

gift BEAT™

Tracking the Pulse of the Gift Industry

marketBEAT

The Industry's Top-Selling Lines



The Arianna zip poncho from Howard's Jewelry is a buyer favorite for fall. Available in four colors. \$45 retail. (howardsinc.com)

MUGS & TUMBLERS

Last ran in April 2019

- #1 **CORKCICLE:** tumblers, canteens, various
 - #2 **SWIG:** tumblers, mugs, various
 - #3 **TERVIS:** tumblers, various
 - #4 **ENESCO:** Our Name is Mud mugs, various
 - #5 **DEMDACO:** Warm Hearts, various
 - #6 **EVERGREEN:** travel mugs, various
 - #7 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY:** mugs, various*
 - #8 **MARY SQUARE:** tumblers, various
 - #9 **PAPERPRODUCTS DESIGN:** mugs, various*
 - #10 **UNEMPLOYED PHILOSOPHERS:** mugs*
- HONORABLE MENTIONS:** Yeti, Mud Pie and Swell

*** OF NOTE!**

PRIMITIVES BY KATHY (wholesale.primitivesbykathy.com), **PAPERPRODUCTS DESIGN** (paperproductsdesign.com) and **UNEMPLOYED PHILOSOPHER'S GUILD** (philosophersguild.com) were not on the chart when it last ran.



The 25-ounce Monarch stainless steel tumbler from Primitives by Kathy features a bamboo lid. \$12 cost. (wholesale.primitivesbykathy.com)

APPAREL

Last ran in May 2019

- #1 **DM:** Hello Mello, Two Left Feet, various
- #2 **SIMPLY NOELLE:** wraps, tops, various
- #3 **SIMPLY SOUTHERN:** t-shirts, various
- #4 **UMGEE:** tops, various
- #5 **HOWARD'S JEWELRY:** tops, dresses, various*
- #6 **OPPORTUNITIES:** vests, scarves, various*
- #7 **HONEYME:** tops, dresses, various*
- #8 **TGBBRANDS:** Coco & Carmen
- #9 **MUD PIE:** tops, dresses, various*
- #10 **JESS & JANE:** tops*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Lake Girl, Mountain Mamas, Gretchen Scott and Life is Good

*** OF NOTE!**

MUD PIE (mud-pie.com) and **HONEYME** (honeymeusa.com) were not on the chart when it last ran, while **HOWARD'S JEWELRY** (wholesale.howardsinc.com), **OPPORTUNITIES** (opportunitiesia.com) and **JESS & JANE** (jessjane.com) all moved from honorable mentions.

HUMOR & WHIMSY

Last ran March 2019

- #1 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY:** signs, tea towels, socks
- #2 **BLUE Q:** socks, oven mitts, various
- #3 **WILD HARE:** tea towels
- #4 **GANZ:** signs, various*
- #5 **UNEMPLOYED PHILOSOPHERS:** mugs, mints*
- #6 **SHANNON MARTIN:** cards, napkins, magnets
- #7 **ABOUT FACE DESIGNS:** signs, mugs, various
- #8 **LEANIN' TREE:** cards, magnets
- #9 **MUD PIE:** tea towels, various*
- #10 **SNARK CITY:** wineglasses, mugs, various*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Mary Square, Schylling, Avanti and Recycled Paper Greetings

*** OF NOTE!**

UNEMPLOYED PHILOSOPHERS GUILD (philosophersguild.com), **GANZ** (ganz.com), **MUD PIE** (mud-pie.com) and **SNARK CITY** (snarkcity.com) were not on the chart when it last ran.

FAST FACT:
60%
of retailers
are cautiously
optimistic about
the upcoming fall
selling season



Snark City's top-selling skus are coffee mugs, but the new pet products released at the summer markets were well received by buyers. (snarkcity.com)

NOTE: Rankings are based on June 2019 sales from Giftbeat's reporting stores.



Chart newcomer Ivory Ella is taking the market by storm especially among tweens and millennials. (ivoryella.com)

TEEN & TWEEN Last ran in March 2019

- #1 **PURA VIDA:** bracelets, rings, various
- #2 **SIMPLY SOUTHERN:** t-shirts, various
- #3 **TY:** plush, slide sandals
- #4 **NATURAL LIFE:** various
- #5 **DM:** jewelry, fashion, various
- #6 **IVORY ELLA:** t-shirts, various*
- #7 **4OCEAN:** bracelets, various*
- #8 **GANZ:** charms, dreamcatchers, various
- #9 **VERA BRADLEY:** ID holders, backpacks*
- #10 **KENDRA SCOTT:** various*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Chala, Alex and Ani, and Fashion Angels

*** OF NOTE!**

IVORY ELLA (ivoryella.com), **VERA BRADLEY** (verabradley.com) and **KENDRA SCOTT** (kendrascott.com) were not on the chart when it last ran, while **4OCEAN** (4ocean.com) moved from honorable mention to number seven.

FUNCTIONAL GIFTS Last ran November 2018

- #1 **NORA FLEMING:** serving pieces, minis
- #2 **MUD PIE:** kitchenware, tabletop
- #3 **CORKCICLE:** tumblers, canteens, various
- #4 **DEMDACO:** Kitchen Boas, tabletop, various*
- #5 **DM:** Hello Mello, Fitkicks, various novelties
- #6 **VERA BRADLEY:** bags, various
- #7 **TADGREEN:** E-cloth
- #8 **SWIG:** tumblers, mugs, various*
- #9 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY:** tea towels, mugs*
- #10 **CARSON:** garden flags, stakes, various*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Tervis, P. Graham Dunn, C&F and Kikkerland

*** OF NOTE!**

SWIG (swiglif.com), **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY** (wholesale.primitivesbykathy.com) and **CARSON** (carsonhomeaccents.com) were not on the chart when it last ran, while **DEMDACO** (demdaco.com) moved from honorable mention to number four.

PLUSH Last ran in April 2019

- #1 **TY:** Flippables, Beanie Boos, Various
- #2 **JELLYCAT:** various
- #3 **DEMDACO:** Giving Bear, Nat & Jules, various*
- #4 **MARY MEYER:** blankets, various*
- #5 **INTELEX:** Warmies
- #6 **DOUGLAS:** Sassy Saks, various
- #7 **GANZ:** various
- #8 **KIDS PREFERRED:** Bunnies By The Bay
- #9 **CUDDLE BARN:** animated, musical, various
- #10 **GUND:** Flappy the Elephant, various*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Aurora, Bearington, Petting Zoo and Melissa & Doug

*** OF NOTE!**

Since the chart last ran, **DEMDACO** (demdaco.com) jumped from number six to number three and **MARY MEYER** (marymeyer.com) moved from number seven to number four, while **GUND** (gund.com) moved from honorable mention to number 10.

HUMOROUS GREETING CARDS Last ran March 2018

- #1 **LEANIN' TREE:** Western, birthday, various
- #2 **AVANTI:** birthday, animals, various
- #3 **PICTURA:** Dolly Mama, Eric Decedes, various
- #4 **SHANNON MARTIN:** various
- #5 **RECYCLED PAPER:** birthday, various
- #6 **OATMEAL STUDIOS:** birthday, various
- #7 **DESIGN DESIGN:** various*
- #8 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY:** Trashtalk, various*
- #9 **RSVP:** birthday, various*
- #10 **BLUE MOUNTAIN:** Suzy Toronto, various

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Nobleworks, Tiramisu, Papyrus and Shade Tree

*** OF NOTE!**

DESIGN DESIGN (designdesign.us), **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY** (wholesale.primitivesbykathy.com) and **RSVP** (creativervp.com) were not on the chart when it last ran.

HOME DECOR Last ran in May 2019

- #1 **MUD PIE:** frames, pillows, various
- #2 **P. GRAHAM DUNN:** signs, various
- #3 **DEMDACO:** Sharon Nowlan, various
- #4 **CREATIVE CO-OP:** prints, various
- #5 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY:** signs, various
- #6 **NORA FLEMING:** platters, various*
- #7 **GANZ:** wall art, various
- #8 **GIFTCRAFT:** wall decor, various*
- #9 **C&F:** linens, rugs, runners*
- #10 **GERSON:** various

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Sincere Surroundings, Park Designs, Evergreen and Raz Imports

*** OF NOTE!**

GIFTCRAFT (giftcraft.com) and **C&F** (cnfei.com) were not on the chart when it last ran, while **NORA FLEMING** (norafleming.com) moved from honorable mention to number six.

JOURNALS & NOTEBOOKS Last ran in March 2019

- #1 **PETER PAUPER PRESS:** journals, various
- #2 **COMPENDIUM:** Thoughtfuls, Write Now, various
- #3 **C.R. GIBSON:** various
- #4 **JOURNALS UNLIMITED:** guided journals, various
- #5 **LANG:** sketchbooks, journals, various
- #6 **MARY SQUARE:** agendas, planners, various*
- #7 **BROWNLOW:** inspirational, various*
- #8 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY:** various*
- #9 **BARBOUR PUBLISHING:** prayer journals, various
- #10 **LIFEGUARD PRESS:** Lily Pulitzer, Kate Spade, various*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Legacy, Vera Bradley and Studio Oh

*** OF NOTE!**

MARY SQUARE (marysquare.com), **BROWNLOW** (brownlowgift.com) and **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY** (wholesale.primitivesbykathy.com) were not on the chart when it last ran, while **LIFEGUARD PRESS** (lifeguardpress.com) moved from honorable mention to number 10.



Ty has expanded its flippable sequin assortment with a number of magical creatures including Karma the chameleon shown here. (ty.com)

TRENDING NOW!
Apparel: Almost half (49%) of retailers report increased sales in apparel



Chart newcomer Giftcraft has introduced a number of new wall decor pieces to its home decor assortment. (giftcraft.com)

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ABOUT

Giftbeat is owned and operated by Instore Magazine Inc. The newsletter was founded in 1992 and has been dedicated to reporting unbiased, factual market trends and business advice from the best and brightest independent store owners for more than 26 years. Giftbeat tracks the top 10 vendors in 50+ product categories, garnering this vital information from a stable of 300 reporting stores across the country. Giftbeat does not accept any advertising. In addition, Giftbeat makes no warranty or guarantee, express or implied, regarding potential sales of any products referred to in the publication.

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METHODOLOGY

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

FROM THE EDITOR

Turning Negatives into Positives

In the past year – my first full year as the owner of *Giftbeat* – I’ve had the pleasure of getting to know hundreds of fantastic store owners and vendors who are as passionate and enthusiastic about their chosen career paths as I am about continuing to produce this industry’s most trusted resource. On the other hand, I’ve also come to learn that this industry has a lot of unhappy people. As a problem-solver, it

frustrates me to listen to people complain about things they can’t change, like the economy, the weather and online shopping, so when I hear from a retailer who faces challenges with a can-do attitude, I feel a jolt of joy. This month that jolt came from an Ohio store owner. While retailers across the country were blaming heavy rains on decreased sales in June, this smart store owner decided to run a rain promo.



ERICA KIRKLAND
PUBLISHER & EDITOR

She promoted all her capes and umbrellas and turned a negative weather event into a positive sales event for her store. Brilliant! ☺

regionalHITS

What sells in your area?

FUNCTIONAL GIFTS

NORTHEAST	SOUTH	MIDWEST	WEST
1. Nora Fleming	1. DM	1. Nora Fleming	1. Mud Pie
2. Corkcicle	2. Mud Pie	2. Mud Pie	2. Corkcicle
3. Mud Pie	3. Nora Fleming	3. Carson	3. Ganz

HUMOR & WHIMSY

NORTHEAST	SOUTH	MIDWEST	WEST
1. Primitives by Kathy	1. Primitives by Kathy	1. Primitives by Kathy	1. Primitives by Kathy
2. Blue Q	2. Blue Q	2. Avanti	2. Wild Hare
3. Ganz	3. Unemployed Philosophers	3. Wild Hare	3. United Art

HOME DECOR

NORTHEAST	SOUTH	MIDWEST	WEST
1. Mud Pie	1. Mud Pie	1. P. Graham Dunn	1. Demdaco
2. Primitives by Kathy	2. P. Graham Dunn	2. Demdaco	2. Creative Co-op
3. Park Designs	3. Creative Co-op	3. Mud Pie	3. Gerson

MUGS & TUMBLERS

NORTHEAST	SOUTH	MIDWEST	WEST
1. Corkcicle	1. Corkcicle	1. Corkcicle	1. Evergreen
2. Enesco	2. Swig	2. Swig	2. Demdaco
3. Swig	3. Tervis	3. Tervis	3. Corkcicle

APPAREL

NORTHEAST	SOUTH	MIDWEST	WEST
1. DM	1. Simply Southern	1. DM	1. Simply Noelle
2. Mountain Mamas	2. Umgee	2. Simply Noelle	2. DM
3. Gretchen Scott	3. DM	3. Simply Southern	3. Jess & Jane

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

Hot Finds & New Releases

Noted

Inspired by the joy of receiving a handwritten letter, **About Face Design's** new Noted collection of sentimental giftware is a departure from the company's bold and bright designs. Evoking the nostalgia of receiving a secret note, each of the four mugs in the initial offering features a minimalistic hand-drawn design, a heartfelt outer message and a corresponding P.S. message inside. \$6 cost. (aboutfacedesigns.com)



Cannaba RX

Created and owned by pharmacists, Cannaba RX offers independent store owners a comprehensive line of CBD creams, drops and gels derived from hemp seeds organically grown in the U.S. Packaged to appeal to gift store shoppers, the products are backed by product liability insurance as well as third-party testing. A starter kit, with four of each of the five products available in the line, comes with a display for \$961. Plus, Cannaba RX can be complemented by Cannaba Naturals, a collection of personal care products, including soap, body wash and body lotion. (medellasciences.com)



Chala Backpack

A consistent bestseller for reporting stores in the purses and bags category, Chala introduced a number of new items at the summer markets, including a new silhouette – a backpack tote, a combination of a midsize tote and a backpack. Each bag will come with a distinctive zipper charm as well as an intricately embellished eagle or moose design on the front. \$27.50 cost. (chalagroup.com)



Fancy Panz

Fancy Panz are taking the tailgating and entertaining industries by storm. The made-in-the-USA plastic serving dishes enable partygoers to effortlessly serve and transport food. Standard-size disposable foil pans nestle into the Fancy Panz, which boasts a removable clear lid for



easy serving. Rather than leaving behind a serving dish, guests simply remove the foil pan and leave it behind or throw it in the trash. The containers are designed to stack, making storage and transportation easy. \$10 cost. (fancypanz.com)

Good Stuff Gifts

The Good Stuff Gifts collection from **Ganz** created a buzz during the summer markets thanks to the witty captions, simple color palette, uncluttered graphics and the opportunity for increased margins. The line encompasses several capsule collections, each built around a t-shirt, with a variety of matching accessories, including socks, hats, mugs, glasses and aprons. Themes include "Life's a Garden – Dig It," "Let It Bee" and "Live Everyday Like It's Taco Tuesday". Ganz is supporting the line with a variety of innovative merchandising ideas for retail stores to replicate. T-shirts and tank tops retail for up to \$24.99, offering the potential for 60 percent margin. (ganz.com)



Four Points Trading Co.

The candle category is ripe for innovation and Four Points is meeting the need for innovative scents with a collection of memory-inducing candles. Each scent – from Library, Sawdust and Money to Dirt, Firewood and Baby Powder – is designed to recall olfactory memories or, as the company's tag line says, "We aren't just creating candles, we're recreating memories." Made from 100 percent soy wax, derived from domestically grown soybeans, each candle is all-natural, vegan and made entirely in the U.S., poured by hand and made in small batches. Available in four (\$5 cost) and eight-ounce (\$9 cost) tins as well as tealights (\$6 cost for six). (fourpointstradingco.com)



Mary Square Scripture Cards

Mary Square went back to its roots, reintroducing its original product in a revised format. The company's new scripture cards are sold with a wooden block, shrink-wrapped with 26 double-sided cards with inspirational sayings as well as scriptures. \$7.50 cost. (marysquare.com)



Game Day Jewelry

To complement its assortment of best-selling game day t-shirts, **Jane Marie** has launched a collection of fashion-forward game day jewelry. The line allows customers to effortlessly support their local athletic teams with three styles of earrings – fan, beaded and football-shaped (\$6.50 cost) – and eight necklace styles (\$12.50 cost) in popular school colors. (janemarie.com)



TRENDING Up or Down

↔ Even

FUNCTIONAL GIFTS: Sales were up for 38 percent of stores and even for 42 percent. A Minnesota retailer credits her sales increases in the category to offering a wider selection of proven bestsellers, including Peeps eyeglass cleaners from **Carbon Klean** (carbonklean.com), tea towels from **Wild Hare** (wildharedesigns.net) and flashlights from **DM** (247dm.com), while a Michigan store owner had success with microfiber towels from **Dock & Bay** (dockandbay.com). A Washington state store owner reports that functional gifts are a strong category year after year and counts tea towels from **Kei & Molly** (keiandmolly.com) and socks from **Notes to Self** (notestoself.com) among her bestsellers.

↑ Up

APPAREL: The category is strong, with 49 percent of retailers reporting month-over-month sales increases. Beyond the chart toppers, bestsellers for stores that recorded sales increases included tops from **Sassy Bling** (sassybling.com) for an Alabama retailer. A Wisconsin retailer credited her sales uptick to brands sourced from online wholesale sites such as **Apple B** from **Fashion Go** (fashiongo.net) and **Be Stage** from **Orange Shine** (orangeshine.com). While it didn't make the chart of top lines (page one), **Gretchen Scott** (gretchenscottdesigns.com) was a collection mentioned by a number of store owners.

↔ Even

HUMOR & WHIMSY: The category is trending even for 49 percent of store owners and up for 30 percent. Greeting cards and coasters from **Paisley & Parsley** (paisley-parsley.com) were listed among the top sellers for a New York retailer and a Vermont retailer, while a Minnesota store owner's top item in the category was signs, including styles from **My Word** (mywordsigns.com). In Rhode Island, a retailer who expanded her selection of humorous goods reported increased sales and noted bestsellers included mints and soaps from **Unemployed Philosophers Guild** (philosophersguild.com), nostalgic items from **Schylling** (schylling.com) and nightshirts from **Relevant** (relevantproducts.com).



Stickers Northwest

Stickers Northwest's extensive assortment of primarily outdoor-themed vinyl stickers offer stores and customers an affordable and on-trend gift or personal purchase. Created by outdoor lovers and adventure seekers with a passion for developing merchandise that celebrates the great outdoors, the company's top product format is vinyl stickers, but hats and buttons are also available. All items can be name-dropped with a store name, city, town, lake, nearby park or local slogan. \$1.50 cost with a suggested retail of \$3.95. (stickersnorthwest.com)

Corkcicle Lunch Bag

Designed to keep contents cold for hours, Corkcicle's newest lunch bag, the Baldwin Boxer, is constructed with food-safe lining, a double-zipper main compartment, an external pocket that can be monogrammed and an adjustable strap to hold water bottles. The Baldwin Boxer retails for \$39.95 and is available in five colors: black, turquoise, rose, silver and black camo. (corkcicle.com)



Give A Sip



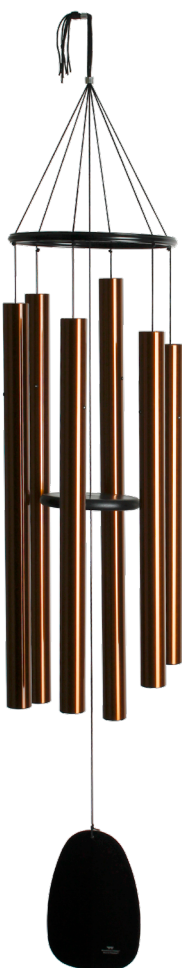
The new Give A Sip collection from **Streamline** is a fun assortment of giftable cocktail-themed items, including cups, straws and the Cocktail Sippers shown here. Sold with a hang-tag cocktail recipe formulated for the portable, unbreakable and foldable 16-ounce and 32-ounce containers, the items cost \$4 and \$5.50. Recipes include Pineapple Margarita, Watermelon Sangria and Island Breeze Punch. (streamlinenyc.com)

Twine

The Twine collection of CBD products was created exclusively for speciality retailers, from the packaging and displays to educational support material available to aid in the selling process. Organic and GMO-free, the products do not contain THC and have been third-party tested. Products available include a variety of different-size oils – both natural and peppermint-infused – along with menthol cream. Retail prices range from \$24.99 to \$74.99. (twinecbd.com)



Supplier Spotlight



Woodstock Rings In 40 Years

Founded four decades ago by award-winning musician Garry Kvistad and his wife Diane, Woodstock Chimes is ringing in 40 years in business this year. The chimes consistently rank on *Giftbeat* charts in the garden and outdoor decor categories as bestselling items for store owners across the country. The company credits its success to the quality of the chimes, specifically the sound quality.

The chimes, originally crafted in an old barn outside Woodstock, N.Y., are now made in a 120,000-square-foot warehouse in nearby Shokan, where the company offers more than 700 different products. Chimes of Olympos, the chime that started it all, remains a customer favorite, with exquisite tuning. Made of cherry-finish ash wood with six silver aluminum tubes, it measures 36 inches in length and retails for \$76. Kvistad made the first Olympos windchime using metal from a discarded lawn chair that he crafted into a metallaphone (metal xylophone) inspired by the scale of Olympos, a 7th-century BC Greek pentatonic scale. "I decided to cut and tune the lawn chair tubes to the exact frequency of the scale," explains Kvistad, who says the ancient notes can't be played on a modern piano. After fashioning the metallaphone, Kvistad decided to create a windchime from the tubes. "It was the perfect instrument for the wind to play," he says. "Plus, you don't need formal musical training to appreciate the beautiful sound." (woodstockchimes.com)

SALESBEAT

Sales Declined in June for 47% of Stores

By Erica Kirkland

For 47 percent of store owners, sales in June were down year-over-year. A lot of rain, lack of interest in Father's Day gifting and the start of the summer holidays contributed to the lackluster sales.

"We had a great deal of rain, serious flooding and a few tornadoes," says an Oklahoma retailer, who reports that weather kept people out of her store. In Missouri, a store owner says that "storm after storm" affected the sales in her farming community.

"June is always the toughest month to figure out what drives people in," says a New York store owner. "Good weather, end-of-school activities, outdoor events and festivals all draw customers away from shopping"

A West Virginia store owner concurs, saying, "June is a month that most retailers dread because it's the start of the summer slump. Customers are planning vacations, paying for extra childcare and there aren't many holidays to capitalize on." Rather than admit defeat, she brings in more beach and travel-related items for those customers focused on upcoming vacations, in addition to holding numerous sales. "Once customers crossed the threshold, the conversion rate was 75 percent plus," she says. She also encouraged shoppers to share pictures on the store's social media pages of what they were doing in June, and many shared pictures of themselves with items they purchased in the store.

Several stores had equally ingenious ideas, including an Ohio retailer who ran a "Rain" promo with discounts on all rain capes and umbrellas, and a Minnesota store owner who offered a "Slide into Summer" sale, offering an increasing discount on summer tops and dresses that matched the date. "It started June 20 and ran through the end of the month," she says, bringing in extra customers and extra dollars she wouldn't have had otherwise

JUNE 2019 SALES

(vs. June 2018)

▲ 10%+	11%
▲ 5-9%	11%
▲ 1-4%	11%
↔	20%
▼ 1-4%	19%
▼ 5-9%	11%
▼ 10%+	17%

EVENT MARKETING

Kick-Start Holiday Sales with Fall Events

Close to one-third (32 percent) of reporting stores plan to host more special events this fall. For many, including a Massachusetts store owner, the season starts with a fall kickoff event. "In October, we have a sale event called 'Head Start' which begins the holiday season," she says. "Then we have our holiday open house, followed by a Black Friday weekend and a Midnight Madness event the first weekend in December."

Partnering

Several store owners say their most popular sales in the fall are group and town events.

"We host regular events with retail stores and restaurants in the area," says a North Carolina retailer. "Generally, the event has a theme. Our main event is a Christmas Stroll in early December, which generates the best sales."

A Michigan multi-store owner participates in a Ladies Shopping Night, a downtown event that corresponds with the opening day of deer-hunting season: "Women circulate around town and we

offer fun food, door prizes and games. It's a great way to bring in sales during a slow time in November."

In West Virginia, a store owner is excited about her town's Autumn Fest, an annual event that takes place in September. "Store owners head to our downtown core to showcase their stores," she explains. "We all network and collaborate on plans for the future while discovering mutual customers and strengthening the bonds between business owners."

Fun Ideas

The multi-store retailer from Michigan plans to host in-store classes throughout the fall and holiday season: "We held four classes in June, and they were a success. We bring in an instructor, have a class and then after the class, the women shop. We advertised these on Facebook and sold out every class."

An Illinois retailer looks forward to an annual trick-or-treat event held in her store's shopping plaza: "It's a great family event that makes everyone happy and gets

a lot of eyes on products."

"Ladies Night Out is one of our best fall events," says a Minnesota store owner. "The event starts at noon and runs until 8 p.m. There are treats, sales and demos. The ladies love it!"

A New Hampshire retailer kicks off fall with a Moms & Mimosas event on the first day of school: "It's a great ice breaker for moms with an entire day in front of them."

In Indiana a store owner is planning a Nora Fleming book-release party at an event venue five minutes from her shop: "This is different from anything we've done in the past, but we've had huge success with fashion shows at this venue, so we're hoping for similar results."

Fashion Fetes

Many store owners mentioned fashion shows as popular events for fall, including an Ohio store owner who says a fashion show dinner she holds three times a year is easily her best event.

In years past, a Minnesota retailer partnered with other boutiques in town to host a runway fall fashion show: "This year we're changing the event to a boutique and pub crawl, still geared around fall fashion. I'm looking forward to giving our event new life and involving more businesses (bars and restaurants)!"

BUSINESS OUTLOOK

Store Owners Cautiously Optimistic Heading into Fall

Most store owners (60 percent) are cautiously optimistic heading into the fall selling season. "Consumers seem more willing to spend than a year ago and our average sale has risen," says a North Carolina retailer, while a multi-store California store owner says, "Customers seem to have a lot of confidence in the economy and are spending money more freely than in the past. They come in for a greeting card and sometimes leave with an outfit and jewelry for themselves."

Yet the future isn't so bright for others. A New Jersey retailer who's very concerned about the business climate says, "Business is worse than it's ever been. There are fewer people in town, and with expenses and rent still going up, it doesn't look good. Consumers seem to want something only when it's on sale."

Traffic Counts Down

Regardless of their outlook, most store owners agree that traffic is down.

"Our head count is way down," says a Massachusetts retailer. "Just getting customers into the store seems to be a challenge. When they do come in, they almost always purchase something and comment on how much they love the store."

Competition from Online Sales

For stores in areas where traffic is good and the economy is healthy, the biggest challenge is finding lines unique to their store and not sold directly to consumers online. "There doesn't seem to be much loyalty from vendors anymore," says an Ohio store owner who struggles to secure lines that don't pop up in every other retail shop.

"The internet is hanging over our heads and we have to get used to it," says the retailer from Massachusetts. "I always try to buy merchandise that isn't easily accessed on the internet or is at least the same price or higher online. Then we offer a value-add, like free gift-wrapping, plus we try to make shopping a very nice experience."

A Colorado retailer says, "We know that customers are shopping more and more online. To help make up for that, we are fairly active with social media marketing. That seems to be successful and we get orders directly from posts. Social media is the new way to have a direct contact with this new generation of customers."

"We are thrilled to hold onto our market share," says a Colorado retailer who's cautiously optimistic heading into fall. "On the other hand," she says, "I feel that online sales are impacting growth. Our job is to figure out how to better address the needs

of the internet shopper."

A Kansas store owner has embraced online selling and says, "We're selling more and more online. We find that customers like to shop late at night. We even ship to people who live just miles from the store." "Working parents are busy with their families' various activities," says a South Dakota store owner. "At the end of the day, it's easy to sit down and scroll Amazon or other sites and order what is needed with the click of a button."

A multi-store Texas store owner concurs, saying, "Customers are buying more and more online and unfortunately this means less traffic in the stores." The upside is that her stores offer online shopping and shipping as well as in-store pickup, so she capitalizes on the trend rather than losing sales.

What Sells

What consumers seem willing to spend money on really depends on individual stores and markets. An Oklahoma retailer says her customers are "willing to spend more on home decor and larger items," while the multi-store California store owner says, "Shoppers seem to be willing to buy something fun such as a sassy kitchen towel or something inexpensive like a car candle from Homegrown." >>

EXPERT Q & A

How – and Why – Stores Should Embrace Online Selling

By Natalie Hammer Noblitt

Setting up web and social media storefronts can be intimidating for small retailers, says Cathy Donovan Wagner, president of RetailMavens, but offering even a small amount of merchandise online is critical. Donovan Wagner and her colleague Jane Hamill, an independent business coach, spoke with *Giftbeat* on ways that store owners can get started with – and grow – online sales.

Q. Should independent retailers make online sales a priority?

A. Donovan Wagner: Yes. They need to be where customers are, and they're online. It's part of good customer service. Having an online option is about servicing existing clientele as well as finding new shoppers.

Hamill: I learned having my own boutique that customers won't always be able to come into your store. Loyal shoppers move away, and others want convenience. Even locals appreciate shopping online when they don't have time to come into your store.

Q. Do consumers value online sales even from retailers like gift stores that traditionally have been all about experiences?

A. Hamill: Consumers expect to do their shopping anywhere. A friend told me recently she ordered from Alexa as soon as she thought of it in the shower. Shoppers expect to buy on their terms and almost everything in their lives is shoppable, from their phones to tablets and Instagram feeds.

Q. What do you tell retailers who worry about the cost and time it takes to set up an online presence?

A. Donovan Wagner: Start small. Take your bestsellers, maybe six, and offer them in a few colors or options. Grow your presence slowly so you can learn how to make it work. If you're already planning window displays and events, the same calendar works to plan your website and social media. Promote merchandise highlighted in your windows and use the images



Jane Hamill

across all platforms.

Hamill: Some retailers fear online sales require too much time and a separate inventory system, but you don't need to start out that way. A custom-designed site is also not necessary. An e-commerce platform like Shopify can be set up easily by someone who's a little tech savvy, maybe even a young employee or family member. It might cost \$500 to get going, but it's well worth the cost.

“Shoppers expect to buy on their terms and almost everything in their lives is shoppable, from their phones to tablets and Instagram feeds.”
– Hamill

Q. What mistakes have you seen small retailers make online?

A. Donovan Wagner: Not getting started with online sales is by far the biggest mistake. At the opposite end, trying to put too much online right away. Another thing retailers overlook is making an online store “mobile friendly” so people can easily shop or browse on their phones.

bringing mom or grandma in as well, and then all the ladies leave with something.” She says, “Customers will purchase products now that I wouldn't have dared to try a year ago. They're anxious to see what's new, and generally, if they like what they see, they buy it.”

A Rhode Island store owner, who is also very optimistic, says she relies on



Cathy Donovan Wagner

Hamill: Retailers shouldn't worry about making lots of sales right away. Take a look at your overall sales and give yourself a challenge to make eight percent of your overall sales through online purchases. The other mistake I see is that retailers assume people know they can shop their online store. Your customers need to be reminded over and over.

Q. Any final words of advice?

A. Donovan Wagner: Jane and I are passionate about helping retailers understand that selling online doesn't have to be hard. It's an important part of the business and can easily be integrated into your existing social media and email marketing. It's easy for small retailers to forget why big stores exist — because shoppers want a consistent experience. If you sell online, it demonstrates that you're current and reliable. It builds your reputation with all shoppers, not just those who shop online. The opportunity to sell should excite you and help you as retail continues to become more competitive. ☒

Cathy Donovan Wagner is a former retailer and the founder of RetailMavens, a consulting and coaching firm for retailers. Visit her website for more information at retailmavens.com or email her at cathy@retailmavens.com. Jane Hamill is a former fashion designer and retailer who now offers online courses and business coaching specifically geared toward women entrepreneurs. Visit her website for more information at janehamill.com or email her at jane@janehamill.com.

insight from her younger staff members to attract younger customers: “Many of our employees are young and they give great input into what they feel is trending among millennial shoppers. Products like 4Ocean, Unselfie, Pura Vida, Puppy Love and other brands that give back are popular, and customers spend more when we offer items with the right perceived value.” ☒

How to Drive Traffic to Your Online Store

Your website and online store can be a fantastic sales tool for your business — if you're getting enough visitors. Jane Hamill, former retailer, fashion designer and current business coach, advises retailers how to get more traffic online. Here are some of her top tactics:

Be a guest expert. Make connections by sharing your retail expertise on a podcast, as a guest blogger or with other interview opportunities. Being a guest on other people's podcasts or blogs can be a very effective way to reach a targeted audience, specifically potential clients for your store.

Place strategic social media ads. If your goal is scaling your business, this is especially important. Instagram ads are very effective right now and cheaper than Facebook because they're newer.

Engage viewers with videos. Video content on Facebook receives 135 percent more engagement than images. Studies show as many as four times more consumers would rather see a video of a product than read about it.

Offer free downloads. Many websites offer free downloads or printables (invitations, place cards, coloring pages, etc.) to attract visitors. Require an email address to get the free download. Pick topics your customers are interested in, like party planning, decorating or fashion.

For more tips, advice and insight, visit janehamill.com

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

Attracting Younger Customers

A West Virginia retailer, who has a very optimistic outlook, says that her business has grown tremendously over the past year by attracting younger consumers: “We were previously serving the 30-to-50 age range — women with upper-class taste. Now teenagers are stopping by to pick up the latest Simply Southern item, sometimes

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BizBEAT

Profiles of the Industry's Best & Brightest

PROFILE



40-Year-Old Wisconsin Shop Flourishes

By Jessica Harlan

When you live in a town called Bloomer, opening a floral shop is a no-brainer. Rita Lenfant, husband Kevin and, now, their daughter Amanda Kollwitz have turned this shop into a vibrant gift store and boutique that supplies locals with everything from the latest clothing to the perfect housewarming gift. Here, Amanda tells *Giftbeat* how the store continues to flourish.

Q: What makes your store unique?

A. We're in a small town of 3600 people and the nearest town is 25 miles away. There's not much in the way of clothing in town, so as the need arose, we started buying clothing in small quantities, so you won't see everyone in town wearing the same thing. Aside from that, we've got a little mix of everything: gifts for people to grab for a housewarming, sympathy items, outdoor garden accessories, kitchen goods, scents and signs.

Q: How would you describe the atmosphere of your store?

A. Cute and inviting. We have flower boxes etched with our name out front. Inside, there's wood flooring throughout with trellis-patterned rugs. Our displays have

spotlights and lamps on shelves to highlight certain things like wineglasses. It's a very bright store, but not overpowering. There's also a big cooler with our fresh-flower arrangements and chocolates.

Q: To what do you attribute your success?

A. Customer service and quality. We know our customers, whether by name or face. I feel like customer service is key in a small town because it's a lot of word of mouth. And quality has also been important. We do constant quality checks, and if something is wrong with anything, we aren't putting it out there. We hear great feedback, especially on the quality of our flower arrangements, saying they last forever.

Q: How do you promote your store?

A. We are very active on Facebook. Whenever we get new clothing items, we'll post about them. For our small area, we get quite a few shares. We also do giveaways; I try to get the community a little involved in what's going on in our store. I also do emails through Constant Contact. We'll give special sale offers to the customers on our email list; right now we have 600 to 700 subscribers.

Q: Do you have a favorite new product line?

A. We just started carrying Layers jewelry by Center Court. The thought of spending \$1000 on a new product line used to scare me – what do I do if it doesn't sell? That's how it was with Layers, but since we got it in, we've reordered three to four times. It's a line that makes me very happy!

Q: Over the past year since you've taken over the store, what's the biggest lesson you've learned?

A. I've learned not everyone has a work ethic! It's been very hard for me to find help. There's a glamor associated with working in a floral and gift store, but there's also a lot to do. ☒

STORE: Bloomer Floral & Gift Shop

LOCATION: Bloomer, Wisc.

SQUARE FOOTAGE: 900

EMPLOYEES:

One full-time, two part-time

WEB: bloomers-floral.com

TOP LINES: Mona B, Save the Girls, Carson, Yelete, Rae Mode, Swan Creek, Michel Design Works, Spootiques

Backstory | Next Generation Plants the Seed

When Rita and Kevin Lenfant moved to Wisconsin in the 1970s, they were looking to start a business. When they came across the town of Bloomer, Wisc., which lacked a florist, despite its name, they decided to give it a shot. The store quickly became known for its beautiful flower arrangements and evolved from carrying knickknacks and collectibles to offering a wider variety of giftware, clothing and accessories. "Forty years later, we're still here," says Amanda Kollwitz who took over the business from her mom last year. "I never ever thought I'd take over the store," she says. It wasn't until she started attending gift shows with her mom, suggesting product lines that ended up being hits, that she realized she enjoyed the challenge of sussing out products. When her mom started talking about selling the store, Amanda quit her job in the nonprofit world and took over. Amanda is now comfortable enough in her new role to start looking ahead. She's particularly excited about increasing the store's fashion-forward clothing offerings. Just recently she started carrying shoes: "We've gotten a huge response," especially for a pair of fancy dress sandals from CJ Shoes that are under \$40. "But some items she'll likely never discontinue, like Mascot prisms. "I can remember them hanging in the store when I was little," says Amanda. "She's had them for 40 years and they still sell great."



Rita Lenfant & Amanda Kollwitz