

giftBEAT™

Tracking the Pulse of the Gift Industry

marketBEAT

The Industry's Top-Selling Lines



New necklace sets from top-selling message jewelry supplier **Roman** are called One for You, One for Me and are designed for mothers and daughters, friends and sisters. (www.roman.com)

COMFORT GIFTS

Last ran in April 2023

#1 **DEMDACO**: Giving, shawls, robes, Willow Tree#2 **BAREFOOT DREAMS**: apparel, socks#3 **INTELEX**: Warmies, neck wraps, eye masks#4 **SNOOZIES**: slippers, various#5 **WORLD'S SOFTEST SOCKS**: socks#6 **CARSON**: windchimes, lanterns, various#7 **DM**: Hello Mello, various#8 **GANZ**: various*#9 **MICHEL DESIGN WORKS**: soaps, lotion#10 **OPPORTUNITIES**: loungewear, slippers, socks***HONORABLE MENTIONS**: Roman, Vera Bradley

*OF NOTE!

Since this chart last ran, **GANZ** (www.ganz.com) and **OPPORTUNITIES** (www.opportunitiesia.com) moved from honorable mentions onto the chart.

"My customers love the cards from Shannon Martin and buy several at a time."
— Ohio retailer

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Top-selling comfort gift supplier **Demdaco** has launched a new Sharing Kindness collection of wraps, lap pocket pillows, weighted heart pillows, blankets, socks, poufs and bracelets. (www.demdaco.com)

MESSAGE JEWELRY

Last ran in September 2023

#1 **ROMAN**: Alexa's Angels, various#2 **DEMDACO**: My Journey, various#3 **MULBERRY STUDIOS**: Lumiela#4 **SCOUT CURATED WEARS**: bracelets, necklaces#5 **SPARTINA**: Sea la Vie*#6 **BRIGHTON**: bracelets, various#7 **KATIE LOXTON**: bracelets, various#8 **CENTER COURT**: Embracelets, Layers#9 **RONALDO**: bracelets#10 **LITTLE WORDS PROJECT**: bracelets*

*OF NOTE!

LITTLE WORDS PROJECT (www.littlewordsproject.com) did not rank when this chart last ran, while **SPARTINA** (www.spartina449.com) moved from an honorable mention onto the chart.

HUMOROUS CARDS

Last ran in August 2023

#1 **LEANIN' TREE**: birthday, various#2 **AVANTI**: birthday, animal, general, seasonal#3 **SHANNON MARTIN**: various#4 **PICTURA**: Eric Decetis, various#5 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY**: various#6 **BLUE MOUNTAIN**: various#7 **PAPYRUS**: various#8 **DESIGN DESIGN**: various *#9 **OATMEAL STUDIOS**: birthday, various#10 **CALYPSO CARDS**: various**HONORABLE MENTIONS**: Chez Gagne, Legacy, Recycled Paper

*OF NOTE!

DESIGN DESIGN (www.designdesign.us) did not rank when this chart last ran.

FAST FACT:

68%
of
independent
gift retailers
are feeling
optimistic
about the
holiday
season

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



Top-selling journal and notebook supplier **Punch Studio** focuses on reimagining vintage motifs. Their new Cream Bouquet Brooch Journal features a jeweled brooch, gold foil accents and a magnetic closure. (www.punchstudio.com)

"The holiday coasters and napkins from **Drinks on Me** started selling in October. Our customers love them!"

— Maryland retailer



The top-selling Made in the USA supplier **Silver Forest** is known industry-wide for their unique and bestselling earrings. (www.silverforest.com)

JOURNALS & NOTEBOOKS Last ran in August 2023

- #1 **PETER PAUPER PRESS:** journals, notebooks
- #2 **COMPENDIUM:** journals, various
- #3 **CHRISTIAN ART GIFTS:** various
- #4 **JOURNALS UNLIMITED:** journals
- #5 **PUNCH STUDIO:** notebooks, various*
- #6 **NATURAL LIFE:** journals, notebooks
- #7 **LEGACY:** journals, notebooks, notepads
- #8 **MARY SQUARE:** various
- #9 **C.R. GIBSON:** journals, cookbooks
- #10 **DENIK:** journals*

HONORABLE MENTION: Lang

*OF NOTE!

DENIK (www.denik.com) did not rank when this chart last ran, while **PUNCH STUDIO** (www.punchstudio.com) moved from an honorable mention onto the chart.

FUNCTIONAL GIFTS Last ran in August 2023

- #1 **NORA FLEMING:** minis, bases
- #2 **MUD PIE:** serveware, barware, tabletop
- #3 **DM:** Lemon Lavender, Krumb's, various
- #4 **KAY DEE DESIGNS:** tea towels, placemats
- #5 **DRINKS ON ME:** coasters, napkins*
- #6 **CORKCICLE:** insulated drinkware
- #7 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY:** tea towels, various
- #8 **YETI:** insulated drinkware*
- #9 **SWIG:** insulated drinkware
- #10 **MICHEL DESIGN WORKS:** foaming soap

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Creative Co-op, Brumate, Lynn & Lianna

*OF NOTE!

DRINKS ON ME (www.drinksonmecoasters.com) did not rank when this chart last ran, while **YETI** (www.yeti.com) moved from an honorable mention onto the chart.

MADE IN THE USA Last ran in June 2023

- #1 **SILVER FOREST:** earrings
- #2 **THE NAKED BEE:** lip balms, lotions
- #3 **STONEWALL KITCHEN:** jams, various
- #4 **SWAN CREEK:** jar candles, wax melts
- #5 **ENEWTON:** bracelets*
- #6 **TYLER CANDLE:** candles, laundry detergent
- #7 **DOWN TO EARTH:** trinket dishes
- #8 **RONALDO:** jewelry
- #9 **THYMES:** Frasier Fir*
- #10 **JESS & JANE:** apparel*

HONORABLE MENTION: Duke Cannon

*OF NOTE!

THYMES (www.thymes.com) did not rank when this chart last ran, while **ENEWTON** (www.enewtodesign.com) and **JESS & JANE** (www.jessjane.com) moved from an honorable mention onto the chart.

HOME DECOR Last ran in August 2023

- #1 **MUD PIE:** pillows, various
- #2 **NORA FLEMING:** minis, bases
- #3 **CREATIVE CO-OP:** pillows, wall art, various
- #4 **P. GRAHAM DUNN:** signs, wall art
- #5 **GANZ:** wall decor, various
- #6 **CARSON:** various*
- #7 **DEMDACO:** various
- #8 **TWO'S COMPANY:** various*
- #9 **GERSON:** various
- #10 **MY WORD!:** porch signs

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Rustic Marlin, Sullivans

*OF NOTE!

TWO'S COMPANY (www.twoscompany.com) did not rank when this chart last ran, while **CARSON** (www.carsongifts.com) moved from an honorable mention onto the chart.

SOCKS Last ran in March 2023

- #1 **WORLD'S SOFTEST SOCKS:** crew, various
- #2 **BLUE Q:** humorous
- #3 **SNOOZIES:** slippers, various
- #4 **BAREFOOT DREAMS:** socks, various
- #5 **SOCKSMITH:** various
- #6 **OPPORTUNITIES:** sherpa
- #7 **E&S:** pet-related
- #8 **DM:** Two Left Feet
- #9 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY:** humor*
- #10 **HOT SOX:** humor, animal, seasonal

HONORABLE MENTION: Solmate Socks

*OF NOTE!

PRIMITIVES BY KATHY (www.primitivesbykathy.com) did not rank when this chart last ran.

HOME FRAGRANCE Last ran in July 2023

- #1 **SWAN CREEK:** jar candles, wax melts
- #2 **TYLER CANDLE:** candles, Diva Wash, various
- #3 **INIS:** candles, diffusers, lotions
- #4 **MICHEL DESIGN WORKS:** candles, foaming soap
- #5 **THYMES:** Frasier Fir*
- #6 **AROMATIQUE:** potpourri, various
- #7 **CAPRI BLUE:** Volcano, various
- #8 **WOODWICK:** jars
- #9 **GREENLEAF:** candles, room spray, various
- #10 **BRIDGEWATER:** candles, melts

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Maison Berger, Voluspa

*OF NOTE!

THYMES (www.thymes.com) did not rank when this chart last ran.

HALLOWEEN-RELATED Last ran in December 2022

- =====
- #1 **MUD PIE:** apparel, tabletop, decor
 - #2 **EVERGREEN:** flags, mats, stakes
 - #3 **GANZ:** figurines, charms, various
 - #4 **NORA FLEMING:** minis, bases
 - #5 **OPPORTUNITIES:** lanterns, decor
 - #6 **GERSON:** decor
 - #7 **ENESCO:** Dept. 56
 - #8 **DM:** light-up necklaces, various
 - #9 **TWO'S COMPANY:** various*
 - #10 **TRANSPAC:** various

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Jellycat, Studio M

*OF NOTE!

TWO'S COMPANY (www.twoscompany.com) did not rank when this chart last ran.

HUMOR & WHIMSY Last ran in August 2023

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

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Ellembec, Ganz

*OF NOTE!

Since this chart last ran **DESIGN DESIGN** (www.designdesign.us) moved from an honorable mention onto the chart.

OUTDOOR SEASONAL DECOR Last ran in Dec 2022

- =====
- #1 **EVERGREEN:** flags, stakes, mats
 - #2 **CARSON:** flags, windchimes
 - #3 **STUDIO M:** flags, planters, mats
 - #4 **WOODSTOCK:** windchimes
 - #5 **WIND RIVER:** windchimes
 - #6 **MY WORD!:** porch boards
 - #7 **GERSON:** stakes, spinners
 - #8 **CUSTOM DECOR:** flags
 - #9 **PREMIER KITES:** lawn spinners
 - #10 **DIRECT INTERNATIONAL:** yard stakes*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Magnolia Designs, Opportunities, Spooontiques

*OF NOTE!

DIRECT INTERNATIONAL (www.directinternationalinc.com) did not rank when this chart last ran.

BABY GIFTS Last ran in July 2023

- =====
- #1 **JELLYCAT:** plush, plush with books
 - #2 **INTELEX:** Warmies
 - #3 **MUD PIE:** apparel, toys
 - #4 **DOUGLAS:** plush, Snugglers
 - #5 **MARY MEYER:** Taggies, Wubbanubs
 - #6 **DEMDACO:** rattles, books, plush, various
 - #7 **GANZ:** plush, frames, various
 - #8 **BUNNIES BY THE BAY:** various*
 - #9 **BEARINGTON:** various*
 - #10 **BELLA TUNNO:** various*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Roman, Copper Pearl, Enesco, Melissa & Doug, Stephan Baby

*OF NOTE!

BUNNIES BY THE BAY (wholesale.bunniesbythebay.com) did not rank when this chart last ran, while **BEARINGTON** (www.bearingtonbears.com) and **BELLA TUNNO** (www.bellatunno.com) moved from an honorable mention onto the chart.

INDOOR SEASONAL DECOR Last ran in December 2022

- =====
- #1 **NORA FLEMING:** minis, bases
 - #2 **GERSON:** pumpkins, santas, snowmen
 - #3 **MUD PIE:** serveware, signs, various
 - #4 **GANZ:** signs, various
 - #5 **RAZ IMPORTS:** Christmas, lanterns
 - #6 **ENESCO:** Jim Shore, various
 - #7 **OPPORTUNITIES:** snowglobes, glitter lanterns
 - #8 **TRANSPAC:** various*
 - #9 **DEMDACO:** various*
 - #10 **MICHEL DESIGN WORKS:** various

*OF NOTE!

DEMDACO (www.demdaco.com) did not rank when this chart last ran, while **TRANSPAC** (www.shoptii.com) moved from an honorable mention onto the chart.

MUGS & TUMBLERS Last ran in April 2023

- =====
- #1 **CORKCICLE:** insulated drinkware
 - #2 **BRUMATE:** insulated drinkware
 - #3 **SWIG:** insulated drinkware
 - #4 **YETI:** insulated drinkware
 - #5 **TERVIS:** various
 - #6 **DEMDACO:** Dean Crouser, various
 - #7 **CLAY IN MOTION:** Handwarmer mugs
 - #8 **CAPE SHORE:** mugs, tumblers*
 - #9 **ENESCO:** mugs, various
 - #10 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY:** mugs*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Carson, History & Heraldry, Santa Barbara Designs

*OF NOTE!

Since this chart last ran **CAPE SHORE** (www.cape-shore.com) and **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY** (www.primitivesbykathy.com) moved from an honorable mention onto the chart.

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



Hugs are the newest plush baby collection from top-selling baby gifts supplier **Douglas**. The delightful dolls are decorated in soft removable swaddles, featuring trending colors and adorable characters. (www.douglastoys.com)

"The new recordable Grandma cell phones from Mud Pie sold right out."

-Ohio retailer



Top-selling mugs and tumblers vendor **Cape Shore** has several whimsical designs for spring including an acrylic wine tumbler featuring a flock of silly seagulls. (www.cape-shore.com)

Mixed Messages

After six months of year-over-year sales declines, retailers witnessed a glimmer of hope on the holiday horizon when the National Retail Federation revealed that a record 200.4 million consumers shopped over the five-day holiday weekend from Thanksgiving through to Cyber Monday, surpassing last year's record of 196.7 million and most analysts' predictions.

Whether independent gift stores were the recipients of this boost remains to be seen,


although positive indicators abound among *Giftbeat's* reporting stores.

Compared to last year, 26 percent of consumers are showing increased interest in holiday themed goods while overall, store owners are feeling more optimistic about the season's potential performance than last year with over 68 percent expecting to come out ahead. However, on the flip side, half of consumers are spending less than they did last year according to early insights from our panel of store



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owners from coast to coast.

Only time will tell what the season has in store. 



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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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chartMOVERS

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

COMFORT GIFTS

Based on strong sales from its Giving assortment and Willow Tree figurines, **DEMDACO** (www.demdaco.com) retained its top spot on the chart followed by **BAREFOOT DREAMS** (www.barefootdreams.com) in second place. Apparel and sock sales from Barefoot Dreams propelled the company from seventh place to second. **CARSON** (www.carsongifts.com) also witnessed an impressive climb, from last place to sixth with store owners reporting sales of its windchimes and lanterns are popular among consumers looking for bereavement gifts. Also of note was **GANZ'S** (www.ganz.com) move from an honorable mention onto the chart.

FUNCTIONAL GIFTS

DRINKS ON ME (www.drinksonmecoasters.com) is a newcomer to this chart but has been appearing on numerous *Giftbeat* charts since launching a few short years ago. Strong sales of tabletop and accessories meant **NORA FLEMING** (www.norafleming.com) and **MUD PIE** (www.mud-pie.com) retained their number one and two positions respectively. Of note was **MICHEL DESIGN WORKS** (www.stonewallkitchen.com) dropping from fifth place to last.

HOME DECOR

There have been a significant number of shifts on this chart since it last ran in July. While **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY** (www.primitivesbykathy.com) was the third bestselling supplier in this category in the summer, they are completely missing from this month's chart while **DEMDACO** (www.demdaco.com) dropped from second place to seventh, and **MY WORD!** (www.mywordsigns.com) went from sixth to last. On the flip side, **P. GRAHAM DUNN** (www.pgrahamdunn.com) climbed from last place to fourth.

SOCKS

Keep your eye on **BAREFOOT DREAMS** (www.barefootdreams.com) as the company climbed from ninth place to fourth on the socks chart. Brand new to the chart was **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY** (www.primitivesbykathy.com) noted by retailers for strong sales of humorous socks. Surprisingly **DM** (www.247dm.com) dropped from fourth place to eighth. 



SEASONAL DECOR SALES

Store Owners Report Brisk Buying

Compared to last year, 26 percent of consumers are showing increased interest in holiday-themed goods at independent gift stores. Retailers have observed positive sales and customer excitement, especially in early November. Some retailers have opted for bigger and more attention-grabbing displays this season, which have been well-received by customers.

“Customers are always excited to see holiday merchandise out,” writes a retailer from Colorado. “We have had some good sales so far, especially in early November. We just hope this continues.”

This season a Wisconsin retailer decided to go big with her seasonal

decor and writes, “We have bigger and brighter displays this year that are more attention-grabbing than in previous years.”

“Our customers are very excited to see holiday on the floor and are starting to scoop it up,” says a Maryland store owner.

In New Hampshire a store owner reports, “We didn’t put a lot into Halloween, just a little bit, but the Xmas stuff we’ve been adding to the floor is selling already.”

“Business still seems to be strong in the seasonal category,” writes a Utah retailer. “I thought I had overbought in August, but Halloween has really sold down well. We will see about Christmas!”

HOLIDAY SALES OFF TO SOLID START

Retailers More Optimistic Than Last Year

Based on sales to date, independent gift retailers have seen a slightly higher percentage of consumers spending more compared to last year. Overall, store owners are more optimistic about the season’s performance than the previous year, with over 68 percent expecting to come out ahead. However, many store owners have shared anecdotes indicating that consumers are not spending as much as they used to. Conversely, some store owners have experienced significant increases in average item and average sale, indicating continued spending by big-ticket customers. There is a middle ground of store owners anticipating a moderate season, recognizing a shift from the spending frenzy of previous years. While some are cautiously optimistic based on a good start, others acknowledge the potential for sudden changes in sales trends.

“We have a lot of older customers

that have extended families to buy for, so they are somewhat limited in how much they can spend on each one,” shares a store owner from Wisconsin.

In Ohio a retailer says, “My traffic isn’t down but I notice they are spending less in some cases,” while a store owner in Pennsylvania says, “Customer counts are the same, but shoppers are spending less.”

On the flip side, another store owner in Ohio reports, “Our average item and average sale are up significantly” and a Utah retailer shares, “Seems like the big spenders are still purchasing heavy.”

In the middle are store owners that are expecting a moderate season.

“The spending frenzy of the last few years is waning, and we should expect more realistic sales,” writes a retailer from Montana while an Arkansas store owner says, “I’m cautiously optimistic . . . I think. So far, we’re off to a good start, but things can change on a dime!”

SALESBEAT

Sales Declines Continue into October for Majority of Store Owners

By Erica Kirkland

In October, 62 percent of independent gift stores reported year-over-year sales declines. Store owners attributed the decrease in sales to a lackluster economy, which kept shoppers at home and resulted in reduced traffic both in-store and online. Many retailers were unsure about the exact reasons behind the significant decline in sales. Some mentioned slow fall sales, potential issues with product mix, delayed setup of Christmas displays, and light foot traffic as possible factors. Adding more inventory did not yield the desired results for some retailers.

“Fall sales were really slow this year,” says a store owner from Tennessee. “I don’t know if I didn’t have the right mix, but I have about 70 percent of fall left.”

In South Carolina a retailer writes, “We had approximately 200 fewer people come to the register and sold 694 fewer items than last October, and our average sale was also down by \$5. That all made for a 25 percent drop in sales from last year.”

“We added a lot more inventory, but it didn’t help as much as we would have liked,” says a retailer from Pennsylvania. “We set up Christmas a couple weeks later than usual so maybe that hurt.”

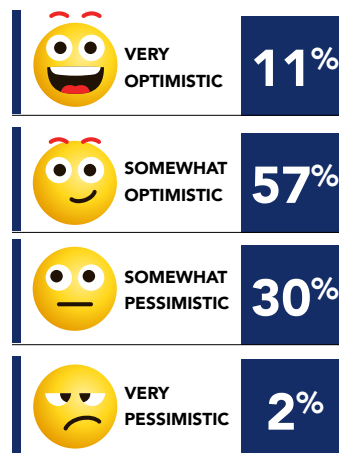
A New Hampshire store owner is puzzled as to why her sales were down, saying, “We’ve been retraining staff and rolling out new product. It just feels like foot traffic was light.”

SEPTEMBER 2023 SALES (vs. August 2023)

↑ 10%+	7%
↑ 5-9%	13%
↑ 1-4%	8%
↔	10%
↓ 1-4%	15%
↓ 5-9%	15%
↓ 10%+	32%

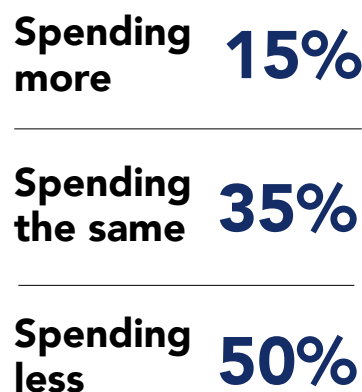
HOLIDAY FORECAST

How Store Owners Think the Season Will Shake Out



HOLIDAY SPENDING

Consumer Spending Volumes vs. Last Year



Open Your Doors And Close A Sale

As Soon as You Unlock Your Doors the Sales Process Begins

By Claire Sykes

The first moments of the day in your store set the stage for everything that follows. Closing the sale isn't a single event. It's a series of decisions that lead to matching a customer's needs with the most appropriate and available products. From greeting that person to accepting their credit card, closing a sale is about building customer relationships.

KNOW YOUR PRODUCTS

When you're truly familiar with your store's merchandise, you better help customers with their buying decisions:

- **Educate yourself.** Read product literature, visit company websites and ask vendors questions.
- **Attend vendor training.** Ask companies to conduct regularly scheduled sessions about the products you buy from them.
- **Know the products' particulars.** When you do, you can more fully answer customers' questions about them and tell them things they didn't know to ask about.
- **Know what's worthy.** For the gift that needs assembling, for instance, when you can attest to how easy that is for customers, you can more easily sell its value to them.
- **Be brand aware.** Know what's special about a manufacturer, such as their environmentally friendly products, to further excite customers to buy.

THE FIRST HELLO

Instead of pondering profits, consider your customers and their first impressions of you, your staff and your store:

- **Be there.** Let customers see



you the minute they enter. They may want to wander around by themselves first, but make sure you're readily available.

- **Be quick.** Immediately greet people when they come in. Make them feel like they're more important than anything else (because at that moment, they are!).
- **Be yourself.** Welcome customers with a smile, genuine warmth and a friendly attitude.
- **Be inviting.** Ask them open-ended questions such as, "What brought you into the store

today?" and "How can we assist you?"

- **Be helpful.** Your goal is to serve your customers and assist them in making the best buying decisions.
- **Be remembered.** People may forget faces, but they'll often keep business cards. Give them yours or have them take a picture of it, so they've got your contact info handy.

KNOW YOUR CUSTOMERS

Shoppers will let you know how they want to interact with you via

their body language, eye contact or lack thereof, words and behavior. There are five types of shoppers:

- **The Approacher.** This person may or may not have decided what they want to buy, but they're sure they want to be waited on. Say hello and let them talk.
- **The Avoider.** They dodge you and head off on their own. Leave them alone. Then, after a few minutes, work your way toward them and casually engage them in conversation.
- **The Browser.** They tell

are or not, treat them like all your other customers.

INVOLVE THE CUSTOMER

Your goal is to keep customers engaged. Earn their trust and confidence and they will talk freely with you. You can:

- **Listen.** You can learn a lot with your ears. And people love the person willing to give them their all. Let them do most of the talking and you'll be closer to making the sale.
- **Ask questions.** Again, open-ended ones. If it's an outdoor tableware set they're after, ask the customer about the style and colors of their patio furniture.
- **Watch your body language.** Keep your posture open instead of crossing your arms, offer a handshake, periodically nod in acknowledgment and maintain good eye contact.
- **Paraphrase.** Before you explain or show any products, assure the customer you understand what they're looking for. Occasionally repeat what you heard them say.
- **Give control.** Don't let the customer feel pressured to buy. Let them feel in charge of the sales process.

thinking you can "save the sale." If you do this or do it too often you could end up making this employee dependent on you when they should be learning from their own experiences. Still, your intervention may be necessary, given the following:

- **An unqualified salesperson.** If the employee can't answer the customer's questions or resolve their purchasing needs, let another salesperson give it a go.
- **A personality difference.** Maybe the customer and salesperson just couldn't connect or one feels uncomfortable with the other. Try a different salesperson.
- **The customer's request.** They might feel more confident if someone higher up in your company explains the product further or verifies information about it.

If you do get involved in an employee's sales process, go in easy. Be gentle and somewhat casual about it, so the customer feels it as a smooth and seamless transition. If you've trained your employee right, they'll introduce you to the customer — using your full name and title — and summarize, at that moment, the customer's needs and how you can help. You want to have all the necessary information so you can proceed further with closing the sale.

SEAL UP THE SALE

Try to do it that day with the customer. Retail is too competitive not to. While the customer is still in your store, you've got a dedicated "audience," and you must assume they might not come back. If you must, come right out and ask the customer to buy.

WHEN TO INTERVENE

What if you think that the customer might leave your store empty-handed? As the owner or manager, don't step into the middle of your sales staff's efforts

you they're "just looking," expecting you to ask if they need help or walk away. Do neither. Instead, ask this customer open-ended questions.

- **The Visitor.** This person doesn't want to buy anything. They're just killing time or wanting to be sociable. Try to interest them in your products anyway!
- **The Competitor.** Just as you go into other stores to see what they sell, so do other retailers. Whether you know who they


FOUR WAYS TO CLOSE A SALE

By Claire Sykes

If you've properly presented your store and products to the customer and focused on their needs — instead of your need to close a sale — the sale will often close itself. Meanwhile, you can rely on the four most effective closing techniques:

1. The minor-decision close. Perhaps the customer isn't ready to make a major purchasing decision if it's an expensive item. Engage them in a series of minor decisions that may inspire them to slap down their credit card. For example, ask, "What is the special occasion for the item?" and "Are you considering purchasing something instead of this item?"
2. The presumptive close. If the customer asks if the product is in stock or if it can be delivered to them that day, presume they want to buy it. Your question should be, "How would you like to pay for that?" It's not a pushy one. Indeed, it may be just what they're ready to hear.
3. The reflective close. Let's say the customer asks you a question that indicates they want to buy, such as, "Do you take Visa?" or "Do you offer financing?" Respond with a decision-making question like, "Are you ready to pay with Visa?" or "Would you like to take advantage of our financing program?" Direct the customer towards an answer that either leads them to buy or postpones their decision.
4. The either-or close. When the customer has shown that they want to buy but they haven't explicitly told you, offer two choices by asking, "Would you like to take this with you now or arrange for delivery?" The person might be compelled to select one of them.

VALUE YOUR STAFF

After the customer has left your store, privately discuss with the salesperson where they may've gone wrong and guide them on ways to improve next time. Spend the time it takes to effectively train sales staff and keep coaching. When you value your sales staff, they'll value your customers, increasing the chance of closing a sale the next time a customer walks through your door. 

EXPERT
Q&AGet Ahead with
AI-Driven Social
Media Changes

By Natalie Hammer Noblitt

Social media marketing requires adaptation, but recent changes — and what's coming soon — may be some of the most groundbreaking we've seen, says Crystal Vilkaitis, social media and digital marketing expert from Crystal Media.

Platforms constantly evolve to improve user experience, and the popularity of TikTok pushed Facebook and Instagram to launch new features this year. At the same time, the power of Artificial Intelligence (AI) will likely upend much of what we know about social media. Here, Vilkaitis weighs in on what retailers should pay attention to right now.

Q. How is AI changing social media marketing?

A. Efficiency is a big benefit of AI. The greatest impact I'm seeing right now is that retailers can leverage ChatGPT as a marketing department. A store owner can create a prompt asking ChatGPT to write captions and create copy, including asking the app to respond with questions it needs answered to generate personalized text. Owners can even request that ChatGPT write a 30-day plan for social media posting and create hashtags (see sidebar).

Everyone is adapting to AI and intelligent user interfaces, with platforms like Meta adding tools to help create text and visuals. Canva and Shopify have also added AI assistant features meant to take over basic tasks. But I don't think



we've seen anything yet compared to what's ahead. I expect 2024 is going to be nuts when it comes to how fast things will change and evolve.

Where ChatGPT can really help retailers is by simplifying the hardest elements of developing creative content. For many of us, sitting down and getting started is challenging. It feels like such a big task when we first begin. ChatGPT can help us think outside of our normal patterns and get us going.

It's a great way to brainstorm, taking what you like from AI content and expanding other elements on your own. When we get past that first hurdle, it often brings back the fun part of creating

content and motivates us. A free version of ChatGPT is available, but the subscription version is about \$20 a month and has more features.

Q. What other ways can retailers use AI beyond ChatGPT?

A. Visual content can also be generated with the help of AI. A plugin called DALL-E 3 can be used with ChatGPT to create images. It can help you create Instagram-worthy photos or help jumpstart brainstorming for everything from visual merchandising to store design. I've also asked DALL-E 3 to draw me a layout for an entire store, giving

the app details on the business style I want and asking it to pull in elements from my location in Colorado. What it generates is amazing. It may not be perfect, but in this case it included design elements like wood, mountains, trees and a sun. It also provided layout ideas I likely would not have thought of on my own.

Copywriting is another area where AI can help retailers. Use it for blogs, website copy and even to respond to negative reviews online. When you ask AI to write in a professional, yet friendly tone, it can take some of the emotion out of what we write. That can be a good thing when dealing with negative customers. It helps you focus on

addressing the problem, owning up to any mistakes and not saying something you might regret later.

A bit of advice on copy written by ChatGPT is that it tends to generate long responses. Make sure to carefully edit copy it generates and add in your own personal style. It will often need to be shortened to make it more readable.

My staff at Crystal Media also advises that for creating ads, some of the AI assistants available on social media platforms are hit-and-miss. It's a little early to tell if they are generating quality followers, as it has been slowly rolling out over the last few months. The AI text suggestions can be OK, but what we've seen is that better results can be obtained using ChatGPT and Google Bard.

Q. Are Facebook and Instagram still the best places to be on social media?

A. The answer depends on where your perfect customers like to be active. Facebook and Instagram boast many millions of users, and Facebook is the best place to reach shoppers 45 and up who are buying online. Instagram users skew younger, and TikTok remains full of young and very active participants.

A recent study found Gen Z consumers are spending six hours a day on social media. Many people wake up scrolling, look at social media while waiting in line or during work, and fall asleep scrolling. We are in a unique place where we get to spend a lot of time with our shoppers on social media. It's important to take advantage of that opportunity to share information with them.

Q. Is organic reach on social media a thing of the past?

A. It is incredibly hard to get organic reach on a platform like Facebook. Most successful retailers post consistently but then

also create ads to ensure content will be seen. The organic reach for posts is about three percent on Instagram and for Facebook between one percent and six percent. Spending money on ads greatly increases those numbers. Our independent gift shop clients usually budget between \$500 to and \$1000 a month for social media ads. If they see results, we advise them to keep fueling their success by budgeting more.

I understand many retailers can't afford that much for advertising. Spending just \$5 a day to get more visibility for posts will be worthwhile, too. Whatever you can do to get more eyes on your content will help generate sales. We see consumers bringing their phones into stores and pointing to their screen saying, "I saw this and I want to buy it."

Q. Are reels and livestreaming still good strategies for increasing views?

A. Livestreaming will get more organic reach than regular posting. The best way to approach livestreaming at your store is to make it consistent, scheduling it

for regular times during the week and marketing those times to your email list. Give viewers notice of when you will be streaming so they know when to tune in. Building an audience will give you much better reach.


I'm on the TikTok train right now because of what we see in gains for organic reach. This is the only place where creators can do a few TikToks and still garner millions of views. That's just not possible on Meta because of the algorithm.

TikTok's local algorithm is also good for retailers who want to connect with their communities. By using your location name in your content and saying it in your video, TikTok will work to reach viewers in that area. I travel a lot and notice local content finds me on TikTok whenever I'm visiting a new area.

Q. What mistakes are you seeing on social media today from small retailers?

A. The mistake I'm seeing today is the same one I've been talking about for more than a decade. It's the resistance among business

owners to put themselves into their social media. Many retailers feel adding themselves and their personality into social media isn't worthwhile or that nobody watching will care. But that is not true. As we talked about before, we are privileged to get time with customers and that they want a connection with us. If I see two different retailers online, the one who I feel a personal connection with is the one who will get my business. It could even be something as simple as knowing her name, what she looks like and that she has a new grandson. But when I go into the store, I already feel comfortable because I know something about her.

Retailers who are intimidated about being seen online should remember that shoppers come from all different generations. All these generations are watching and want relatability when talking about gifts, fashion and decor. They love hearing stories behind the products and reasons why you love your store. Showing up authentically gives our viewers permission to show up as well and be seen. 

How to Use ChatGPT

Asking AI to Plan Social Posts

Crystal Vilkaitis of Crystal Media offers this prompt to use when asking ChatGPT to plan a social media post. She says it directly as an instruction. Try it to see if the results can help your business:

"Create a social media content calendar for the next 30 days. I post to Facebook and Instagram five times a week. I want a blend of personal and sales videos and posts. I need you to help me with this, as well as provide me with the full content calendar for each platform. First you will ask me questions about my business and audience until you have enough information. Then you will provide me with a calendar formatted in two tables, one for Instagram and one for Facebook. You will provide me with the text caption column, which should include three to five hashtags, and a suggested image in the second. My store is {enter name}. Here is our website {enter URL}. Let's begin."

The free version of ChatGPT isn't able to get more information about your business from your website. Instead, if you're using the free version, you need to paste in more details. For example, instead of saying "here is our website," you'll say, "here is more information about my business." Use this area to list details about your store, your location, your products, etc.



The Power of Color

Harnessing the Influence of Hues

By Andrea Hein

Color is one of the most powerful tools in a retailer's tool kit. It has the power to turn us off or pique our interest. It grabs our attention and draws out our emotions – and has the power to invoke memories instantly.

Using color correctly in the retail world is extremely important. “Color is the key to success in the design industries,” says Marcie Cooperman in *Color: How to Use It*. “Color is what drives customers to your door. But the wrong color can keep customers from buying your product.” If you take nothing else from this article, take that sentence and remember it.

COLORS DEFINE BRANDS

As business owners, managers or merchandisers, our focus is always on the customer – what do they want, what do they need and what could make their shopping experience easier? We pigeonhole them and try to figure out who they are and what target market they fit into, but when it comes to color, we need to simplify things.

Color evokes emotion in us unlike anything else and we create emotional attachments to color. When a brand features one of the colors in their line or their displays we easily form attachments to those products. Think about Kate Spade's pink

and green purses or Dior's black and white offerings.

PERSONAL COLOR STYLES

Colors define brands, but they also define our personal style and influence where we choose to shop. If you're not interested in bright handbags and bold scarves, you're unlikely to go into a Kate Spade store at all.

Color also tends to bring out our picky nature. You could fall in love with a style of boots or a watch, but if it doesn't come in a color you're attracted to, you won't buy it at all. Hues and tones of color matter so much, especially when it comes to fashion. A bubble gum pink dress

could make us feel juvenile, while the same dress style in dusty rose would make us feel sophisticated. While we're on the topic of pink, consider the difference in a menswear shop where pinks aren't pink, but rather salmon.

Each of us has a personal color style, whether we're aware of it or not. Look at your wardrobe or the furniture in your home, and you'll start to pull your colors together in a mental mood board quickly.

COLORS OF PRODUCTS BEYOND OUR CONTROL

It's important to remember that product colors and fashion lines are not determined by shop owners

and merchandisers. By the time these items get to us they've been selected up to two years prior. Yet, shop owners and buyers still can select within those lines to create a powerful color story which communicates their brand to customers.

YOUR STORE'S BRAND COLORS

Your brand starts with your logo where you have all the control. Your logo should communicate to customers what they can expect in your store. Then you move onto your shop's brand colors.

"Color is the marketing tool that sends a message to customers instinctively without engaging their conscious attention," says Cooperman in *Color: How to Use It*. "The message of color is actually understood faster than words."


Consider what the colors you're using are communicating to customers utilizing this chart from Xtreme Brand Makeover (www.xtremebrandmakeover.com). As you run down the list of colors and their associated emotions you can start to make connections with familiar brands. The black and red of Lululemon's logo communicates strength, elegance and passion.

Sportswear companies typically choose bold, vibrant colors because we understand subliminally that those colors mean health, vibrancy, youthfulness and energy. As you can see, color can and will do most of the marketing for your store.

Once you've presented your brand to your customer and piqued their interest through your exterior presentation, the interior of your store must hold the same power that your logo does. Your walls and your packaging must be consistent with the colors in your logo and the message you're

conveying because color will set the mood for your customers the second they step through your door.

The color you choose inside your store should say just as much

about the products you offer and your brand as your logo does. You want to create a welcoming environment that expresses who you are and what your shop is all about. 

Andrea Hein is the owner of Andrea Hein Occasions which specialises in custom decor for various clients including the Buffalo Bills. Hein started her career at Walt Disney World and has worked for both boutique and big-box stores. (www.andreaheinoccasions.com)

	Black: serious, distinctive, elegant, bold, powerful, sophisticated, expensive, night, death		Brown: earthy, wholesome, delicious, rich, rustic, warm, natural
	Dark Grey: conservative, classic, responsible, dull, somberness, authority,		Dark Red: rich, refined, tasty, expensive, luxurious
	Light Grey: neutral, logical, rich, practical, reserved, trust		Red: aggressiveness, passionate, sexy, strength, powerful, assertive, vitality, fear, speed, danger
	Blue: authority, nautical, dignity, security, confident, classic, stability, trust		Hot Pink: exciting, playful, tropical, flirtatious
	Light Blue: calming, patient, cool, water, contentment, trusting		Light Pink: romantic, sweet tasting, femininity, innocence, softness, youthful
	Teal: serene, sophisticated, water, coolness		Purple: sophistication, mysterious, spirituality, dramatic, wealth, royalty, youth, creative
	Green: healthy, fertile, freshness, environmentally conscious, nature, reliable, appetite		Light Purple: romantic, sentimental, nostalgic, fragrant
	Light Green: calm, soothing, refreshing, young		Ivory/Cream: classic, soft, comforting, natural, smooth
	Yellow: youth, friendly, positive feelings, sunshine, surprise, cowardice, energetic, caution		White: purity, truthfulness, faith, pristine, contemporary, refined, airy
	Orange: fun, cheeriness, sunset, exuberance, spontaneous, optimistic, speed		Silver Metallic: sleek, modern, classy <i>metallics can't be reproduced online</i>
	Amber/Gold: history, autumn, earthiness, richness, tradition, conservative		Gold Metallic: rich, expensive, valuable, prestigious <i>metallics can't be reproduced online</i>

Unleashing the Power of Storytelling

How to Create Displays that Captivate Hearts and Minds

By Nickeisha Lewis



Beyond the mere arrangement of products, storytelling is a powerful strategy that aims to captivate hearts and minds while developing deeper connections with customers. At its core, storytelling is a bridge that connects people through shared emotions and experiences. When you incorporate storytelling into your displays you become far more than just a retail store. Rather, your store evolves into a combination of visual cues, scents, textures and sounds which transport customers to another world – a world that aligns

with your brand and products. This type of merchandising is what really leaves a lasting impression and makes a retail store memorable.

INCORPORATING STORYTELLING INTO DISPLAYS

Take the time to understand your customers – their interests, preferences and aspirations. By truly knowing what your clients like and need, you can tailor a narrative that will deeply resonate with them. Start by defining the concept that aligns with your

business and your target audience and then develop a narrative that unfolds seamlessly throughout your displays. The narrative could be based on your brand's values, a product line, a seasonal theme or any other relevant concept.

Remember, storytelling is more than just visuals. Make sure you're engaging all the senses to really create an exceptional experience and help transport your customers into the world of the story you're trying to tell. This could include playing background music or ambient sounds, using scents that evoke specific emotions or

memories and offering product samples that enhance the sensory experience.

DEVELOPING NARRATIVES

But how do you develop a themed narrative that perfectly aligns with your brand and products? First define the key values of your brand and how you want to show them in your displays. Think about what sets your brand apart and how you can highlight those unique business qualities through stunning displays.

Let yourself get inspired by each unique season. What feelings and emotions related to the seasons


resonate with your customers? In the summer is it the joy of beach days, eating ice cream every day or going on vacation? Allow yourself to be creative.

DETAILS MATTER

Add small visual elements to your store and displays that enhance the storytelling experience. It could be seashells on your window displays and shelves or a huge beach inflatable in the corner of your store. These small touches will help transport your customers into your story.

Align your products with your themed story. Whether you're selling swimwear, summer clothing or outdoor accessories and equipment, adjust your displays to match the story you're trying to tell.

INVITE ENGAGEMENT

Be sure to create opportunities for your customers to engage with your brand and products. This could be through instore events, demonstrations, personalized recommendations, etc. Invite your customers to these engagement opportunities and encourage your customers to actively participate. 



Nickeisha Lewis is the founder of Nola Designs, a retail interior design firm focused on helping female-owned businesses take their retail stores to the next level. www.noladesigns.ca



Asheville Store Has Unique Mission

By Jessica Harlan

Ashley Deck quit her job in education and moved to Asheville, N.C., to open Madame Clutterbuckets Neurodiverse Universe, a gift shop that aims to provide a supportive employment environment to people with disabilities. It's a cause near and dear to her heart, as her son is autistic.

What makes your store special?

We have a mission to sell the art and maker wares of folks with developmental, mental, and intellectual disabilities. And for our staff, we try to target the folks that would not typically be hired quickly in certain settings. We try to bring disability into elevated adulthood snarkiness, demystifying it through comedy with the products that we carry.

How would you describe the atmosphere of your store?

Our shop has a lot of intentionality in how it's set up. When you come into the shop, there's a sign that says, "We're so glad you're here. This is an inclusive and safe place. If you feel the noise level is too loud, we provide noise canceling headphones. Anyone in an electric or manual chair, or with mobility issues, is able to navigate through the merchandise easily. There are chairs out for people who need to sit and rest. Concrete floors can be challenging for those with sensory issues, so we put down large carpets. All our display cases are lifted up and have fringe curtain backs instead of sliding doors so they're easy to access for our employees. I've seen people who've come in here in wheelchairs and they're in tears because they say, "I can navigate in here!"

To what do you attribute your success?

Our store is just two years old, but I think part of our success so far is because of the planning I put in. I did a lot of research, looking at profiles of different towns. The

tourism rates in Asheville blew all the other towns away.

The other part is our employees and our mission. They are incredible human beings, they're charming and funny and quirky, and people connect with them

right away. And if someone is coming to our shop because they know about our mission, it's because they would rather take their dollars and spend them where it means something more.

How do you promote your store?

A lot of it is word of mouth, and some amazing people who have gotten our story out. I recently hired a social media person who is awesome! We're on Facebook, Instagram, and Tik Tok right now. In the past year I was able to buy some advertisements in the local paper — I always try to connect with locals, because a lot of them don't come into town. In the past year we've started vendoring more at local events like Beer City Comicon and the Bigfoot Festival. We also just did our first float in the Asheville holiday parade. We're always trying to get out there and connect more with folks.

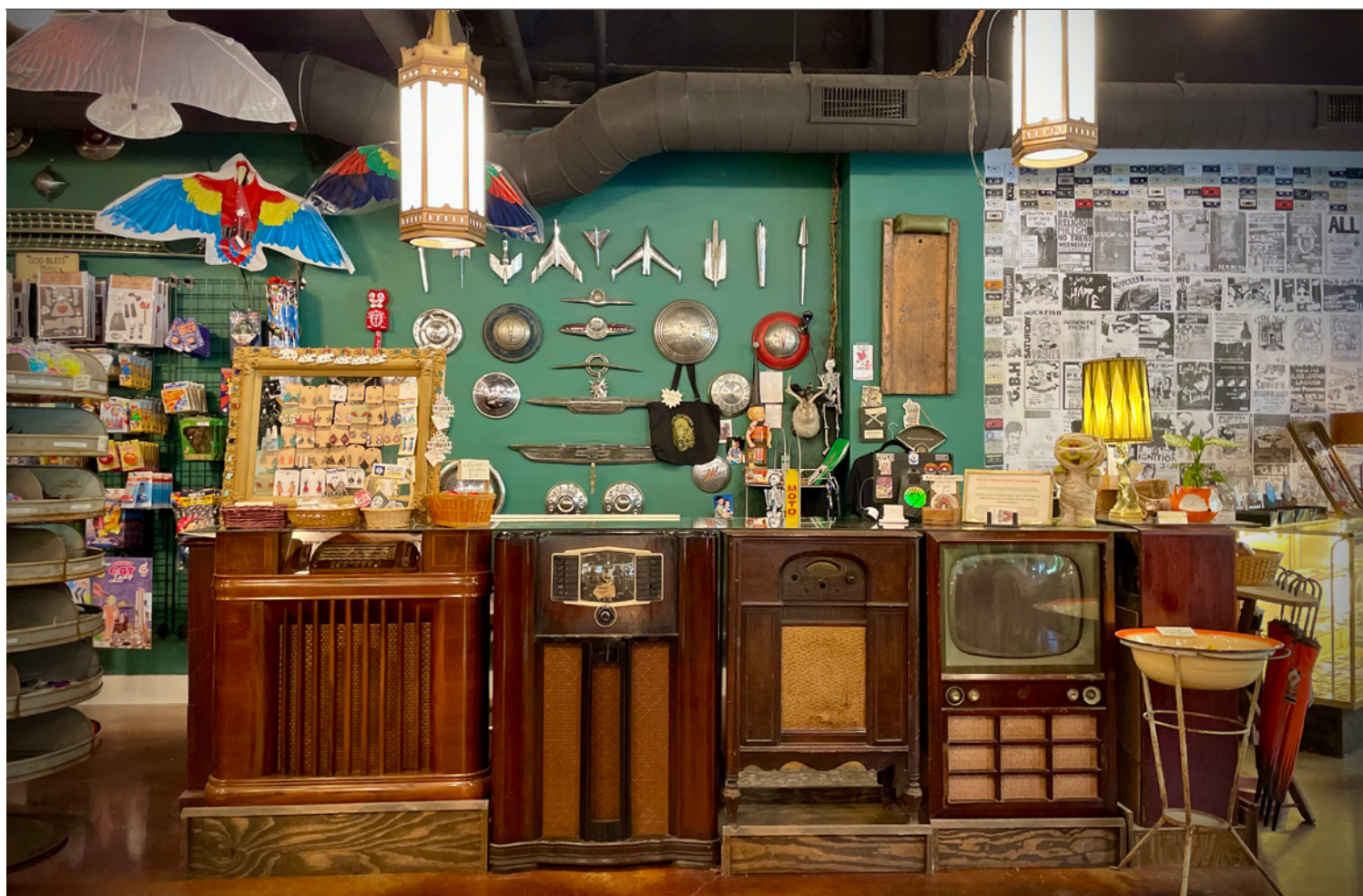
What has been your most successful recent event?

We do neurodivergent artist pop-ups in the store. For instance, we have one gentleman who is nonspeaking. He loves to shred paper — it's his thing! He will soak the paper and compress it into fire bricks. They're a natural wood substitute which you can take camping and they burn for a couple of hours to get a fire started. We have another gentleman named Joe who is coming in to run a coffee cart pop-up. It's called Cup of Joe, and if you buy a cup of coffee, he'll sing you a song. It's super fun and brings more whimsy and charm to the shop.

Do you have a favorite new product line?

I'm building a case of adult





PROFILE

STORE: *Madame Clutterbuckets
Neurodiverse Universe*

LOCATION: Asheville, N.C.

SQUARE FOOTAGE: 2300

EMPLOYEES: One full-time,
14 part-time

WEB: madamclutterbuckets.com

TOP LINES: *Fun Club, FootClothes,
Hands Craft, Spot Colors, Gift
Republic, Archie McPhee,
Flat Earth Designs*

fidgets that are higher dollar and more sophisticated for adults in the workplace who might need something to mess with that doesn't make noise. One, called Möbii, is made of interlocking steel rings and is very subtle.

What is your most successful retail strategy?

Any suggestion our employees bring, we try it. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. If it doesn't work, we'll fall back. My son kept wanting us to do a 50-cent sticker basket, and I didn't think it would work. But finally, we tried it and it's been a huge success. We've probably sold 30,000 stickers!

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

To trust my gut and trust my instincts. And to believe in what I'm doing — if you don't believe, no one else is going to. The other part of that is, don't keep from doing something because you're afraid it won't work. You can always fall back and adjust your plan. I got to the point where I realized that failure isn't trying something and having it not work out, failure is not trying, period. **22**

Hot Finds & New Releases



Grow Rock

The Grow Rock utilizes microcurrent technology based on a 200-year-old science to enhance the growth of houseplants without the need for chemicals or fertilizers. According to the company, over 33.1 million gift store customers are in-home plant owners. This was in part what motivated the design team to create their first collection for home gardeners. The Grow Rock comes in four designs, each featuring motivational sayings, and is packaged with a slot for easy hanging on a pegboard. Additionally, a rotating countertop display capable of holding 12 units is available. (www.growrock.com)

Reader's *Pick*

Hoo Hoops

Holly Hudson didn't invent the hoop earring but refined it for modern wearers. Early in her youth, while developing her personal style, she recognized the versatility of the hoop earring as an accessory suitable for both casual and formal occasions. Due to personal style preferences and skin allergies, she faced challenges finding affordable and lightweight hoop earrings. While studying for her business degree at the University of Mary Washington, she designed the perfect hoop earring through extensive research. The result was a pair of everyday hoop earrings that met her expectations and more, being lightweight, affordable and hypoallergenic. The Hoo Hoops collection offers two staple sizes and various colors, including popular options like tortoise shell, bright pinks, and blues. Feedback from a reporting store in Tennessee indicates that all styles of Hoo Hoops sell well. (www.hoohoops.com)



Supplier *Spotlight*

The Lifetrack Story

Lifetrack is a new brand that's all about making everyday a bit brighter and a whole lot more organized. It began in the spring of 2023 with a straightforward concept: a habit tracker on a glass plaque that allows users to write on it using a dry-erase marker. This innovative product enables individuals to monitor their healthy habits, to-do lists, and other tasks. The idea of combining a habit tracker with the convenience of a dry-erase surface proved to be both practical and appealing.

The company quickly expanded its product line, developing a wide range of 160 designs, including menu boards, chore charts, book trackers, exercise logs, gratitude boards, and even wine and bourbon tasting trackers. All these products are proudly manufactured in the USA, offering excellent profit margins. Being a small startup, each day brings new challenges and opportunities. The company is committed to actively listening to its customers' needs and continually adjusting and improving its product range based on feedback received. (www.lifetrackwholesale.com)



New Lifestyle Brand from Boston International

Boston International has announced a new lifestyle brand collaboration with Mangiacotti, a plant-based home fragrance and personal care company.

This collaboration will result in creative cross-merchandising solutions which in addition to paper products and home decor will now include personal care and home fragrances for both independent and retail chain stores.

"As a customer-first business, we constantly access the needs of our ever-evolving industry," says Pam Metz, president and owner of Boston International. "Creating merchandising solutions for our customers with coordinating paper products, home decor and home fragrance/personal care is where we can help our retailers succeed. Our new contemporary branding communicates our trend-forward thinking, as we too, evolve as a brand. Excitement for the future with respect for our past is our brand strategy."



Celebrating Barbara Knight

The Just Got 2 Have It! family lost their beloved founder Barbara Knight on November 16 when she passed away, surrounded by family, following a courageous battle with leukemia.

With partner Michelle Ruby Morgan, Barbara founded the sales agency in 2000 and went on to win several awards as Just Got 2 Have It! became a premier agency in the gift and decorative accessories space.

Her name and Just Got 2 Have It! are synonymous with excellence throughout our industry while Barbara's radiance, brilliance, compassion, vision and passion helped her create a leading agency and allowed her to help innumerable people launch and grow their businesses along the way, giving many the courage to pursue their dreams.

In January 2021, Barbara was diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukemia (AML). Despite the odds, she bravely faced the disease with unwavering grace and extraordinary strength. During her time in the hospital, she became keenly aware of how stressed her fellow AML patients were by the financial burdens of their ongoing care, so she created the Barbara Knight Foundation to promote awareness of AML and provide financial and emotional support to those who continue the fight. To donate to this cause please visit www.barbaraknight.org.

Every area of Just Got 2 Have It! is profoundly better because of Barbara Knight. She lived an amazing life, inspiring all who met her with her positivity, poise and faith. Barbara's philanthropy, entrepreneurship, leadership and visioning are outpaced only by the love and care she embodied for all.

For the one who taught us how much a great gift means, we're missing one of the greatest gifts today: Barbara Knight.



Funatic to Acquire About Face Designs

Giftware company About Face Designs has entered into an agreement to sell its intellectual property and other assets to Michael Barr, owner of Funatic. The transaction will bring together two leading brands in the gift industry which sell hilarious, trendy, pop-culture inspired gifts.

Under the terms of the agreement, the new About Face Designs will relaunch on January 1, 2024. The transaction includes the purchase of the brand and its intellectual property and does not include any inventory or staff. The About Face Designs brand will remain intact and will continue to be marketed independently with the goal of continued growth and expansion.

New owner Michael Barr said that he will continue to develop the About Face Designs brand, adding his own spin with new creative and new offerings.

"I've been a huge fan of About Face Designs for years, and their products align beautifully with our mission of bringing funny on-trend gifts to independent and specialty gift retailers nationwide," said Barr.

The new team plans to curate and streamline About Face Designs' existing categories, expand into new categories, and introduce new designs while maintaining the same humor and irreverence that customers have come to expect.

About Face Designs was founded in 1998 and has seen consistent growth in its 25 years of business. Owner and president Robert Ricciardi, who is retiring said, "We are thrilled that About Face Designs will live on under Mike's ownership and we're excited to watch the brand evolve under creative new leadership."

Introducing The Minnesota Gift Show

The Minnesota Gift Show is a new trade show set to debut in the wholesale gift, apparel, and home industry. It will take place from February 4 to 6, 2024, and will feature over 300 lines and agencies, including C&F, Stonewall Kitchen, Abdallah, Howard's, Terrapin Ridge, Brief Insanity, Boston International, DM Merchandising, Swig, Elsie & Zoey, Park Designs, Jen & Co, Warmies, World's Softest Socks, Young's, Soul Stacks, Karma and more.

As an all-encompassing trade show, the Minnesota Gift Show aims to be the go-to event for retailers, buyers, and suppliers in the gift, apparel and home sectors. Attendees will discover a wide range of products, including giftware, apparel, home decor, accessories, jewelry, gourmet food products and much more.

The show was founded by seven sales agencies and vendors who shared a common vision for a trade show in the Upper Midwest: DC Associates, DNA Sales, Howard's Inc, Markwest, Priorities2, The Street Brands and Twist Sales. With their collective experience and commitment, they're dedicated to creating a platform that celebrates the talents and products of the region, while fostering innovation and connections within the industry. (www.mngiftshow.com)

Show Travel & Buying Plans For 2024

Travel Up, Spending Intentions Down

By Erica Kirkland



This year, 59 percent of retailers plan to attend winter markets, up from 47 percent last year. Atlanta is the most popular show with 54 percent of attendees, followed by Dallas at 44 percent. Las Vegas will see just under 20 percent, while five percent will head to New York. Additionally, 17 percent will attend regional markets, including Denver. Vendors can expect 50 percent of store owners to maintain last year's purchasing budgets while 43 percent will be spending less with just seven percent buying more.

Many retailers are waiting to see how the fourth quarter goes until they finalize purchasing budgets for next year while others are sitting on excess inventory they don't anticipate selling through before next year.

"We're sitting on a surplus of inventory so future buys will depend on sell thru during Q4," writes a store owner from Florida while a retailer in Colorado says, "At this point we have extra inventory because of a slower summer and early fall so unless things really pick up big time we will buy with caution."

giftBEAT
Tracking the Pulse of the Gift Industry

ARTICLES OF NOTE:

- *Sales Declines Continue into October*
- *Holiday Sales Off to Solid Start*
- *The Power of Color*
- *Storytelling in Your Displays*
- *AI-Driven Social Media Changes*

CATEGORIES TRACKED

Baby Gifts
Comfort Gifts
Functional Gifts
Halloween-Related
Home Decor
Home Fragrance
Humor & Whimsy
Humorous Cards
Indoor Seasonal Decor
Journals & Notebooks
Made in the USA
Message Jewelry
Mugs & Tumblers
Outdoor Seasonal Decor
Socks

Top-selling vendors:
Email us for your top-selling vendor badge if you haven't received one already.

**KEEP
INFORMED!**

For up-to-the-minute analysis and insight into the gift market, follow our social feeds!

