

giftBEAT™

Tracking the Pulse of the Gift Industry

marketBEAT

The Industry's Top-Selling Lines



Look for a number of new functional items for fall and the holidays from functional gift chart topper **Mud Pie**. Reporting stores noted strong sales of the company's tabletop and serveware during the spring months. (www.mud-pie.com)

FUNCTIONAL GIFTS

Last ran in April 2023

- #1 **NORA FLEMING**: minis, bases
- #2 **MUD PIE**: tabletop, serveware
- #3 **KAY DEE DESIGNS**: tea towels, various
- #4 **DM**: kitchen gadgets, various
- #5 **MICHEL DESIGN WORKS**: foaming soap
- #6 **SWIG**: insulated drinkware*
- #7 **BRUMATE**: insulated drinkware
- #8 **CORKCICLE**: insulated drinkware
- #9 **CREATIVE CO-OP**: tabletop, serveware
- #10 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY**: tea towels, tabletop

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Yeti, Vera Bradley

*OF NOTE!

Since this chart last ran, **SWIG** (www.swigwholesale.com) moved from an honorable mention onto the chart.

PAPER NAPKINS

Last ran in February 2023

- #1 **BOSTON INTERNATIONAL**: cocktail, guest, various
- #2 **MICHEL DESIGN WORKS**: cocktail, guest, various
- #3 **PAPERPRODUCTS DESIGN**: humor, various
- #4 **CASPARI**: guest, various
- #5 **DESIGN DESIGN**: humor, summer, various
- #6 **DRINKS ON ME**: humor*
- #7 **MUD PIE**: various*
- #8 **SHANNON MARTIN**: humor
- #9 **NORA FLEMING**: guest*
- #10 **ALLIED SUPPLY**: various*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Harman, Chris's Stuff, My Mind's Eye, Park Hill

*OF NOTE!

NORA FLEMING (www.norafleming.com), **ALLIED SUPPLY** and **DRINKS ON ME** (www.drinksonmecoasters.com) did not rank when this chart last ran while **MUD PIE** (www.mud-pie.com) moved from an honorable mention onto the chart.

"We do very well with Avanti cards. I always think my customers will get tired of them, but they keep coming back for more!"
— Wyoming retailer

HUMOR & WHIMSEY

Last ran in December 2022

- #1 **DRINKS ON ME**: coasters, napkins
- #2 **BLUE Q**: socks, gum, various
- #3 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY**: signs, cards, tea towels
- #4 **MUD PIE**: tabletop, tea towels, various
- #5 **AVANTI**: greeting cards
- #6 **LEANIN' TREE**: greeting cards*
- #7 **WILD HARE**: tea towels
- #8 **GANZ**: various*
- #9 **LAZY ONE**: men's boxers
- #10 **SHANNON MARTIN**: greeting cards

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Design Design, Fun Club

*OF NOTE!

LEANIN' TREE (www.leanintree.com) did not rank when this chart last ran while **GANZ** (www.ganz.com) moved from an honorable mention onto the chart.

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At the summer markets paper napkin chart topper **Boston International** unveiled a new product assortment which leverages their most popular napkin designs, using matching artwork to adorn candles (\$8.50 cost), bar soap (\$4 cost), foaming soap (\$6 cost) and trivet trays (\$4.50 cost). The initial assortment includes 12 patterns with plans to expand the collection soon. (www.bostoninternational.com)

FAST FACT
Retail sales
climbed in
June for
52
percent of
store owners

NOTE: Rankings are based on **June 2023** sales from Giftbeat's reporting stores.

HUMOROUS CARDS *Last ran in December 2022*

- #1 **LEANIN' TREE:** birthday, various
 - #2 **AVANTI:** birthday, animal
 - #3 **SHANNON MARTIN:** birthday, various
 - #4 **PICTURA:** birthday, Eric Decetis
 - #5 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY:** various
 - #6 **BLUE MOUNTAIN:** various
 - #7 **RECYCLED PAPER:** various
 - #8 **OATMEAL STUDIOS:** birthday, various
 - #9 **CALYPSO CARDS:** various
 - #10 **PAPYRUS:** men's birthday, various
- HONORABLE MENTION:** RSVP

*OF NOTE!

The same vendors are listed in the top 10 this month as when the chart last ran in December 2022.

APPAREL *Last ran in April 2023*

- #1 **ZENANA:** basic t-shirts, tanks, dresses
- #2 **UMGEE:** tops, dresses
- #3 **DM:** Hello Mello, various
- #4 **LAZY ONE:** boxers, pajamas
- #5 **LIFE IS GOOD:** t-shirts
- #6 **SIMPLY SOUTHERN:** t-shirts
- #7 **INDIA BOUTIQUE:** dresses, various*
- #8 **TRIBAL:** bottoms, tops, dresses
- #9 **HABITAT:** tops, tunics, various*
- #10 **KEREN HART:** tops, various*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Luba's Fashions, THML, Coco & Carmen, Howard's, Jess & Jane

*OF NOTE!

INDIA BOUTIQUE (www.india-boutique-inc.myshopify.com) did not rank when this chart last ran while **HABITAT** (www.habitatclothes.com) and **KEREN HART** (www.kerenhart.com) moved from honorable mentions onto the chart.

MEN'S GIFTS *Last ran in August 2022*

- #1 **BRUMATE:** insulated drinkware
- #2 **DUKE CANNON:** soaps
- #3 **BLUE Q:** socks
- #4 **DR SQUATCH:** bar soaps, deodorant*
- #5 **LIFE IS GOOD:** t-shirts
- #6 **CORKCICLE:** insulated drinkware
- #7 **LAZY ONE:** boxers, briefs, various
- #8 **YETI:** insulated drinkware
- #9 **SOCKSMITH:** socks*
- #10 **HOT SOX:** socks

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Mad Men, Pavilion, Swig, Tervis, DM, Kerusso

*OF NOTE!

DR. SQUATCH (www.drsquatch.com) and **SOCKSMITH** (www.socksmith.com) did not rank when this chart last ran.

HOME DECOR *Last ran in May 2023*

- #1 **MUD PIE:** frames, pillows, various
 - #2 **DEMDACO:** wall art, frames, various
 - #3 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY:** signs, various
 - #4 **EVERGREEN:** collegiate, pillows, various
 - #5 **NORA FLEMING:** minis, bases
 - #6 **MY WORD!:** porch signs, various*
 - #7 **CREATIVE CO-OP:** tabletop, vases, various
 - #8 **GANZ:** various seasonal decor
 - #9 **GERSON:** various seasonal decor
 - #10 **P. GRAHAM DUNN:** wall signs, various
- HONORABLE MENTIONS:** Carson, Sullivans

*OF NOTE!

Since this chart ran last, **MY WORD!** (www.mywordsigns.com) moved from an honorable mention onto the chart.

JOURNALS & NOTEBOOKS *Last ran in April 2023*

- #1 **PETER PAUPER PRESS:** journals, notebooks, various
- #2 **CHRISTIAN ART GIFTS:** prayer journals
- #3 **COMPENDIUM:** notebooks, journals
- #4 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY:** journals
- #5 **JOURNALS UNLIMITED:** mini journals, various
- #6 **LEGACY:** notebooks, various
- #7 **NATURAL LIFE:** journals, various*
- #8 **MARY SQUARE:** prayer journals, bible covers, various
- #9 **C.R. GIBSON:** journals
- #10 **SIMPLY SOUTHERN:** planners, calendars, various*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Lang, Punch Studio

*OF NOTE!

SIMPLY SOUTHERN (www.simplysouthern.com) and **NATURAL LIFE** (www.naturallifewholesale.com) did not rank when this chart last ran.

PLUSH *Last ran in April 2023*

- #1 **INTELEX:** Warmies
- #2 **JELLYCAT:** dogs, plush with books, various
- #3 **DOUGLAS:** baby, dogs, various
- #4 **TY:** Beanie Boos, Beanies, various
- #5 **GANZ:** various
- #6 **MARY MEYER:** Taggies, various
- #7 **DEMDACO:** various
- #8 **KELLY TOY:** Squishmallows
- #9 **BUNNIES BY THE BAY:** various
- #10 **WISH PETS:** animals*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Mud Pie, Aurora

*OF NOTE!

Since this chart last ran **WISH PETS** (www.b2b.wishpets.com) moved from an honorable mention onto the chart.



Humorous card chart topper **Shannon Martin** introduced a new calendar at the summer markets featuring her signature humor paired with vintage snapshots. Printed on premium paper and finished with a protective sleeve, the last page contains a two-year calendar and plenty of space for notes. (www.bielyshoaf.com)

"We have built a nice clientele that loves Habitat."

— Ohio retailer



The number one bestselling men's giftware line, **BruMate**, came to summer markets with a number of new launches, the most notable being the Roteria featuring a patent-pending twist-to-sip straw lid that lets customers sip without touching the straw and a durable silicone sleeve which can be swapped out for different colors and styles. (www.brumate.com)

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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 30 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. In addition, Giftbeat makes no warranty or guarantee, express or implied, regarding potential sales of any products referred to in the publication.

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Reversal of Fortune

After independent gift stores logged three months of year-over-year sales declines, June brought a ray of sunshine in the form of sales increases for 52 percent of shop owners. Heading into the summer season, the sales increases from June add a much-needed wind to their battered sails.

While we may be in the midst of summer, retailers have their sights clearly set on hosting successful

fall and holiday events and promotions. In this issue, on the last page, we unearth some of the most successful events store owners have hosted for this ultra important time of year in the hopes you'll add one or two new events to your calendar.

This issue also delves into the uses of a point-of-sale system, which 74 percent of independent store owners have now adopted with much fanfare as we divulge in *Power to the POS* on page 7.



ERICA KIRKLAND
PUBLISHER & EDITOR

In all we hope this issue provides the insight and market research you've come to rely on *Giftbeat* to deliver.

chartMOVERS

A deep dive into the companies trending up and down in this issue's charts

APPAREL

ZENANA (www.ezenana.com) bumped **DM** (www.247dm.com) from the number one spot, moving up two places from third based on the sales of its basic tanks, t-shirts and bottoms. **SIMPLY SOUTHERN** (www.simplysouthern.com) dropped in the rankings from number four in April 2023 to number six. Also of note is that **HOWARD'S** (wholesale.howardsinc.com) and **COCO & CARMEN** (www.cococarmen.com) were bumped from the chart onto the honorable mention list while **CHARLIE PAIGE** was absent from both. The sole newcomer to the chart was **INDIA BOUTIQUE** (www.india-boutique-inc.myshopify.com), coming in at number seven. A retailer in California who buys for multiple locations says that she ordered dresses and cover-ups from the company this season and "had to reorder the dresses within a few weeks of them arriving."

HOME DECOR

NORA FLEMING (www.norafleming.com) was bumped from the number one spot by **MUD PIE** (www.mud-pie.com) and landed four spots down at number five. **DEMDACO** (www.demdaco.com) climbed five spots from number seven to number two with store owners noting strong sales of frames and wall art. **EVERGREEN** (www.myeverygreenonline.com) climbed six spots from number 10 to number four with reporting stores noting the company's collegiate line is particularly strong.

MEN'S GIFTS

BRUMATE (www.brumate-wholesale.com) bumped **DUKE CANNON** (www.dukecannon.com) from the top position to lay current claim to the title of bestselling men's giftware line. **BLUE Q** (www.blueq.com) maintained its third-spot position while **CORKCICLE** (www.corkcicle.com) dropped from fourth place to sixth. New to the chart this time around is **DR. SQUATCH** (www.drsquatch.com) coming in at number four. A Massachusetts retailer reports that, "Bar soaps and deodorant from Dr. Squatch have quickly become our top-selling men's gift. People come in and buy multiple bars at a time." A California store owner with multiple locations shares, "We have this line in our stores year round. It's very popular."

MARKETING TO GENERATION Z

Is Your Marketing Attune with Gen Z?

By Natalie Hammer Noblitt

Generational boundaries help marketers better define consumers by their age, preferences and habits. Generation Z, sometimes called post-Millennials, include young people born after 1996, according to the Pew Research Institute. These 27-and-younger shoppers grew up with heavy access to tech and experienced the pandemic as young adults. They are an important part of the present and future life of

retail. We asked a group of savvy marketers how to best target Gen Z.

SOCIAL MEDIA IS A MUST

Gen Z loves social media, and they are more likely than any generation to make purchases directly from social channels, says Tim Williams, a television and web marketing strategist who founded Ads by Popcorn Trailer.

“Small retailers can team up with popular social media influencers

and run campaigns that target two factors that make sense to Gen Z, which include authenticity and social proof,” Williams says. “Gen Z appreciates businesses that communicate honestly. When a brand demonstrates authenticity, they are more likely to trust and engage, leading to potential purchases. These shoppers want social proof before making a purchase. They trust recommendations from peers, influencers, and online reviews. Positive testimonials play a huge role in their purchasing decisions.”

While Gen Z may not be known as avid TV watchers, they do show a high rate of binge-watching habits on platforms like YouTube and TikTok, says Williams.

“When creating marketing content, it is crucial for smaller retailers to capture Gen Z’s attention and create anticipation for daily or weekly viewing. The primary objective should be to entertain rather than sell directly. Create curiosity through episodic content and pique curiosity about your business and your products,” he says.

AUTHENTIC, BITE-SIZE CONTENT

User-generated content (UGC) is another important part of entertaining Gen Z and earning credibility as a business. Crystal Vilkaitis, founder of Crystal Media, a digital retail marketing group, gives retailers tips on how to encourage user-generated content among your store’s shoppers.

“User-generated content can be a powerful marketing tool, with so many benefits,” she says. “It can help save time, take the guesswork out of creating content on your own, increase engagement and brand loyalty, and even broaden your overall reach.”

Four simple ways her team suggests promoting UGC starts with regularly engaging your store’s audience. Simply and consistently

responding to comments, answering questions and participating in social media discussions will humanize your store and allow shoppers to better relate to you. This helps build trust and open lines of communication, she says.

Next, offer an incentive or reward — that doesn’t even need to be monetary. Ideas include featuring customers in a newsletter, sharing their images on your website/social media, or even doing a profile of them for a blog post.

Track what shoppers say about you with your own branded hashtags. These can be a strategic way to promote new products, describe your business or refer to your community of followers. When promoted correctly, they can motivate your audience to start including them in their own posts, she says.

Create a spot in your store for photo ops. Suggestions include showcasing a vibrant decal on a dressing room mirror or setting up a fun photo booth/space on a wall. People love to post themselves at creative photo-op spots on their social feeds, so use this as an opportunity to get credibility and recognition with your shoppers’ friends, Vilkaitis says.

BE ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY

Sustainability also ranks high on the list of important values among many Gen Z shoppers, Williams says. “Retailers can show their love for the environment by stocking items created with eco-friendly materials, like toys made from recycled plastic or clothes made from organic cotton. Additionally, small eateries should have a vegan dish or organic ingredients as a menu item.”

Returns are another area where Gen Z is paying attention to sustainability and environmentally friendly practices among retailers and brands. Firms like Loop Returns have established a business

SALESBEAT

June Sales Climb Year Over Year

By Erica Kirkland

Reversing a three-month trend of sales decline, sales in June were up year over year for 52 percent of independent gift retailers.

A Maryland retailer whose sales were up by 10 percent or more said, “We’ve been working diligently on getting our inventory assortment really tight, adding great items and removing slackers. I think it’s making a huge difference.”

In Ohio a store owner who experienced a drop in sales reported, “We sell collegiate items and that category was down 30 percent mostly due to shipping delays. I just didn’t get the products needed for those Father’s Day sales we typically can count on.” She also admitted that she didn’t have time to “push our social media” and she was short staffed due to vacations.

For a New York retailer June is the best month of the year. “We sell a lot of teacher gifts and there’s also a lot of graduations and weddings.”

Another store owner in Ohio reported having their best June ever. “I think consistency on social media and our weekly emails contributed to our success, but the best marketing we do is calling

our customers when their favorite brands arrive or when they have rewards to spend. They love those phone calls and come right in.”

In Oregon a retailer who reported year-over-year gains shared, “We held an event on National Splurge Day which was very successful. We also started an apparel clearance rack to move older apparel and called it ‘Final Few’ so customers think they’re getting a great deal on something new.”

JUNE 2023 SALES (vs. June 2022)

↑ 10%+	23%
↑ 5-9%	11%
↑ 1-4%	18%
↔	9%
↓ 1-4%	15%
↓ 5-9%	6%
↓ 10%+	18%



model by helping stores better handle returns that typically generate a lot of waste.

Tasha Reasor, senior vice president of marketing at Loop Returns says Gen Z consumers are more likely to shop with brands who offer eco-friendly return options. Some of those offerings include package-less or carbon-neutral returns. She says retailers may be surprised to learn Gen Z shoppers aren't apprehensive about paying a fee to return their goods. In fact, she says their own polls show 70 percent would be willing to pay a small fee for a convenient, premium return experience. Options shoppers favor include at-home pick-up, which 69 percent indicated they'd used in the last year, and box-less drop-off, which 51 percent said they'd used.

Reasor says she would caution retailers that Gen Z shoppers are more likely to look at a store's return policy to determine how sustainable their overall business is. Ninety-one percent said they prefer eco-friendly or sustainable return options. More than 80 percent

said they like retailers who clearly communicate sustainability. More than half of those polled said they'd declined to return a product due to environmental implications.

KINDNESS COUNTS

How a business or product manufacturer operates their business matters in other ways to younger consumers. A June 2023 survey revealed that more than half (57 percent) of all U.S. respondents avoided buying a product or service in the last two years because they felt a company was unkind or did not display kind qualities, according to Baringa, a global management company. While this statistic is for all ages surveyed, it is known that among Gen Z consumers, ethical business practice is of even greater significance.

"Consumer perception matters," says Jeff Hartigan, a partner with Baringa. "In sectors like retail and fast-moving consumer goods — where industry growth has been hovering around three percent — even marginal potential impacts could provide a material

financial edge. We believe the effect of kindness is much more than marginal."

Baringa's survey found that even during the current economic downturn, 81 percent of consumers in the range of 27 to 35 years old said they are more likely to purchase from companies they considered kind. Retailers should keep in mind that stores who apply hidden fees, provide misleading information or difficult policies for returns are considered unkind by consumers. Forty-nine percent of the 16 to 24-year-olds surveyed by Baringa said this would be a reason to avoid buying from them.

REWARD LOYALTY WITH COMMUNITY

One hallmark of the Gen Z consumer group is a desire for loyalty and customized experiences, many marketing experts agree. To combat price resistance among Gen Z, implementing or boosting rewards programs for shoppers should be a priority, say experts at Marigold, a global relationship marketing firm. In Marigold's 2023

U.S. Consumers Trends Index report, they found Gen Z — and all generational groups — made purchasing choices influenced by loyalty programs.

More than half (52 percent) of U.S. consumers will likely engage in new loyalty programs this year, with even greater responses from Millennials and Gen X shoppers. Of the 33 percent of consumers who abandoned a preferred brand in the past year, a quarter cited poor loyalty programs as a core reason, according to Marigold's report.

"It's more important than ever for marketers to properly plan and forecast how they evolve their relationships with consumers and the role loyalty plays into all marketing initiatives," says Tim Glomb, vice president of content at Marigold.

But rewards can't just be generic programs when targeting Gen Z, say Marigold researchers and other experts. Savings and rewards are important, but the feeling of inclusion and being valued rank higher with younger consumers. With more customers citing loyalty programs as an incentive to keep coming back, retailers must work hard to keep loyalty programs meaningful, says Marigold. Many of the most successful brands have incorporated gamification, user-generated content, and insider offers into their loyalty programs to cultivate a sense of community, Glomb says. Transparency with this audience on how you gather data is also crucial, since so many have seen big data breaches in their lifetime.

While some of Gen Z may still be too young to have full-time jobs, retailers must pay attention to their future influence and start building relationships now, says Marigold's report. Also, it shouldn't be underestimated the power these young consumers have to influence their households and other relatives in older age groups. **BE**

CUSTOM CONNECTIONS

Store Owners Use Personalised Products to Elevate Offerings

Close to two-thirds (64 percent) of independent gift store owners offer custom products, up from June 2021 when 54 percent of retailers reported curating personalised items.

Popular categories for custom products include frames, cutting boards, tea towels, drinkware, pillows, apparel, towels, coasters, hats, stickers and gourmet food.

“Custom products are quickly becoming the largest portion of our business,” says a retailer from Indiana who reports that cups and t-shirts sell particularly well at her store.

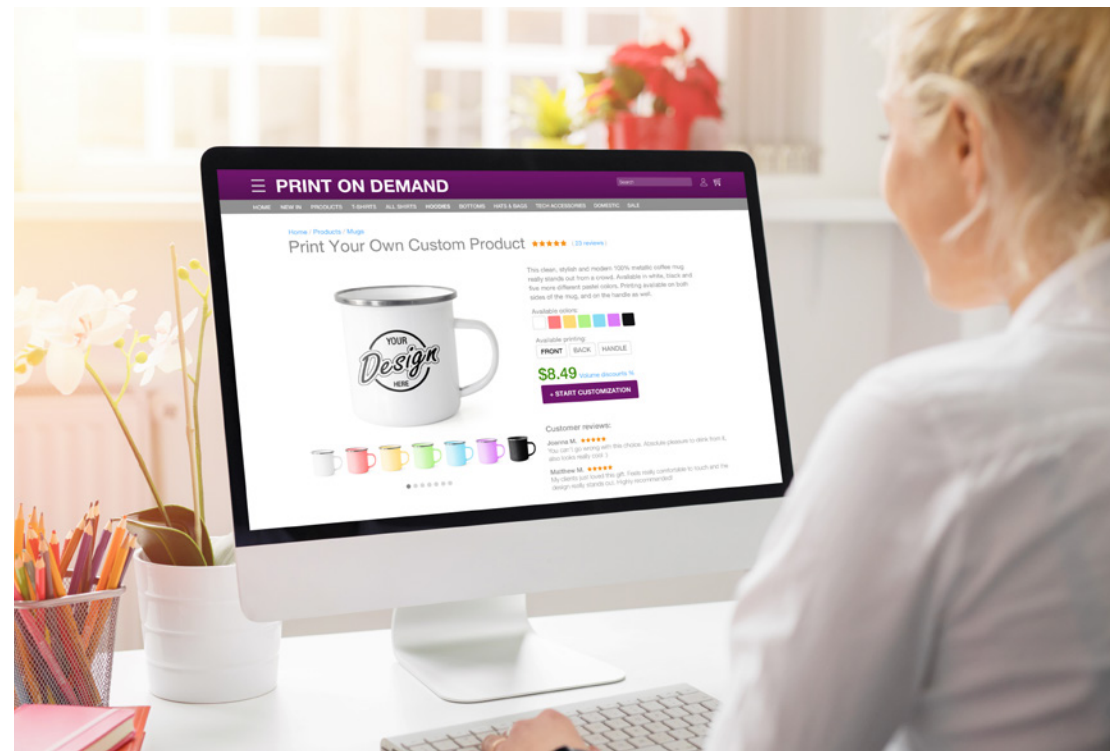
“We have started to find some unique things on Faire that we don’t have to order large quantities of even though they’re personalized,” shares a Colorado store owner. So far drinkware is selling the best at her store.

“We’re in Montana so souvenir items are the largest part of our business,” says a reporting store from that state. “Our largest category in custom is printed t-shirts, but we also do custom hats, stickers, mugs, etc.”

The most positive aspect of offering custom products is that they’re unique to your store. “It’s a wonderful way to be different from your neighbors,” says a store owner from Oregon. “Many vendors have custom possibilities with low thresholds for quantity. Just do it!”

COMPANY RECOMMENDATIONS

Looking for companies with a proven sell-through? Here are the ones recommended by *Giftbeat*’s reporting stores: Lakeshirt, Trays4Us, Town Pride, Lola & Company, Stickers Northwest, Luba’s, CoasterStone, Mariposa, Legacy Candles, Coast & Cotton, Rustic Marlin, Soundview Millworks, Maple Leaf at Home,



Little Birdie, Sincere Surroundings and Ella B Candles.

IN-HOUSE CUSTOMIZATION

As for companies who offer an in-store program for making personalised items, the only one suggested to *Giftbeat* was P. Graham Dunn’s engraving program which a retailer from Texas also uses to engrave Corkcicle product.

There were a handful of retailers who mentioned using in-house vinyl machines to customize products including a North Carolina store owner who uses hers to personalize insulated drinkware. She adds that, “We order various items customized with our town name on them.”

As for the one-third of store owners who don’t offer custom products, not having enough staff to properly explain the product can be detrimental as it was for an Ohio retailer who ordered pillows that could be customized with names. “We will never do that again,” she says. “It took up way too much staff

time trying to explain the process. For stores that have staff available to answer questions, it would be a huge seller. We’re a pharmacy and discovered we need products with clear signage which is self explanatory.”

A North Carolina retailer agrees that an employee, preferably a dedicated employee, be assigned the task of overseeing custom products. “It’s a money maker if you have a staff member who knows how,” shares the store owner who adds, “We’ve done thousands of custom vinyls. Customers love to be able to make their gifts personalized.”

START SMALL

If you’re wary about wading too deep into custom products a retailer from New Hampshire suggests going more general – “Doing state items instead of town items for example.”

A retailer from Massachusetts recommends, “Try one line and limit the amount of skus you offer. Stick to top sellers to make it easy

for your staff (and customers) to understand. Having signage that explains how you can customize the items is important too!”

In Utah a store owner recommends starting with t-shirts, one of the most popular and profitable customizable items. He says that a basic design with your town name in six colors will suffice to start in sizes small, medium, large and extra large with two of each size. “Find a company such as Luba’s where the minimum order is 48 items,” he says. The cost when ordering 48 pieces from Luba’s as described brings the item cost to \$4.95. After mark-up, these tees are fetching \$13.95 to \$15.95 retail.

“Don’t be afraid to be creative,” says a store owner from Indiana. “Custom is quickly becoming the largest part of our business. Start asking your customers if they would like to see custom items.”

“Jump in,” urges a Wyoming retailer. “Walmart will never customize anything, but you can!” 📌

POWER TO THE POS

Majority of Independent Stores Use Point of Sale Systems

Among independent gift store owners, 74 percent are utilizing a point-of-sale (POS) system in their shop. They're using their system to track inventory, payroll, customer's purchases and to run sales and tax reports, access reordering requirements and track their loyalty program points. And among those that use these systems, 93 percent say they're a good investment. Let's face it, it's impossible for a store owner to know in detail exactly how many items have sold from all the vendors they order from and how long it's taken those items to sell, information which is critical to informing decisions regarding discounts. Not to mention how one even begins to run a loyalty program on paper these days when a system can effortlessly track your customers' purchases and automatically issue discounts. It's like you have a wizard right at your hands who can tell you everything you want to know about your inventory – what's selling, what's not, what's most profitable and what you need to reorder ASAP. Relying on memory and gut intuition is what independent retailers did for many years but the ones holding out are doing themselves no favors by not employing the technological tools required to succeed in retail today. Don't take our word for it. Hear what your peers have to say.

WHY POS SYSTEMS ARE WORTH THE INVESTMENT

"I can't imagine keeping track of inventory, reports, customers and our loyalty program in multiple different avenues," says a Maryland retailer. "I love having everything in one place. It's more efficient for us and gives us a better look at our business."

"We use our POS for

everything," says a Massachusetts store owner. "We track our inventory costs, stock, etc. Without the POS system, I would not be able to run my business as well as I do. We also use it as a customer database where we collect customer's names, zip codes, emails, etc."

"Our customers love our loyalty program," says a retailer from North Carolina. "Our computer keeps up with their purchases and automatically prompts a store credit at a certain amount of our choosing. Nothing for us or the customer to keep up with."

"It certainly helps to know which lines are growing and which are not," says an Indiana store owner regarding the ways in which she utilizes her POS system.

"There are a myriad of ways to utilize it," says a New Hampshire retailer of her POS. "I know our system has more capabilities that I haven't even begun to use." As is, she uses it to evaluate sales,

inventory, dating and to manage her mailing list. It also tracks sales by customers so she can see who her best customers are and what they're buying. She also tracks sales by employee to see who might need more coaching.

A store owner in South Carolina says her system helps her keep up with thefts. "We can be sure items are on the sales floor and not left in the stock room. The system also helps us follow trends because we can pull reports by department which gives us sales in these categories as a whole."

GIVE IT TIME

Of course, it's not all rosy when it comes to adding a POS system to the mix. As an Ohio retailer reports, "I put my POS in in March 2020, right before we were shut down for Covid. I am not a techie person and that's what held me back. I finally got an employee that was willing to head up the installation. It was a bear, but they

did it! I'm so thankful now! Sadly, when you buy a POS system, they'll take your money but there's no one to teach you how to install it. They say there is, but it's not what a non-tech person can wrap their heads around. We actually closed for a week to get it installed and to log in all the items we had."

A North Carolina retailer admits it took her a long time to learn her system as well. "Investing in the maintenance program is worth it because we can call any time and ask any questions," she says.

RECOMMENDED POS SYSTEMS

When it comes to systems they would recommend for tracking inventory and running various reports, here are the companies noted by *Giftbeat*'s reporting stores: Retail Pro, General Store, Lightspeed, Rain, Shopkeep, Counterpoint, Heartland, Shopify, Quickbooks, Square and Clover. 



Beachy Vibes are Alive at Ruby Sun Gifts

By Jessica Harlan





Debbie Helton ran a successful art studio in an Orlando suburb, but when Covid hit, and the in-person art classes and birthday parties that were the mainstay of her business weren't possible, she pivoted. Stocking her space with cute gifts, beachy goods, art supplies and other creative products, Helton turned Ruby Sun into a colorful, lively gift shop.

What makes your store special?

Our tagline is "good vibes and great gifts," and when people come in, they always say how much they love the vibe. I want things in here that make people happy. I love to hear them laughing when they're looking at something funny, or to find a gift that can foster connections, like Spark cards from Chronicle Books.

How would you describe the atmosphere of your store?

We're in a house that was built in 1881. The whole house looks like a beach cottage with tongue-and-groove walls and some of the original flooring. I painted all the ceilings Haint blue, and I love vintage stuff so I'm always trying

to source cool pieces I can use in displays. It's very relaxing and feels like you just want to stay here all day. Sometimes customers will jokingly tell me they want to live here!

To what do you attribute your success?

One thing I'm really good at is reaching out to other businesses or local gift shop owners. I've been able to create friendships with other people and get advice from them that has been super helpful. I'm also a total people person; sometimes when someone comes in, I can just tell that they need to talk. I'm a good conversationalist and a good listener, and I've created a very friendly environment that people love.

How do you promote your store?

I post frequently on Instagram and Facebook, but mainly it's word of mouth. I have a certain core group of women who come in all the time and share about my store with everyone. I also try to give back to the community, especially the local schools. For instance, I'll donate gift certificates during teacher appreciation week.

What has been your most successful recent event?

We've done sip and shop events with the local elementary school PTA. They come in after the store is closed, bring in food and drink and spend time visiting and shopping. I'll usually do a drawing or a giveaway.

For instance, I've ordered custom drink stirrers from Friendlily Press in the school colors to give away.


Do you have a favorite new product line?

I recently brought in a line of beach bags made from Tyvek from Marloru, a Florida-based company. They come in beautiful colors and the things inside stay dry.

What is your most successful retail strategy?

I have special little stickers made with the store's logo that say Ruby Sun State of Mind. I give them to customers with every sale. People love to get a little something (they're great for water bottles!), and I feel good giving them away. I'm so grateful for every person who comes in and shops in my little store!

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

To be flexible and to figure out who my person is — i.e., the person who shops here. I once made a mistake, buying a whole display of car t-shirts, thinking they'd fly off the shelf when we had our local antique car show. They didn't sell and I ended up selling them at a deep discount. Now I know that I need to be okay with buying in smaller quantities to test the waters first. 



PROFILE

STORE: Ruby Sun Gifts

LOCATION: Longwood, FL.

SQUARE FOOTAGE: 1500

EMPLOYEES: One full-time

WEBSITE: www.rubysungifts.com

SOCIAL: www.instagram.com/rubysungifts

TOP LINES: Sand Cloud, Blue Q, E. Frances, Natural Life, Jellycat, Kala Ukuleles, Creative Co-op

New Products & Hot Sellers

10 Must-Have Market Trends

Mega Mugs

Hydrating has never been easier with the massive 40-ounce mega mugs that deluged the insulated drinkware category during market. A number of key players in the category along with newcomers introduced massive vessels the likes of which we've never seen before. Among the styles that stood out to us were items from Swig, Funatic, Katydid and The Darling Effect. Pouches which attach to insulated tumblers along with sling purses to hold bottles crossbody style were also spotted frequently.

With three buildings averaging 18 floors in each, the Atlanta Market produced bi-annually in July and January by AndMore in the AmericasMart buildings in Atlanta is one of the industry's must-attend events, where a large gathering of vendors and buyers meet to see what's new and what's hot. As our editors and contributing writers walked the aisles this past July, a number of trends easily introduced themselves. Here we present a snapshot of the trends we spotted, but be sure to stay tuned to future issues for more trends along with hot new product releases we uncovered just for you.



Crushing this Mom Thing is one of the bestselling 40-ounce insulated tumbler styles from **Funatic**. Available in 16 styles for \$14.75 cost. (www.funatic.com/wholesale)



Katydid is offering 12 styles of 40-ounce insulated tumblers which include a straw. Available in both patterns and solids the mugs wholesale for \$18. (www.katydidwholesale.com)



Mega mugs from **Swig** boast a silicone straw, easy-to-grip handle and are reported to keep drinks cold for 24 hours. \$22 cost. (www.swigwholesale.com)

The Darling Effect is offering a 40-ounce mug in their darling prints but we also liked their 34-ounce plastic tumbler that comes with a handle and straw for \$14 cost. Available in three styles – Here Comes the Bride, Here Comes the Party and Dink and Drink for the pickleball fans out there. (www.thedarlingeffect.com)



Children's Jewelry

Jewelry was a category with lots of new introductions but the most notable trend was the focus on children's jewelry. The Mazie Mae line of children's earrings is selling so well for stores stocking the line from Center Court that it's no surprise other vendors have noticed and hopped into the arena. We liked the collections we spotted from Canvas Style and Top Trenz.



Top Trenz prides itself on predicting trends and creating products that bring them to life. At market their Collegiate Charm Necklaces spoke to three trends – collegiate, initials and jewelry for children. The multi-color varsity-like necklaces are one size fits most and come carded. A free display is available with a 60-piece order. \$5 cost. A new licensing agreement with Squishmallows which includes fidget items and water toys is also worth checking out. (www.toptrenz.com)



Canvas Girl from **Canvas Style** offers a number of new jewelry options for children and tweens including carded necklaces, earrings and bracelets featuring fanciful motifs like strawberries and macarons. There's a large focus on pearls, however beaded and ribbon styles are also available alongside Bali bracelets – silicone bands with gold, pearl and enamel embellishments. (wholesale.canvasstyle.com)

Bedding Collections

If you're thinking about filling the gap that Bed Bath and Beyond has left in the retail arena, you were not hard pressed to find bedding collections at market. Showing bedding for the very first time was Indaba. We also loved the bedding from Patina Vie, and lastly, showing in the Ivystone showroom, the Ida Mae Home line stopped us in our tracks.



With a fan following for its intricately designed pillows, when **Indaba** announced it was extending its textile range to bedding the news arrived with much fanfare. With a focus on wool, cotton and linen, the bedding collection aims to bring elements of the outside in. In addition to throws and cushions the company is now also offering linen duvet covers and sets. (www.indabawholesale.com)



In addition to stunning cocktail glasses with a distinct Moroccan flair, fanciful glass candles, frames and trinket trays, American brand **Patina Vie** offers a selection of intricately woven and eye-catching cushions and throws alongside divine duvet covers and sets in fabulous patterns including Sapphire in Bloom shown here along with luscious solid-colored velvet duvet covers and sheet sets. (www.patinavie.com)



Ida Mae Home creates classic quilts with a modern twist. Using vibrant colors and unique designs, the quilts are printed and stitched entirely in the USA. The quilts can be effortlessly layered but also stand just as beautifully on their own. The wide range of quilt styles are complemented by coordinating pillows. (www.idamaehome.com)

Pickleball *Mania*

The coast to coast obsession with pickleball shows no signs of slowing down and many vendors came to market with strong pickleball collections. Coastal Pickle, Canvas Style, Swig, Kay Dee and The Darling Effect were among the vendors showing sizable pickleball assortments.



Coastal Pickle specialises in producing premium pickleball paddles. Available in six on-trend styles, the paddles wholesale for \$55 with a recommended retail of \$110 to \$119. The company also offers a custom program with a minimum order of just 20 paddles. A different design can be placed on each side. Lead time for custom orders is eight to 10 weeks. (www.coastalpickle.com)



Insulated drinkware maker **Swig** offers a pickleball pattern in many of its popular insulated drinkware sizes and coolies. (www.swigwholesale.com)



Canvas Style came to market with a fun and preppy collection of pickleball earrings which were downright irresistible. \$7.50 cost. (wholesale. canvasstyle.com)



Pickleball towels from **Kay Dee Designs** feature a hanging strap with a grommet closure making them easy to attach to nets, gym bags or the kitchen stove. Available in six styles, the 16-inch by 26-inch terry towels are made with 100 percent cotton. \$3.75 cost. (www.kaydeedesigns.com)



The Darling Effect released absolutely darling pickleball paddles and cases at market which buyers were fawning over. (www.thedarlingeffect.com)

Honey

The gift industry has found a winner with all things bee related, from an obsession with bee motifs to a plethora of honey-based products. True Honey Teas and Generation Bee were among the honey-based brands showing in Atlanta that stood out for their great taste and fantastic packaging.

The folks behind **True Honey Teas** love tea and honey so they decided to combine their loves into a single-serve honey tea bag made with natural honey granules sourced directly from farmers. Each of their blends are carefully chosen for strong taste, quality and uniqueness and include lemon lavender, rooibos, chai, ginger lemon zest and a variety of fruit teas. Teas are sold in pouches with resealable zippers as well as in boxes. The company also offers a line of K-Cup style teas. (www.truehoneyteas.com)



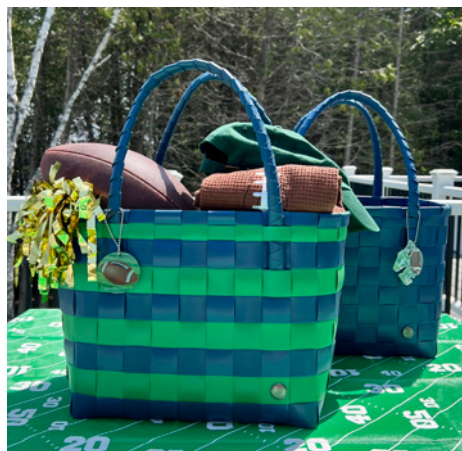
With a passion for beekeeping, **Generation Bee** was founded with the simple goal to create an all-natural line of luxury skincare products using beeswax, honey and pollen from beehives. After much success crafting personal care products, the founders turned their attention toward creating food-grade gourmet honey and the results are delicious. The first product to market is a set of three three-ounce honeys packaged in a gift box. The flavors are lavender, orange basil and chile de arbol. (www.generation-bee.com)

Collegiate

Collegiate items were back in a big way and were a focus for many vendors. We liked the variety of items that could be found including items for kids.



Glory Haus' collegiate collection has been reinvigorated with a fresh set of styled artwork adorning everything from mugs, pennants and Christmas ornaments to boxed signs, canvases, tumblers, tea towels and pillows. With licenses for 20 teams there are items in this collection perfect for hosting game day parties and for gifting graduates and fans. (www.gloryhaus.com)



HandedBy specialises in producing what it calls a Paris Spirit shopping bag in one size – 11-inches by 12-inches by 10-inches approximately. The braided bags are woven by hand using 70 percent recycled plastic and are now available in a wide range of game-day color combinations. Great for toting provisions and blankets to the game, the bags are easy to clean with soap and water. (www.handedby-usa.com)



When we spotted these licensed glasses from **Blue Planet** we couldn't believe somebody had not thought of this licensing deal earlier. The glasses are \$12.50 each sold in a dozen pack by school. The plastic frames include UVA/UVB polarized polycarbonate lenses. A display is available which holds 24 glasses. (www.blueplaneteyewearwholesale.com)



As you can tell by the number of times **Canvas Style** is mentioned in this trend round-up, the company really hit the mark at market with collections that had buyers excited including their collegiate assortment of jewelry with 21 NCAA licenses. With a variety of enamel earring, pendant necklace and bangle styles there are options for even the fussiest fashionista. There is also a mix and match jewelry collection featuring non-licensed solid colors which are great for high schools and clubs. (wholesale.canvasstyle.com)

The collegiate market is expanding and focusing on the youngest fans – kids. **Kitchen Innovations** took the lead in this area offering dynamic drinking boxes – called FunTops – as well as snack cups featuring a variety of college licenses. Available in two sizes – eight and 12-ounce, FunTops are made from food-safe medical grade silicone. A variety of countertop displays are available. (www.kitcheninnovationsinc.com)



First beaded earrings were all the rage and now we're seeing beaded handbags have another day in the sun. The collegiate varieties from **La Chic** were stunning and the displays at market very eye catching. With licenses from 19 schools, each collection for each school includes a variety of mini crossbody bag styles (\$22 cost), credit card holders (\$15 cost), bag straps (\$32 cost), keychains (\$12 cost), beaded wristlets (\$25 cost) and beaded coin purses (\$15 cost). (www.lachic.us)

Food & Drink *Smokers*

Food smoking is the new favorite cooking trend with delicious smoke flavors being imparted into such varied foods as butter, fruit, yogurt, desserts and beverages as well as traditional items like meat, marinades and sauces. Cooking with smoke involves skill, but it's also fun and there's plenty of room to experiment with different ingredients that would not usually come into contact with smoke. In the past you'd need to build a smokehouse to smoke your foods but now the market is awash in portable food and drink smokers.



The Smoked Cocktail Kit from the **Viski Alchemi** line from True Brands was new to market. The kit includes everything needed to easily infuse spirits, garnishes and drinks with a rich, smoky quality, including a 14-ounce lowball glass, smoker, fine mesh strainer, tin of oak wood chips and a handheld butane torch (fuel not included). \$38.99 cost. Experts stress that only food-grade butane should be used in the torches when smoking food and drinks. (www.truebrands.com)



The Whisky Smoker from **Mad Men** was designed to give cocktails a heavy, smoky flavor. The kit includes everything needed to add layers of flavors to a cocktail including a portable torch, smoke infuser wood top with a filter, four different flavors of wood chips, a scoop and cleaning tools. The company promises the kit is simple to use for the beginner or professional bartender. \$30 cost. (www.mad-men.com)



If you're looking for a smoker that does it all, look no further than the Foghat Smoking Cloche set from **Thousand Oaks Barrel Co.** The set includes a Foghat smoker with a stainless steel mesh guard, glass cloche, charcuterie board with leather strap, wood chips, torch and food-grade butane. Hand turned from a solid piece of white oak, the Foghat smoker sits comfortably on a rocks glass, snifter and the specially designed cloche. Simply add wood chips (aka smoking fuel) burn with the torch and watch a cascading waterfall of culinary smoke while it enhances the flavor of food and spirits. \$189.95 retail. (1000oakbarrels.com)

Sleepy Times Sets

Sleepy time sets for children exploded onto the scene at market. Whether pajamas paired with a plush animal or a book with an accompanying friend, the sets we spotted were adorable and affordable.

Books to Bed is a new venture from Hatley Little Blue House which pairs the company's adorable, printed pajamas with well-known children's stories. Children will love turning the pages of their favorite books and seeing the beloved stories illustrated on their sleepwear. Available in infant and children's sizes. From \$65 retail for set. (www.hatley.com)



The **Slumberkins** collection introduces children to 15 adorable plush critters which they call snugglers and their inspiring stories of resilience with the goal of empowering children to grow more caring, confident and resilient. All snugglers come with a book and affirmation card for \$24 cost. Additional books can be purchased for \$6.49 cost which the company suggests store owners buy so shoppers can pick up and peruse the titles. (www.slumberkins.com)



Just when we thought this line couldn't get any stronger, **Warmies** shows us how wrong we were. Not only has it usurped Jellycat as the current top-selling plush line but it also expanded its collection at market to include exquisite children's pajamas which coordinate with items from its collection of irresistible cuddly creatures. Available in sizes 2T to 5T with plans to release infant sizes soon, the pajamas wholesale for \$14.50. Currently six styles of pajamas are available: Calico Cat, Dinosaur, Marshmallow Bear, Pink Unicorn, Puppy and Sloth. (www.warmies.com)

Gourmet Food

There's a renewed focus among gift store owners on gourmet food and drink items. As consumers become more fickle with their hard-earned cash, many retailers are looking to stock functional, consumable items which keep customers coming back for more which is where gourmet food enters the picture. Our favorite line from market was Crackerology. We were also impressed with the packaging and taste of items from Dick Taylor Chocolate.



Besides great packaging and delicious flavors this line of gourmet chocolates from **Dick Taylor** caught our attention because they ship all year long unlike some chocolate wholesalers who don't ship in the hotter months due to melting. Dick Taylor packs all their orders with ice packs to avoid this problem ensuring stores have access to their favorite chocolate all year round. The small batch, bean-to-bar craft chocolates are made with just one or two ingredients and sold in bar form (from \$9.50 suggested retail), as coated almonds and cherries (\$18 suggested retail) and as drinking chocolate (\$18 suggested retail). A variety of paper and hardwood countertop displays are available. (dicktaylorwholesale.com)

Crackerology is one of the most innovative gourmet food products we've seen on the market in recent years. Founded two summers ago, the brand meets the need of quick, on-the-go gourmet appetizers that pair well with cocktails, beer and wine – and it's already won a coveted Sofi award. After several focus groups, the company created all-in-one kits which include everything needed to create a tray of appetizers or desserts within minutes. The sweet and savory kits include the company's proprietary shortbread-like crackers and cookies paired with shelf stable toppings including cheeses, jams and nuts. The kits also include a bamboo spoon/spreader to snack on the go. The snack-size kits are perfect for one to two people and include seven flavors while the full size appetizer and dessert kits (\$19.50 retail) serve four to six people. The ingredients are shown on the outside of the box so customers know what they are getting. Plus, inside there are additional pairing suggestions for customers who want to expand upon the offerings and create a charcuterie-style offering. (www.crackerologywholesale.com)

Pink Nutcrackers

Based on the number of nutcracker patterns spotted at the show, it's a good bet that the nutcracker will be a strong motif this season. A new twist to this traditional symbol comes in the form of color, in particular pink. Many vendors were showing pink nutcracker themed decor, apparel and functional items. The collections that caught our eye were from Swig and Mary Square.



Swig's new nutcracker pattern is on a pretty pink background and features metallic gold accents. The pattern is available in many of the company's most popular drinkware and coolie sizes and styles. (www.swigwholesale.com)

Beyond offering a line of traditional nutcracker decor, **Mary Square** has designed a new collection called Oh What Fun which features pastel-hued nutcrackers in pink and teal. The pattern is available on stemless acrylic wine tumblers (\$6 cost), acrylic tumblers with straws (\$8 cost) and a ceramic mug (\$8 cost). The top seller at markets was the mug. (www.marysquare.com)



FALL PROMOTIONS & EVENTS

Retailers Plan for Uncertain Fourth Quarter

By Erica Kirkland

When it comes to plans for instore events and promotions for fall 63 percent of store owners are scheduling the same number of events as they did last year with just 20 percent anticipating hosting a higher number.

A retailer from California commented, “Sounds like it might be a little tougher fourth quarter this year.” As such she says, “We’ll be adding one to two mini events earlier in the season to our main event in November” which is the store’s “biggest and most exciting event” – their holiday open house.

FUN EVENT IDEAS

In Kansas a store owner is pulling out all the stops, reporting, “We will have a fall open house and a Christmas open house.” She also participates in town-wide events including a Santa’s coming to town when area businesses are invited to create live windows, and on Black Friday the businesses in the area stay open late.” The store owner will also be hosting a late-night shopping event for husbands and prior to that will have a late night for ladies to make a wish list for their husbands.

The week leading up to Small Business Saturday is the week an Ohio retailer is most excited about. In addition, she says, “We always do a bingo card with four other local businesses during Thanksgiving week which is a huge hit. Each business chips in pretty good prizes and we have huge turnout. We also do a loyalty card with two other businesses where



when the customer spends so much at all three stores, they’re entered into a draw. That one is usually also popular. We do that mid December for two weeks.”

A Michigan retailer is hosting a variety of events and promotions including a big runway fashion show, a brunch, Halloween open house, a Witches Night Out, Made in Michigan Day and 13 Days of Halloween Deals.

“Last year, we had customers pick a piece of Halloween candy with a discount percentage on it and that was the amount they received off their entire purchase. It was a hit!” shares a Tennessee store owner.

“Events keep ‘em coming back,” says an Ohio retailer who is excited about her annual upcoming fashion show held in a restaurant across the street from her store.

“We charge a fee and have a limited number of seats. Each person gets a meal, favor, coupons and the chance to win prizes, plus we run raffles. After the event, we have our shop open just for the

attendees. It is a happy time from beginning to end and it brings in great sales too! It’s wonderful and a win-win for sure.”

NO EVENT MANTRA

Despite how successful they are for many store owners, numerous independent gift retailers report that hosting events is more effort than they’re worth for them.

“We generally don’t do events,” says a New York store owner. “They’re too much trouble.”

In Utah, a retailer writes, “Events are difficult to create and don’t seem to get much response. People seem like they are over stimulated by so many offers, discounts, promises, etc.,” he said.

Another Utah store owner commented that, “People are still Covid shy” and her “sales have been fine without hosting costly and time-consuming events.”

“We have found that events are less and less effective, so we don’t do any beyond a holiday open house,” reports a Texas store owner.

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Tracking the Pulse of the Gift Industry

ARTICLES OF NOTE:

- June Sales Climb
- Personalized Products
- POS Systems
- Fall Events & Promotions
- Marketing to Generation Z
- 10 Must-Have Market Trends

CATEGORIES TRACKED

Apparel
Functional Gifts
Home Decor
Humor & Whimsy
Humorous Cards
Journals & Notebooks
Men’s Gifts
Paper Napkins
Plush

Top-selling vendors:

Email us for your top-selling vendor badge if you haven’t received one already.

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