

Make Your Move

Moving an entire business is never easy. Find out what the owners of Boulevard Flowers did to make the transition as smooth as possible and to encourage customers to follow.

By Jasmina Radjevic

Three years ago, Mark and Fran Landa, owners of Boulevard Flowers, Colonial Heights, Va., made the decision to move their 52-year-old business from its original facility to a location three miles away. Although the new destination was a significant improvement from the old one, there were many hurdles the couple had to overcome before finalizing the transition, from complying with zoning regulations to not knowing whether or not their customers would follow. The entire process took years of work and preparation, but in the end, the Landas said it was worth it. They are now in a location that is more than double the size of their original facility, and business is booming!

A Need For Change

Back in the 1950s, Boulevard Flowers' original location was ideal. "We were pretty much a fixture on a main road through the main part of town," said Mark Landa. It was a good location as far as traffic and visibility, and shopping centers were located directly across the street. However, over the years problems escalated due to being located on a condensed, 1-acre lot. It would get quite crowded for shoppers, and extremely limited parking did not help.

Another problem was the facility had gotten so old the Landas could not efficiently make any more upgrades. Three small, gutter-connected, glass greenhouses were originally built in the mid 1950s, and a couple more double-poly houses were added in the 1970s. All of the greenhouses were 9 ft. to the gutter, and they had very low ceilings; at the time, Landa thought he was being energy efficient by keeping the heat in check by lowering the ceilings. He later realized this led to uncomfortable shopping for customers. After all the additions, the total size of the garden center cov-



Within the new facility, Boulevard Flowers was able to install an internal shade system and open, ventilated roofs, which make for a better environment for both the customers and workers.

ered about 12,000 sq.ft., so Mark and Fran finally decided something needed to change.

Through all the trials and tribulations involved with the move, the biggest complication was in the actual building and the physical move, according to Landa. "I don't think anybody, regardless of all the planning you do, is going to be anywhere near 100 percent on that," he said. "There are going to be so many regulations that nobody will ever tell you about until you're into it."

Preparation Is Key

While still at the old location, a Boulevard Flowers employee brought up the idea of setting up a suggestion box to find out how customers felt about a possible move. According to Landa, the response was half and half. One group of customers felt the move would be favorable to them with the new parking area and structures. Other customers had mixed emotions, while some even claimed they would not visit the new location because of the longer 3-mile drive. After weighing their options, the Landas decided it was best to make the move.

Two years before the actual move, which took place the last week in February 2007, Landa began informing customers of their intentions. "We had architectural drawings up on easels showing what [the new location] was going to be," he said. He also created maps and distributed handouts for customers. After the move, a sign was placed on the old property that read "Moved 3 Miles North" just in case any old customers unaware of the move drove by and wondered what happened to the business.

Although the move was three years in the making, some customers were still unaware of when and if it was actually going to happen. "We had people who used to drive one-half hour to 45 minutes to come to our place," explained Landa. "Those are the ones we really found we had a hard time getting the message to."

Making Progress

When it came time to relocate, the Landas had a brand-new facility built that consisted of a Nexus open-roof structure with internal shading. Everything is now under one roof but with three different bays, one main bay in the center with two outside bays. There is also a gift area enclosed in the front of the garden center, and the office area is enclosed in the back, with a total of roughly 34,000 sq.ft. at the new facility. "It's a lot higher, and the heat escapes much better," explained Landa. Another added benefit is there are 165 parking spots, while there were only 40 at the old facility!

Most of Landa's employees were content with the relocation "because they knew they were going somewhere where their feet weren't going to be wet and they had dry offices." Every department manager now works in an area that is dry and air conditioned. The checkout area also is air conditioned.

A new structure was not the only needed upgrade. The Landas implemented a new POS system, which included all new computers, central checkouts and other technology.



Boulevard Flowers was able to add more than 100 parking spots to the location, making it easier and more convenient for shoppers to travel to the garden center. (Photos: Nexus Corporation)



Roughly 80 percent of Boulevard's old clientele followed the business to its new location since its move in late February 2007.

Making The Move

Landa thought he would be able to make the move to the new facility with the same staff even though the new building was much larger. Landa eventually found out he needed to add more staff to the new location because of the increased number of customers and business.

As with any significant business change, there were many complications involved with the move. Landa explained that more advertising needed to be done for the new location, not just the products. Because so many articles were written about "part of the boulevard leaving," Landa was surprised to still receive phone calls from customers asking what happened to the old location and saying they did not know the move was going to occur so quickly.

Most of Landa's customers took the relocation seriously and paid attention to the handouts that were distributed at the old facility. "I think about 80 percent of our customers followed us," said Landa. "We saw a good remaining 20 percent in new faces that had come from right around the surrounding area." Landa still remains hopeful the rest of the customers from the old location may still walk in and surprise him. After all, the move itself has only been complete for a few months.

A Learning Experience

Now that the move is complete and it's business as usual, Landa and the Boulevard Flowers family are extremely happy with the transition as a whole. Customers are shopping at ease and employees are working in a more comfortable environment.

There has been so much positive feedback with the new facility, but it will probably take a few seasons before everything is shaped out the way it should be, said Landa. "Customers will dictate to you a lot of times your actual flow. You can tell

them all you want, this is the way it's supposed to go. By the time it starts working, they'll tell you which way they're going to go," he explained. Landa and his team are now learning that some things are going to

be directed by the customers and that is a good thing. ✎

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