

gift BEAT™

Tracking the Pulse of the Gift Industry



Gearing Up for Summer Sales!



TIME MANAGEMENT
FROM
THE TRENCHES

APRIL
SALES DOWN
FOR 50%

GIFTBEAT'S DATA IS
BASED ON ACTUAL
STORE SALES FROM 300
REPORTING RETAILERS
FROM COAST TO COAST

New Measures *Giftbeat* is Taking to Protect our Intellectual Property

Stopping the Practice of Unauthorized File Sharing

Giftbeat has remained a cornerstone of unbiased market research for gift industry professionals for over three decades. As the only national publication serving the market that does not accept advertising, retailers have come to confidently rely on our data to source products, while vendors cherish the recognition their rankings bring. However, recent trends are putting the integrity of our service at risk.

Since transitioning to a digital format, some of the *vendors* who rank in the charts, alongside the *agencies* and *reps* supporting these lines, are illegally sharing chart rankings with non-subscribers on a more consistent and prolific basis – despite the charts being covered in watermarks. This not only violates our terms of service but also threatens the very foundation of our business model.

For over a decade, *Giftbeat* has offered unbiased market data into the top-selling vendors in over 60 product categories based on actual store sales from a panel of 300 reporting stores for the low rate of \$129 a year. Vendors and agencies spend none of their marketing budgets purchasing advertisements in *Giftbeat*. Rather, vendors benefit from the unbiased rankings which indicate their line is among the top selling in the industry, which is significantly more valuable than \$129 a year.

Giftbeat would like to recognize that the actions of these few do not align with the high level of integrity and professionalism exhibited by the majority of the professionals who work in this industry, and who have shown time and again how much they value the service that *Giftbeat* provides. We are asking you, loyal subscribers, to help us protect our subscription service by reporting instances of illegal file sharing.

Together, we can ensure that *Giftbeat* continues to serve as a trusted resource for the gift market for decades to come.

**Thank you
for your understanding
and cooperation.**



Learn why protecting our data matters and the serious consequences of illegal distribution.

Understanding Copyright Infringement

Copyright infringement occurs when protected material is used without permission. In our case, it involves the unauthorized distribution of *Giftbeat's* market data.

Examples of infringement include:

- Sending our data to non-subscribers via email whether in the original form or a text format
- Creating and distributing copies of our reports and charts internally and externally to rep teams and customers
- Posting excerpts or entire reports on public forums or social media

Consequences of Illegal Sharing

Giftbeat will now be pursuing legal action against individuals and companies caught infringing on our copyright. First, offenders will have their subscriptions terminated with a lifetime ban on accessing our content legally. Then all parties caught will be held liable for financial damages, including legal fees and compensation for lost revenue.

The Value of Protected Unbiased Information

By adhering to copyright laws and respecting our terms of service, you help *Giftbeat* maintain the quality and reliability of the data and insights the industry has come to rely on. This integrity is only possible through the support of paying subscribers.



Topping the Charts

COLLEGIATE & GAME DAY *New category!*

- #1 **EVERGREEN:** flags, mugs, various
- #2 **CANVAS STYLE:** earrings, trays, various
- #3 **TERVIS:** tumblers
- #4 **MAGNOLIA LANE COLLECTION:** frames
- #5 **NORA FLEMING:** minis
- #6 **SWIG:** insulated drinkware
- #7 **BRUMATE:** insulated drinkware
- #8 **LITTE BIRDIE:** pillows
- #9 **CAMPUS COLLECTION:** t-shirts
- #10 **CAT STUDIOS:** tea towels, pillows

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Evergreen came out on top as the bestselling vendor of collegiate and gameday items in our inaugural chart. Stores noted their flags, mugs, tumblers and a variety of other items are strong sellers. www.myevergreenonline.com

JEWELRY *Last ran in February 2024*

- #1 **SILVER FOREST:** earrings
- #2 **BRIGHTON:** earrings
- #3 **ENEWTON:** bracelets, Hope Unwritten
- #4 **RAIN:** earrings
- #5 **CENTER COURT:** Layers, Stacks, various
- #6 **PERIWINKLE BY BARLOW:** earrings
- #7 **SCOUT CURATED WEARS:** wrap bracelets
- #8 **KENDRA SCOTT:** earrings, necklaces
- #9 **PANDORA:** various
- #10 **RONALDO:** bracelets, earrings*

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HONORABLE MENTIONS: Lola & Company, Mulberry Studios

*OF NOTE!

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

TEA & COFFEE *New category!*

- #1 **THE REPUBLIC OF TEA:** canisters, tins
- #2 **TEA FORTE:** tea
- #3 **COFFEE MASTERS:** whole bean coffee
- #4 **OLIVER PLUFF & CO:** tea, custom
- #5 **PINKY UP:** loose tea
- #6 **DOOR COUNTY:** single-pot packages
- #7 **METROPOLITAN TEA:** loose tea
- #8 **EXQUISITE COFFEE LOCAL:** flavored coffee
- #9 **FIRESIDE COFFEE:** single-serve coffees
- #10 **MORNING GLORY COFFEE & TEA:** various

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Rankings are based on April 2024 sales from Giftbeat's reporting stores.

GAMES FOR ADULTS *New category!*

- #1 **WHITE MOUNTAIN PUZZLES:** puzzles
- #2 **MADD CAPP:** puzzles, games
- #3 **SPRINGBOK:** puzzles, board games
- #4 **HYGGE:** games, cards
- #5 **CAVALLINI:** puzzles, games
- #6 **EEBOO:** puzzles
- #7 **GENTLEMEN'S HARDWARE:** cards, games
- #8 **KELLI'S:** cards, games
- #9 **WS GAME COMPANY:** vintage games
- #10 **CARMA GAMES:** Tenzi



Puzzles are the clear winner in this category, and the styles from White Mountain Puzzles were the bestselling skus for stores' making the company the top-selling vendor of games for adults in our inaugural chart. www.whitemountainpuzzles.com

IMPULSE ITEMS *New category!*

- #1 **GANZ:** pocket charms, various
 - #2 **ABDALLAH CANDIES:** caramels, chocolates
 - #3 **ENEWTON:** bracelets
 - #4 **DM:** nail accessories, various
 - #5 **SILVER FOREST:** earrings
 - #6 **THE NAKED BEE:** lip balm, lotions
 - #7 **CENTER COURT:** Layers, Stackers
 - #8 **TELETIES:** hair ties, hair clips
 - #9 **BRIGHTON:** earrings, various
 - #10 **FAHLO:** animal-tracking bracelets
- HONORABLE MENTIONS:** Jelly Belly, Sweet Shop USA



Centre Court's popular Mazie Mae line of earrings expanded recently to include necklaces which retailers say are selling well not just among younger consumers but all age groups. \$4.75 cost with a \$12.99 suggested retail or two for \$20. www.centercourtonline.com

KITCHEN-RELATED *Last ran in November 2023*

- #1 **NORA FLEMING:** minis, bases
 - #2 **MUD PIE:** tea towels, serveware, mugs, various
 - #3 **KAY DEE DESIGNS:** tea towels, oven mitts
 - #4 **MICHEL DESIGN WORKS:** foaming soap
 - #5 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY:** tea towels, various
 - #6 **CREATIVE CO-OP:** serveware, tea towels
 - #7 **DM:** air fryer liners, jar openers, various
 - #8 **DEMDACO:** various
 - #9 **COTON COLORS:** attachments, bases*
 - #10 **TOTALLY BAMBOO:** state cutting boards*
- HONORABLE MENTIONS:** C&F Home, Euroscrubby



Stunning new barware from kitchen-related chart topper Creative-Co-op includes a gorgeous green decanter, a variety of glasses and unique stir sticks. www.creativecoop.com

MADE IN THE USA *Last ran in December 2023*

- #1 **SILVER FOREST:** earrings
 - #2 **STONEWALL KITCHEN:** jams, jellies, mixes
 - #3 **ENEWTON:** bracelets
 - #4 **THE NAKED BEE:** lip balm, lotion, various
 - #5 **TYLER CANDLE:** Diva wash, various
 - #6 **SWAN CREEK:** candles
 - #7 **P. GRAHAM DUNN:** various wall art*
 - #8 **DOWN TO EARTH POTTERY:** little dishes
 - #9 **JESS & JANE:** tops
 - #10 **LEANIN' TREE:** greeting cards*
- HONORABLE MENTIONS:** Studio M, Ronaldo

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*OF NOTE!

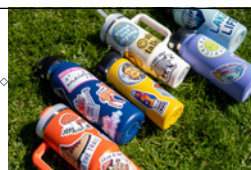
Since this chart last ran, **COTON COLORS** (coton-colors.com) and **TOTALLY BAMBOO** (totallybamboo.com) moved from honorable mentions onto the chart.

*OF NOTE!

P. GRAHAM DUNN (www.pgrahamdunn.com) did not rank when this chart last ran, while **LEANIN' TREE** (www.tradeleanintree.com) moved from an honorable mention onto the chart.

VINYL STICKERS *New category!*

- #1 **STICKERS NORTHWEST:** custom, various
- #2 **NICE ENOUGH STICKERS:** custom, various
- #3 **TGT:** custom, souvenir, mini
- #4 **BLUE 84:** custom
- #5 **BIG MOODS:** various
- #6 **BRASS REMINDERS:** custom
- #7 **GOOD SOUTHERNER:** various
- #8 **JAMES HAGEN:** various
- #9 **LANTERN PRESS:** custom
- #10 **SIMPLY SOUTHERN:** various



Custom stickers from Stickers Northwest alongside the company's bestselling skus placed them firmly in the top spot in our inaugural chart of bestselling suppliers of vinyl stickers. stickersnorthwest.com

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WALL DECOR *Last ran in October 2023*

- #1 **P. GRAHAM DUNN:** signs, crosses, various
 - #2 **PRIMITIVES BY KATHY:** box signs, plaques, various
 - #3 **GANZ:** signs, metal art, blocks, various
 - #4 **SINCERE SURROUNDINGS:** signs, plaques
 - #5 **MY WORD!:** porch signs, skinny signs, various
 - #6 **DEMDACO:** various
 - #7 **CREATIVE CO-OP:** framed prints, various*
 - #8 **RUSTIC MARLIN:** signs, blocks*
 - #9 **EVERGREEN:** various
 - #10 **RAZ IMPORTS:** mirrors, prints
- HONORABLE MENTIONS:** Meissenburg Designs, Mud Pie, Kendrick Home

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*OF NOTE!

CREATIVE CO-OP (www.creativecoop.com) did not rank when this chart last ran, while **RUSTIC MARLIN** (rusticmarlin.com) moved from an honorable mention onto the chart.

ChartBeat

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

JEWELRY

Silver Forest, **Brighton** and **Enewton** maintained their respective first, second and third positions on the jewelry chart. **Scout Curated Wears** made a climb from last place to seventh while **Kendra Scott** moved up one spot to number eight. **Mulberry Studios** which ranked seventh in February did not make the top 10 while **Ronaldo** moved up from an honorable mention to number 10. Among the top-selling vendors, earrings were on fire for stores selling **Brighton** with a New York retailer commenting, "Earrings are the best category in Brighton." And, of course, earrings are the top-selling item in the **Silver Forest** line as well, while bracelets are the clear frontrunner for **Enewton**. A Massachusetts retailer says that the line is a "consistent top seller every month" while a retailer from Indiana shares, "This brand is hitting every age group from 13 to 83 years old."

KITCHEN-RELATED

Nora Fleming and **Mud Pie** held onto the first and second spots respectively while **Kay Dee Designs** bumped **Michel Design Works** from third place. **Coton Colors**, a company that does not make the top 10 normally, moved from an honorable mention to number nine. **Totally Bamboo** is new to the list with reporting stores noting a variety of kitchen-related goods from the company sold well in April including their signature state-shaped cutting boards alongside colored bamboo serveware and spoons.

MADE IN THE USA

Silver Forest maintained its poll position as the top-selling line made in the USA while **The Naked Bee** was replaced by **Stonewall Kitchen** in second place. **Enewton** climbed up two spots from number five to three while **Leanin' Tree** jumped from an honorable mention to the tenth bestselling line. Back in December, **Thymes** ranked as a top-selling vendor in this category based on sales of its Frasier Fir scent but is absent

from these rankings. Back on the chart at number seven in **P. Graham Dunn** who did not rank or list as an honorable mention in December.

TEA & COFFEE

With gourmet food becoming a staple category among gift store owners, we have expanded our reporting of gourmet food by adding **Drink Mixes** and now **Tea & Coffee!** The inaugural chart includes a variety of both tea and coffee suppliers with **The Republic of Tea** coming out on top for their collection of canister and tinned teas. Other top-selling tea items ranged from packaged to loose-leaf varieties while on the coffee side, store owners listed both packages of whole bean coffee and single-serve coffees as good sellers in their stores.

VINYL STICKERS

With the plethora of vinyl stickers on the market, it was high time to track the category and see who came out on top based on actual sales. First time out, **Stickers Northwest** is the leader in the category with a big point spread. As a Virginia retailer says, "Their best-selling designs are always a hit," while in Minnesota a store owner writes, "We always do best with our custom, local or Minnesota themed ones." Overall, custom and souvenir themed stickers are the clear winners no matter the line.

WALL DECOR

P. Graham Dunn and **Primitives By Kathy** held onto their first and second spots respectively while **Ganz** replaced **Sincere Surroundings** as the third bestselling line, moving up from seventh place. **Raz Imports** dropped from sixth to tenth place while **Mud Pie**, which ranked eighth last time, dropped to an honorable mention. **Creative Co-op** at number seven did not rank in October while **Rustic Marlin** at number eight moved up from an honorable mention.

GAMES FOR ADULTS

While we have tracked the top-selling games and toys for children, this is the first time we plotted the bestselling games for adults. Clearly, puzzles are the winner with board games and card games sprinkled here and there. **White Mountain Puzzles** is the top-selling line followed closely behind by both **Madd Capp** and **Springbok**; all three were noted for strong sales of puzzles.

IMPULSE ITEMS

While impulse items have been tracked under register-area items in the past, splitting it out into its own category expands the top-selling list to include items that aren't necessary stocked at the cash desk. However, the top-selling supplier in both categories is **Ganz** for their wide selection of pocket tokens. Closely behind **Ganz** is **Abdallah Candies**, another supplier which charts in various categories we track. Not surprisingly, **Enewton** ranked at number three with strong sales of its trendy bracelets.

COLLEGIATE & GAME DAY

Giftbeat has not tracked sales in this category for many years, so we decided to bring it back. Coming in at number one on the chart is **Evergreen** for a variety of items including flags and mugs. Following close behind **Evergreen** is **Canvas Style** in second place for its gameday earrings and jewelry. In general, a variety of items are top sellers in this category ranging from t-shirts and insulated drinkware to pillows and tea towels. We will chart this category again in our November issue based on September 2024 retail sales. 📊

RegionalBeat

Breaking down the top-selling lines by region



IMPULSE ITEMS

NORTHEAST

1. Silver Forest
2. Ganz
3. Enewton

SOUTH

1. Ganz
2. Center Court
3. Enewton

MIDWEST

1. Abdallah Candies
2. Ganz
3. Brighton

WEST

1. DM
2. Silver Forest
3. The Naked Bee

JEWELRY

NORTHEAST

1. Silver Forest
2. Periwinkle by Barlow
3. Brighton

SOUTH

1. Enewton
2. Brighton
3. Rain

MIDWEST

1. Silver Forest
2. Center Court
3. Brighton

WEST

1. Silver Forest
2. Rain
3. Scout Curated Wears

MADE IN THE USA

NORTHEAST

1. Silver Forest
2. Down to Earth
3. Enewton

SOUTH

1. Tyler Candle
2. Enewton
3. Stonewall Kitchen

MIDWEST

1. P. Graham Dunn
2. Silver Forest
3. Stonewall Kitchen

WEST

1. Silver Forest
2. The Naked Bee
3. Down to Earth

TEA & COFFEE

NORTHEAST

1. Tea Forte
2. The Republic of Tea
3. Oliver Ploof

SOUTH

1. Coffee Masters
2. Tea Forte
3. The Republic of Tea

MIDWEST

1. Coffee Masters
2. The Republic of Tea
3. Door Country

WEST

1. Metropolitan Tea
2. Morning Glory
3. Tea Forte

WALL DECOR

NORTHEAST

1. Primitives by Kathy
2. Sincere Surroundings
3. Rustic Marlin

SOUTH

1. Creative Co-op
2. Ganz
3. My Word!

MIDWEST

1. P. Graham Dunn
2. Kendrick Home
3. Demdaco

WEST

1. Primitives by Kathy
2. Ganz
3. My Word!

March Gains Didn't Carry Through to April



Retail Sales Down for 50 Percent

By Erica Kirkland

We rejoiced last month when sales figures among our panel of reporting stores revealed that 65 percent banked year-over-year sales gains after months of declines. One month later, things have reverted to the negative with 50 percent logging declines, 16 percent managing to hold steady and 34 percent recording gains.

Retailers in the Midwest had a slightly better April with 42 percent reporting year-over-year increases and 42 percent logging declines. Southern stores fared slightly better as well with

46 percent noting declines and 36 percent logging gains.

In the Northwest, sales declines were 12 percentage points higher than the national average at 62 percent while gains were just 25 percent.

Overwhelmingly, store owners reported that Easter falling in March was the main reason for the declines. "Easter was in March not April this year," explains a Massachusetts retailer. "Taking those sales out, I think we would be even or up slightly." 📧

APRIL 2024 SALES (vs. April 2023)

Up 10%+	16%
Up 5-9%	8%
Up 1-4%	10%
Even	16%
Down 1-4%	18%
Down 5-9%	12%
Down 10%+	20%

Hours Remain Steady

Owners Maintain Regular Work Hours Despite Challenges

By Erica Kirkland

Despite all the challenges this year has thrown at store owners, the majority (55 percent) are working the same number of hours this year vs. last. This is an improvement over last year when 47 percent reported working the same number of hours. During the middle of the pandemic the numbers were quite different with 56 percent of owners working more hours.

Hands-on Business Owners

While a few store owners are still struggling to find staff these days, others are intentionally working more hours to save on payroll costs. Others note that traffic has picked up requiring them to spend more time in the store.

Overall, being an entrepreneur means that our businesses are all consuming. There is always something else that can be done. The to-do list is never ending making many of us feel like we must keep running on the hamster wheel.

“Owning your own business means being there,” says an Ohio retailer. “No one will look after your store or your customers like you do.”

“I have worked more this year than I have in the past,” shares a store owner from Tennessee. “I’ve spent more time unboxing and pricing because I need my ladies out on the floor with the customers.”

Another retailer from Ohio says, “I find I need to put in a tad more hours (especially after we close) to arrange more events to get people in the door and to do a floor change with no distractions or interference.”

“As an owner who works the sales floor I need to start working before I have

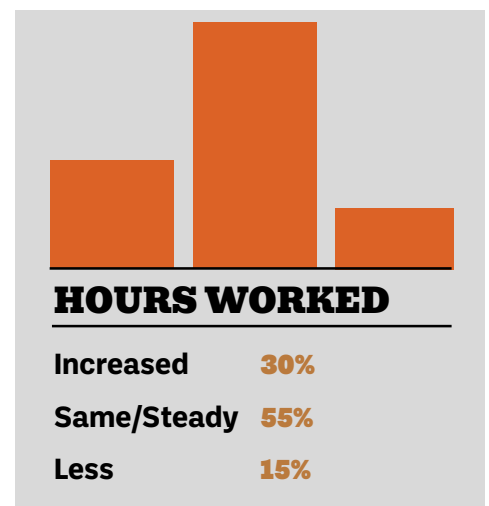
customers,” says a third store owner from Ohio. “I usually have about two to three hours in before we open.”

An Oregon store owner sums it up perfectly, writing, “Business is so much more complicated these days. We are always learning new ways to improve our operations, but there is just not enough time in the day.”

Intentionally Stepping Back

Taking time away from work to pursue personal hobbies is not only good for our wellbeing but often sparks creativity which helps drive our businesses even further.

A successful multi-store operator in Michigan shares, “I have started a journey as an artist, so in order to have time to paint, I have stopped taking work home. It has given me back the spark of creativity and a willingness to create.” She also notes that scaling back on volunteer work that doesn’t align with your business goals or which doesn’t give back to you in a positive way, is a step that store owners should take without feeling guilty. “When evaluating activities, you are doing or are asked to do, ask yourself if it is a “Hell, yes!?” If not, then it’s a “Hell, no!” and you need to say no, or stop doing it.” 📧



Time Management From The Trenches

How to Use Your Time More Efficiently

By Erica Kirkland

Delegate Your Way to Success

As the owner of your business it's hard to step back and let others take over areas that you've always managed. Often, we feel like we are the only ones that can do the job correctly the first time. If we have a bad experience delegating to one staff member, we are reluctant to delegate to others and the issue snowballs to where we have staff members who don't hold meaningful roles and who aren't adding to our bottom line or operational efficiencies.

An owner in Ohio has struggled with giving tasks to staff, writing, "It has been difficult to find someone who stays on top of things and doesn't get sloppy."

While an employee will never do things the exact way we would, giving them autonomy to make mistakes and improve on them will benefit you in the long run.

As a store owner from Virginia points out "Delegating is a 'work in progress', it doesn't result in success right off the bat. But the rewards are worth it. "As you delegate more, you grow and expand in other areas," he explains.

The reward for an Oklahoma owner is that she now has her nights back. "I have my fulltime sales associate placing all new arrivals on our website, rather than staying up all night to do it myself."

How To Delegate

Rather than just telling an employee what you want them to do to, first show them and then ensure you have the steps written out for them to reference in case they forget.

"I spend more time answering questions and instructing and training than ever," shares a Montana store owner.

"It's not my favorite part of the job. I would rather 'do' than 'show', but it is paying off in additional free time."

As this retailer illustrates, the training process is never ending. Employees often need frequent guidance and reminders to ensure they're doing the job correctly and that you are all on the same page.

Another store owner from Ohio delegates every single day in a very direct way ensuring the tasks she wants completed are completed. As she explains, "I type up to-do lists for each store every day and send them to whoever is scheduled to open so they know what they need to get done that day."

In South Dakota, a boutique owner has found the more detailed instructions she leaves, the better success she has. "I am specific in any instructions I leave my employees. All of them have been employed for many years so they're able to perform most duties without much help."

Batching & Other Techniques

Ensuring that every employee has a role and sticks with it is one way to ensure your ship sails smoothly.

"I concentrate on analyzing data and ordering," explains a New York retailer of her time management methods. "My partner does all the display work. The employees take care of the customers superbly. The business runs effortlessly."

A retailer from Massachusetts has taken the same approach. "I delegate tasks to key staff members so I'm more effective in my work. Some staff members are now helping with order entry into

my POS system, entering items on my e-commerce store and helping to line up social media posts for each week."

A store owner from Michigan has found success by "batching" her days – allotting certain tasks for specific days. As she explains, "All ordering on one day, social marketing on another."

Empowering Employees

Delegating tasks to employees not only lessens your workload it also increases your staff's capability and their buy-in to your business. As a store owner from Illinois writes, "I try to work from home most mornings, so staff make more decisions on their own rather than asking me."

In Ohio, a store owner writes, "Delegating empowers employees and frees me to deal with more pressing business dealings."

Employing Technology

In addition to warm human bodies, there are new technologies at our disposal these days which help us make effective use of our time, including ChatGPT.

"We are using AI (ChatGPT 4.0) to create our social media content calendars, write blog posts and design content for our website," shares a Florida store owner. "It still requires a good deal of editing but cuts out the number of hours needed to research and plan content ahead of time."

A multi-store owner from Michigan shares, "I ask ChatGPT questions like 'Give me 100 ways to promote my store for Mother's Day' or 'write 10 headlines for a blog about...'"

Customer Counts Dip

Traffic Decreases While Average Sales Tick Up

By Erica Kirkland

Despite a decrease in foot traffic, boutique owners are seeing a rise in average sales per customer, suggesting a shift towards higher-value transactions and more targeted shopping experiences. Last year at this time store owners reported that customer counts were down 55 percent year-over-year. Today the levels are ticking back up with 35 percent reporting increased traffic vs. last year and 46 percent noting decreased traffic.

The average sale is up slightly from 41 percent year-over-year in June 2023 compared to 43 percent this year. 📈



CUSTOMER COUNTS

(Traffic Levels vs. Last Year)

Up	35%
Down	46%
Same	19%

AVERAGE SALES

(Average Sales vs. Last Year)

Up	43%
Down	25%
Same	32%

Adaptation of AI Low

Store Owners Not Using New Technology

By Erica Kirkland

Despite the technology being free and easy to use, just 34 percent of reporting stores are using AI to assist them in their retail operations. Most cited a lack of time to understand or learn the technology as a reason for this lack of adaptation, however, ChatGPT and other AI generating platforms are among the easiest digital tools unveiled in recent years. Still others view using these tools as the equivalent to being lazy or cheating.

Embracing change isn't easy for those who are comfortable with the status quo but if you want to grow your business and are looking for some help gratis, with ChatGPT you have a free co-worker available to you at any time of the day.

Super Simple to Use

For those who are worried they don't have the time to figure it out, take that excuse and throw it out the window. All you have to do is head to chatgpt.com and enter text (a prompt) into the empty box. You can't do anything wrong or break the system. You just type in what your problem is or what you want to write about and voila, it comes up with ideas.

For example, you can ask it to generate 50 ways you could promote your store this weekend. Explain where your store is located, the vibe of your store, your typical customer or the type of customer you want to attract along with what you sell. Within seconds, ChatGPT searches the web, locates all the local event listings and creates promotional tie-in ideas. The first generation of ideas might not align exactly with your goals, so you just adjust your prompt by adding in more



details or more directions.

If you struggle to come up with ideas for your social media posts or need help crafting an email, then head over to chatgpt.com and sign up for an account. Dozens of our reporting stores are saving tons of time by using AI to help write copy for their holiday catalogs, descriptions for items on their websites and social media posts.

If you spend hours crafting a seasonal message for your email newsletter, ask these digital tools to help. Tell them what you want to convey, the tone of voice you'd like to use and let it work its magic. One store owner even used the tool to write her employee handbook.

Now, you'll have to take what it generates and add your own tone of voice – and factcheck. It's not simply a copy and paste exercise but ChatGPT is a heck of lot faster and more efficient than



ADOPTION OF AI STORE OWNERS USING

Yes	34%
No	63%
Plan to	3%

staring at a screen for hours on end trying to think of witty hashtags. ChatGPT can do it in 10 seconds 🤖

Boosting Your Bottom Line

Innovative Ways to Bump Up Your Average Sales

By Erica Kirkland

With averages sales on the rise, we asked our panel of successful boutique owners what techniques they're currently using to kick up those sales.

Impulse Items

An experienced store owner in South Carolina shares that she, "Always tries to have great impulse items at the checkout counter," while a retailer in Ohio says, "We are keeping more items at the counter for customers to buy."

Upselling

In addition to focusing on impulse items at the cash, store owners are increasing their average sales by upselling customers by suggesting appropriate add-on items.

"Our goal is to have three items in each customers' basket," says a buyer for a multi-store chain in California. "If a customer is buying a greeting card, we remind them we have seasonal cards too which they can buy since they are shopping anyway!"

In Massachusetts, a store owner writes, "We always ask if they need a card to go with a gift or suggest a scarf to complement a handbag or an outfit."

"When we have a matching item, we point that out to the customer," says another store owner from Ohio. "We will also help a customer put together a gift basket of items" which helps increase their average sale.

Training

A number of stores noted that by focusing on sales training they've been able to increase their average sale. "Our sales-



CUSTOMER LOYALTY PROGRAMS

people are very skilled at making add-on suggestions," shares a New York retailer.

Adding Perceived Value

For other business owners a complete revamp of their store has resulted in customers being treated to an entirely new experience.

"We are concentrating on the shop experience more and less on making a sale," says an Indiana store owner. "I feel that if people have a great experience, even if they don't buy something, they are more likely to return and refer."

Higher Quality Merchandise

To increase their average sales some store owners are focusing on weeding out products with low price points and low margins including an Arkansas retailer who writes she is trying to increase her average sale by "Mainly culling out junk items with very low price points."

In Tennessee, a store owner writes,

"I've gotten rid of the items that are \$10 or less. It's just not worth it after credit card fees, gift wrap, etc."

Loyalty Programs

A certain contingent of store owners swear their loyalty programs are integral to assisting them in increasing their average sales.

A retailer in Ohio with a loyalty card program explains, "There are 12 numbers on our card and a customer gets a punch every time they spend \$25. Once all the holes are punched, the customer can spend \$25 towards the purchase of one regular-priced item. We always let them know if they're close to getting another punch and 99 percent of the time, the customer will buy one more thing to get that punch."

GWPs & BYOBs

A tried-and-true tactic deployed by independents and big-box stores alike is the gift-with-purchase (GWP) promo. A multi-store owner in Michigan writes, "At one of our stores, we are trying to increase our average sale to over \$75, so we are offering a free tote bag with a \$75 or larger purchase."

Another Ohio retailer has run a tote bag giveaway every spring for years. "This year's bag had a retail value of around \$20 which the customer received for free if they spent \$80 on regular-priced merchandise."

Yet another retailer in Ohio has taken the BYOB acronym and created Build Your Own Bundle sets in her store. "In order to get the discount, customers need to buy two or more items," she explains. 📦

Avoid the Retail Summer Slump

Nine Practical Ways to Kickstart Sales this Season

By Sara Burks



Summer brings a blissful break for many, with thoughts turning to vacations, outdoor activities, and long, lazy days soaking up the sun rather than shopping sprees. For boutique retailers, this seasonal shift can lead to a noticeable dip in customer foot traffic and sales. However, rather than resigning to this summer slowdown, savvy business owners strategically use this period to boost immediate sales and long-term customer loyalty. Here are proven strategies to help your boutique avoid the retail summer slump.

1 CREATE SUMMER-THEMED PROMOTIONS

Capitalize on the season by crafting promotions and sales around summer themes and holidays. Think beyond the typical Fourth of July sales. Consider themes like Backyard BBQ Essentials, Summer Solstice Sale or Beach Getaway

Must-Haves. Tailoring your promotions to summer activities not only taps into your customers' current mindset but also makes your offerings seem timely and irresistible. Check out our Creative Summer Sale Ideas [blog post](#) for inspiration!

2 LEVERAGE LOCAL EVENTS

Summer is packed with local festivals, markets and community gatherings. Participate in these events to maintain visibility and attract new customers. You can set up a pop-up shop, sponsor a booth or partner with event organizers. This not only boosts your summer sales but also enhances your community presence, which can pay dividends year-round.

3 HOST IN-STORE EVENTS

Organize in-store events such as styling sessions, summer fashion shows or a meet-the-maker day

with local artisans whose products you carry. Events are excellent for building community and giving people a reason to visit your store. Offering a special discount during the event can also convert attendees into buyers.

4 BOOST YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE

With many potential customers traveling or spending more time outdoors, online shopping increases. Ensure your e-commerce site is optimized for mobile use, update your online inventory and consider targeted digital advertising to reach your customers wherever they are. Engaging content that resonates with summer activities or preferences, shared across your social media platforms, can also drive online traffic and sales. Try re-merchandising your website a bit with a new homepage or cart layout. >



5 OFFER SEASONAL LOYALTY REWARDS

Encourage repeat business through a summer loyalty program. Offer rewards that are seasonally appropriate and potentially quicker to attain, such as “Buy three, get your fourth summer essential at 50 percent off.” Make sure the rewards are tempting enough to bring customers back into your store multiple times throughout the summer.

6 PARTNER WITH OTHER LOCAL BUSINESSES

Team up with nearby businesses to cross-promote each other’s offerings. For instance, a collaboration with a local ice cream shop could involve offering discount vouchers to each other’s stores. These partnerships help widen your reach and attract a diverse array of customers.

7 RE-MERCHANDISE YOUR STORE

Refreshing your store layout can dramatically increase interest and

sales. Move your merchandise around to highlight different items and create new displays that draw attention to products that might have been overlooked. Online, consider updating product categories and feature items on your homepage that are particularly suitable for summer or any current promotions.

8 RE-STYLE AND RE-SHOOT PRODUCTS THAT AREN’T SELLING

If certain items aren’t moving, they might just need a new context. Restyle them in a summer setting, perhaps paired with best-sellers or seasonal items, and shoot new photos for your online and physical marketing materials. Fresh images can reignite interest and help customers see these products in a new light, potentially boosting their appeal.

9 INVEST TIME INTO EDUCATION

As a business owner, you are never going to know it all. With constant

shifts in retail trends and consumer behavior, investing time into education is necessary. Using a slow sales time to expand your knowledge with education is the perfect use of time. 📖



Sara Burks is the Director of Partnerships and Education at The Boutique Hub. She has been in the boutique industry for over 20 years

and has a master’s in business administration. At The Boutique Hub, she shares her practical knowledge of the boutique business with Hub members. On top of her boutique experience, Sara is a rodeo coach, started a jewelry brand, is a wife, and a mom of two girls. Follow The Boutique Hub on Instagram ([theboutiquehub](https://www.instagram.com/theboutiquehub)) or join the community at theboutiquehub.com for more content.



Clear Out Your Costly Clutter

Boost Profits by Moving Old Inventory

By Natalie Hammer Noblitt

Boxes of old merchandise you've avoided in your back room could be costing much more than you realize. Retail strategist Salena Knight of the Retail Academy cautions that just one moderately priced item sitting around can drain you of millions in wasted time, effort and potential. Here she explains how it becomes such a large problem for retailers and offers advice to get it moving, so it no longer burdens your mind and finances.

Q. All retailers deal with stock that doesn't sell. When does it become a larger issue?

A. We all have products we buy that will be misses or don't move for a variety of reasons. But I can say from experience that many problems with stock left piling up come from retailers not being able to properly forecast sales. This leads them to buy too much inventory.

The best way to approach buying is looking at your history. If I know candles made up 15 percent of my sales in the past few years, I need to keep my buying budget around 15 percent for this category. It would be a mistake to go to market, fall in love with new candles and spend 30 percent of my budget on candles. Many times, we buy what catches our eye and return with more of a category or item than we can truly sell.

That's why before going to a show or making big inventory purchases, retailers

To avoid discounting, bundle slow movers with pieces that move better. If your clientele expects an upscale product from you, this is a much better way to move out stale merchandise. People feel like, "How awesome! I'm getting two for the price of one."

should establish a rough buying plan. Know how items and categories sell each season and in what quantities. Be sure to leave enough money to purchase new and trending items.

Q. Once merchandise goes past its season, what mistakes do you see retailers making?

A. Many retailers put away seasonal items that don't sell, hoping they will sell the next season. I've done the math on these types of situations. Putting \$500 worth of holiday stock away in a cupboard could mean \$50,000 or more in foregone sales, and it happens quickly. This sounds incredibly high, but you must consider opportunity cost and time tied up in that item.

By holding on to it, you are forgoing the things you could have bought and sold in the meantime. The value of that loss expands rapidly. Say you bought something for \$20 and you sell it for \$40. Now you have \$40 to buy two of the \$20 things. Then, take that revenue

to purchase four \$20 items. When you do the math with an eye on the opportunities you missed out on, you begin to realize how much inventory left in the back room costs your business.

Retailers will come back to me and say, "It's just easier to put it away and think about it next year." But I remind them, recouping \$5 from a \$20 buy means you can use that money to buy something that will sell over and over again. The money lost can be regained but only if the item isn't sitting there collecting dust and costing you money.

Q. What are some of the best ways to avoid a glut of old stock?

A. Understand who your best customers are but keep an eye on changing demographics as your current customer can change, especially with the economic times we're facing. The person shopping with you during the pandemic, when everyone was all cashed up from staying

continued on pg 16 >



Clear Out Your Costly Clutter

Continued from page 15

at home, may not be the same one shopping now. When things get easier financially for more shoppers, we will likely need to change how we market to them again. It's all about tweaking our messaging to meet shoppers where they are in this moment.

Opportunity cost is something we aren't properly taught when running a store. Even when earning my business degree, it wasn't discussed the way it should be. But the ideal way to operate is increasing your ability to jump at great opportunities. By forecasting sales as best you can, and knowing what sells for your area and customer, you will have the best opportunities to grow your business. Clearing out your inventory of items that don't sell gives you a better chance to buy ones that will earn revenue.

Q. What are the best ways to rid your store of stale merchandise?

A. There are many ways, including all the traditional ways: price reductions, sales and giveaways. The last resort is to give the item to charity for a tax deduction. It's important to keep in mind the ways in which these methods can reflect on your business, and whether they are the right message to send to customers.

Instead of reducing items by 50 percent, which makes people wonder if the item is less valuable, consider another approach. Try offering a 'Buy two products and get one free' or 'Buy one, get one.' To avoid discounting,



bundle slow movers with pieces that move better. If your clientele expects an upscale product from you, this is a much better way to move out stale merchandise. People feel like, "How awesome! I'm getting two for the price of one."

Q. What approach should be taken to clear out holiday items?

A. Many people think it makes sense to hold onto holiday merchandise until the next year, but that couldn't be further from the truth. Find a way to move it before the holiday arrives, even if it's on

Christmas Eve. And that doesn't mean just discounting. People will still enjoy those purchases made close to the holiday.

One retailer I've worked with who owns a nursery and gift shop found herself with excess holiday stock and decided to offer a 'buy two, get one' free deal on Christmas Eve. Within five hours, she sold \$3000 of holiday merchandise with this promotion. Instead of holding on to the items and letting them gather dust, she had the power of that money to use in the new year to increase her profits. 📦

Gift For Life Team Raises \$46K During NY Aids Walk

A mighty group of 16 industry volunteers raised an astounding \$46,457 for the AIDS Walk NY as members of the Team Gift for Life/NY NOW. The walk is the world's largest and most visible annual HIV/AIDS fundraising event. In 2024 alone, some 10,000+ participants raised \$1,872,909.

"I couldn't be prouder of this year's team who pulled out all the stops to raise more than \$46K," said team co-captain Caroline Kennedy. "We had a great walk – full of team spirit and great weather. Our grateful thanks to everyone who has supported our efforts to raise money for this important cause."

This year marks the 12th consecutive year that Gift for Life has fielded an AIDS Walk NY team. The 16 participants this year included both in-person participants in New York City as well as remote participants across the United States. Former Gift for Life chair, Matthew Katzenson, led the team in fundraising with \$13,445 and was one of the event's overall top fundraisers. The industry can donate to this cause through to the end of June at <https://gmhc.aidswalkny.org/team/556203>.



Front row (L-R): Caroline Kennedy, Shayna Ventricelli, Amy Loewenberg, Annmarie Sumski. Back Row (L-R): Carolyn Geremia, Kate Duff, Bill McCue, Terese Affolter, Sally Fisher, Matthew Mathiasen, Karalynn Sprouse and Sandra Kehoe. Participants not pictured include Angela Schmook and family, Kelly Bristol, Su Hilty and Matthew Katzenson.

Just Got 2 Have It Expands Atlanta Footprint Agency Adds Additional Showroom

Just Got 2 Have It is expanding its footprint in Atlanta by adding an additional showroom to their anchor locations on the 17th floor of building 2 in AmericasMart.

The agency's lifestyle brands will now be presented in one cohesive location, showroom 1700 near the elevators while gift brands will be presented in the existing showroom, 1721, located by the escalators.

"This expansion is a great reflection of our growth over the past 24 years and a testament to our continued leadership in the industry," says principal Michelle Morgan. "We have many exciting changes ahead for the July market."

Just Got 2 Have It was founded in 2000 and is proudly woman-owned, covering 37 states with divisions in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, Midwest and West, and more than 24,000 square feet of showroom space between its Las Vegas and Atlanta showrooms.

REPS ARE LOCAL TOO

New Movement Aims to Strengthen Retailers Relationships with Reps

A collaborative initiative named "Reps are Local Too" is set to launch this summer fueled by the representative agencies nationwide who have united in order to champion their local reps. Through the endeavour, the group plans to use various methods and means to encourage retailers to foster partnerships with representatives.

"In the spirit of the 'Shop Local' movement, 'Reps are Local Too' underscores the importance of retailers collaborating with their local representatives," says Angela Schmook, vice president of Road Runners who initiated this program alongside Kelly Bristol from Just Got 2 Have It.

Kelly adds, "This movement transcends individual interests, bringing together rep agencies from across the country in an unprecedented, shared commitment."

The campaign will be noticeable throughout the summer market season at Dallas Market Center, Atlanta Market Center, Las Vegas Market Center, Seattle Mart and NY NOW. A media campaign scheduled to launch on June 4 will include a coordinated social media blitz across participating agencies.

Agencies participating in the Reps are Local Too movement include And! Sales, Darrah & Company, Diverse Marketing, Enchanted Moments, Just Got 2 Have It, Keith Smith, The Link Companies, NEST, Next Step Reps, The Portico Collection, On the Road Reps, Ritz Sisters, Road Runners, Sales Producers, SE Marketplace, Twist Sales, among many others.



Texas Shop Celebrates Sweet 16

By Jessica Harlan

Cynthia Sutton-Stolle is no stranger to the retail industry. Throughout her career, she's worked in marketing and other roles for department stores, shopping malls, and clothing and jewelry brands, before moving to Texas and retiring. "That lasted a year," she laughs. Wanting a new challenge, she opened The Silver Barn, named for the round metal Quonset barns that dot the landscape. She reveals what she thinks about while shopping markets, the unique way she celebrates her store's anniversary and her winning retail strategies.

JUST THE FACTS

STORE:

The Silver Barn

LOCATION:

Columbus, Texas

SQUARE FOOTAGE: 1800

EMPLOYEES:

One full-time,
three part-time

WEB:

thesilverbarn.com

TOP LINES: d'Marie,

Allsop Home & Garden,
Modgy, Voluspa, Jellycat,
Nora Fleming

What makes your store special?

We are very in tune with who our customer is. When I go to market, I have them in mind. I'm shopping for the customer who has a new grandbaby or I'm finding things I know another customer will love. In fact, all my sales reps know the story about my husband's great-aunt Wanda who wanted to support my store but thought it was too expensive for her social security budget. When she was shopping for a wedding gift, I asked how much she wanted to spend and she gave me an amount, which was not much. But we found the perfect gift for her, and she was so excited that it was right within her budget. Now I tell my reps, we need to find an Aunt Wanda gift, meaning something that's inexpensive for our older customers to buy when they want something nice.

How would you describe the atmosphere of your store?

Our store is a little more sophisticated than what you might expect in our town. Most of our fixtures are pieces I've bought at Round Top during their antique show, such as a vintage stove at the front where we display our food. Our building is almost 100 years old, but we recently redid the ceiling and the lighting so it's fun and contemporary but still has a country ambiance.

To what do you attribute your success?

The ability to survive! I met a girl at market last January who was just opening her first store and asked me what kind of pitfalls there are. I told her that there are so many: the pandemic, slowdowns at every election, droughts that affect our cattle prices or crop prices – every day is a challenge. Your job is to figure it out and just be aware. During the first week of the pandemic,



I was at home wondering what to do. I realized, I've got a website that's just sitting there, I can focus my time and attention on that. We put effort into Facebook and Instagram, even buying ads. I found fan clubs of Nora Fleming and Jellycat and let them know we had product, and that got us through the pandemic. Last year we finally hit a milestone where 14 percent of our overall gross sales are web sales.

How do you promote your store?

We do a lot of work with various charities around town. We'll do gift baskets or donate gift cards for fundraising charities like the Columbus Historic Preservation Trust or schools. We also advertise in a quarterly magazine that many visiting tourists pick up. Everything else is Facebook and Instagram, and I recently added in TikTok.

What has been your most successful recent event?

For our anniversary in March every year, we do a tote bag filled with goodies. We'll create an image and print it on

35 to 40 tote bags. We'll fill them with items from our vendors; each one is filled with different things but with a similar value. Customers who spend \$100 get to pick which tote bag they're going to take. This year we ran out of bags by 11 a.m. I have some customers who have all 16 tote bags for every year we've been doing this.

Do you have a favorite new product line?

We brought in a CBD lotion from Yuzu that's been really successful. The reason I bought it is because I'd fallen before I went to market and my back was hurting. A rep gave me a sample to try. I tried it that night and the next day I walked the floor without any problem!

What is your most successful retail strategy?

For us, it's our displays. Pricing is such a crazy thing right now with shipping and the price of goods and imports. I can't compete on pricing with the Walmart's of the world, so I have to make my strategy more about how I display merchandise to make it appealing and something somebody would buy, enabling them to visualize that it would look good in their house.

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

Every day is a new day, and you must roll with the punches. There's always a reason why something's not good. You must look for the silver lining. When I'm feeling down and I'm having a bad week, it never fails that a customer will come in or email me and tell me that it was the best shopping experience that they've had, and that makes it all worthwhile. 📧



Star Spangled Tea

Star Spangled Tea is a line we discovered in the Atlanta temps last winter. This is an American brand through and through— a true liberty-loving tea brand. Owned by a U.S. Army Iraq war veteran and his wife, an elementary school teacher, Star Spangled Tea highlights the cultural importance and health benefits of top-tier American classic tea. From their Florida and Georgia tea blends to their American herbal collection, each ingredient is meticulously sourced to create the highest quality heritage blend teas. \$6.99 cost per pouch. (starspangledtea.com)

Set The Mood

Tumbled marble coasters from Black Angel Designs are a bestseller for one of our reporting stores and the company reports the coasters are also the bestselling products in their wholesale division. Within this collection, “Our classic book-cover coasters are by far our bestsellers, going into bookstores and gift shops,” says company owner and designer Cortney Kinzler. “Recently, our Swiftie-inspired art coasters have been growing in popularity as well.”

The company also designs custom coasters for clients. “We can do custom coasters for different locations, name drops and store logos. We also wholesale our designs as stickers, art prints, t-shirts, and tea towels,” says Cortney who makes the coasters by hand with her husband Graig.

Using a unique ink-transfer process, the coasters are then finished with a waterproof sealant and a cork backing to protect surfaces. \$5.45 cost per coaster. (blackangeldesigns.com)



Cheeky Pillows

Ampersand Design Studio is launching a new line of Martini glass and olive-shaped throw pillows for Peking Handicraft this summer. Made with wool hook, these cushions feature a poly velveteen back and poly blow-fill, ensuring both comfort and durability. Shipping in July 2024, these pillows promise to match the high standards of Peking Handicraft's other handmade hook pillows. While Peking Handicraft may not always top our sales charts in the pillow category, we hold a special fondness for this line. These meticulously crafted products combine high quality with trendy designs, appealing to discerning consumers who value both quality and artistry. (www.pkhc.com)

Reader's Pick!



Project Genius

Established in 2009, Project Genius is a woman-owned company located in Round Rock, Texas. The company was referred to us by one of our reporting stores from Montana who writes, "All the wooden puzzle toys" from Project Genius are topsellers when it comes to games for adults (see the chart on page 4). "This line is great for us!"

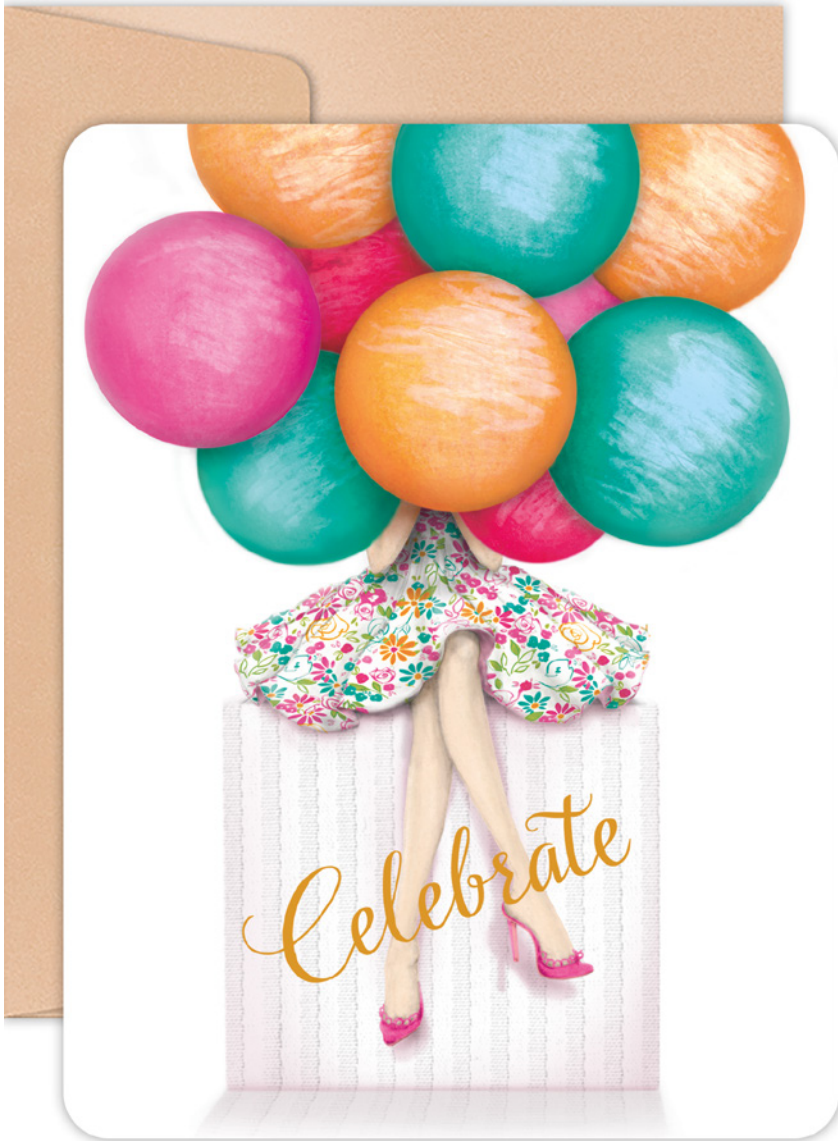
The company's True Genius line features wood and metal brainteasers inspired by ancient artifacts. Finished in an antique style, the puzzles look as though they might actually be artifacts. The line offers a wide variety of price points to choose from in addition to difficulty levels and solve types, filling in gaps in your puzzle section or standing alone as a comprehensive collection of brainteasers.

The Lost Treasure Collection, pictured, is an assortment of five brainteasers inspired by ancient civilizations with a unique solution for each, offering a range of difficulty levels. \$12.50 wholesale. (projectgeniusinc.com)



CHRISTMAS TREE TENT

If you didn't venture into the Dugan Bliss showroom during the last Atlanta market, you would not have discovered The Magical Underland Christmas Tree Tent. Each tree is almost six feet tall and includes integrated 3D infinity lights inside the tree which provide hours of entertainment with over forty light variations, all Bluetooth enabled to sync with music. The trees assemble in minutes with a removable sherpa flooring for easy cleaning. Customers can decorate a base tree or purchase a fully decorated tree (pictured). The trees are an investment and are designed as heirloom pieces which will provide entertainment for years to come. Each unit is sturdy and hand built to ensure quality construction. From \$250 cost. (sales@magicalunderland.com)



Willow & Ivy Press

Leanin' Tree has launched a new division, Willow & Ivy Press, featuring 134 cards for everyday occasions, plus 24 designs for fall and winter holidays. The card designs infuse color and design trends with authentic and meaningful sentiments, bundled into a petite notelet size.

"Our goal at Willow and Ivy Press was to create cards that you want to keep long after you receive them," says Ashley Akin, head of business development. "We want to keep people close and connected in a fun and beautiful way."

"The development of our (new) brand has been thoughtful and purposeful," Ashley adds. "Our close-knit team of writers, designers and mentors infused our cards with the care and passion every moment of connection deserves."

Willow & Ivy cards are die-cut with foil and glitter embellishments and paired with champagne-gold pearlized envelopes. All designs retail for \$6 and are manufactured and fulfilled in the U.S. (www.willowandivypress.com)

BRUCE JULIAN HERITAGE FOODS

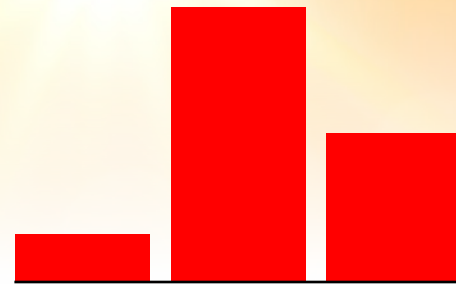
A haberdasher from North Carolina, Bruce Julian had been on a quest to create the perfect Bloody Mary for years before nailing it in 2014. The Bruce Julian Bloody Mary Mix is an all-natural, handcrafted, sophisticated mixer that starts out sweet and finishes savory – with just enough heat.

We met Bruce and his team in the Atlanta temps in January where he explained that he was encouraged by customers to sell his concoctions and that's how he ended up at the market. Alongside his wife Bonnie, they launched Bevs and Bites with partner Paul Raybin. To further pay homage to their beloved Bloody Mary Mix, they added a savory rimmer and pickled veggies. But they couldn't stop there.

"Because we love all the gracious Southern classics, we dug deep into our memories of favorite things throughout our lives." They took all their memories and created "an amazing array of savory, sassy Southern fare" that includes Craft Beer Brittle, additional cocktail mixers, meatball kits, and Couch Mixes which combine snacks sprinkled with spices and aromatic herbs. (brucejulianheritagefoods.com, www.couchmixsnacks.com)



SUMMER SALES OUTLOOK



SUMMER SALES OUTLOOK

Very optimistic **8%**

Somewhat optimistic **61%**

Somewhat pessimistic **31%**

Based on Spring Patterns, Stores are Somewhat Optimistic

By Erica Kirkland

Store owners are entering the summer selling season feeling somewhat optimistic. Experiencing year-over-year sales declines for most of the year, and facing an election in November, retailers aren't feeling overly confident that the summer will be stellar, and 31 percent are feeling somewhat pessimistic.

"Business has been up and down all spring, and we're not seeing any consistency that gives us optimism that we'll show steady increases," says an Illinois retailer.

"This is the first time I have checked a pessimistic box, but I feel like it will be a dry summer in terms of sales," predicts a South Carolina store owner. "It's almost a full-time job finding unique marketing ideas to keep customers engaged and excited enough to come through the door."

"I have always tried to see the positive but after two consecutive years of being down and tracking that way this year

again, I am losing my optimism," shares a Minnesota store owner.

"I think people are being more careful with their money," says a Pennsylvania store owner while in Massachusetts, a store owner writes, "People seem to spend less during presidential election years. A store owner in Rhode Island concurs, saying, "During election years people restrict their discretionary spending."

"With the prices of everything still going up, it's safe to say that small business owners are cautiously optimistic," says another Illinois retailer. "We keep hearing of so many small businesses in our area doing really badly with talks of closing. Something has to give for small businesses to survive."

In Wisconsin a retailer writes, "There is a new shop across the street from me that shops for her store on Temu and markets it as a makers' market with local artisans, and I'm afraid people will fall for it. We are in a small town so there are only so many customers in the pie. 🍷"

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ABOUT

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* makes no warranty or guarantee, express or implied, regarding potential sales of any products referred to in the publication. *Giftbeat* is owned and operated by *Instore Magazine Inc.*

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