

Fostering A True Customer Community

An Interview with Jim McCann, Founder, Chairman, and Chief Executive Officer, 1-800-Flowers.com, Inc.

EDITORS' NOTE In 1976, Jim McCann bought his first of many retail flower shops in the New York metropolitan area. As his company expanded, McCann focused on innovation and being an early adopter of new technologies that enhanced customer engagement to grow his business. As a result, 1-800-Flowers.com, Inc., was among the first to offer 24-hour service through an 800-phone number and to use the Internet for direct sales to customers, becoming AOL's first merchant partner of any kind in 1994.



Jim McCann

COMPANY BRIEF 1-800-Flowers.com, Inc. is a leading provider of gifts designed to help customers express, connect, and celebrate. The company's e-commerce business platform features an all-star family of brands, including: 1-800-Flowers.com®, 1-800-Baskets.com®, Cheryl's Cookies®, Harry & David®, PersonalizationMall.com®, Shari's Berries®, FruitBouquets.com®, Moose Munch®, The Popcorn Factory®, Wolferman's Bakery®, Stock Yards® and Simply Chocolate®. The company also operates BloomNet®, an international floral and gift industry service provider offering a broad range of products and services designed to help members grow their businesses profitably; NapcoSM, a resource for floral gifts and seasonal decor; and DesignPac Gifts, LLC, a manufacturer of gift baskets and towers. 1-800-Flowers.com, Inc. was recognized among the top 5 on the National Retail Federation's 2021 Hot 25 Retailers list, which ranks the nation's fastest-growing retail companies.

How do you describe 1-800-Flowers' culture and values?

Our organization is rooted in the belief that relationships matter. We're united by a shared vision to inspire more meaningful connections and know that gift-giving is an important tool to help nurture and grow those bonds. Our goal is to make the gift-giving process easy, engaging, and enjoyable for everyone. We bring this vision to life through constant innovation. We encourage our employees to think big, take risks, and experiment. By fostering a culture of innovation and creativity, we constantly look for impactful ways to elevate the gifting experience for the giver and receiver and help them create meaningful moments.

We also believe in both challenging and supporting our team members. While we set ambitious goals and push for hard work, we're committed to investing in our people, providing the education, resources and tools they need to succeed. Our focus is on fostering both personal and professional growth, creating an atmosphere where everyone can thrive. Ultimately, our goal is for everyone who works here – whether they stay for a few years or build their entire career with us – to look back

and say that it was the best place to work. We want them to feel that they were challenged, supported, and that they grew both as professionals and as individuals.

What have been the keys to 1-800-Flowers' industry leadership, and how do you describe the 1-800-Flowers difference?

Our leadership in the industry really comes down to one thing: constant innovation. From day one, we've been committed to staying ahead of the curve and meeting our customers where they are – whether that was

in-store with our first brick-and-mortar shops, on the phone as we became pioneers of the 800-number, online as the first retail partner on AOL, through mobile with our early apps, and now with conversational commerce and early AI adoption. We know that technology drives consumer behavior, and we keep a close eye on new innovations to help us better engage with our customers.

What sets us apart is our ability to adapt and evolve while maintaining a strong connection with our customers and fostering a true customer community. Over the years, we've transformed from a collection of specialty brands to a unique e-commerce platform that inspires people to give more, connect more, and build better relationships. This focus on community – not just transactions – is a big part of what makes us different. For instance, we've introduced things like our weekly Celebrations Pulse email, which shares inspiring stories and ideas, and experiential events like Harry & David hosted dinners. These initiatives help us build deeper relationships with our customers, driving loyalty and keeping us relevant in today's fast-paced world.



Kevin McCann at Smile Farms

“Over the years, we’ve transformed from a collection of specialty brands to a unique e-commerce platform that inspires people to give more, connect more, and build better relationships.”

Our commitment to innovation, understanding customer behavior, and using technology helps us stay ahead of industry changes, ensuring we continue to meet and exceed our customers’ needs.

Where do you see the greatest opportunities for growth for 1-800-Flowers?

I believe one of the most exciting opportunities for growth lies in how we’re leveraging artificial intelligence. At 1-800-Flowers, we’ve

been embracing AI’s transformative potential, but always with a focus on maintaining genuine human connections. It’s a balance we take seriously – using AI to enhance, not replace, the personal touch that our customers value. AI is already helping us create more dynamic, personalized experiences. For example, tools like automated reminders ensure customers never miss important milestones like birthdays and anniversaries. We’ve also had some fun with AI-powered features like MomVerse and DadJoke GPT, which let customers create personalized poems, songs, and jokes.

On the operational side, we’ve integrated AI into customer care and our e-commerce platform to streamline processes and improve service. Our new customer care platform uses AI to consolidate multiple systems into one, allowing our agents to assist customers across all our brands instead of being limited to a single one. AI also equips agents with customer information as calls come in, making interactions more efficient and personalized.

As we move forward, we see even more opportunities to harmonize AI with human interaction. AI can help us address challenges and scale our ability to foster meaningful connections. At the same time, we’re mindful of the potential risks, like contributing to social isolation or losing the human touch, and we’re committed to navigating these thoughtfully.

As we look ahead, we will continue exploring new AI opportunities, always focusing on how they can bring additional value to our customers.

What are the key characteristics you look for when attracting talent to 1-800-Flowers?

We look for people who thrive in an atmosphere of doing – those who are intellectually curious, willing to experiment, take risks, and aren’t afraid to fail. Ours is a culture of innovation. We value bold thinking, trying new things, and looking to the future. Mistakes are part of the process because they mean you’re pushing boundaries, and that’s exactly what we encourage. At the same time, we value the uniqueness of every individual and make it a priority to create a supportive environment where people feel celebrated – whether it’s for small wins or big successes. I’ve always believed that our company is more than just a place to work. Yes, we have high expectations and push people to work hard, but we also want our teams to feel they’re growing



Heat with Heart™ hot sauce is composed entirely of peppers grown by Smile Farmers



Smile Farms at Family Residences and Essential Enterprises, Inc. (FREE) in Oakdale, New York

personally and professionally in a fun, collaborative environment.

To strengthen this culture, especially as we've grown and integrated new brands, we've introduced initiatives like our Emeralds Program, which identifies and nurtures top talent to prepare them for future leadership roles. Tools like LinkedIn Learning, Microsoft Teams, and our custom training series, Fresh University, keep our thousands of associates engaged and learning with virtual lunch-and-learns that foster cross-functional knowledge-sharing and help everyone stay agile. We've also started piloting innovative solutions like Microsoft Co-Pilot to give associates access to AI tools that streamline workflows and enhance productivity. These efforts help us adapt quickly to changing business needs and ensure our teams are prepared for the future.

How important is it for 1-800-Flowers to build a diverse and inclusive workforce?

Creating a diverse and inclusive workforce is incredibly important to who we are at 1-800-Flowers. Our mission is to inspire more human expression, connection, and celebration – for everyone. This begins with our own team. We're committed to fostering an environment where all team members, customers, and partners feel respected, valued, and empowered. Helping people connect and build more and better relationships is truly a team effort – and one that requires a highly engaged and passionate network of people. That's why we're committed to creating an environment where everyone feels welcome and supported. To bring this to life, we actively tap into diverse talent pools. We work with several organizations across

the country to recruit and advertise available positions, including veterans' associations, second chance programs, local family services, local shelters, and more. This includes First Step Staffing, one of the largest nonprofits in the U.S. focused on helping individuals overcome poverty and homelessness through employment opportunities. We also recently launched an initiative with The Fuse Network, an Ohio-based nonprofit dedicated to supporting adults with disabilities. Just this past August, we welcomed our first group of associates from The Fuse Network as part of a training program designed to prepare adults with disabilities for meaningful employment. Together, we're creating opportunities that empower individuals to build relationships, gain financial independence, and reduce reliance on paid support systems.

Diversity and inclusion are essential to fulfilling our mission and growing as an organization. When we embrace the unique perspectives and talents of our team members, we're strengthening the connections we create with our customers and communities.

What do you see as 1-800-Flowers' responsibility to be engaged in the communities it serves and a force for good in the industry?

Giving back and supporting our community is part of our DNA. Our signature philanthropic partner, Smile Farms, is at the heart of this commitment. My brother Chris and I created Smile Farms 10 years ago to ensure that differently abled individuals, including our brother Kevin, could access meaningful work opportunities. We saw firsthand how stigma often prevents people with disabilities from accessing jobs, and we knew we needed to help change

that. A quarter of adults in the U.S. are living with a disability and 8 in 10 disabled adults are unemployed. That's why programs like Smile Farms can make a real difference. Today, Smile Farms operates 13 campuses and employs more than 375 farmers, providing valuable life and job skills training in agriculture and hospitality. Each Smile Farms campus generates sustainable revenue that funds essential services for our partners or produces fresh products to help feed the hungry. It's been inspiring to watch our employees volunteer their time and skills for Smile Farms. Over the years, it has become a significant cultural contributor here at 1-800-Flowers, deepening our shared commitment to giving back and attracting people who share these values.

What are your priorities for Smile Farms as you look to the future?

As we look to the future, we're focused on expanding Smile Farms across the U.S. and continuing to break down barriers to employment for people with differing abilities. We're committed to empowering individuals to find meaningful work opportunities and creating a future where everyone has a chance to contribute and thrive. Smile Farms has already made a significant impact across Long Island, New York, but we're eager to grow and expand to other locations.

One of the things we're particularly excited about is increasing our partnerships with restaurants and other businesses to provide more job opportunities for our farmers. One of our Smile Farmers, Manny, is a great testament to this. Manny's first job was as a Smile Farmer, working at an urban garden in the New York area. He's one of many who have been able to take the next step in their careers thanks to our partnerships. Craft Hospitality, the food service company founded by my friend and celebrity chef, Tom Colicchio, has been a long-time partner of Smile Farms. It hosted a campus, bought Smile Farms-grown produce, and even supported our hot sauce initiative, Heat with Heart™ hot sauce, which is made from peppers grown by Smile Farmers, individuals with different abilities, across six Smile Farms campuses.

When the pandemic subsided, Craft's New York restaurants were struggling to find staff. This led to a conversation with Smile Farms and the nonprofit's expansion into hospitality. Manny joined the team at Craft and his initial role was to polish glassware. It was an essential job in a high-end restaurant setting. But Manny didn't stop there. He went to the chef on his own and asked to learn kitchen prep – and is loving his new position. Craft has seen firsthand how hiring Smile Farmers has boosted productivity and efficiency across the restaurant.

Work is so much more than a paycheck. It's about purpose, connection, and community. It's why we get up in the morning, and for people like Manny, it's a chance to be part of something bigger. That's why we're focused on continuing to break down barriers and build a future where everyone is valued for their contributions. ●