

# Success blooms for student with online flower business

Political science freshman Michael McNeeley created FloristDEX.com, which links 45,000 sellers with buyers

By Steven Neuman  
News Reporter

Freshman Michael McNeeley never planned on going into the flower business during his first year of college, but today McNeeley is the proud owner of FloristDEX.com, a Web site that boasts affiliations with more than 45,000 florists.

The transformation from student employee to business entrepreneur began when McNeeley took a job working as a customer service representative for national floral retailer FTD at a Medford call center. He said he picked up the job "out of nowhere."

"I was not looking to become part of the floral industry or anything like that, I just got really into it," McNeeley said. "We worked in a giant call center — I spent my entire life in a cubicle and dealt with florists and dealt with consumers and I had to mediate between the two."

Through witnessing the conflicts between consumers and florists, he began to formulate a business plan.

McNeeley said his site offers consumers a national listing of florists' phone numbers and addresses. Rather than attempting to sell flowers directly, FloristDEX allows the consumer to directly contact the florist, and the result is a cheaper price for consumers. Unlike other services that charge a fee to connect consumers with florists, FloristDEX receives revenue from the florists who pay for the listing. Consumers get their flowers at the price that one would get for a bouquet ordered locally.

As one of the next steps, McNeeley said he wants to partner with wholesale retailers of flowers to offer discount incentives for florists who sign up with FloristDEX.

McNeeley's business plan seems solid, said Gecko Designs owner Gabe Silverman. Silverman's company designed the graphical side of FloristDEX for McNeeley. For Silverman, a multimedia design major who graduated from the University in June 2003, the plan sounded familiar and ambitious.

"I started my own business in 1996 when I was a sophomore in high school," he said. "Back then, there was this idea floating around that you could make a Web page, put it up on the Web, clients would be beating



Tim Bobosky Photographer

Freshman Michael McNeeley, the owner of FloristDEX.com, hangs out among the wildflowers Thursday outside the EMU. His Web site connects florists and buyers nationwide. He got the idea for the Web site after working in an FTD call center, he says.

down the door and you could start cutting checks right away."

Silverman said when McNeeley first contacted him last year, he had underestimated his plans.

"I thought, you can go to FTD and order flowers and there is no way he can compete," Silverman said. "But he had really thought about it and had done his work."

McNeeley said the process has become more challenging as the business has developed.

"It wasn't daunting when I first started this, it still isn't daunting to an extent, but the fact that FTD and all these other companies are so large, and I'm just a student, it's a little bit difficult," McNeeley said. "The design process, all the ideas, it was really fun developing all that. Working things like getting registered for the state, taxes, all the things that are more logistical, that was more daunting."

McNeeley studies political science at the University, not business.

"I just do what I enjoy," he said. "I don't think that to be successful in business you have to have a business major."

Silverman said McNeeley has shown a serious devotion to making FloristDEX a success while making an effort to understand the inner workings of the Web site.

"When we first put the site up it was getting hits but not as many as he wanted, so he came back and did a re-design and he worked with us to change the site," Silverman said.

Peter Maag, a University multimedia design major who runs The Maag Group, agrees with Silverman. McNeeley hired Maag's company to handle the programming for FloristDEX.com.

"He was one of the first people we worked with who was younger than us," said Maag, who plans on graduating in the fall. "He was very mature. It's just like dealing with any other adult client we've had in the past."

McNeeley said although FloristDEX.com officially launched only four months ago, the site has proven successful.

"It's gone really well," he said. "It's been in the works for a year or so now, and yesterday we doubled our web traffic, and since the first month we're probably up over 10,000 percent."

Maag said he thinks McNeeley has a future in business.

"He's pretty young, and he has a lot of room and time to grow," he said.

Contact the business/science/technology reporter at [stevenneuman@dailymerald.com](mailto:stevenneuman@dailymerald.com).

**LIVE! @ THE JUNGLE**

**Ozomali**  
W/ GO BUDDY GO  
**THIS TUESDAY! 18+**

**SPARTAN**  
W/ ENGINE DOWN  
& ALLSTATE CHAMPION  
**18+ 18+ TUESDAY, MAY 25TH**

TICKETS AVAILABLE AT THE JUNGLE, JOE'S BAR & GRILLE, TICKETSWEST, FASTIX, CD WORLD, HOUSE OF RECORDS, AND FACE THE MUSIC.

23 WEST 6TH, EUGENE (541) 338-9000 INFO **KRYM** JAGUAR PRODUCTIONS

- Are you male?
- Are you 18-23 years old?

**YES!**

We want your help testing an interactive multimedia program about pregnancy prevention.

**Here's what it involves:**

- Viewing a computer program on either pregnancy prevention or an unrelated topic
- Filling out two brief questionnaires
- Takes about 1 hour
- You will receive \$25 for your participation

**For more information:**

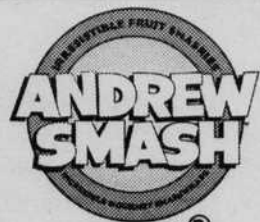
Please call 284-5183  
(outside Eugene, 1-866-730-3211)  
Ask for the Pregnancy Prevention Project.

This is a research project funded by the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development

Oregon Center for Applied Science, Inc.  
1839 Garden Avenue Eugene, OR 97403

Just come in and say:

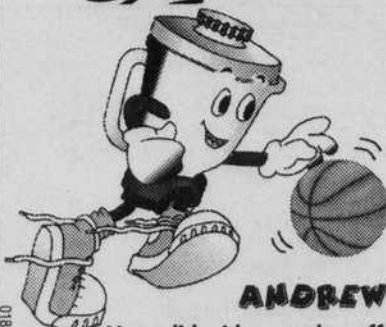
**PLAY HARD,  
EAT WELL!**



and receive a 16 oz.

**SMASHIE®**

for only  
**\$1.00**



**ANDREW SMASH—IN THE EMU**

Not valid with any other offers. Good through 5/21/04.

## Need a Great Place to Live?

If you haven't stopped by lately, it's time to check out Duck's Village today!

1, 2, 3 & 4 Bedroom Furnished Apartments, and so much more . . .

Leases by the Bedroom  
Extra Large Bedrooms  
Large Outdoor Pool  
Bicycle Racks  
Fitness Center

Night Time Security Patrol  
Full or School Year Leases  
Large Indoor Spa  
Computer Lab w/high-speed Internet  
Volleyball & Basketball Courts

On Site Management Team  
Near LTD Routes to U of O  
Free Off-Street Parking  
Recreation Room  
Roommate Referrals Available



**\* Now Leasing for 2004-2005 \***

**Check this out: We're Renovating!**

1, 2, & 3 Bedroom Units are getting a face lift including new carpet, flooring and paint jobs!

3225 Kinsrow Avenue, Eugene (541) 485-7200

**[www.ducksvillage.com](http://www.ducksvillage.com)**