes teach floral design featuring a particular focal flower. Dahlias, one of our most popular with many variations, was the perfect flower to highlight for a design class hosted at Butterbee Farm, one of our growers in Pikesville MD. In addition to the instruction, students toured the farm, heard stories from the farmer, and picked their own flowers for their arrangements. We added even more value by inviting a professional photographer to document the event and offered pictures for the students.

Classes on the farm are such a hit, we schedule several every year.