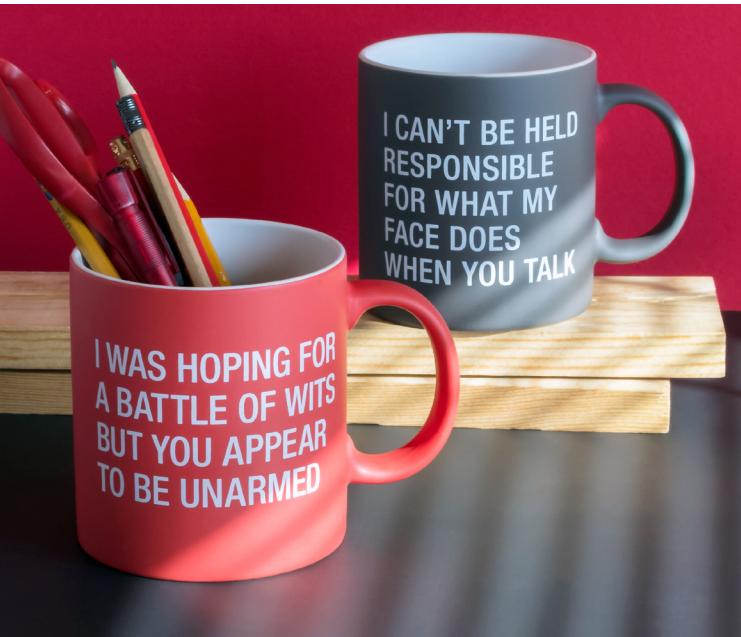


gift BEAT™

Tracking the Pulse of the Gift Industry

marketBEAT

The Industry's Top-Selling Lines



About Face continues to reign supreme in the humor and whimsy category for its simple yet hilarious assortment of mugs, desk signs and glasses. From \$5 cost for mugs. (aboutfacedesigns.com)

TEA TOWELS

Last ran in September 2019

- #1 **KAY DEE DESIGNS:** holiday, wine, pet
- #2 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY:** LOL, holiday
- #3 **MARIASCH STUDIOS:** holiday, humor, name-drop
- #4 **C&F HOME:** embroidered, holiday
- #5 **MUD PIE:** holiday, wine, various
- #6 **BLUE Q:** various*
- #7 **WILD HARE:** various
- #8 **GREENBOX ART:** holiday, animals, various*
- #9 **MARY LAKE THOMPSON:** holiday, flour sack
- #10 **MONA B:** humor, waffle*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Park Designs, Michel Design Works, Now Designs, The Coin Laundry

*** OF NOTE!**

GREENBOX ART (greenboxart.com) did not rank when the chart last ran while **BLUE Q** (blueq.com) and **MONA B** (mona-b.com) moved from honorable mentions onto the chart.



Kay Dee Designs has taken the top spot in our tea towel chart. The company continues to create collections which resonate with consumers including the newly introduced Pet-itudes line of giftable and whimsical herringbone towels shown here. \$3.50 cost. (kaydeedesigns.com)

FAST FACT:
December sales were up or even over last year for **57%** of stores

HUMOR & WHIMSY

Last ran in August 2019

- #1 **BLUE Q:** socks, tea towels
- #2 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY:** signs, mugs, various
- #3 **ABOUT FACE:** desk signs, mugs, wine glasses
- #4 **GANZ:** signs, wall art, various
- #5 **WILD HARE:** tea towels
- #6 **UNEMPLOYED PHILOSOPHERS GUILD:** various
- #7 **AVANTI:** greeting cards*
- #8 **MARIASCH STUDIOS:** tea towels*
- #9 **DM:** various*
- #10 **MONA B:** bags, tea towels*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Lazy One, Natural Life, Paisley & Parsley, Dammit Dolls

*** OF NOTE!**

DM (247dm.com), **MARIASCH STUDIOS** (mariaschwholesale.com) and **MONA B** (mona-b.com) did not rank when the chart last ran while **AVANTI** (avantipress.com) moved from honorable mention to number seven.

FASHION ACCESSORIES

Last ran in July 2019

- #1 **DM:** Two Left Feet, Hello Mello, scarves, gloves, hats
- #2 **VERA BRADLEY:** bags, scarves, various
- #3 **OPPORTUNITIES:** shawls, scarves, socks*
- #4 **SIMPLY NOELLE:** wraps, scarves, wallets, gloves, hats
- #5 **SNOOZIES:** Sherpa socks*
- #6 **WORLD'S SOFTEST SOCKS:** socks*
- #7 **MYRA BAGS:** canvas bags and totes
- #8 **CHALA:** various bags
- #9 **JOY SUSAN:** wristlets, bags
- #10 **HOWARD'S JEWELRY:** scarves, ponchos

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Blue Q, Judson, Brighton

*** OF NOTE!**

OPPORTUNITIES (opportunitiesia.com), **SNOOZIES** (snoozies.com) and **WORLD'S SOFTEST SOCKS** (worldssoftest.com) did not rank when the chart last ran.



DM's apparel and fashion accessories were great sellers for reporting stores during the fourth quarter and the company isn't resting on its laurels, launching new items in its popular Hello Mello line, including the super-soft sleep shirt shown here. \$8.75 cost. (247dm.com)

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



4Ocean has maintained its number one status in our give-back chart. This year, they're launching a new design featuring a hand-braided cord and toggle closure both made from post-consumer recycled products. The braided bracelet comes with the promise to remove one pound of trash from the ocean and coastlines for every bracelet purchased. The style will begin shipping this summer and will retail for \$20. (4ocean.com)



P. Graham Dunn, a leading vendor in the message and inspirational category, introduced a number of new items at winter markets including cushions, coasters and tea towels. \$10 cost for pillow. (pgrahamdunn.com)

TRENDING NOW!
Jewelry: Month-over-month sales increased for 60 percent of stores



Ganz, a newcomer to the tabletop accessories chart, introduced a number of new items at markets last month, including its new Bella Casa melamine tableware collection. \$6.50 retail for bowl. (ganz.com)

GIVE-BACK Last ran in September 2019

- #1 **4OCEAN:** bracelets
- #2 **PURA VIDA:** bracelets
- #3 **SCOUT CURATED WEARS:** jewelry*
- #4 **ALEX AND ANI:** jewelry
- #5 **CHAVEZ FOR CHARITY:** bracelets
- #6 **IVORY ELLA:** apparel
- #7 **BLUE Q:** socks*
- #8 **SIMPLY SOUTHERN:** apparel, various
- #9 **INIS:** various*
- #10 **VERA BRADLEY:** cancer awareness products

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Ronaldo, The Naked Bee, Natural Life

*** OF NOTE!**

SCOUT CURATED WEARS (scoutcuratedwears.com) moved from number nine to three while **BLUE Q** (blueq.com) and **INIS** (inisfragrance.com) moved from honorable mentions onto the chart.

MESSAGE & INSPIRATIONAL Last ran in Sept. 2019

- #1 **DEMDACO:** Willow Tree, Giving collection, various
- #2 **ALEX AND ANI:** jewelry*
- #3 **P. GRAHAM DUNN:** signs, various
- #4 **GANZ:** pocket tokens, memorial
- #5 **CENTER COURT:** Embracelets, Focus, various
- #6 **CARSON:** windchimes, lanterns, various
- #7 **MANTRABAND:** bracelets
- #8 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY:** signs, various
- #9 **ROMAN** frames, jewelry, various
- #10 **EARTH ANGEL:** bracelets*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Ronaldo, Adams & Co., Brighton, Mud Pie

*** OF NOTE!**

EARTH ANGEL (theangelsfourlives.com) did not rank when the chart last ran while **ALEX AND ANI** (alexandani.com) shot up from ninth place to second.

TABLETOP ACCESSORIES Last ran in Sept. 2019

- #1 **MUD PIE:** Circa, Bistro, various
- #2 **NORA FLEMING:** minis, serveware
- #3 **DEMDACO:** Dean Crouser, Kitchen Boas, various
- #4 **CREATIVE CO-OP:** glassware, serveware, various
- #5 **GANZ:** coasters, mugs, various*
- #6 **CERTIFIED INTERNATIONAL:** holiday tabletop*
- #7 **PARK DESIGNS:** various linens
- #8 **C&F HOME:** tea towels, placemats
- #9 **GRASSLANDS ROAD:** holiday tabletop*
- #10 **TWO'S COMPANY:** various*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: P. Graham Dunn, Evergreen, Tervis

*** OF NOTE!**

GANZ (ganz.com), **GRASSLANDS ROAD** (grasslandsroad.com) and **TWO'S COMPANY** (twoscompany.com) did not rank when the chart last ran while **CERTIFIED INTERNATIONAL** (certifiedinternational.com) moved from honorable mention to number six.

MEN'S GIFTS Last ran in April 2019

- #1 **DM:** hats, gloves, socks, various
- #2 **CORKCICLE:** tumblers, Whisky Wedge
- #3 **DUKE CANNON:** soaps, toiletries
- #4 **BLUE Q:** socks
- #5 **TERVIS:** tumblers
- #6 **SOCKSMITH:** socks
- #7 **YETI:** tumblers, various
- #8 **MAD STYLE:** various*
- #9 **DEMDACO:** mugs, games, gadgets*
- #10 **LIFE IS GOOD:** t-shirts*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Evergreen, P. Graham Dunn, Gold Medal, Somerset Toiletry

*** OF NOTE!**

LIFE IS GOOD (lifeisgood.com) and **MAD STYLE** (mad-style.com) did not rank when the chart last ran while **DEMDACO** (demdaco.com) moved from honorable mention onto the chart.

WINE & ALCOHOL RELATED Last ran in Oct. 2019

- #1 **CORKCICLE:** tumblers, Whiskey Wedge, various
- #2 **ENESCO:** Lolita wine glasses, Snowpinion
- #3 **GANZ:** wine stoppers, signs, various
- #4 **SWIG:** tumblers
- #5 **SUSQUEHANNA:** name-drop wine glasses
- #6 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY:** signs, mugs, socks
- #7 **DM:** wine stoppers, bottle toppers, various*
- #8 **DEMDACO:** wine charms, wine lanterns*
- #9 **PAPERPRODUCTS DESIGN:** napkins, greeting cards*
- #10 **MUD PIE:** beer mugs, wine glasses, various

HONORABLE MENTIONS: Kay Dee Designs, GurglePot, Mariasch Studios, MeraVic

*** OF NOTE!**

DM (247dm.com), **PAPERPRODUCTS DESIGN** (paperproductsdesign.com) and **DEMDACO** (demdaco.com) did not rank when the chart last ran.

JEWELRY Last ran in July 2019

- #1 **SILVER FOREST:** earrings
- #2 **BRIGHTON:** necklaces, bracelets, earrings
- #3 **CENTER COURT:** Layers, Embracelets, various
- #4 **ALEX AND ANI:** bracelets, various
- #5 **RONALDO:** bracelets, necklaces, earrings
- #6 **PANDORA:** various
- #7 **PERIWINKLE BY BARLOW:** earrings, bracelets, various
- #8 **ETHEL & MYRTLE:** bracelets, necklaces, earrings*
- #9 **KENDRA SCOTT:** various
- #10 **SCOUT CURATED WEARS:** various*

HONORABLE MENTIONS: TGBBrands, Earth Angel, Tiger Mountain, Rain

*** OF NOTE!**

ETHEL & MYRTLE (ethelandmyrtle.com) and **SCOUT CURATED WEARS** (scoutcuratedwears.com) did not rank when this chart last ran.

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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

The Big Cs

A common theme throughout this issue is the focus on some big c words: change, collaboration and cooperation.

Our roundup of new products is marked by a number of collaborations as manufacturers have realised that collaborations – “collabs” as the cool kids say – are a great way to market, expand and build a brand among a new audience.

Savvy retailers are collaborating as well. Whether it be partnering

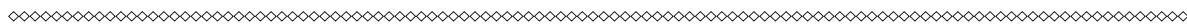
with local businesses to co-host events or building their own networking groups. As one of our favorite contributors, Becky Tyre, details in this issue’s not-to-be-missed Expert Q & A, being an independent retailer can be lonely and many store owners are creating peer groups of store owners which meet at market and correspond online via private Facebook groups.

Change is a word that’s been vital to retailing for centuries. This new decade is no different. The retailers and vendors who’re succeeding are



ERICA KIRKLAND
PUBLISHER & EDITOR

constantly reevaluating their business models to ensure they remain relevant to today’s shrewd store owners and shoppers. 



regionalHITS
 What sells in your area?

GIVE-BACK

NORTHEAST	SOUTH	MIDWEST	WEST
1. 4Ocean	1. 4Ocean	1. Chavez	1. Pura Vida
2. Ivory Ella	2. Pura Vida	2. Pura Vida	2. The Naked Bee
3. Scout	3. Ronaldo	3. 4Ocean	3. Natural Life

MESSAGE & INSPIRATIONAL

NORTHEAST	SOUTH	MIDWEST	WEST
1. Demdaco	1. Demdaco	1. Demdaco	1. Demdaco
2. Primitives By Kathy	2. P. Graham Dunn	2. Ganz	2. Center Court
3. Carson	3. Alex and Ani	3. Carson	3. Alex and Ani

TEA TOWELS

NORTHEAST	SOUTH	MIDWEST	WEST
1. Mariasch Studios	1. Kay Dee Designs	1. C&F Home	1. Kay Dee Designs
2. Primitives By Kathy	2. Wild Hare	2. Mud Pie	2. Park Designs
3. Kay Dee Designs	3. Primitives By Kathy	3. Primitives By Kathy	3. The Coin Laundry

FASHION ACCESSORIES

NORTHEAST	SOUTH	MIDWEST	WEST
1. DM	1. Vera Bradley	1. DM	1. Chala
2. Snoozies	2. Simply Noelle	2. Opportunities	2. Opportunities
3. Vera Bradley	3. DM	3. Vera Bradley	3. DM

JEWELRY

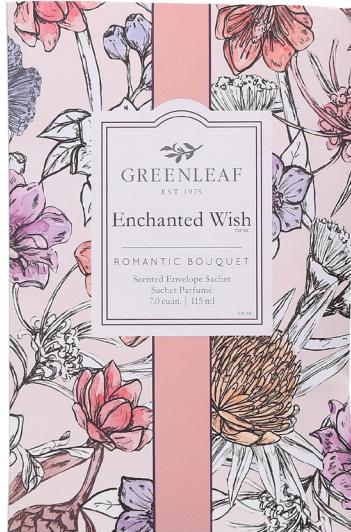
NORTHEAST	SOUTH	MIDWEST	WEST
1. Silver Forest	1. Brighton	1. Center Court	1. Silver Forest
2. Brighton	2. Ronaldo	2. Silver Forest	2. Rain
3. Earth Angel	3. Pandora	3. Alex and Ani	3. Tiger Mountain

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

Hot Finds & New Releases

Tropical Getaways

In the depth of a dreary winter, consumers are dreaming of exotic winter getaways. Help them escape the doldrums without getting on a jet plane with luscious and luxurious new scents from **Greenleaf's** Signature Candle Collection. Enchanted Wish and Tropical Orchid are both fruity and floral blends which the company has intensified by adding rich, warming notes. Available in a range of scent options including candles, sprays and new standing sachets featuring an easel back so the item can be displayed as a piece of art. \$3.50 retail for standing sachet. (greenleafgifts.com)



DeckMates

The **Gumbies** line of footwear is well known in the United Kingdom and Australia and is making inroads in America thanks to its commitment to the planet. The fashionable styles of footwear are made entirely from recycled materials -



laces from recycled water bottles, grips from recycled rubber, soles from algae foam and the canvas tops from recycled canvas. The new DeckMate styles shown here were launched in five colors: pink, seafoam, navy, black and gray and wholesale for \$22.50/ pair. (gumbies.com)

All She Wrote Notes

Mary Square has partnered with author and award-winning artist Maghon Taylor (pictured on the right with Mary Square CEO and founder Kelly Shiley) on a new collection of paper goods and gifts called All She Wrote Notes for Mary Square. Based in Elon, North Carolina, Taylor has a large social media following predicated on her signature pink and yellow attire, love of confetti and ability to show others how to turn their handwriting into art. The All She Wrote Notes collaboration with Mary Square debuted with a number of drinkware options, including tumblers, mugs and cozies, alongside small framed art pieces and stationery, of course. (marysquare.com)



Nora Fleming & Fiesta Dinnerware

Social media was all abuzz when Nora Fleming and Fiesta Dinnerware announced their hot new collaboration. The partnership pairs an exclusive Nora Fleming decorative mini with a round serving platter in Fiesta Dinnerware's newest hue – Butterscotch. The platter is only being made for the Nora Fleming partnership and was designed to fit the four-inch tall Fiesta Dancing Lady mini which features several Fiesta Dinnerware colors. The set retails for \$115 and will only be available in 2020. (norafleming.com)



Bluetooth Drinkware

The showrooms in Atlanta were humming with buyers excited about new pattern and style launches from major players in the drinkware arena alongside innovations from lesser known brands. Case in point: **Pure Drinkware**. The brand created a stir at market with its Waves Speaker Bottle which boasts flashing, multi-color LED lights and a Bluetooth speaker built into the top. The collection was launched exclusively for the speciality retail market and includes eight colors. The charge lasts about two to three hours played on a louder setting and four to five on a lower setting. The bottles are dishwasher safe while the tops are water-resistant. \$24.50 cost. (puredrinkware.com)



Changing Seasons

Transpac debuted Changing Seasons, a clever and coordinating collection of transitional gifts and decor, at the winter markets. The collection includes a variety of double-sided products for the fall and winter holidays. For instance, the reversible pillow shown here features 'Boo' on one side and 'Blessed' on the other. Other items include porch signs and door hangers. (shoptii.com)



Lemon Jelly

Headquartered in Portugal, Lemon Jelly is one of the largest producers of footwear components and molded footwear in Europe. Besides sporting stylish silhouettes and colors, the brand is distinguished by its comfort and lemon scent. That's right, each shoe is imbued with a soft and fresh lemon scent. The footwear is also waterproof, fast drying and made entirely from recycled plastic. The Sunny silhouette (shown here) is currently a top seller for the company. Launched last spring in four colors, stores were reordering three or four times. The company has expanded the assortment this season to include 12 colors. Wholesale cost is \$27. Lemon Jelly made its name on its rainboots and those remain a top seller as well. (lemonjellyshoes.com)



TRENDING Up or Down

↔ EVEN

GIVE BACK: Sales were steady for 43 percent of stores and up for 31 percent. Bracelets from **4Ocean** (4ocean.com) and **Pura Vida** (puraavidabracelets.com) were huge sellers over the fourth quarter, placing at number one and two on the give-back chart (see page 2), and bringing in new shoppers for many stores including an Indiana retailer who noted the brand is attracting “customers we’ve never seen before.” Store owners who reported increased sales in the category with lines not listed on the top 10, included a Rhode Island retailer who notes that miniature cows from **Cow Parade** (cowparade.com) sold well, while a Mississippi store owner listed jewelry from **Project Halo** (projecthalolife.com) as her top seller.

↔ EVEN

MEN’S GIFTS: Month-over-month sales were on par for 53 percent of stores and up for 31 percent. Retailers who reported gains offered a combination of traditional “manly” gifts alongside items that helped men embrace their feminine sides. For instance, an Arizona store owner’s top-selling item was a John Wayne cookbook from **Treasure Chest** (treasurechestbooks.com), yet she also did well with Kitchen Boas for men from **Demdaco** (demdaco.com). Numerous stores had success with socks and scarves from a variety of vendors not on the top-sellers list, including **Fraas** (fraas.com), **Socksmith** (socksmith.com), **Fashion Go** (fashiongo.net) and **Opportunities** (opportunitiesia.com).

↑ UP

FASHION ACCESSORIES: The category was hot in December with 60 percent of store owners reporting month-over-month gains. Many store owners remarked on the success of lines not ranked on the top 10 chart (see cover) including a Massachusetts retailer who listed reversible faux-fur mittens from **Pandemonium** (pandemoniumhats.com) as her top seller. For a North Carolina gift shop owner, scarves and wraps from **Pretty Persuasions** (pretypersuasions.com) were selling while a Mississippi store owner noted footwear from **Corkys** (corkysfootwear.com) and **Yellow Box** (yellowboxshoes.com) were tops for her.

Hot Finds & New Releases



True Cotton

Studio M has introduced a new gift and decor line designed by artist Arin Guthe. The collection, True Cotton, includes a wide range of items including bandana scarves, photo frames and canvas prints, along with Studio M’s signature Art Planters, Art Poles and Art Pots. Margo Tantau, the director of product Innovation for Studio M, told *Giftbeat*, “Arin’s airy watercolor artwork makes for gorgeous gifts and interior decor, but also carries over into our outdoor product lines. This is a unique occasion where we’re able to offer specially designed gifts and decor as well as our signature product formats in one cohesive collection.” Prices range from \$5 to \$50 cost. (wholesale.studio-m.com)

Political Puppets

Whether you’re a Bernie Bro or drawn to Elizabeth Warren’s magnetic personality, **Unemployed Philosophers Guild** is introducing cheeky new political finger puppets (which double as magnets) just in time for the lead-up to the 2020 election. The puppet version of the Vermont-by-way-of-Brooklyn politician features wonderful hair, just like the original, while the Warren finger puppet is poised to take just as many selfies as the politician herself. Both styles will be shipping in mid-February and retail for \$6.95. (philosophersguild.com)



Trend ALERT



Tile Bracelets

One of the biggest jewelry trends this season are tiled bracelets. Also referred to as glass tile and mosaic tile, these bracelets were absolutely everywhere at the Atlanta Market and are inspired by traditional Miyuki beads from Japan which are slim, sleek and square. The styles shown here are from **Jane Marie’s Mosaic Stack It Collection** which are sold in packages of 24 for \$144. (janemarie.com)

Scrunchie Watch Bands

Spotted at the January gift markets in abundance, the scrunchie trend is here to stay. Some fun new takes on the trend include a scrunchie watch band as well as bandana and scrunchie combos.

The watchbands shown here are from **Ethel & Myrtle** and are designed to fit Apple watches. They sell for \$8.75 wholesale and are available in over 24 patterns. They come prepackaged in slim white boxes which can be hung on pegboard. Countertop displays are also available. (ethelandmyrtle.com)



SALESBEAT

Holiday Sales Up Over Last Year

By Erica Kirkland

December sales were up or on par over last year for 57 percent of reporting stores. Many retailers took the time to comment on the shortened time between Thanksgiving and Christmas – it was a boon for some and a bust for others.

“If we had that extra week between Thanksgiving and Christmas, our sales would have been even better,” shares a Georgia store owner whose store’s sales were up between one to four percent from last year.

A retailer in New York attributes the tight timeframe between the two holidays to her decrease in sales, saying, “We had six fewer BIG shopping days and that really hurt.”

Some store owners couldn’t figure out what impacted their sales – positively or negatively. As a retailer from Ohio reports, “One store was down significantly, but the other store more than made up for it.” She had the same product lines and deployed the same marketing and sales training for each location. “We just didn’t have the foot traffic we needed.”

Other retailers felt confident that certain strategies resulted in increased sales including an Arizona retailer who says that an “increased spend in advertising” boosted her sales. For a Virginia store owner putting a focus on product was the key. “We went deep into areas we hoped would perform – Sherpas, hats, gloves, scarves, etc. – and they did.”

DECEMBER 2019 SALES

(vs. December 2018)

▲ 10%+	10%
▲ 5-9%	15%
▲ 1-4%	26%
↔	12%
▼ 1-4%	13%
▼ 5-9%	11%
▼ 10%+	13%

HOLIDAY SALES

Stores Impacted by Online Shopping



While the majority of store owners (41 percent) indicated that holiday sales were better than they expected, many struggled to compete against online shopping.

“Our business was definitely affected by online sales,” says a New Jersey store owner whose December sales were down over last year. “Some of our own vendors have websites and are competing against us.” To combat this, she is sourcing fashion jewelry lines which either can’t be found online or which can’t easily be priced-shopped online.”

“The choices of places to shop are few and far between in our rural area, so online shopping is huge,” says a store owner from Kansas. She turned this seemingly negative into a positive by concentrating her efforts on an ecommerce website, sharing that, “We worked really hard to give our customers the option to shop online with us and many did.”

STOCKING STUFFERS

Numerous stores mentioned their customers were on the hunt for unique stocking stuffers and that sales were way up over previous years.

“Hats, scarves, ear warmers and bracelets” were big sellers for a Virginia retailer while a store owner in Minnesota,

who said that, “Stocking stuffers sold better than ever,” listed top sellers as lotions from The Naked Bee, socks, funny coasters, jewelry, tech-related items and small things from DM.

For an Ohio store owner, “The no-show style of socks from Living Royal did amazing.” She also reordered Glo Pals three or four times.

A Massachusetts retailer opined that stocking stuffer sales were up in his store because consumers bought big-ticket items online.

SEASONAL MERCHANDISE

The biggest surprise of the season for a Colorado retailer was that sales of holiday-themed merchandise were up. “I credit this to the fact that farm and country-themed items still sold well and are of great interest in our region. If it had a pick-up truck or tractor on it, it sold well.”

An Arizona store owner couldn’t keep boxed Christmas cards from Leanin’ Tree in stock. “We reordered several times and only had six boxes left on Christmas Eve.”

Yet, a Georgia store owner said her customers were less interested in ornaments this year and that there was a decreased interest in cardinals. “Normally anything with a cardinal sells quickly, but it didn’t this year.”

HOLIDAY 2019 DISCOUNTING

When Stores Discounted

43%	DISCOUNTED PRIOR TO DEC 25
47%	DISCOUNTED AFTER DEC 25
10%	DIDN'T DISCOUNT AT ALL

IMPORTANCE OF DISCOUNTS TO CUSTOMERS

35%	VERY IMPORTANT
47%	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT
18%	NOT IMPORTANT

HOLIDAY RESULTS

How Retailers Assessed the Christmas Season

41%	BETTER THAN EXPECTED
26%	ABOUT THE SAME
33%	BELOW EXPECTATIONS

BUYING PLANS FOR 2020

Retailers Are Taking a Conservative Approach

26%	VERY CONSERVATIVE
46%	SOMEWHAT CONSERVATIVE
25%	SOMEWHAT AGGRESSIVE
3%	VERY AGGRESSIVE

“If we had that extra week between Thanksgiving and Christmas, our sales would have been even better.”
– Georgia retailer

EXPERT Q & A

Is Your Store Relevant to Today's Consumer?

By Natalie Hammer Noblitt

Retail expert and journalist Becky Tyre offers insights into how independent stores can gauge their relevancy in an ever-changing market and adapt to meet the needs of today's shopper.

Q. Do you see a positive future for independent retailers?

A. Retail is not dying, but it's evolving as shopping preferences and consumers evolve and change. Unfortunately, some retailers aren't changing with them, including big-box, chains, department stores and independent shops.

Much of the change is generational and demographical. For instance, the last of the Baby Boomers are retiring and they buy less stuff. They still love to entertain and spend money on gift giving. If stores cater to this demographic, they need to adjust to meet their needs.

Q. What can retailers do to stand out and attract shoppers of all ages?

A. Know your customers' names and preferences and provide personal service. Stores that are succeeding today are purchasing with particular customers in mind.

Train sales staff to develop a customer base. Create branded cards, or use ones in stock, and have them write notes to shoppers who haven't visited in a while and thank you notes to those who've made recent purchases. Keep track of your customer's big life events and preferences in your POS system. This should be a shared database for your staff, allowing them to provide more customized service.

Q. What shifts in retail trends should stores be ready to handle?

A. In the past 10 years, innovations in point-of-sale (POS) and inventory software have resulted in sophisticated systems which are now more affordable, and which provide the data stores need for accurate record keeping. A POS also provides intelligence into what's selling, true costs and margins, and can also facilitate a loyalty program.

Social media as a communications and marketing tool is another obvious and impactful trend affecting retail. For retailers successfully using the various new

elements of social media (Facebook Live, Instagram Stories, etc.) it has been a game-changer in terms of reaching customers. If you haven't embraced it, now is the time to get started.

Customer service is an area many big stores have let slip. Independent stores must grab this chance to shine — and it's not that hard to do. But you may be hiring younger staff who haven't grown up within a strong customer service environment, so proper training is imperative.

Q. Have big box stores and online retail changed shopper's expectations?

A. Customers go to physical locations to make purchases because they need to get something at the last minute or want something unique that they can't find elsewhere. They may also need assistance choosing a gift or want to touch an item before purchasing. I'd like to think some shoppers just prefer to shop locally, as well.

Younger shoppers seek community and stores can be a big part of creating this for them. The popularity of in-store workshops and events is evidence it works. Something as simple as offering coffee in your store can be the reason two friends choose your store as their place to meet.

Q. What encouragement would you give small retailers as they start a new decade?

A. Being an independent retailer can be lonely. Find colleagues outside of your area who you can talk to and learn from. Meet them at markets and correspond online via private Facebook groups and email. Also, follow other stores on social media to see great displays or events that can inspire you.

Secondly, 2020 is a good year to look at your branding. Is it time for an update? Does your logo and branding speak to the customers you want to attract? Is your branding consistent across all channels: tags, signage, online? Consider incorporating branded hang-cards for scarves and other small items. This is a simple and relatively low-cost way to distinguish your store as a brand.

Q. You mentioned the importance of events and building community.

was surprised that this line, already popular for two years, kept going like crazy for the holidays — we had to order weekly." A New York retailer was floored by sales of DM's Night Scout hat. "Seriously, why do this many people need a hat with a light on it?" (247dm.com)



Becky Tyre

What are some of your favorite retailers doing well?

A. We just taped a new episode of the *Retail Details: The Podcast* in Atlanta at AmericasMart and Amy Rutherford from Red Barn Mercantile in Alexandria, Virginia shared a bounce-back event that's been one of her best. She borrowed the idea from a restaurant and tweaked it to fit her shoppers. In December her store gave out sealed envelopes containing either store gift cards or in-store promotions. To create anticipation and entice them to come back in January, the shoppers had to bring the envelope back sealed to reveal what they'd won. The event generated lots of excitement and it provided a great way to bring back shoppers during a slower time for the store.

I also tell retailers not to be discouraged about hosting events or workshops when you feel there's not enough room at your locations to make them work. Partner with stores or event spaces in your community. Find a coffee shop or craft store which could tie in with your event and provide a better space. Spreading out the marketing and event costs can be a win for both businesses. ☑

Becky Tyre is a journalist and retail expert with decades of experience working with independent retailers. She currently hosts Retail Details The Podcast and founded the Retail Details blog and social media channels. For more information about the podcast, visit retaildetailspodcast.com. To reach Becky, email her at hello@retaildetailspodcast.com.

HOLIDAY TRAFFIC BOOSTERS

Retailers Recount the Events and Promos That Drove Traffic

Traditional holiday open houses along with '12 Days of Christmas' promotions topped the list of events which drove traffic to stores this past holiday. For other store owners, putting a twist on traditional events was the ticket to increased sales.

KIDS' SHOPPING DAY

A Colorado retailer hosts a shopping day just for kids on the first Saturday after the Black Friday weekend, offering shoppers under 18 a discount. "Most of the time one or both parents will bring the kids in and let them shop for siblings, parents, grandparents, friends, etc. We run this event with other merchants and many of them also offer specials which is a draw." To boost her traffic, she offers photos with Santa. "We have a nominal charge for it, but give all of our profits to a local charity."

SCAVENGER HUNT

"We ran a cute scavenger hunt," says a New Jersey store owner. Customers were challenged to find discounts hidden throughout the store. "It was such a success that we did it a couple of times!"

FREE FOOD & PRIZES

Free never fails to draw a crowd. A Virginia retailer decided to serve refreshments and offer a door prize every Saturday beginning with Small Business Saturday and continuing through December 21. "It made for great sales each and every Saturday," she said.

THREE-DAY WEEKEND

"We lengthened our customer appreciation day from one Sunday to an all-weekend event, beginning Friday and ending Sunday," says an Illinois retailer who ran the event from December 13 to the 15 and realized a 40 percent increase in sales that weekend.

SURPRISE SELLERS

Products That Flew Off the Shelves

For many retailers, it was the lines they thought had run their course that shoppers were most interested in purchasing during the fourth quarter.

DM "Hello Mello was our number one seller," says a North Carolina retailer. "I

SIMPLY SOUTHERN

"I couldn't believe how well Simply Southern sold for us considering we're in northern Illinois, but it was huge! I ran out of sizes which almost never happens. People wanted the items so bad they were willing to try to make the wrong sizes work!"

A Virginia retailer went in "pretty deep" on Sherpa sweaters from Simply Southern and still had to reorder. "They've been strong for two seasons. I'm not sure what

next year will bring...they'll probably flop just like blanket scarves did." (simplysoutherntees.com)

FUNKY MONKEY

Blanket scarves certainly weren't dead for a Pennsylvania store owner who says that styles from Funky Monkey were "huge" this year. "I've had blanket scarves in the past, but I think it was the price and display that made them fly out the door." (funkymonkeyfa.com)

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BizBEAT

Profiles of the Industry's Best & Brightest

PROFILE

Shopping is a Hoot at this Northeastern Gift Shop

By Jessica Harlan

Kathy and Robin Chesmer opened this Connecticut shop in 1967, and still run it today alongside daughter Lisa who's helped them hone their savvy mix of products and welcoming atmosphere. Lisa shares how the Hoot has continued to resonate with customers and ring in sales after more than five decades in business.



Q. What makes your store unique?

We're one of the largest gift shops in our area and we offer a great mix of merchandise, with a focus on handicrafts, particularly American pottery. Customers love that they can shop here for gifts that are unique and unexpected.

Q. How would you describe the atmosphere of the store?

It's delightful and engaging, and also very spacious with high ceilings and wide aisles. We try to use a lot of antiques and bring in natural elements like birch trees, boulders and a barn wall. There's a large purple tree with a tunnel in the children's section which they love to climb through.

Q. To what do you attribute your success?

Our large variety of categories and product lines really gives us the flexibility to change with the times. When one area slows down, usually another area shows growth.

Q. How do you promote your store?

We post on Facebook once a week with information about new items, sales and events, and we send email updates to around 3500 customers. We've had a great response to our postcard mailings which we send twice a year to our clothing customers, offering them 20 percent off one item.

Q. What has been your most successful recent event?

The week before Thanksgiving we have an event called Celebration of the Season. It's our holiday open house, but we do something unusual . . . we host live owls! We partner with a local raptor rehabilitator who brings four or so owls. During the event, we sample food and offer 20 percent off holiday ornaments.

Q. What's your favorite new product line?

Our state just banned the use of plastic shopping bags, so reusable bags have become a very important product category for us. Apple Green Duck, Flip & Tumble and LOQI are some of our good sellers.

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

To offer the product that your customer wants, not what you like. You have to buy the trendy items that you might not even understand. That's been very important.

Q. What do you see for the future of your store?

The way things are changing, we just take it day by day and keep evolving with the customers' wants. A lot of people don't want as much stuff in their homes anymore, so we have to be more selective when buying. Fashion accessories and clothing, handbags and garden still do well, while toys and bath and body are a little slower.

Q. Finally, how do you stay inspired?

We enjoy reading publications like *Giftbeat!* It helps us to hear what other stores are doing and what products are doing well. Also, going to gift shows in Atlanta and elsewhere, we see lots of new things and great displays which inspire us to come back to our store and do something new.

STORE: The Hoot

LOCATION: Mansfield, Connecticut

SQUARE FOOTAGE: 13,000

EMPLOYEES: Six full-time, 12 part-time

WEB: hootgifts.com

TOP LINES: Vera Bradley, Luca + Danni, Habitat, Natural Life, Pictura, Woodstock Chimes, Jellycat, Habersham Candle

Backstory | A Whirlwind of Location Changes

In 1967, in a sleepy town in Connecticut, Kathy and Robin Chesmer, fresh out of college, opened a 400-square-foot gift shop, carrying mostly clothing, candles and gifts.

Over the past 50 years, the store has moved seven times, hopping from main street-type locations to shopping malls. With each move, the square footage slowly increased into what is today a 13,000-square-foot store in a well-trafficked strip mall.

Daughter Lisa is now part of the business, accompanying Kathy to gift shows and helping with visual merchandising. After all these moves, she says that they're finally satisfied with their size and location and focused on being a source of inspiration and excitement to the community, from their popular holiday open house where actual hoots can be heard from live owls, to the summer events they plan for the kids, including scavenger and treasure hunts.



Lisa and Kathy Chesmer