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# STATIONERY

SUMMER 2021

## Trends

THE OCCASIONS ISSUE



MERRY

# 24 Tips for Selling Christmas

*Retailers share what succeeded last year — plus their '21 plans*

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The Merry Party Pennant and The Perfect Tree Acrylic Stir Sticks and Gift tags from **Cami Monet** capture the wonder of the season in displays, windows and screens. **Circle 124.**

This photograph and styling courtesy of Juliana Mary (julianamary.com)

2020 was full of surprises, most of them horrible, but there was the occasional burst of optimism — even if we didn't learn about that until afterwards. Originally, the National Retail Federation (NRF) forecast 2020 holiday sales to increase from 3.6% to 5.2% over 2019, settling somewhere

between \$755.3 billion and \$766.7 billion. That's on par with 2019's 4.1%. Instead, on Jan. 15, the NRF reported that holiday sales swelled 8.3%, to \$789.4 billion. That figure includes online sales, which swelled 23.9%, to \$209 billion.

## COVER STORY

With that kind of success, I wanted to learn exactly how our community across the nation navigated what will be remembered as the strangest holiday season ever. They also shared tips on how they are prepping for 2021's fourth quarter in the face of the ever shifting challenges presented by COVID-19 and our nation's recovery.

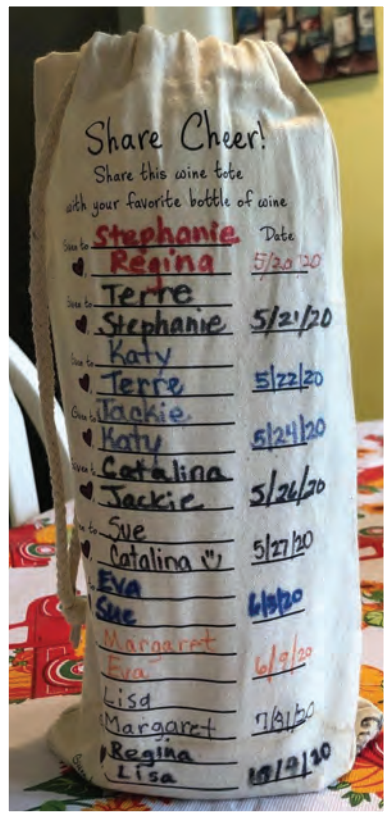
1. **Start Your Buying Sooner.** "One thing we learned last year with all of the supply chain issues is to order EARLIER!" exclaimed Kandice Matsler, creative-in-charge at Barque Gifts, Lubbock, Texas. "This holiday already looks a lot different than previous years because we did the majority of our holiday buying by mid-April. Of course we'll still add new discoveries as we find them, but we plan to ship everything earlier than normal."

2. **Promote Sooner.** Faced with the prospect of USPS issues and copious online orders, Shayna Norwood, owner of Chicago's Steel Petal Press, started encouraging her clientele to shop online, early and often. "The holiday shopping season started much earlier than usual because of this," she noted.

3. **Rethink Your Reality.** Pei Sim, the owner of The Paper + Craft Pantry in Austin, was open only by appointment throughout Holiday '20, with about six slots from Fridays-Sundays. "I was fully prepared to come in financially under 2019," she explained. "(To) take the pressure off December, (I) spread out financial goals over the entire quarter. We started promoting our online holiday shop in October and had our single biggest sales day on launch day. We sold out of a lot of holiday décor, ornaments and candles really quickly, which was wonderful, but also proved challenging as we were not able to reorder in time for the holidays. We will definitely be launching our online holiday shop earlier, perhaps not in October but early November. We used to only put out holiday goods on Small Business Saturday!"

4. **Add Imaginative Styling Streetside.** "We still wanted to create little joys for our customers (so we) collaborated with our long-time prop stylist to launch a new holiday window display to believe in magic," described Grace Kang, founder and chief buyer of the Pink Olive stores in downtown Manhattan and Cold Springs, New York. "We brought in some whimsical elements that showcased the importance of slowing down — i.e., sending more mail and doing the little things that bring magic."

5. **Deck The Halls Online First.** With the trend of shopping early likely to hold strong, Ann Cantrell, owner, Annie's Blue Ribbon General Store, Brooklyn, New York, will not just put themed wares such as ornaments out early — but "even earlier on our website," she detailed.



PhiloSophie's expressed the giving spirit of the season via a specially designed ornament and a wine & spirits tote designed to be filled, drunk and passed among friends.

## COVER STORY

- 6. Retain What Works.** Jennifer Luna, owner of Paper Luxe, Fircrest, Washington, more than doubled her 2019 holiday sales in 2020, despite having capacity capped at 25%. “Curbside pickup has always been available, so we were positioned well when COVID-19 hit. We still see very strong online and curbside orders, as shoppers find it safe and convenient. I don’t think this will change even after the pandemic is over!”
- 7. Expand Virtually.** Norwood is staying on the path she forged last year. “For Holiday 2021, I would like to get more items from our retail shop online, and also am looking to update our website to be more conducive to online shopping.”
- 8. Go Outside the Box.** On Black Friday 2020, Suzanne Loesch, proprietor of Mockingbird Paperie, Ithaca, New York, and her husband tested positive for COVID-19, impacting not just their health but Mockingbird’s holiday season. An SBA loan helped refine and relaunch their online presence so sales were down “only” about 25%. Still, her high-end, custom offerings retain shoppers. “For example, we carry a line of products by a West Coast artist who crafts whimsical holiday dioramas within real goose eggs. Customers return each year to add to their growing collections.”
- 9. Hire Seasonal Staff.** “(Last year) I didn’t hire seasonal help because I wasn’t sure how busy we would be or if (we’d) be shut down again,” recalled Norwood. “With so many more people shopping online, our shipping team was much busier than previous years. The USPS and all postal carriers were overwhelmed, and packages were massively delayed. In addition, one of our cards went viral on Etsy, and we were completely backlogged with orders. In 2021 we will be more prepared with additional shipping staff and additional retail workers.”
- 10. Throw a Party.** Not being able to have a physical open house did not stop Matsler from creating a festive shopping atmosphere. “Since we couldn’t have an in-store event, we preloaded our holiday items on the website but made them hidden. Customers pre-purchased tickets to the online event. For either ticket level, regular or VIP, customers received a swag bag worth more than their ticket and an event discount code.”



Despite dealing with reduced capacity, Jennifer Luna of Paper Luxe, ST’s newest editorial board member, still doubled her 2019 holiday sales in 2020, with help from enchanting, engaging vignettes stocked with colorful cards and a very distinctive advent box (top row). Pink Olive’s windows, devoted to “Don’t Stop Believin” and cozy comfort themes, turned many a streetside stroller into a store shopper (bottom row).

“On the night of the Launch Party, ticket holders received a link and password to the hidden collection. The VIP group was allowed to shop an hour earlier, so that was a great perk for our competitive shoppers! At first, it was tricky to figure out the logistics of filling a large amount of orders in the middle of a merchandise flip, but it worked out. Since we didn’t put any holiday products on the sales floor until after the party, we didn’t have to destroy a display.”

Several items sold out, so those never even made it on the floor! Customers told us it still had a party atmosphere. Maybe the limited number of tickets and the rush of trying to login to a ‘secret’ website made it feel like frantic holiday shopping? Whatever it was — it worked!”

- 11. Make a List, and Check it Twice.** “For holiday 2021, I plan to be more strategic with what our community really responded well to last year,” Sim underscored. “I hope

to place larger quantity orders and expand on holiday varieties as well as make a short list of vendors who have the ability and capability to restock inventory quickly!”

**12. See What’s Selling, and Plan Accordingly.**

Kang’s holiday ‘20 bestsellers included Pink Olive’s handmade Rifle fabric face masks, candles, baby gifts, and cards. She increased production of her private label candle collection, and Pink Olive became its own #1 selling vendor, bypassing long-time record holder Rifle Paper Co. “Based on our candle success, we’re looking to launch a ‘candle of the month’ subscription. Kind of like a wine of the month club, but for candle lovers,” Kang outlined. As for additional plans, “We’re looking to cook up something fun for Holiday 2021. It may have something to do with self-care.”

**13. Join the (Pop) Culture Club.** “Our biggest successes were very focused on the zeitgeist of the times – like Santa ornaments with masks and election-themed items,” remembered Cantrell, who is also an

associate professor at the Fashion Institute of Technology. “We will continue to leave money open to add these fun items to our assortment, as long as we can get them in in a timely manner.”

**14. Shop Wide, Not Deep.** “We think Holiday 2021 is going to be big and festive!” continued Cantrell. “We are going back to breadth instead of just depth so our in-store customer will have more options. We cut back SKU count to get more items online.”

**15. Take A Holiday Scroll.** “My team and I have made it a top priority to consistently show up on social media, and we credit that for our continued success,” emphasized Luna. “Sharing new products, doing quick shop tours, and highlighting hot products always keeps (us) top of mind for our customers.”

Luna has taken it further with live events as well as an app, she continued. “We recently started hosting weekly Facebook live sales utilizing the CommentSold software. This has generated a lot of engagement and additional sales, and we definitely

plan to continue through the holidays. Our live events also broadcast in our new app and customers are loving it! We’re finding the app a fresh new way of reaching our customers via push notifications in a time when algorithms and constant changes in social media are a challenge.”

**16. Bundle It!** Like many retailers I interviewed, Luna has found success online and onscreen with curated gift bundles, both year-round and seasonally themed. “Our customers like the simplicity of picking and clicking a complete gift quickly and easily. We hand write their gift notes and ship in a box lined with tissue and crinkle paper,” she described.

**17. Go Corporate.** Don’t forget to connect with local businesses, Luna recommended. “Real estate agents and mortgage brokers love our personal shopping and curated gift baskets for their clients. They give us a bit of info about their clients and their budget, and we craft a beautiful gift they can pick up the same day.”

♥  
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*with HEART*  
**STUDIO**

We are excited to share our 2021 Holiday Collection with you.

We have a gorgeous selection of greeting cards, boxed card sets, giftwrap and coordinating gift tags to choose from.

We’d love to be a part of your Holiday product lineup.

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Circle 412



Traditional crafts are being rediscovered and redefined by today's captivating marketplace. Pei Sim of **The Paper + Craft Pantry** lets hand drawn blackboard imagery and messaging set the creative mood.

local delivery customers," commented Cantrell. "It's all a moving target! But we are cautiously optimistic for the holiday and buying that way to secure stock."

**19. Have Mercy on the Pandemic Procrastinators.**

If conditions allow it, Matsler is hoping to meet her customer requests for a repeat performance of her "Procrastinator's Party." "For one day, we offer select items at a discount that can still be monogrammed or personalized — even just the week before Christmas. A lot of these products are done in-house, so it doesn't stress us out, but our customers have the chance to personalize something special."

**20. Keep it Personal.** Joanna Alberti, owner and artist of philoSophie's Stationery & Gifts, Spencerport, New York, made personalized products the cornerstone of her 2020 holiday season, when she was open by appointment. Easy to order online and then ship or pick up storeside, it "was all about making a personal connection," she enthused. "I offered personalized Holiday philoSophie's on greeting cards, ceramic mugs and porcelain ornaments. (Some) you could personalize with town or city, (while

with) the signature Sophie characters, a customer personalized the hair color and skin tone. Themes included Better Together, Home for the Holidays and Friends Close at Heart."

**21. Brand Yourself.** Packaging can enable your shop to stay top-of-mind, Alberti pointed out. "Each product was lovingly gift wrapped with a shop small gift tag and red ribbon. It also took the work out for the customer."

**22. Complimentary is Complementary.** "I'll bring back a matching/free greeting card with purchase in Holiday '21," Alberti added. "(Either) the customer includes a special message with the gift or philoSophie's handwrites their note to ship on their behalf. This adds to the personal touch and also impacts the customer. (Meanwhile for the recipient) the card is the first touch point of the special gift they're about to open."

**23. Take a Risk.** "COVID-19 really put everything into perspective," Loesch shared. "Instead of my usual behavior of being completely terrified whether I would be open in 2022, I began to think how I could expand my business. Being a "paperie" I have

## A Homespun Holiday

For many retailers in our space, strong fourth-quarter sales result from stellar in-store shopping experiences and exceptional DIY workshops. Luna is still hoping to kick off her season with her holiday open house the first weekend in November. The festivities include watercolor, cookie decorating, and calligraphy workshops, all of which "customers have been begging us to start again," she explained.

Bailey Rivera and Emma James are proprietresses of the Antiquaria wholesale range and mercantile in Littleton, Colorado. While they have built a tight crafting community, "We have definitely seen this really boom in the past year as people found a new appreciation in making and hobby related products," Rivera noted, citing their calligraphy kit and interactive sticker sheets as recent customer favorites. "We see a shift in customers valuing the experience of the product and looking for more than just an object."

Alison Kaplan of Kata Golda Handmade has also seen a big jump in interest in her DIY kits and craft supplies. "The intention of the finished project plays a big factor in what products customers gravitate toward: a little pin to put on a child's jacket, a heavily stitched pocket pal to hang on the Christmas tree, a stuffed companion to gift to a grandchild, a new hardbound book for journaling. I love it when people share pictures of their creations with me, and I get to see how they have made the project their own."

The winter holidays already have so many established handmade traditions, James continued. "Whether it's cookies with the littles, ornaments, table decorations or hand-addressed holiday cards, customers are looking to up their skills with each passing year. We definitely see a huge uptick in calligraphy kit and calligraphy supply sales as the holidays approach. People are purchasing both for themselves to help them craft holiday tags and envelopes and of course, also for gifts."

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"In my house, the same collection of things comes out of the holiday box every year, and most of those things are handmade," added Kaplan. "They hold so many memories – not just in the tradition of displaying the item year after year, but also the memory of the time spent making it. These things represent different ages and phases of creativity with my daughter, the different crafts that were sparking my interest that year, the things my mom saved that I made when I was little. I like to add a new keepsake each year. I always set the intention to slow down and craft and create during the holidays, both for myself and to give as gifts."

Kaplan encourages her retailers to set up a little display of the made items as a silent selling tool. "I offer a pre-made version of all of the DIY kits, or I nudge the retailer to try their hand at making one of the kits for display."

The elephant in the room is when in-person workshops can resume, and how to build community in the meantime. "If conditions do not allow meeting in person," Luna promised, "we're looking at holding (holiday) events online!"

When IRL is impossible, venues that "offer support and have knowledgeable, crafty staff have the most success," Rivera described. "We have a library of tutorial content we've made over the years to use as a reference."

Like many makers, Kaplan started posting free sewing tutorials on her site the past year, building brand loyalty as crafters sharpen their skills. "I try to make these projects accessible to most skill levels and adaptable to materials people likely already have at home. These projects are a good place to start when you want to make something but find your mind empty of ideas."

The prospect of gathering to craft in person is appealing on several levels, finished James. "We think this category is one that is here to stay. As we are able to gather more safely, I can see meetups and classes being a really big draw for local shops and their communities."



Clockwise from top, **Antiquaria** (circle 136) elevates the act of calligraphy into a meditative practice. Meanwhile sweet **Kata Golda** (circle 138) kits can be the start of new family customs, and **STORIBRUSH** (circle 137) integrates personalization into the DIY mix by transforming photographs into paint-by-numbers.

noticed that through the pandemic people were really writing a lot more. Whether it be journaling or writing a letter a day to someone they couldn't touch ... it didn't matter if they lived across the world or the next room. It only mattered that they wrote. So I am considering launching a branded product line. Hopefully, I will be able to pull it

off by the holiday season. It will be beautiful and smell amazing!"

**24. Think Positive.** Be ready for anything, but don't lose that spring in your step. "I really hope to be more prepared this year!" Norwood finished. "I also hope that the majority of people are vaccinated and we can all shop without capacity limits!" *ST*