

Working day of an auction buyer

An understanding of the general routines for buyers at the auctions and appreciating how you can make their life either easier or reduce the business risks, can ultimately turn your flowers into 'profit-makers'.

By Jeroen van der Hulst

Every morning, there is only one reason why all the buyers go to the auction; they want to buy flowers that make them money. The alarm clock of a buyer on the flower auction will often be set at around 03:00 hrs to arrive at the flower auction around 04:00. When they arrive at their own premises on the auction, they go through their orders, speak to their col-



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leagues on the sales department and prepare themselves for the start of the auction. After 30-45 minutes they will

leave for the auction cold store, in order to check the fresh supply of flowers from all over the world. Most of the buyers spend another 30-45 minutes in the 2°C cold store, before they leave at 5:30 for the auction room and a welcome cup of coffee.

Start of the auction

The last 30 minutes before the start of the auction is spent with setting up their lap tops and some final calls to their sales colleagues to gather the last orders. This time is also spent with social talk and some jokes with their competitors and the auctioneers in the auction room. At 06:00 sharp the auction starts with the sales of

thousands of trolleys with flowers from hundreds of growers. A good auctioneer can sell up to 1100 lots per hour. This is only 3-4 seconds for every lot!

Buying on the auction

The buyers join the bidding and decide whether to buy certain lots or not. They base their decisions on a number of arguments, which can include price developments, quality of the produce, "name of the grower", standing orders and market developments. Some will buy "on the off chance" when they see some flowers for an interesting price, making their decision in a split second. Later on they will decide how to earn



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money from these flowers.

The major flower traders can buy up to 60-80 lots per hour. This means that they are buying flowers every minute. It also means that they are spending hundreds or sometimes even thousands of Euros per minute!

Exporting flowers

After the auction the flowers

are delivered to the buyers, within two hours after the clock has stopped. More than 85% of the flowers are exported on the same day. Trucks for Italy, Germany or France must leave at 13:30 to reach their destinations in time. This tight schedule leaves little time for the buyers to check the quality of the flowers. If they would only take one minute for every

lot, some of them would spend more than two hours checking all their flowers. This is not possible as most of the flowers are packed and shipped within two hours.

A risky business

Spending a few thousand Euro on flowers and exporting them without quality inspection is a risky business. Suppose that there is a small quality problem, like *Botrytis*? After paying for the flowers and the trans-

port, the shipment can be refused by the buyer's customer, leaving the buyer with a significant loss. One problematic shipment on a day can ruin a whole day's profit. Quality and reliability are therefore very important factors. Creating the confidence factor among the buyers for your flowers can certainly help turn them into profit-makers, something both you and the buyers are looking for! ■