

To Thine Pricing Be True

There's a difference between deferring when you disclose a price (like in a long-copy sales letter for a high-end product or for a charity or cause) and when you bury prices so deeply or label them so insanely that the action angers customers and turns them away.

I was one of the latter a couple of weeks ago when I went online to order flowers for my husband's grandmother, who lives two hours away. I had a "go to" florist in her area that I usually ordered from, but that particular morning I decided to check another florist out. At first, the florist, which I'll call "Amanda's Flowers," seemed promising. The home page of the business's website boasted "BIG Sales! *up to 45% OFF w/ FREE DELIVERY used code: FREEDEL20 - Valid ONLINE ONLY."

"Perfect," I thought. "I like a sale, and flowers are so expensive anyway."

So I went about my shopping, found a bouquet I liked, and proceeded to checkout. There's where the problems occurred.

I had hoped that the \$44.99 price I saw on the bouquet's product page was the original price. It was not. Okay, that still was a pretty good price for flowers, especially if the delivery fee was being waived, and it was. My coupon code took the \$9.99 charge off my total. What was added, however, was a \$19.95 "Service Fee."

Here's where the story gets good. The "service fee," according to the florist's website, "varies based upon a variety of factors related to the specific order placed. Some of the factors used to determine the service fee are whether it is same day or next day order, type of item ordered, proximity to a holiday, day of the week, order location and time of day. The service fee is calculated after you enter what you are ordering, where the item is going and when your order is placed. The service fee is displayed after it is calculated and prior to the final checkout."

While all this may be true (and none of it applied, in my case), it shouldn't be buried in the fine print and sprung on the customer right before the transaction goes through. If you have costs that vary, build those into your prices. If you can't do that, notify your customers throughout the buying process of the potential for additional costs, based on selection. Be clear. Be specific. Be up front. Buyers won't stick around if they think you're playing games with them and hiding fees and other costs.

I didn't. I emptied my cart on "Amanda's" website and headed back to my old standby, where I found an equally beautiful and bountiful bouquet for \$39.99 and a \$5.00 delivery charge.

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