

RETAIL IDEAS

BY THOMAS LESTER

Retail ideas from our Retail Stars

LAST MONTH, WE HAD THE HONOR of introducing the 2017 Retail Stars, a select group of 50 of the best and brightest independently-owned brick-and-mortar home décor retailers in the U.S.

This month, we're taking an in-depth look into what makes many of these stores so special in their communities. We asked the Stars what sets them apart in their market, and what kind of strategies and ideas they've implemented to drive traffic and boost sales.

Frequently changing the store's look is a common practice shared by many of the Stars. For instance, Tulsa, Okla.-based **T.A. Lorton** does it often to highlight different styles and products.

Robin's Nest Interiors in Louisville, Ky. also puts thought into its arrangements. Owner Robin Cole said by getting creative with vignettes, it creates additional sales opportunities because some customers wind up buying the complete look "as-is."

Luxe Furniture & Design of Tulsa, Okla. rearranges its floor set at least once a quarter. Officials say it keeps inventory looking fresh while demonstrating current design trends.

Jayson Home, based in Chicago, opened a seasonal pop-up store in Sag Harbor, N.Y., last summer. Beaufort, N.C.'s **Calypso Cottage** sometimes conducts trunk shows as far away as Vero Beach, Fla.

Events and workshops held in-store are surefire ways to build success according to several Stars.

New Orleans' **Modern Market** holds them often as a way to maintain and grow clientele and sales: "Our most recent was partnering with a local startup to raise awareness of our brand, promote the modern lifestyle and support growing relationships within our community ... Near the holidays, we hosted a succulent wreath workshop, teaching the technique for creating succulent wreaths. Our goal was for people to come in and leave with knowledge, holiday cheer, inspiration and a new gift for their own home or someone else's."

Jonathons Coastal Living, located in Fountain Valley, Calif., reports that it incorporates teaching workshops into in-store events throughout the year. Easton, Md.-based **Bountiful Interiors** also notes that in-store events are big draws.

Six-store rug specialist **NW Rugs & Furniture** positions its employees as experts in the field to help consumers feel better about their purchases: "We pride ourselves on delivering awesome content. We work hard on photography and writing content that helps the customer through their buying journey. We want to lead in the space of content marketing."



Wit & Whim owner Laurie Scheinman said her Port Washington, N.Y.-based shop recently rolled out a "Why I love Wit & Whim" 30-second video contest to create more of a sense of community with its customers.

Bowling Green, Ky.'s **Barbara Stewart Interiors** uses cause marketing to benefit a local women's fund as a way to build local business and goodwill.

That sense of community is present in **Obelisk Home**, as it strives to be a good corporate citizen in Springfield, Mo. The retailer gives back and helps others by hosting events, participating in a variety of charities and offering time and talents for animal, children's and civil rights causes as well as supporting nearby Missouri State University.

Huck & Peck Home Furnishings of Chattanooga, Tenn. will routinely donate furniture items to schools, foundations and community charities for silent auctions.

Absolutely Fabulous often pairs with local churches in and around Huntington Beach, Calif. and provides deeply discounted product for their functions. The churches are then given the difference in monies collected.

While word-of-mouth has proved to be great for **Wit & Whim**, the Port Washington, N.Y.-based store decided to amplify its message.

"We often hear customers gush about the shop so this past holiday season, we decided to use these great testimonials by offering a 'Why I love Wit & Whim' 30-second video contest," said Wit & Whim owner Laurie Scheinman. "What started out as a fun way to create a conversation with old and new customers became a phenomenon."

Décor Direct, of Sarasota, Fla., invites its team members to take ownership with an idea-of-the-month program in which staffers contribute two ideas weekly to improve upon in each category.

"The ideas can be product ideas, merchandising thoughts, innovative techniques, new equipment needed or just

about anything else," said Décor Direct owner Celeste Greunstein.

Trend House, located in Palm Springs, Calif., reported that it brings in a mid-century artist to paint homes for clients.

True to its name, Brooklyn, N.Y.-based **Smallhome** specializes in small batch products – some are brought in and some are crafted on site.

"I only carry small batch American-made items – many we make ourselves in the workshop in the back of the shop," noted owner Julia Small. "With an intense focus on sustainability, we create little worlds and showcase objects that deserve to be treasured and feel good buying."

Technology is a big area where **Jerome's Furniture**, which is based in San Diego and has stores throughout Southern California, stands out. It has recently broadened its "Real Family Values" experience across all channels.

"We're doing this by leveraging augmented reality technology into our website," said Scott Perry, Jerome's senior vice president of digital marketing, IT and omnichannel. "This enables customers to view how the furniture would look in their home through their mobile device."

While these ideas have worked for our Retail Stars and could work for yours, perhaps you have techniques that help your store garner additional sales. Share your best tips with us by emailing tlester@homeaccentstoday.com. ■

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