

# giftBEAT

Tracking the Pulse of the Gift Industry

## marketBEAT

The Industry's Top-Selling Lines



The Weekend Collection from comfort gift chart-topper **World's Softest Socks** combines ultra-soft knit fabric and trendy hues. \$4.25 cost. ([worldssoftest.com](http://worldssoftest.com))

### GREETING CARDS

Last ran in October 2020

- #1 **LEANIN' TREE:** birthday, various
- #2 **BLUE MOUNTAIN ARTS:** various
- #3 **AVANTI:** birthday, various
- #4 **PAPYRUS:** birthday, Valentine's
- #5 **PICTURA:** various
- #6 **RECYCLED PAPER GREETINGS:** birthday, various
- #7 **SHANNON MARTIN:** various
- #8 **CALYPSO:** birthday, various
- #9 **OATMEAL STUDIOS:** humor, birthday
- #10 **QUILLING CARD:** various\*

**HONORABLE MENTIONS:** American Greetings, Compendium, Seek Publishing

#### \*OF NOTE!

Since this chart last ran, **QUILLING CARD** ([quillingcard.com](http://quillingcard.com)) moved from honorable mention to number 10 on the chart.



The Gardening Card from chart-newcomer **Quilling Card** is handcrafted using the ancient paper art form of quilling. \$4.50 cost. ([quillingcard.com](http://quillingcard.com))

Wages decreased  
year over year for 30%  
of store owners

### COMFORT GIFTS

Last ran in December 2020

- #1 **DEMDACO:** Giving Collection, Willow Tree
- #2 **SNOOZIES:** slippers socks
- #3 **INTELEX:** Warmies
- #4 **DM:** Hello Mello, various
- #5 **CARSON:** memorial garden decor
- #6 **WORLD'S SOFTEST SOCKS:** socks
- #7 **VERA BRADLEY:** throws
- #8 **MICHEL DESIGN WORKS:** foaming soap, various
- #9 **ROMAN:** crosses, various
- #10 **GANZ:** ornaments, pocket tokens\*

**HONORABLE MENTIONS:** Barefoot Dreams, Opportunities, Natural Life

#### \*OF NOTE!

Since this chart ran last, **GANZ** ([ganz.com](http://ganz.com)) moved from an honorable mention to number 10 on the chart.

### CANDY & GOURMET

- #1 **ABDALLAH CANDIES:** candy, chocolate
- #2 **STONEWALL KITCHEN:** jam, jelly, condiments
- #3 **WIND & WILLOW:** mixes, dips
- #4 **RUSSELL STOVER:** boxed chocolate
- #5 **SAVORY FINE FOODS:** seasonings
- #6 **CALICO COTTAGE:** fudge
- #7 **JELLY BELLY:** jellybeans
- #8 **SOUTH BEND CHOCOLATE:** chocolate-covered items
- #9 **COUNTRY HOME CREATIONS:** dips
- #10 **SWEET SHOP USA:** truffles

**HONORABLE MENTIONS:** Godiva, Chapel Hill Toffee, Curly Girlz

**FAST FACT:**  
Despite  
February sales  
declines,  
store owners  
are  
feeling positive  
heading  
into spring.

**Do you have a great  
idea to share?**

Email *Giftbeat* Editor  
Erica Kirkland at  
[erica@giftbeat.com](mailto:erica@giftbeat.com)

**NOTE:** Rankings are based on **February 2021** sales from Giftbeat's reporting stores.



Among the bestselling items from apparel chart-topper **Howard's** were a variety of capes from the company's fall 2020 collection. ([wholesale.howardsinc.com](http://wholesale.howardsinc.com))

### APPAREL Last ran in Nov 2020

- #1 **DM:** Hello Mello, various
- #2 **SIMPLY SOUTHERN:** t-shirts, various
- #3 **UMGEE:** tops, dresses
- #4 **SIMPLY NOELLE:** tops, coats, various
- #5 **TGBBRANDS:** tops, dresses, various
- #6 **HONEYME:** tops\*
- #7 **LAZY ONE:** boxers, PJs\*
- #8 **NORDIC BEACH:** wraps, jackets\*
- #9 **HOWARD'S:** capes, sweaters, various\*

#10 **LIFE IS GOOD:** t-shirts

**HONORABLE MENTIONS:** Charlie B, Habitat, Judson & Co.

#### \*OF NOTE!

**LAZY ONE** ([lazyone.com](http://lazyone.com)), **NORDIC BEACH** ([nordicbeachapparel.com](http://nordicbeachapparel.com)) and **HONEYME** ([honeymeusa.com](http://honeymeusa.com)) did not rank when this chart ran last, while **HOWARD'S** ([wholesale.howardsinc.com](http://wholesale.howardsinc.com)) moved from an honorable mention to number nine.

### FUNCTIONAL GIFTS Last ran in December 2020

- #1 **NORA FLEMING:** minis, serving pieces
  - #2 **MUD PIE:** kitchen and dining-related items
  - #3 **BRUMATE:** insulated drinkware
  - #4 **MICHEL DESIGN WORKS:** foaming soap, various
  - #5 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY:** tea towels, various
  - #6 **DM:** kitchen gadgets, various
  - #7 **DEMDACO:** kitchen and dining-related items
  - #8 **KAY DEE DESIGNS:** tea towels, aprons, oven mitts
  - #9 **CORKCICLE:** insulated drinkware
  - #10 **E-CLOTH:** cleaning products
- HONORABLE MENTIONS:** Vera Bradley, Yeti, C&F Home

#### \*OF NOTE!

Since this chart last ran, **KAY DEE DESIGNS** ([kaydeedesigns.com](http://kaydeedesigns.com)) moved from an honorable mention to number eight on the chart.

### JOURNALS & NOTEBOOKS Last ran in Dec 2020

- #1 **PETER PAUPER PRESS:** journals
- #2 **COMPENDIUM:** journals
- #3 **JOURNALS UNLIMITED:** journals\*
- #4 **LANG:** journals, password books
- #5 **FRINGE STUDIO:** journals
- #6 **BROWNLOW:** journals
- #7 **C.R. GIBSON:** address, guest, various
- #8 **CHRONICLE BOOKS:** journals\*
- #9 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY:** notebooks and pads
- #10 **DAYSRING:** various

**HONORABLE MENTIONS:** Legacy, Christian Art Gifts, Design Design

#### \*OF NOTE!

**JOURNALS UNLIMITED** ([journalsunlimited.com](http://journalsunlimited.com)) and **CHRONICLE BOOKS** ([chroniclebooks.com](http://chroniclebooks.com)) did not rank when this chart last ran, while **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY** ([wholesale.primitivesbykathy.com](http://wholesale.primitivesbykathy.com)) moved from an honorable mention to number nine on the chart.

### PLUSH Last ran in February 2021

- #1 **JELLYCAT:** bunnies, various
- #2 **TY:** Beanie Boos, Squish-a-Boos
- #3 **INTELEX:** Warmies
- #4 **MARY MEYER:** baby, various
- #5 **DOUGLAS:** dogs, various
- #6 **DEMDACO:** bears
- #7 **GANZ:** baby, various
- #8 **BURTON & BURTON:** various\*
- #9 **CUDDLE BARN:** various\*
- #10 **AURORA:** various\*

**HONORABLE MENTIONS:** Bunnies By The Bay, Unique Designs

#### \*OF NOTE!

Since this chart last ran, **BURTON & BURTON** ([burtonandburton.com](http://burtonandburton.com)) and **CUDDLE BARN** ([cuddle-barn.com](http://cuddle-barn.com)) moved from honorable mentions onto the chart.

### MUGS & TUMBLERS Last ran in December 2020

- #1 **CORKCICLE:** tumblers, canteens
- #2 **BRUMATE:** Hopsulator Slim, various
- #3 **DEMDACO:** Dean Crouser, Warm Heart
- #4 **ENESCO:** Our Name is Mud, various
- #5 **TERVIS:** tumblers
- #6 **SWIG:** mugs, various
- #7 **YETI:** various
- #8 **CLAY IN MOTION:** Handwarmer mugs
- #9 **UNEMPLOYED PHILOSOPHERS:** mugs
- #10 **KARMA:** mugs\*

**HONORABLE MENTIONS:** About Face, Evergreen, Spootiques

#### \*OF NOTE!

**KARMA** ([stephenjosephinc.com](http://stephenjosephinc.com)) did not rank when this chart last ran.

### VALENTINE'S DAY Last ran in April 2020

- #1 **ABDALLAH CANDIES:** chocolate, candy
- #2 **SILVER FOREST:** earrings
- #3 **VERA BRADLEY:** handbags\*
- #4 **BRIGHTON:** jewelry
- #5 **DEMDACO:** Willow Tree
- #6 **SIMPLY SOUTHERN:** t-shirts
- #7 **PAPYRUS:** greeting cards
- #8 **RUSSELL STOVER:** boxed candy and chocolate
- #9 **PANDORA:** jewelry
- #10 **NORA FLEMING:** minis\*

**HONORABLE MENTIONS:** Sweet Shop USA, Lola & Company

#### \*OF NOTE!

Since this chart last ran, **VERA BRADLEY** ([verabradley.com](http://verabradley.com)) and **NORA FLEMING** ([norafleming.com](http://norafleming.com)) moved from honorable mentions onto the chart.



**Karma's** 16-ounce ceramic "Boho" mugs helped usher the supplier onto the top 10 chart. The mugs feature black and white artwork from various artists which is inspired by nature. ([karmagifts.com](http://karmagifts.com))

**PUBLISHER & EDITOR**

Erica Kirkland  
erica@giftbeat.com  
905-690-0492

**ART DIRECTOR**

Gerry Wiebe

**SUBSCRIPTIONS**

Giftbeat publishes 11 issues a year  
U.S.: \$129 US/year  
Canadian: \$139 US/year  
International: \$159 US/year  
For details and to subscribe visit [www.giftbeat.com](http://www.giftbeat.com)

**ABOUT**

Giftbeat is owned and operated by Instore Magazine Inc. The newsletter was founded in 1992 and has been dedicated to reporting unbiased, factual market trends and business advice from the best and brightest independent store owners for more than 28 years. Giftbeat tracks the top 10 vendors in 50+ product categories, garnering this vital information from a stable of 300 reporting stores across the country. Giftbeat does not accept any advertising. In addition, Giftbeat makes no warranty or guarantee, express or implied, regarding potential sales of any products referred to in the publication.

**DISCUSSION BOARD**

Subscribers to Giftbeat receive free access to our popular online discussion board. Sign up to join the discussion today at [www.giftbeat.com](http://www.giftbeat.com).

**CONTACT US!**

905-690-0492  
customerservice@giftbeat.com  
1342 Military Road  
PMB 952944  
Niagara Falls, NY 14304  
[www.giftbeat.com](http://www.giftbeat.com)

© Copyright 2021

Redistribution or reproduction of Giftbeat without permission is against the law. If you would like to reproduce, reprint or reuse any of our content, please email your request to [erica@giftbeat.com](mailto:erica@giftbeat.com).

**METHODOLOGY**

A nationwide network of reporting stores completes a monthly questionnaire that asks them to rank their three top-selling items in each of the product categories. Items ranked first are assigned five points; items ranked second are given three points; those ranked third are given one point. Point values are totaled and ranked in descending order to come up with the top-selling items. Reporting stores include card, gift, boutique, specialty and home decor stores across every region of the country. In addition, none of the retailers who participate are affiliated with any vendor. Unless otherwise specified, all data are based on sales (dollars) within the stated month.

# Spring Forward

The warm weather ushered in by spring couldn't come soon enough for gift retailers who were battered by brutal winter storm systems in February resulting in year-over-year sales declines for 57 percent.

In addition to inclement weather, retailers have taken a beating this past year on many fronts. Our research reveals that while 56 percent of store owners are working longer

hours, salaries have decreased for 30 percent.

Yet, despite repeatedly being kicked while they're down, independent retailers continue to get up, dust themselves off and start all over again. Heading into spring, a whopping 72 percent of reporting store owners are optimistic. With COVID case counts dropping across the country, and vaccinations on the rise, they're buoyed by



**ERICA KIRKLAND**  
PUBLISHER & EDITOR

high hopes (with their fingers crossed behind their backs) that life will soon return to 'normal'. ☺

## regionalHITS

What sells in your area?

**COMFORT GIFTS**

NORTHEAST	SOUTH	MIDWEST	WEST
1. Demdaco	1. Demdaco	1. Demdaco	1. Demdaco
2. Snoozies	2. DM	2. Carson	2. DM
3. Vera Bradley	3. Intalex	3. Snoozies	3. Intalex

**FUNCTIONAL GIFTS**

NORTHEAST	SOUTH	MIDWEST	WEST
1. Nora Fleming	1. Nora Fleming	1. Nora Fleming	1. Mud Pie
2. DM	2. BruMate	2. BruMate	2. Kay Dee Designs
3. Michel Design Works	3. Mud Pie	3. Mud Pie	3. Demdaco

**MUGS & TUMBLERS**

NORTHEAST	SOUTH	MIDWEST	WEST
1. Enesco	1. Corkcicle	1. BruMate	1. Demdaco
2. Demdaco	2. Tervis	2. Corkcicle	2. About Face
3. Swig	3. BruMate	3. Clay In Motion	3. Karma

**PLUSH**

NORTHEAST	SOUTH	MIDWEST	WEST
1. Jellycat	1. Ty	1. Ty	1. Mary Meyer
2. Ty	2. Intalex	2. Jellycat	2. Intalex
3. Demdaco	3. Jellycat	3. Burton & Burton	3. Douglas

**NOTE:** Reporting stores break down as follows: Midwest (23%), South (32%), West (21%) and Northeast (24%).



## Hot Finds & New Releases



### Everyday Bags

Admittedly it was the distinctive rope detailing that reeled us in, but as we dug deeper, we discovered how cool the **JimEila** collection of purses really is. Designed to be lightweight, the purses are made for women who want their accessories to work overtime, going from day to night. Using simple materials and smart designs, JimEila's bags are not only functional, but they are also fabulously chic and unique with a style all their own. The carry-all travel tote pictured here is available in black, white, royal blue, nude and grey. The rope straps add a distinctive design detail and also distribute the weight of the bag evenly for maximum comfort. \$60 cost. ([shopjimeila.com](http://shopjimeila.com))



### Wireless Charging Pads

Compatible with Apple and Samsung devices, these unique charging pads from **Phunkee Tree** elegantly combine the natural beauty of agate crystals with wireless technology. Simply place any wirelessly-compatible device on the pad to start charging. \$49.99 retail. The company offers a variety of other on-the-go wireless charging devices as well. ([phunkeetree.com](http://phunkeetree.com))



### Trendy Trunks

Tropic like it's hot with the latest addition to **DM's** bestselling Two Left Feet assortment – men's swimwear. The trendy trunks include a mesh lining and boast roomy side pockets, a zippered back pocket and SPF protection. The best part? They fold and zip into their own back pocket which includes a mini travel carabiner. Nine on-trend styles available. \$13.50 retail. ([247dm.com](http://247dm.com))



### Ring Stacking

Despite having been around for a few seasons now, the stacking-rings trend is still going strong. Gone are the days when you had to pick just one or two fingers to adorn – now it's all about the more-is-more approach: multiple fingers sporting multiple rings. A well-curated selection of simply-adorned bands is the hallmark of the new **CIAO!** brand of stacking rings from **TGBBrands**, but what really sets the collection apart is the gorgeous faux-suede packaging. A starter kit, which includes 44 base bands (11 each of four sizes), 96 inner rings (two each of 12 styles, per size) and a spinner display, costs \$1077. ([tgbbrands.com](http://tgbbrands.com))



### A Lot to Love

Looking for a footwear line that supports the feet, lasts for years and looks phenomenal? Check out **Oka-B**, a collection made in Burford, Ga. The super fun footwear is fashioned with adorable sparkles, bows and tassels, but it takes ergonomics seriously, producing shoes with premium arch support and soothing massage beads in the soles. As a women-led company the ladies behind Oka-B know what it takes to make the perfect sandal and ballet flat, and they are focused on creating products that look as good as they feel. Made from recycled materials, the footwear is easy-to-clean, slip resistant, colorfast, waterproof and eco-friendly. From \$30 retail. ([okab-trade.com](http://okab-trade.com))



## Light Up the Night

Light the sparklers and make a wish as the new Star Burst collection of insulated drinkware from **Swig Life** is perfect for festive Fourth of July celebrations. Featuring shades of faded denim, patriot blue and watermelon, Star Burst is available in six silhouettes: two tumblers, two can holders, a mug and stemless cup. For those unfamiliar with the line, Swig's collections are designed with the average woman in mind - the busy mom, girl-on-the-go and working woman. While its products are superbly made, what really sets the line apart are the creative and eye-catching patterns, colors and designs which are constantly changing. This pattern will start shipping this month. ([swiglifeline.com](http://swiglifeline.com))

## Literary Licenses

Possibly the most famous and beloved female author of all time, Jane Austen has been delighting readers for over two centuries with such classic novels as *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Emma*. Hailed by many as an early feminist, she is known for her witty prose, elegant style, and insightful social commentary - and now readers can celebrate their love of Jane Austen with a collection of stationery and giftware from **Insight Editions**. Designed for letter-writers, note-takers and daydreamers, the assortment includes softcover notebooks, binder clips, pens, magnets, pouches and candles. Notebook, \$16.99 retail. ([insighteditions.com](http://insighteditions.com))



# OUTLOOK: *Fall Fashion Trends*



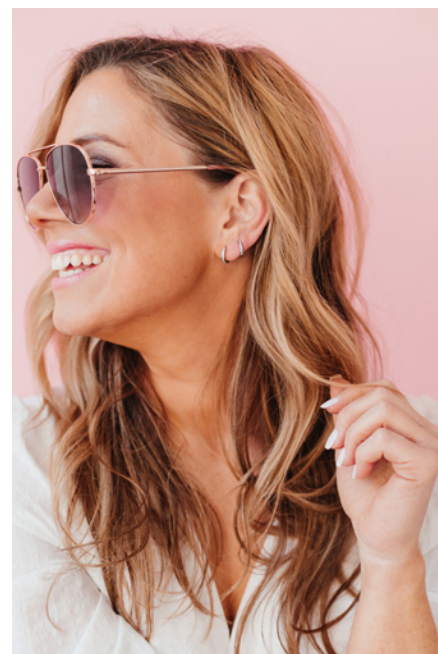
## Versatility and adaptability

are the defining elements of fall and winter fashion trends, according to Morgan Ramage, Atlanta Apparel's fashion director. "Consumers will be looking to create longevity and comfort in their wardrobes as they embrace prolonged 'stay at home style.' Everyone will be on the hunt for that perfect Zoom sweater into early next year," she says.

"Strategic color choices are essential for cost-conscious consumers," says Ramage. As such, key colors include rich neutrals, steel and bright blue, dark greens along with berry and plum accents."

Must-have products include athleisure pieces, blanket coats, cardigans, column skirts, hats, jersey dresses, matching two-piece sets and shackets (oversized shirts that function as jackets).

# Reader's *Pick*



## Chloe & Lois

"The price point is right, and the packaging is on point with beautiful pink boxes," writes a reader from New York state who is in love with this new jewelry line. "The collection is just as sparkly and beautiful as the inspiring creator herself, Brooke Anthony," she says. The pieces, while sparkly, are dainty, which makes them the perfect addition to any outfit. Top sellers include stacking rings, ear climbers (Anthony has actually inspired many women to get a second hole in their ear to sport these earrings) and pretty necklaces. ([chloeandlois.com](http://chloeandlois.com))





### SALESBEAT

Bitter Weather Dampens February Sales

By Erica Kirkland

For the second month in a row retail sales were down year-over-year for independent gift retailers. In February, 57 percent of reporting stores noted decreased sales while 32 percent recorded increased sales.

Horrible winter weather was frequently mentioned by retailers as the main contributing factor to the declines. Many stores report having to close for days due to inclement weather which put a huge damper on sales.

In Arizona, an ice and snowstorm shut down a reporting store for 12 days. "We missed all of Valentine's week and more," says the owner.

"We were experiencing temps as low as -25," says a Colorado retailer. "It really caused us to have a slower holiday."

"We had bad weather here in the Midwest – lots of snowstorms and bitterly cold days," reports a Wisconsin retailer. "People did not want to be out shopping."

A Virginia retailer concurs, writing, "It was cold and rained 75 percent of the month. No one walks main street in that – especially in February!"

In Montana, milder weather combined with lower COVID-19 case counts led to increased sales for one reporting store owner who says, "We were surprised to be up so much, but Montana is mostly open, so we see a lot of Washington state residents where there are more restrictions."

#### FEB 2021 SALES (vs. February 2020)

▲ 10%+	17%
▲ 5-9%	6%
▲ 1-4%	9%
↔	11%
▼ 1-4%	13%
▼ 5-9%	9%
▼ 10%+	35%

### SPRING OUTLOOK

Buyers Buoyed by High Hopes

As COVID case numbers drop and vaccinations rise, consumers and store owners are feeling positive heading into spring

"Things are gradually getting better here as far as COVID," says a store owner from Alabama. "So, we're optimistic, and hopeful, for great sales this spring."

"Customers come in eager to tell us they got their COVID vaccination," says a Kansas retailer. "One customer just told me he hadn't been out shopping in a year."

"I think customers have a 'spring fever' type of mood and are anxious to get back out and

do some of the things they miss (shopping included)," says a Colorado boutique owner. "Montana was so busy last summer – hiking, biking, camping in the great outdoors was available and relatively safe," says a store owner from the state. "We believe this trend will continue, even as other activities like concerts, sporting events, etc., begin to reopen."

#### OUTLOOK FOR SPRING



CAUTIOUSLY  
OPTIMISTIC  
55%



VERY  
OPTIMISTIC  
17%



A BIT  
CONCERNED  
24%



VERY  
CONCERNED  
4%

### TICK TOCK

Time Management Techniques from the Retail Trenches

Giftbeat's stable of veteran reporting stores share new ways they've saved time this past year.

Adjusting her schedule has resulted in improved personal efficiency for a North Carolina retailer. "I'm in the store three days a week now, working from home for two days." She says the schedule allows her to be more present when she's at the store. "I enjoy being on the floor more and having time to engage with customers rather than holing up in my office to get orders written," she says. "Plus, I think our staff enjoys having more responsibility (they all got salary adjustments too) and they know that I'm only a phone call away!"

A South Carolina retailer has saved herself a great deal of time by committing to opening each email she receives just once. "I make a quick decision and move

on. I also have specific times each day to check my email, otherwise I focus on customers."

A Michigan retailer with four stores has found hiring an assistant to be a saving grace. "This employee actually moved out of the area and is working remotely. I forward her all the things I don't want to take care of, but which she can do remotely. A year ago, I wouldn't have thought that any of our jobs could be done remotely!"

Taking a direct approach is a winning strategy for a Wisconsin retailer. "I've found I need to be very direct in saying exactly how I want things done to produce the results I'm looking for. No one can do exactly what I do, how I do it, but I try to get as close to that as possible. Sometimes I feel like I sound too bossy or particular, but I have to remember this is my business and I should be!"

### OPERATIONAL MATTERS

Salaries Decrease as Hours Worked Increase

Exactly 30 percent of store owners are paying themselves less this year than last year, while 56 percent report working longer hours.

"I had to pay myself less because I wanted to pay the overhead, my staff and pay for the inventory," says a South Carolina store owner. "After that, there was hardly anything left – all due to COVID, of course."

An Illinois owner writes, "I just

want to make sure I'm treading water until we're on the other side of this, so paying myself has not been a priority."

While she is paying herself "quite a bit more", a Michigan retailer with multiple locations reports she's working 5.5 to six days a week, but she's also bringing home a lot of work and working every evening. "It's very stressful. But the entire last year has been stressful!"

#### WAGES

Owners/Manager  
Salaries Year Over Year

EVEN	DECREASED	INCREASED
65%	30%	5%

#### HOURS

Hours Worked  
Year Over Year

MORE	SAME	LESS
56%	39%	5%

# EXPERT Q & A

## Ramp Up Your Store's Social Engagement

By Natalie Hammer Noblitt

Marketing experts predict social platforms will continue to be strong tools for promoting stores, even as physical locations regain traffic. To keep momentum, businesses must analyze their social strategies and improve weak areas. Are store regulars still engaged? Is your audience expanding? New social platforms and posting tweaks can boost your virtual endeavors.

### NEW WAYS TO BE SOCIAL

Clubhouse, a new app for iPhone users, attracts participants to join "Clubs" or interact in "Rooms" with people interested in a common topic. Users can find discussions on everything from relationship help to hobbies and entertainment.

"The main difference is the competitive advantage of creating a fear of missing out," says Bishal Biswas, CEO at Word Finder. "The podcasts can't be recorded and saved for later, which makes people want to join live chats and be amongst the first of the few who got to know about it."

You won't find photos on Clubhouse, except for headshots of moderators and participants. You can join a live chat just to listen or raise your hand and ask to be called on so you can make comments

or queries.

Retailers can use the live element as a way to market products and services to shoppers, Biswas says. "Create a virtual event (on Clubhouse) before launching a new product or service, talk about its features and the idea behind it. Share insights you won't share anywhere else to create hype amongst the audience."

Clubhouse represents an incredible opportunity for small retailers who can position themselves as experts, says Daniel Snow, head of The Snow Agency. "You can connect with locals by presenting yourself as a leader and hosting rooms where topics encompass what you sell. For example, a florist can join local clubs or chats with businesses who have similar customers. Good fits may be bridal shops, wedding photographers and people in 'engaged' or 'getting married' clubs."

Creating a Clubhouse audience requires work just like on other social platforms, says Cale Loken, CEO at 301 Madison Consulting. "It can be challenging to attract consumers to your chat room. Inviting influencers and announcing their presence in your chat on Instagram and Facebook can be very effective."

Snow also suggests promoting Clubhouse chats on the two social

accounts already integrated into the app – Instagram and Twitter. "When you set up an event, create a quick graphic to share on Instagram in 'Stories' and 'Reels'. Then Tweet it to your audience," he says.

### PIN DOWN MORE SHOPPERS

While it isn't new, Pinterest can be a very effective social marketing platform although it often gets forgotten among Facebook, Instagram and other apps. But Pinterest has an advantage since it's always been a platform about shopping inspiration, says Laura Rike, who offers marketing consulting services based primarily on Pinterest. She says audiences remain strong on the platform.

"I have personally worked with several brands with no Pinterest sales that then saw a 67 percent increase in revenue from Pinterest organically," says Rike. "Another client saw a 141 percent increase in monthly leads and a 28 percent growth in overall website traffic."

There are a few ways to sell products on Pinterest, but it all starts with the same thing: a high-quality, beautiful, optimized pin, she says.


"Visually appealing photos or videos of your product will inspire customers. Get creative, and don't just focus on product shots," Rike adds. "Find ways to showcase your product in use, behind the scenes of making it, or even use a text-only pin optimized for search results."

Not all pins need to link directly to a product, she says. "Gift guides, product round-ups, and tutorials do very well on Pinterest. They can be a great way to drive traffic to your site and increase conversions. So, get creative!"

Many brands on Pinterest forget to spend time on the descriptions. "Research applicable keywords for your product. Include them appropriately in your title and description to increase your reach and tell the buyer a story," Rike says. "It's an opportunity to persuade them to keep reading, make a purchase or visit your website."

To get started on Pinterest or to revamp your presence, Rike suggests searching the platform for a phrase, keyword or product your customers are interested in purchasing. Then review the search results.

Rike says retailers should ask themselves: "How are others with similar product marketing with pins? Are there ways to use those strategies in my store's marketing?"

No matter which platform you use for social communications, experts say not going into autopilot is the key to keeping engagement high. Make sure someone on your team always monitors comments and happenings. Just as important is making sure you look at the interactions you get and adjust when they aren't helping to create relationships and sales for your store. 

## Budget-Friendly Social Strategies

It doesn't take a huge ad budget to win social media. Cameron Mason, owner of Target Mix Marketing, shares ways to use organic reach on social platforms to increase awareness on a shoestring.

**Consistency is Key:** Many small businesses don't stay top-of-mind with shoppers because they don't post enough, which is about five to seven times a week. For frequent posters, not unifying topics and messages hurts engagement. Create a content calendar for staying on top of posts and to map out topics.

**Act Authentically:** Shoppers

want to connect to humans. Share behind-the-scenes happenings at your store and pictures of the team. Too many businesses overthink posts, creating content that sounds spammy. It's OK if posts aren't perfect, as they may perform better than you think!

**Brand Better:** Set up a proper list of brand guidelines for your store. Use this to create uniformity in online communications to look professional. Fill 'About' sections on your website and social profiles with details and calls to action.

**Tag Your Content:** Tag your employees, other businesses or organizations you partner with — and get permission to tag customers. This gives you more reach than posting on your

own. Readers want to see active and engaged members of their community.

**Get Vocal:** Share, make comments and start conversations in online groups. Just keep it positive. Social media is about making connections without negativity or complaining. Offer suggestions and solutions to problems in a friendly way. Don't get political.

**Share Reviews:** Show the world how good your business actually is with real voices and customers. Reviews build SEO for your business, too.

**Call for Action:** Guide viewers after you get their attention. Use phrases like: "Call Now," "Click this link," "Leave a comment below,"

"Message us now," or "Link in bio." Don't let people get away without engaging in your brand.

**Study Results:** You don't need to go deep into ad management pages to analyze social engagement. Simply check your insights and look for the posts that worked or flopped. Post more of what readers liked and move away from topics that got little response.

**Get Personal:** Facebook business pages get almost no organic reach because of algorithm changes. If you're comfortable, be transparent between your personal and business pages. Let friends know where you work (and tag your store page). Let them know why you're passionate about your business page within personal posts.

## This Issue:

*Positive Outlook for Spring  
Time Management Techniques*

## Top 10 Charts:

*Apparel  
Candy & Gourmet  
Comfort Gifts  
Functional Gifts  
Greeting Cards  
Journals & Notebooks  
Mugs & Tumblers  
Plush  
Valentine's Day*

## **BizBEAT**

### Profiles of the Industry's Best & Brightest

#### Keeping it in the Family

By Jessica Harlan

**A**my Craft Ahrens was working for a national gift retailer in Chicago when her dad was renovating a beautiful historic building in their hometown of Bowling Green, intending to expand his Ace Hardware store into the new space. When Amy pointed out that the area was in sore need of a gift shop, her dad challenged her to come home and open one herself — and she did.

#### **What makes your store unique?**

It's our commitment to the community. My family's been in business in Bowling Green since 1976, owning several businesses which I've worked in since I was nine years old. Some of my customers have been shopping with me for nearly 50 years! People in our community know us and they feel like they are family when they shop with us.

#### **How would you describe the atmosphere of your store?**

Our store has three levels — a ground

floor, balcony and second floor. It's long and skinny, like a bowling alley which creates some challenges, but our customers tell us they love looking into all the little corners and tucked-in spaces. The original 15-foot tin ceiling gives our space a traditional feel, and we keep it feeling open and airy with light-colored displays.

#### **To what do you attribute your success?**

Adaptability and change. We listen to customers about what they want to buy. When we opened in 1997, the collectible market was hot. We transitioned out of that relatively quickly!

#### **How do you promote your store?**

We use direct-mail catalogs in the spring, fall and for Christmas. The coupons inside really bring people into the store. We also have a great loyalty program. Our members get a tote bag that they can use four times a year. Anything they fit into the bag, they can buy for 20 percent off. Also, after every sixth purchase, our customers get a gift card equal to five percent cash back, which I send with a handwritten note.



It's been eye-opening to see how many people are propping our business up; some of our customers are on their eighth or ninth cash-back card.

#### **How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your business?**

One good thing to come out of COVID was our Mystery Box program. Soon after we shut down, a former employee messaged me and said, "Make me a box of about \$50 worth of your favorite things in the store." I put together a box of things and posted it on Facebook, asking who else would like a Mystery Box. It just took off! We do them for all kinds of occasions; our customers give us a little

## PROFILE

#### **STORE: For Keeps Gifts**

**LOCATION:** Bowling Green, Ohio

**SQUARE FOOTAGE:** 4000

#### **EMPLOYEES:**

two full-time, three part-time

**WEB:** [forkeepsgifts.com](http://forkeepsgifts.com)

**TOP LINES:** Nora Fleming, Demdaco, Blue Q, Gina B Designs, Milkhouse Gifts, Swan Creek Candle Co., Offensive&Delightful

information about who we're shopping for and we go from there. It's time consuming, and we don't make the same profit, but it really kept us going during the shutdown and allowed me to pay my employees even though they weren't working.

#### **Looking back, what's the biggest lesson you've learned?**

You set the tone in your business. If you are doom and gloom all the time, your customers will be too. You have to be upbeat and positive even when you're not always feeling it, and the same goes for your employees. That comes across with the way people will feel when they walk into your business. ☺