

DECEMBER 2022/JANUARY 2023

giftBEAT™

Tracking the Pulse of the Gift Industry

marketBEAT

The Industry's Top-Selling Lines



Chart newcomer **Bella Tunno** wins rave reviews among reporting stores for its Wonder Bibs which some claim are the best silicone bibs on the market. \$15 retail. (bellatunno.com)

FUNCTIONAL GIFTS

Last ran in August 2022

- #1 **NORA FLEMING:** minis, bases
 - #2 **MUD PIE:** serving pieces, kitchenware
 - #3 **BRUMATE:** insulated drinkware
 - #4 **MICHEL DESIGN WORKS:** foaming soap, various
 - #5 **CORKCICLE:** insulated drinkware
 - #6 **SWIG:** insulated drinkware*
 - #7 **DM:** Krumbs, various
 - #8 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY:** coasters, mugs, various
 - #9 **KAY DEE DESIGNS:** tea towels, various
 - #10 **DEMDACO:** serving pieces, kitchenware
- HONORABLE MENTIONS: Vera Bradley, Yeti, Drinks on Me

*OF NOTE!

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

FAST FACT:

Less than one third of independent gift retailers reported year-over-year sales gains in October

MADE IN THE USA

Last ran in June 2022

- #1 **SILVER FOREST:** earrings
- #2 **THE NAKED BEE:** personal care
- #3 **STONEWALL KITCHEN:** gourmet food
- #4 **TYLER CANDLE:** candles
- #5 **THYMES:** candles*
- #6 **SWAN CREEK:** candles
- #7 **P. GRAHAM DUNN:** signs, various
- #8 **RONALDO:** bracelets
- #9 **TERVIS:** tumblers*
- #10 **JESS & JANE:** apparel*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Down to Earth, Leanin' Tree, Duke Cannon

*OF NOTE!

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

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New from functional gifts chartlister **Swig** is the Wild Child print, one of 30 fresh patterns the company is introducing across its insulated drinkware collection. They will also debut a new 40-ounce mega mug. (swigwholesale.com)

"We started displaying the Trash Talk spatulas from Primitives by Kathy in a bucket by the cash register and have reordered three times."

– Ohio retailer

BABY GIFTS

Last ran in July 2022

- #1 **JELLYCAT:** plush, books
- #2 **MUD PIE:** apparel, decor, gifts
- #3 **DEMDACO:** scarves, bears, plush
- #4 **INTELEX:** Warmies
- #5 **MARY MEYER:** Huggies, Taggies, Wubbanubs
- #6 **DOUGLAS:** plush
- #7 **STEPHAN BABY:** blankets, apparel
- #8 **BELLA TUNNO:** bibs, teething, toys*
- #9 **COPPER PEARL:** bandana bibs, various
- #10 **MELISSA & DOUG:** toys*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Angel Dear, Bunnies By The Bay

*OF NOTE!

BELLA TUNNO (bellatunno.com) and **MELISSA & DOUG** (melissaanddoug.com) did not rank when this chart last ran.

NOTE: Rankings are based on **October 2022** sales from Giftbeat's reporting stores.



While a standard vendor on the humorous greeting cards chart, **Avanti** makes a debut this issue on the humor and whimsy chart for its line of laugh-out-loud greeting cards. (avantipress.com)

HUMOR & WHIMSY Last ran in August 2022

- #1 **DRINKS ON ME:** coasters, napkins
- #2 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY:** signs, tea towels, various
- #3 **BLUE Q:** socks, mints, various
- #4 **AVANTI:** greeting cards*
- #5 **MUD PIE:** tabletop, signs
- #6 **SHANNON MARTIN:** greeting cards*
- #7 **WILD HARE:** tea towels*
- #8 **ABOUT FACE DESIGNS:** wine glasses
- #9 **LAZY ONE:** pjs, boxers
- #10 **ELLEMBEE:** tea towels

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Ganz

*OF NOTE!

AVANTI (avantipress.com) did not rank when this chart last ran, while **SHANNON MARTIN** (bielyshoaf.com) and **WILD HARE** (wildharedesigns.net) moved from honorable mention onto the chart.

OUTDOOR SEASONAL DECOR Last ran in Dec 2021

- #1 **EVERGREEN:** flags, mats, spinners
- #2 **STUDIO M:** art poles, flags
- #3 **MY WORD!:** Porch boards
- #4 **CARSON:** flags, birdfeeders, windchimes
- #5 **GERSON:** wreaths, yard stakes, porch decor
- #6 **WIND RIVER:** windchimes
- #7 **CUSTOM DECOR:** signs, steppingstones
- #8 **WOODSTOCK:** windchimes
- #9 **PREMIER KITES:** spinners, balloons*
- #10 **ROMAN:** doorbells, steppingstones, statues*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Mud Pie, Regal, Magnolia Designs

*OF NOTE!

ROMAN (roman.com) did not rank when this chart last ran, while **PREMIER KITES** (b2b.premierkites.com) moved from an honorable mention onto the chart.

INDOOR SEASONAL DECOR Last ran in Dec 2021

- #1 **MUD PIE:** tabletop, textiles, various
- #2 **NORA FLEMING:** minis, platters, bases
- #3 **GANZ:** signs, pumpkins, various
- #4 **SULLIVANS:** floral, various
- #5 **MICHEL DESIGN WORKS:** foaming soaps, various
- #6 **RAZ IMPORTS:** various
- #7 **GERSON:** decor, gnomes, lanterns, pumpkins
- #8 **ENESCO:** mugs, tea towels, various
- #9 **OPPORTUNITIES:** lanterns, gnomes, pumpkins
- #10 **SPECIAL T IMPORTS:** gnomes, ornaments*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Transpac

*OF NOTE!

SPECIAL T IMPORTS (specialtimports.com) did not rank when this chart last ran.

HALLOWEEN-RELATED Last ran in December 2021

- #1 **EVERGREEN:** flags, mats, decor, stakes
- #2 **MUD PIE:** decor, serving pieces, various
- #3 **OPPORTUNITIES:** Halloween trees, various
- #4 **GERSON:** gnomes, lanterns, decor
- #5 **DM:** hats, necklaces, various
- #6 **NORA FLEMING:** minis
- #7 **GANZ:** various
- #8 **TRANSPAC:** various
- #9 **ENESCO:** Jim Shore
- #10 **SIMPLY SOUTHERN:** t-shirts, tumblers

HONORABLE MENTIONS: C&F Home, K&K, Kelly Toy, Red Stone

*OF NOTE!

The same vendors are listed in the top 10 this month as when the chart last ran in December 2021.

SOCKS Last ran in March 2022

- #1 **WORLD'S SOFTEST SOCKS:** crew, various
- #2 **BLUE Q:** humor, various
- #3 **DM:** Two Left Feet, Lemon Lavender
- #4 **SNOOZIES:** slipper socks, various
- #5 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY:** humor, seasonal, pet
- #6 **HOT SOX:** novelty, various
- #7 **E&S:** pet-themed
- #8 **OPPORTUNITIES:** sherpa, various
- #9 **SOLMATE SOCKS:** crew, various
- #10 **FOOZYS:** various*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Socksmith, Barefoot Dreams, Me Moi, Simply Southern, Vera Bradley

*OF NOTE!

Since this chart last ran, **FOOZYS** (foozies.com) moved from an honorable mention onto the chart.

HOME DECOR Last ran in August 2022

- #1 **MUD PIE:** lanterns, wall art, various
- #2 **NORA FLEMING:** minis, bases
- #3 **CREATIVE CO-OP:** bowls, various
- #4 **P. GRAHAM DUNN:** wall art, porch decor
- #5 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY:** signs, various*
- #6 **SULLIVANS:** candle rings, various*
- #7 **DEMCO:** wall art, various
- #8 **MY WORD!:** porch boards, signs, various*
- #9 **GANZ:** wall art, spring decor, various
- #10 **GERSON:** various

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Park Designs, Rustic Marlin

*OF NOTE!

SULLIVANS (sullivangift.com) and **MY WORD!** (mywordsigns.com) did not rank when this chart last ran, while **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY** (primitivesbykathy.com) moved from an honorable mention onto the chart.

"The coasters from Drinks on Me continue to be a best seller but the napkins are making a run!"
- Maryland retailer



Sock chart-topper **World's Softest Socks** retains its leading poll position with retailers still raving about the sell-through of the company's super-comfy crew socks. (worldssoftest.com)

Crunching The Numbers

HOW DOES THE RANKING SYSTEM WORK?

A nationwide network of reporting stores completes a monthly questionnaire where they rank their three top-selling items in each of the product categories polled. Items ranked first are assigned five points; items ranked second are given three points; those ranked third are given one point. Point values are totaled and ranked in descending order resulting in a statistically valid list of top-selling items based on actual store sales.

Reporting stores include card, gift, boutique, specialty and home decor retailers across every state. None of the reporting stores are affiliated with any vendor. Unless otherwise specified, all data are based on sales (dollars) within the stated month(s).

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MUGS & TUMBLERS Last ran in April 2022

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

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Carson, Santa Barbara Designs

*OF NOTE!

CLAY IN MOTION (clayinmotion.com) did not rank when this chart last ran, while **YETI** (yeti.com) and **CAPE SHORE** (cape-shore.com) moved from honorable mentions onto the chart.



Featured in our last issue, **Cape Shore** is new to the mugs and tumblers charts, offering retailers dozens of styles, most of which can be name-dropped. (cape-shore.com)

COMFORT GIFTS Last ran in April 2022

- #1 **DEMDACO**: Giving collection, various
- #2 **INTELEX**: Warmies, eye masks, various
- #3 **DM**: Fit Kicks, Hello Mello, Lemon & Lavender, various
- #4 **WORLD'S SOFTEST SOCKS**: socks
- #5 **SNOOZIES**: slipper socks
- #6 **BAREFOOT DREAMS**: socks, blankets, travel wraps*
- #7 **CARSON**: windchimes, lanterns, various
- #8 **MICHEL DESIGN WORKS**: soap
- #9 **ROMAN**: bracelets, frames, various*
- #10 **GANZ**: pocket tokens, various*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Opportunities, Vera Bradley

*OF NOTE!

BAREFOOT DREAMS (barefootdreams.com) did not rank when this chart last ran, while **ROMAN** (roman.com) moved from honorable mention onto the chart.

MESSAGE JEWELRY Last ran in September 2022

- #1 **DEMDACO**: Dear You, Journey, prayer, various
- #2 **CENTER COURT**: Embracelets, various
- #3 **KATIE LOXTON**: birthday, best friend, mother, various
- #4 **SCOUT CURATED WEARS**: bracelets, necklaces, various
- #5 **PURA VIDA**: bracelets
- #6 **MULBERRY STUDIOS**: Lumiela, various
- #7 **BRIGHTON**: various
- #8 **ROMAN**: bracelets
- #9 **SPARTINA**: Sea la Vie*
- #10 **RONALDO**: bracelets

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Mantraband, Earth Angel, Little Words Project

*OF NOTE!

Since this chart ran last, **SPARTINA** (spartina449.com) has moved from an honorable mention to number nine.

"I haven't picked a password book from Peter Pauper Press yet that hasn't sold."
— Oregon retailer

HUMOROUS CARDS Last ran in August 2022

- #1 **LEANIN' TREE**: birthday, boxed, various
- #2 **AVANTI**: birthday, general
- #3 **SHANNON MARTIN**: birthday, everyday
- #4 **PICTURA**: Eric Decetis, various
- #5 **PAPYRUS**: various
- #6 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY**: Trash Talk, various
- #7 **OATMEAL STUDIOS**: various
- #8 **BLUE MOUNTAIN**: general
- #9 **RECYCLED PAPER**: various
- #10 **CALYPSO CARDS**: general

HONORABLE MENTION: Design Design

*OF NOTE!

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

JOURNALS & NOTEBOOKS Last ran in August 2022

- #1 **PETER PAUPER PRESS**: password books, various
- #2 **COMPENDIUM**: journals, various
- #3 **JOURNALS UNLIMITED**: journals, various
- #4 **C.R. GIBSON**: address, notebooks, memory books
- #5 **CHRONICLE BOOKS**: notebooks, journals
- #6 **CHRISTIAN ART GIFTS**: journals
- #7 **LANG**: calendars, journals, notebooks
- #8 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY**: notepads, various
- #9 **PUNCH STUDIO**: journals, notebooks*
- #10 **LEGACY**: notebooks, pads, various

HONORABLE MENTION: Natural Life

*OF NOTE!

PUNCH STUDIO (punchstudio.com) did not rank when this chart last ran.



Marrying hand-painted watercolors with vintage ephemera, journal and notebook newcomer **Punch Studio** has gained a loyal following for its line of unique stationery, gift, home and office decor. (punchstudio.com)

Holiday Season Not So Merry

A few months ago, retailers were positive that fourth-quarter sales would be healthy this holiday as they had in past years despite reports of a recession on the horizon. However, early holiday sales have been drastically disappointing, with store owners reporting that 50 percent of shoppers are spending less this year.

This departure from last year when 64 percent of shoppers were spending more year-over-year has caused store owners to revise holiday sales forecasts with 36 percent

now feeling pessimistic.

Despite purchasing enticing assortments which are on-trend and appealing, that is not enough this season to get consumers in most markets to part with their hard-earned money – in the early weeks of the buying season anyway. In fact, many store owners are already speculating that discounts will be required this year, for the first time in a few, to soften the cash flow burn.

All in all, it's not the season most of us hoped for, but as those of us who've been in this industry for any



ERICA KIRKLAND
PUBLISHER & EDITOR

amount of time can attest, there is only one thing certain about this business – uncertainty, and if you can't take the heat, you better get out of the kitchen. Happy holidays. Stay safe, and don't get burned.



PUBLISHER & EDITOR

Erica Kirkland
erica@giftbeat.com

OPERATIONS CO-ORDINATOR

Tina Nicholl
tina@giftbeat.com

ART DIRECTOR

Gerry Wiebe

SUBSCRIPTIONS

For details and to subscribe visit
www.giftbeat.com

ABOUT

Giftbeat is owned and operated by Instore Magazine Inc. The newsletter was founded in 1992 and has been dedicated to reporting unbiased, factual market trends and business advice from the best and brightest independent store owners for 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.

CONTACT US!

905-690-0492
customerservice@giftbeat.com
103 Niska Drive
Waterdown ON L8B 0M8
www.giftbeat.com

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chartMOVERS

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

BABY GIFTS

Jellycat (jellycat.com) replaces **Demdaco** (demdaco.com) as the top-selling vendor of baby gifts. New to the chart is **Bella Tunno** (bellatunno.com) known for their line of silicone bibs called Wonder Bibs. Reporting stores note the company's teethingers, cups, plates and rattles are also strong sellers. **Cooper Pearl** (copperpearl.com) moved from an honorable mention onto the chart in July and maintained its chart position, even inching up one spot as stores report robust sales of the company's bandana bibs, burp cloths and swaddles.

COMFORT GIFTS

Barefoot Dreams (barefootdreams.com), the company noted in the last issue as being one to watch, has made another chart appearance in this issue on the comfort gifts chart coming in at the sixth spot. Socks were most commonly mentioned by store owners as top-selling items while some retailers noted their travel wraps and shawls also sold strongly. **Snoozies** (snoozies.com) usually ranks as a top-selling vendor on this chart but what's interesting this month is that in addition to mentioning the company's slipper socks, retailers also noted that the new shea-infused socks are selling briskly.

HOME DECOR

Demdaco (demdaco.com) dropped from the number one spot in August 2022 to number seven, usurped by **Mud Pie** (mudpie.com) as the bestselling vendor of home decor based on October 2022 sales. Sales of porch boards continue to be strong landing **My Word!** (mywordsigns.com) a spot on the chart, however, reporting stores note sales of the company's newish skinny signs are also strong. **Rustic Marlin** (rusticmarlin.com) earned an honorable mention with store owners raving about their wooden blocks and twine signs.

HUMOR & WHIMSY

Drinks on Me (drinksonme.coasters.com) skyrocketed to the top of the humor and whimsy chart within a paltry few months of their coasters being on the market, barrelling over long-term vendors such as **Blue Q** (blueq.com) and **Primitives by Kathy** (primitivesbykathy.com). Also new to the chart is **Avanti** (avantipress.com) who did not rank in December 2021.



SALESBEAT

October Sales Lacklustre
Heading into Holiday Rush
By Erica Kirkland

Coming off September, when sales were up year-over-year for 55 percent of store owners, October's sales were disappointing. Less than one third (29 percent) of independent gift retailers reported year-over-year gains.

Concern among consumers that a recession is looming, along with the increased costs of goods and gas, has shoppers keeping a sharp eye on their purse strings.

Store owners noted that traffic was down in general which is remarkable in a month where many shops hold holiday open house events.

"Worry about a recession and rising prices is still affecting people's shopping habits," says a Wisconsin store owner. [Q2](#)

OCTOBER 2022 SALES (vs. OCTOBER 2021)

↑ 10%+	12%
↑ 5-9%	6%
↑ 1-4%	11%
↔	15%
↓ 1-4%	14%
↓ 5-9%	17%
↓ 10%+	25%

ROCKY START TO HOLIDAY SALES

A first glimpse into the holiday crystal ball is not proving to be comforting. Last year we reported that 64 percent of shoppers were spending more on holiday goods than they did the year before. This year, 50 percent are spending less.

"Our customers are being much more conservative with their spending right now," says a retailer from Montana. "I really hope that changes as we approach the holidays."

A store owner from South Dakota writes, "Customers are not buying Christmas decor yet which is very different from last year. That makes me nervous as this has always been a strong category."

"Customers are worried about rising prices and a recession," says a shop owner from Wisconsin. "Last year,

everyone was just happy to be out shopping."

An Ohio retailer is very concerned about the economy and what it holds for the fourth quarter. "I've seen consumer spending declining since August, along with their confidence and concern for rising gas and heating prices."

"We are having our toughest fall ever," says another store owner from Wisconsin. "Cash flow has never really caught back up after the summer lull. I think it is a combination of the economy, the election, and our location in a rural downtown that is not experiencing revitalization."

In North Carolina a retailer writes, "We have invested deeply in the holiday, but I'm not confident we will ultimately have the sales we need for it. I see large discounts on the horizon." [Q2](#)



HOLIDAY SPENDING

Consumer Spending
Volumes vs Last Year

SPENDING
MORE

12%

SPENDING
THE SAME

38%

SPENDING
LESS

50%

HOLIDAY FORECAST

How Store Owners
Think the Season
Will Shake Out



VERY
OPTIMISTIC
8%



SOMEWHAT
OPTIMISTIC
56%



SOMEWHAT
PESSIMISTIC
33%



VERY
PESSIMISTIC
3%

POST PANDEMIC RETAIL TRENDS

Trends Shaping the Retail World Today

By Erica Kirkland

From recessions and depressions to rebuilds and renaissances, there have been some interesting periods in the storied history of retail, yet today's confluence of market, political and economic turmoil is not something your ancestors likely faced.

How do retailers respond to this difficult set of challenges and circumstances? They must be artists and scientists – and financial gurus because it's going to require smarts and agility to compete and succeed.

However, independent gift retailers are well positioned to respond to this unique set of market challenges, but to do so, they must have a solid understanding of the trends impacting their businesses.

It's crucial to adapt to external changes. Oftentimes this relates to a new way of doing business or technology, but it can also be about your mindset. If you refuse to adapt, you will lose market share. But if you remain nimble, and adjust to what shoppers need and want, you will sustain your business through these disruptions. Knowing what your customers want requires collecting data and making informed decisions – not just gut reactions. To help you learn and adapt to what your shoppers need, we've broken the trends shaping the retail world post pandemic into six bite-sized sections.

THE ECONOMY AS AN OPPORTUNITY

Inflation will profoundly affect consumer behavior this year just as it did when Covid was at its height and consumers were afraid to shop. But the good news is, unlike the pandemic, retailers have experienced inflationary times before and know what to

expect. Before you panic - and make assumptions, see how your shoppers are adapting to these new challenges. Low-income people are particularly impacted by price hikes because they spend a disproportionate percentage on essentials like food and gas. But more affluent customers are enjoying many of the luxuries they did before. Although their real estate and equity assets have lost some value, their disposable income remains high. Independent store owners must target a more inflation-protected shopper with a higher and more disposable income as it's foolhardy to compete on price with the economies of scale afforded to mass merchants.

There are still plenty of people interested in buying if they receive the right emotional and style motivation. Case in point is Ralph Lauren, which is targeting sales growth over the next three years, aiming to pick up new customers while continuing to raise prices. CEO Patrice Louvet told BNN Bloomberg in a recent interview that the U.S. represents a growth opportunity that investors may be underestimating. The company is looking to cultivate younger customers, who Louvet credits with helping to push online sales to 26 percent of revenue. He expects that figure to reach about 33 percent in the next several years. In addition, the company is targeting average price increases in the mid-single-digit range. They have achieved this in the past, in part, by decreasing its reliance on discounts in department stores. In turn, those higher average prices have helped to boost sales and attract more affluent customers that are willing pay higher prices, elevating the brand.



INCREASE YOUR INTIMACY WITH CONSUMERS

What retailers need to worry about and to think hard about now is how to increase the intimacy they have with their customers. As customers become more discerning due to increased prices, customer service and the “customer experience” will become even more important. Ensure that you're valuing your customer's time and addressing their needs as all this factors into whether a customer trusts and values the interactions they have in your store. To remain relevant and drive customer loyalty, independents need to understand the growing range of consumer needs, eliminate pain points and quickly respond with the right offerings at the right price.

E-COMMERCE IS LOSING LUSTRE

Buoyed by bets on the public's reluctance to shop in physical stores during the pandemic, e-commerce stocks maintained high values over the past two years. But, as consumers gradually return to old habits, analysts are cautioning that the online traffic growth seen during the pandemic may not prove sustainable which is fantastic news for retailers who are still heavily invested in their brick-and-mortar locations.

In a dramatic turnaround from its constant expansion of the past decade, Amazon began laying off corporate employees in November, becoming the last of the tech giants to slash its workforce in an increasingly uncertain



economic climate. In recent weeks, Twitter, Salesforce, Facebook parent company Meta and other technology companies, including Juniper by IMC, have announced significant layoffs or hiring freezes, following months of warning signs, such as tech companies finding it harder to raise capital. Meta cut 11,000 jobs or 13 percent of its work force prompting some analysts to comment that these bloated tech companies were not built for a softer economy like the one we're seeing.

SUPPLY CHAIN ISSUES PERSIST

While we all hoped the worldwide shipping fiasco would have sorted itself out by now, shipping challenges will continue into the foreseeable future. Data from Project 44, which tracks global supply chains, showed that shipment delays between China and major U.S. and European ports have quadrupled since late March when China shutdown Shanghai – the world's busiest container port – due to a Covid outbreak. Additionally, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has added volatility to transportation costs.

The strategies companies have used to compensate for the shortage

of shipping containers and backlogs at ports have just created other issues, turning the whole situation into a game of whack-a-mole. When you take a step back and truly think about it, the systems out there weren't designed for disruption on the scale of Covid.

THE POWER OF ENTREPRENEURS

The continued meltdown of global supply chains has given retailers an opportunity to reassess their sourcing strategies. As an independent retailer you have a leg up on the majors as you don't need to order as much inventory, nor do you have to order as far in advance of a season. You can place smaller orders with multiple vendors.

If you haven't already, you can begin sourcing from cash and carry markets to eliminate shipping costs, source local handmade products and order smaller amounts from a variety of wholesalers. Also consider stocking products which are less expensive to ship – like home textiles – but which have a maximum impact and can garner a higher margin.

Though consumers may not be looking to replace their sofa or dining table anytime soon, a fresh set of placemats, a new table

runner, cute cushions and fresh wall art are easy and inexpensive ways you can help them decorate and celebrate themselves this year.

CONSUMER AND PRODUCT TRENDS

Home Cooking

A new passion for cooking at home developed during the pandemic when we couldn't leave our houses, and now because of high grocery prices, consumers are sticking to cooking at home, supporting local growers and farmer's markets, which is a bonus for stores located nearby or those who take out booths to advertise their stores to these customers who are obviously interested in purchasing local. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in 1994 there were 1755 urban markets where farmers sold directly to consumers. By 2019, there were close to 8771.

Global Culture - Locally

Shoppers support businesses close to home even as they see the whole world as their culture and culinary marketplace. According to Facebook research, 58 percent of consumers worldwide say they try to shop local even when it's more expensive, and 62 percent

consider themselves a global citizen, a broad term that refers to awareness, affinity and/or engagement with worldwide events, products and culture. Social media helps create borderless cultures as most users today follow accounts by topic without regard to country borders. Consumers are seeking items inspired by global cultures which are made or sourced locally, including food, furniture and clothing. They are also turning away from throw-away culture and into a mindset of 'reuse and repurpose' as they recognize the footprints they leave behind impact the entire world. Second-hand clothes shopping is the trend du jour among the most aware and hip consumers.

Gender Neutrality

According to the Gen Z Fashion Report by Unidays, which was a survey informed by a panel of 4000 Gen Z students across the U.K., U.S. and Australia, 87 percent of Gen Zs believe strongly that there should be better gender equality and inclusion within fashion yet 61 percent say the mainstream fashion industry overlooks minority groups, including non-binary and trans people. The survey clearly illustrates that we can all be doing more in our marketing and advertising campaigns to better portray such representation.

Despite the strong influence that price holds over this demographic, the findings of this study show that Gen Z are hyper-informed and switched on when it comes to identifying which brands they consider inclusive and representative. By expanding your focus on representation and communicating authentically with your audience, you will succeed in driving affinity with this highly influential generation. But be careful because if you get it wrong you'll be accused - rightly - of being tokenistic.

The New Look of Love

Love continues to grow and permeate, leading to new forms of

connections, much of it driven by the Millennial mindset shift which places higher expectations on love and connectedness. Did you know that #LoveConquersAll is the most used hashtag on Instagram?

There's a quiet sexual revolution being led by non-traditional leaders that will evolve over the next few years and lead some to rethink societal boundaries. People continue to demand that media and advertising be inclusive, representative and real. Brands in sectors such as beauty and fashion may lead the way by launching campaigns that celebrate non-traditional standards, but the opportunity to show your audience you really see them has relevance that transcends industry.

Historical Reckoning

All around the world, people and cultures have struggled to come to terms with unfair and cruel pasts in hopes of building a more inclusive tomorrow. Many people are seeking to have meaningful conversations about these painful issues, honing their racial literacy as they come to realise ally is a verb. This rising historical identity connection is especially pronounced among younger generations. Rise to your consumer's expectations by leading with meaningful actions, followed by purposeful statements.

Activism

People find joy in their identity – from bisexual pride to cultural heritage. Society is inclusive these days and store owners need to be too. Champion inclusivity in your store and within your brand values. Stay curious: Talk to people whose experiences can expand your own perspective. Partner with people in the communities you want to represent to ensure you're being authentic.

Change starts with us. How will you cultivate a radically inclusive culture at work today? According

to a 2019 study from Accenture, 52 percent of consumers expect the companies they shop with to take a stand on the social, cultural, environmental and political issues close to their hearts. Your store should communicate what it stands for and its purpose. You don't have to sell sustainable products or have a charitable component to create a purposeful identity.

Wellness

People are increasingly striving to nurture their whole selves with many reporting mental health surpassing physical health in its importance to total wellness. Most of this change came from the extreme stresses brought on by the pandemic as consumers reassessed and reprioritized what mattered most to them. As mental health is more openly discussed, conversations about self-reflection, self-love and mindfulness increase.

This desire for ultimate wellness has led to people embracing new omnidirectional fitness motivation strategies (e.g., working out in VR), non-traditional healthcare, an embrace of natural ingredients (and nature itself) as well as a desire to giveback through fundraising or being a volunteer. Alternative wellness approaches such as botanicals, acupuncture, meditation, energy healing, nature therapy and yoga are also skyrocketing.

Getting Back to Nature

Luggage brand Away is making its foray into the great outdoors with the release of a new polyester gear line, aiming to capitalize on the demand for outdoor travel. The launch signals a major new expansion for Away, known for their hard-shell cases, and is yet another sign that retailers are catering to new travel habits, which involve an increasing amount of car trips, close-to-home getaways and outdoor adventures.

It should be noted that retailers across the sector have said that consumer demand has waned recently without the spending boost from last year's government stimulus. Inflation has curbed consumer spending and squeezed profit margins that are already under pressure from continuing supply chain disruptions and rising shipping costs.

As the pandemic becomes a less important motivator of consumer behavior, anything can happen in the nature industries of camping, hiking, birding, etc., but with so many new consumers having tried and enjoyed these activities and with the nature of the activities being in line with consumer interests these days, it seems likely there is still growth potential here, albeit slower than in previous years.

Local Love

During the pandemic, as more people worked at home their shopping habits changed dramatically as they became less willing to drive across town to shop at a crowded mall and instead rediscovered local neighborhood merchants. According to a recent survey from Constant Contact, 94 percent of consumers feel small businesses impact their lives, and 70 percent plan to support them regardless of what happens with inflation.

The reality is small businesses feed our communities, take care of our children, renovate our homes, and keep us healthy. Small businesses power our lives, make us feel good and give our communities their unique personalities. If small businesses did not exist, our lives would be noticeably harder and much less interesting. When we celebrate our contributions to our communities as small businesses, we underscore our importance. We also need to remember that our assets as business owners are not inventory but our deeply loyal customers.



THE OPPORTUNITY IS YOURS FOR THE TAKING

Do you try to approach each day with a smile, grace and kindness? If so, chances are you're soaring above your fellow store owners who are quick to throw up their hands in defeat, lamenting there's nothing they could possibly do to improve their store sales and traffic. But there is always something store owners can do – if they want.

Inflation is an outside force we can't control. But what we can control is the way in which we choose to help customers celebrate the birthdays, births, graduations, holidays and anniversaries that happen every year regardless of the economy.

Our industry offers the world the products they need to show loved ones they are cared for and products which bring joy and beauty to a world that needs so much more joy and beauty. Celebrate your role in bringing that joy to the world. ☺

KANSAS BOUTIQUE SOARS TO NEW HEIGHTS

By Jessica Harlan

Much has changed since we featured Main Street Co. & Kitchen Corner in *Giftbeat* more than six years ago. For one, owner and founder Vicki Stobbe has retired and her daughter Tina, who was just four years old when Vicki first opened the store, bought the store from her with husband Matt in 2020, months before Covid shut down businesses globally. Since taking over the helm, Tina has made some big changes in order to keep the store vital to its small community.

What makes your store unique?

People joke that we're kind of a department store because we have so many different types of products. We have guy stuff, kid stuff, kitchen and home products and clothing for women – we really do have something for everyone.

How would you describe the atmosphere of your store?

We're in an old, historic building on our town's main street with the original hardwood floors and tin ceilings. We like to keep the atmosphere fun, upbeat and positive. Shoppers can always come in and grab a cup of coffee and

cider or iced tea in the heat of the summer and just hang out.

To what do you attribute your success?

We believe in building relationships with our customers, not just trying to sell stuff. As a small family business, we treat everyone like they're our family, and I think that makes a huge difference. Customers come back because we greet them by name when they walk in, and if they're not local, we try to make them feel like they're still a part of our family.

How do you promote your store?

We do a little advertising in our local paper and send out postcards a few times a year. We have an app for our live videos, and we are active on social media. We have a Facebook group of several thousand that I started during 2020. We get a lot more interaction in that group than we do on our business Facebook page.

What has been your most successful recent event?

Our girls' night out events, which we try to do once a quarter, are extremely successful. We'll




personally invite our top customers via a phone call (not by text or email). It's usually a Thursday or a Friday evening from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. after the store is closed. We put out brand new stuff, run specials, usually offer a gift and serve food and drinks. It's always a fun time.

Do you have a favorite new product line?

We just started a man cave department and the Lazy One boxers we recently brought in have done well. They have hilarious images and text on them.

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

You've got to be flexible and just pivot and turn on a dime without over-analyzing the situation. Before I took over the store, we didn't sell online. When Covid struck and we had to shut down, I built an online store in two and a half days, and online sales became close to 20 percent of our sales in 2020 and 2021. 

PROFILE

STORE: Main Street Co. & Kitchen Corner

LOCATION: Newton, Kan.

SQUARE FOOTAGE: 8000

EMPLOYEES:

Five full-time, seven part-time

WEB: shopmainstco.com

TOP LINES: True Blue Clothing, Zenana, Corkys Footwear, Norpro, OXO, Euroscrubby



Tree Decorating 101

Seven steps to creating a professionally decorated tree

BY ANDREA HEIN

Before you brush past this article thinking it can't help you know that your trees are already installed, take the time to honestly ask yourself if your trees are hurting or helping your holiday sales this year?

If you're using trees to showcase and sell ornaments or simply to add a seasonal ambiance to your space, it's imperative that they stand out for their professional appearance. When shoppers come to your store, they expect to see the prettiest trees in the city. So, if your trees need a little professional trimming, read on!

STEP 1: SHAPING

As soon as you remove the tree from storage, before you add ornaments, make sure you shape the branches. Shaping is the most important step – it can't be skipped. If you have already placed ornaments on your tree and you have the energy, remove the decorations and starting from the bottom, work your way to the top, unfolding each stem on each branch for maximum impact. Note: Since most trees come pre-lit, we've skipped past the importance of lighting.

STEP 2: RIBBON

Cascading ribbon is the easiest way to use ribbon. Start with a simple knot at the top of the tree (roughly eight to 12 inches from the top) with a 10 to 12-inch loop. Tuck the ribbon at the back of a branch and wrap it around it. Dovetail the ends of the ribbon or

cut them on the diagonal to keep everything looking neat. Typically, three to four cascading rows will cover most trees. (If you're more of a visual learner, head over to YouTube and search "Andrea Hein Occasions ribbon." We promise you'll be a ribbon expert by the end of that video.)

STEP 3: GARLAND

Start at the bottom – about six to 12 inches from the bottom row of branches – and work up to the top with about two feet of spacing in between strands.

STEP 4: BALLS

Use three different sizes of ornaments: small, medium and large and place them in a zig-zag pattern beginning with the largest size. For the largest ball, I use (200 to 300 mm) pumpkin balls and find about seven to nine is sufficient per seven-foot tree. These massive balls create depth and provide a pop of subtle color. Push them into the tree, rather than dangling them from the tips of branches, and never place them near the bottom, but rather slightly above the mid-way point.

Next, place your medium balls (100 to 150 mm) into the tree – again do not dangle from the tips of branches. The smallest balls (60 to 80 mm) can be placed from the bottom all the way to the last foot of the tree. Mix up the placement – push some in and dangle others from branches. Just be sure to leave two-thirds of the branches clear for your detailed ornaments.



Shaping the Tree



Cascading Ribbon





Detailed Ornaments



Picks and Sprays

STEP 5: DETAILED ORNAMENTS

These are your wow ornaments – the ones people will stop to take a closer look at. Put these ornaments in the best possible spots on the tree. Let them dangle, spin and sparkle while your colorful ball ornaments act as the supporting players to the star attractions.

STEP 6: PICKS AND SPRAYS

At this point, you're probably thinking your tree is full, but there's always room for picks and sprays. They're easy to use, make a dramatic impact, add an element of interest and create depth. Use anywhere from 20 to 40 with three to five different styles and colors. Place them all over the tree, filling in any remaining space. Purchase seven to 10 more to use as a tree topper if you like.

STEP 7: THE TREE TOPPER

Bows, picks, sprays, clocks, top hats and deer busts – literally anything can be a tree topper if it can be wired to the tree. If you follow me on Instagram or Facebook, you know I don't do stars or angels on top of my trees. Literally never. 🙅

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



Tree Toppers

Adding Spice to Your Space

How Build a Swing for Your Store

By Andrea Hein

While you may not have an Instagram account, your customers do. They also have Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat and at the very least, a working camera on their phone. We live in a digital world where we communicate through images and videos. Have you ever gone shopping, even to the grocery store, found something that your friend or family member was looking for and sent them a quick photo to confirm that's what they wanted? This is how we shop now which is why it's important to have a photo-worthy space in your store that makes people want to share their experience with others.





How To Create A Swing

Backdrop

For this installation our goal was to design a space that looked like an old, cobblestoned street in Mexico, so we used one-foot by eight-foot pine panels to create the look of a wooden fence and painted them bright pink, but you could paint them any color you wanted.

Flooring

Recreating the look of a cobblestone street required we first build a base as the room we installed the swing in had carpeting. For the base, we used two sheets of Masonite from Home Depot and applied a few rolls of stone-printed adhesive vinyl purchased through Amazon.

The Swing

The structure of the swing was the easiest part and since we had the luxury of space, we opted to make the swing eight-feet tall using pressure-treated lumber for the frame, enabling it to be used repeatedly. To make the swing, we used a hammock rope kit weighted for up to 1200 pounds and a piece of sanded-down pine for the seat.

Alternate Uses

Keeping the style of the frame simple allows us to embellish the swing for other events in different themes. For this installation, the frame was dressed up with giant foam flowers but shortly after this event we received a request for the swing for an event called Sink the Stigma. The event was hosted at a mini golf course so we swapped out the painted pine for a sheet of AstroTurf. We kept the wooden frame undecorated because the look worked with the picnic tables and outdoor vibe of the event. A white sign with the event logo and name was eye catching and stood out against the guest's pictures.

The decor possibilities with a piece like this are endless, and it doesn't always have to be used as a photo op area. You could also use it to display products and add interest to a window display. No matter what you use it for, creating something like this in your store provides your customers with a shareable photo op and helps to create interest every time you switch it up. 📸

Hot Finds & New Releases

Socially Responsible Stationery

Asha Banks launched **CheerNotes**, a company dedicated to increasing representation in stationery, because she knew too many people felt unseen when looking for cards, just as she did. According to McKinsey, two out of every three Americans give top priority to their social values when making purchases. In addition, 45 percent think retailers should actively support Black-owned businesses.

"In this age of fleeting digital messages, real cards are being treated with renewed respect," said Banks whose company offers 300 eco-friendly cards from 35 artists and brands. "We continue to utilize recycled materials in our products despite limited supply and escalating prices," she says. "All of our supplies come from local U.S. suppliers and many of our printing partners use two or more environmentally friendly manufacturing techniques including wind energy and chlorine-free procedures."

Rather than sales, CheerNotes measures success by the connections their cards help make, and so far this year they have facilitated about 10,000 connections. Cards retail from \$5. (www.cheernotes.com)



Pucker Up

Poppy & Pout lip balms and scrubs are made in small batches and packaged by hand with ingredients straight from nature. The company's packaging is not only very eye-catching, but it's also eco-friendly.

Poppy & Pout has been making lip balms by hand in Idaho since 2014 using ethically sourced beeswax and sunflower oil from the United States along with organic coconut oil from the Philippines, essential oils and vitamin E. \$9.95 retail. (wholesale.poppyandpout.com)

Supplier Spotlight

Drinks On Me

After months of trying, *Giftbeat* finally tracked down the illusive duo beyond the runaway success Drinks on Me. Since introducing their laugh-out-loud coasters to the market at NY Now in February of 2020, the brand almost instantly appeared on *Giftbeat's* charts. Impressively, in this issue, Drinks On Me is the top-selling supplier in the humor and whimsy category, an impressive showing for a relative start up.

The power couple behind Drinks on Me are no strangers to entrepreneurial adventures, however. The company is the latest business venture from the creative minds of Jennifer Neuguth and David Riordan. The self-proclaimed serial entrepreneurs have created four businesses and four brands over their career. Business partners before they were married in 1991, the couple drew on all past experiences when they created Drinks On Me.

"It has been a career of success and failures," Riordan told *Giftbeat*. "Thankfully, we have had more success. That said, our coaster 'Apparently rock bottom has a basement' certainly represents a time in our life!"

The collection of 500 coasters and cocktail napkins feature highly relatable quotes and takes on life through the eyes of a 50-something couple that has been through it all and always seems to find the lighter side of life.

Based in New England, the coasters (from \$5.50 retail) are made in the USA while the new cocktail napkins (from \$6.95 retail) are produced in Germany. (drinksonmecoasters.com)



Readers' *Picks*

Portable Party

Handmade with nontoxic materials in Maryland by two dads whose jobs were impacted by the pandemic, **City Bonfires** are portable fire pits that can easily be taken on the road – tailgating, hiking and camping – without the hassle and mess of wood, embers and soot. The fire pits are great sources of heat and are safe to roast marshmallows when paired with food-grade soy wax. Each fire pit measures four inches by two inches and has a three to five-hour burn time with a \$30 retail price tag.

A popular seller among reporting stores is the company's holiday gift box set which includes two City Bonfires, a smores kit, cup of hot chocolate and two Citronella candles for \$89.99 retail. (citybonfires.com)



The Closure You've Been Waiting For

KardiKlips are stylish clips that lend cardigans, kimonos, dresses, tunics and vests the shape and stability your customers have always wanted. Small but mighty, the metal and leather dress clips offer a fierce hold that won't be shaken. Available in many different colors and styles, the proprietary grip clips sell in the range of \$18.95 to \$24.95 retail. Made in the USA by a small, woman-owned company with a passion to help other small businesses, you won't find this line on Amazon or in the aisles of Target. (kardiklips.com)



Reusable Dishcloths

The retailer from Wisconsin who recommended this line of reusable dishcloths from **Cose Nuove** says she's had the best luck displaying them vertically. "They pretty much sell themselves," she says, "but I've found hanging them leads to more sales and interest than placing them in a basket." She also says that creating signage describing the benefits and use of the cloths has been well worth the time invested.

Cose Nuove offers the absorbent cloths, commonly referred to as Swedish dishcloths, in over 280 designs backed by a promise that they absorb more than 15 times their weight in water. Made of 70 percent cellulose and 30 percent cotton, the cloths can be tossed in the washing machine when dirty, and since they're all-natural, they can even be composted. \$5.99 to \$7.50 retail. (cosenuove.com)



Sasquatch Farts

A Kentucky store owner who turned us onto this novelty candle from **Candle Cottage** shares that she has sold just as many Sasquatch Fart candles in store as she has online. "The price point along with the novelty of the item are selling points," she says. Plus, "It's the perfect man's gift in a woman's boutique!"

Hand poured in Sieverville, Tenn., the candles are made from gel and not wax. They are highly scented and long-burning made with lead-free wax. (candlecottage.com)



Serve Up Style

A Tennessee retailer decided to take a chance on these epoxy and wooden cheese boards from **Lynn & Liana**, and much to her surprise the boards have outsold her plain boards to the point that she no longer orders them.

Lynn & Liana's cheese boards blend Acacia hardwood and eco-friendly epoxy to create one-of-a-kind pieces of serveware available in a variety of sizes.

"The medium size sells best for us although we have success with the extra-large boards during the holidays," says the store owner from Tennessee. "We merchandise the boards with the company's boxed cheese spreader set, along with books about creating boards such as *Spectacular Spreads*."

The store owner admits that "They're just so pretty that they can be paired with something as simple as a candle to make a great gift. This summer we paired them with a candle and called the set 'A Toast to the Host' - customers loved them." (lynnliana.com)

A Cut Above

Established with the sole purpose of providing high-quality wood products made from Texas wood, **Kalisee** is a family-owned business whose lineup consists of charcuterie and cutting boards, wood trays, and a wide variety of accessories including hand-forged cheese knives, forks and spreaders. The company's best-selling Amarillo board is made with black Walnut wood with rustic iron handles (pictured here). The live edges of this board are designed to reflect the natural beauty of the wood. Measuring 18 inches by 11 inches by two inches the board retails for \$160. (kalisee.com)



This Issue:

Holiday Forecast

Retail Trends Post Pandemic

Show & Sourcing Plans

Top 10 Charts:

Baby Gifts

Comfort Gifts

Functional Gifts

Halloween-Related

Home Decor

Humor & Whimsy

Humorous Cards

Indoor Seasonal Decor

Journals & Notebooks

Made in the USA

Message Jewelry

Mugs & Tumblers

Outdoor Seasonal Decor

Socks

retailBEAT

**Advice from Experts
& Fellow Retailers**

SHOW & SOURCING PLANS

Some Retailers Slowly Returning to Shows

By Erica Kirkland

Close to half (47 percent) of gift store owners plan to attend a trade show this winter while one third say they will save their money and stay home while the rest remain undecided.

The numbers closely mirror the percentage of buyers who attended or planned to attend summer markets (49 percent).

While some buyers can't wait to hit the road and have plans to attend Dallas, Atlanta and Vegas, the third of buyers sitting out this show cycle have various reasons. Among those who are staying put are a Virginia retailer who says, "Hotels are so expensive, and I feel like my sales reps do an amazing

job of letting me know what's new."

"Much to my surprise, I have trended more and more toward Faire," says a store owner from North Carolina. "What I'm finding on Faire is more unique items with smaller minimums from companies that share the values we've adopted as a store."

"Since COVID, we've become quite comfortable sourcing online," says a Michigan store owner. "A lot of our vendors are on several buying platforms, such as Faire and L.A. Showroom, in addition to their own websites. We alternate between where to buy depending on pricing and available inventory." 

