



From the Editor: How good is your customer service?

Written by Dave Harrison

Rosa Flora Ltd. in Dunnville, Ontario, is one of Canada's largest cut flower growers and wholesalers. The company recently hosted an open house to celebrate 30 years of growing success, and I welcomed the opportunity to again tour its facilities.

Otto and Corine Bulk established their business in 1978, beginning with 1.3 acres of hybrid tea roses. It now spans some 28 acres, grows sweetheart roses, snapdragons, gerbera and alstromeria, and employs 160 people. It also sources locally grown flowers to augment what it doesn't grow for its wholesale division.

Rosa Flora has always been one of the most technologically advanced companies in the industry. It has had a cogen system since 1992. It has switched from natural gas to biomass-fuelled systems, and launched an onsite wood materials processing plant to ensure fuel consistency. It is meeting some of its electricity needs from its own 100-metre tall wind turbine. It has an underground conveyor system to transport harvested snaps to the shipping area. It has automated moving bench systems in its gerbera and rose houses, optimizing crop maintenance and harvesting functions since all the work can be done from centrally located workstations; no need to move up and down the rows. It has new energy-efficient lighting.

In 2006, the company was officially recognized as an Industrial Energy Innovator by the Canadian Industry Program for Energy Conservation.

Clearly, technology has significantly contributed to the success of Rosa Flora.

But there's more to this success story than just quality, productivity and efficiency. I saw a sign in one of the greenhouses that reflects the company's business philosophy. It's a daily reminder that keeps any company at the top of its game.

The sign and message were simple – no elaborate graphics, fancy fonts or ornate frame. It was probably printed on a manager's computer. It simply read: "RULE #1: If we don't take care of the customer ... somebody else will."

Other companies have similar signs in their lunch areas or boardrooms. But it always bears repeating. It's a great strategy by which to grow a business. Customer service is not a given anymore. Think of how many times you've walked out of a store because you couldn't find something, nor an employee to help you.

We have a coffee shop in our neighbourhood. It's one of several in its chain of about 50 stores in southwestern Ontario. It brews great coffee at a reasonable price, and with no lineups. On two recent occasions, they've been momentarily out of decaf and asked if I could wait while a fresh pot finishes brewing; a two to three minute wait, tops. And both times, they've given me a coupon for a free coffee for my next visit. That's great customer service.

If you're not in business to truly take care of customers and ensure they succeed, you won't be in this for long.

Rosa Flora's success reflects a company just as committed to leading edge technology as it is to customer service and satisfaction. You can't have one without the other. And that's a recipe shared by all successful greenhouse operations in Canada.

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