

INSPIRED TO
Sew

*A glimpse into the creative heart of today's
most talented sewing & quilting artists.*



Evolution of Learning



Rhonda with Nancy Zieman and Deanna Springer
2016 International Quilt Market, St. Louis MO

Have learning environments changed quicker in the last year than any other time in history? After Rita Farro wrote this feature, we learned that Nancy Zieman was inducted into the Wisconsin Broadcasters Hall of Fame for her Sewing with Nancy PBS television program. For 30 years, Nancy progressed with kindness, vulnerability, courage, and creativity as the tv pioneer teaching others the love of sewing & quilting. Her mission continues in the capable and creative hands of Deanna Springer, Nancy's right arm. Nancy would be proud of how Nancy Zieman Productions and Stitch It! Sisters have transitioned forward in the age of social media.

In this issue, take a walk down memory lane of how retailers used to communicate with consumers and how the industry is traversing forward into the wild realm of social media. I wonder, how learning will change in the next five years? Or rather, I wonder how learning will change next month? Hang on, because the only constant is change.

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Rhonda

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Evolution of Learning



Evolution of Learning

There is nothing permanent except change.

- Heraclitus

The heartbeat and lifeblood of the sewing business has always been classes. When the Covid pandemic hit, sewing machine dealers, fabric stores, and quilt shops across the country were forced to close their doors. Whether or not a business survived Covid was often a matter of whether or not they were able to transfer their classroom/customer experience to the internet.

Now, the big question is what do all the changes of the last year and a half mean? Will our beloved, tried-and-true model of in-person classes ever come back? The truth is that you can never un-ring a bell. And in the history of the world, once technology makes an advance, it never goes back. Nobody is

making black-and-white televisions, and you can't remember the last time you rode in a car with no air-conditioning. That was then and this is now.

The advancements in digital/virtual technology have forever changed the way we deliver sewing education and information. The question is, is that a good thing?

Debbie Byrne's family has been in the fabric business for generations. In 1944, her great-great-great grandfather had a mercantile store in Philadelphia. In 1980, Debbie and her husband, Mike, opened their first fabric store, [Byrne's Sewing Connection](#), in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, and she has witnessed many changes over the years.



In 1980, a snail mail newsletter was the main way for a store to communicate with their customers. The newsletter would announce sales, special events, and classes. Debbie says, *When we started out, the cost of sending our newsletter was \$1,000. Twenty years later, sending our newsletter cost \$10,000. So, yes, we were eager to embrace the internet.*

It's no wonder snail mail newsletters became extinct faster than you can say, *Where's my VCR?*

[Red Pine Quilt Shop](#) in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota, opened 19 years ago. The owner, Joy Fetting, says they never sent a snail mail newsletter. They do a once-a-month email newsletter, and since Covid, they have gone to Facebook mini-classes which are free.

The transition to online learning didn't happen overnight. And it wasn't always easy. To begin with, many customers didn't have a computer in their home. By the year 2000, only 50% of U.S. homes had a proper computer. And, like a toaster or a television, that computer was often shared by everybody in the family.

In the 1990s, the store newsletter would announce the new class schedule. Students would call or come into the store to sign up and pay their class fees. By 2000, email newsletters were replacing snail mail, but the class format remained the same. Customers would get the new class schedule, then call or visit the store to sign up, and pay for their classes.



In those early days, stores struggled with expensive, poorly designed websites that made signing up for classes online a difficult, often frustrating process.

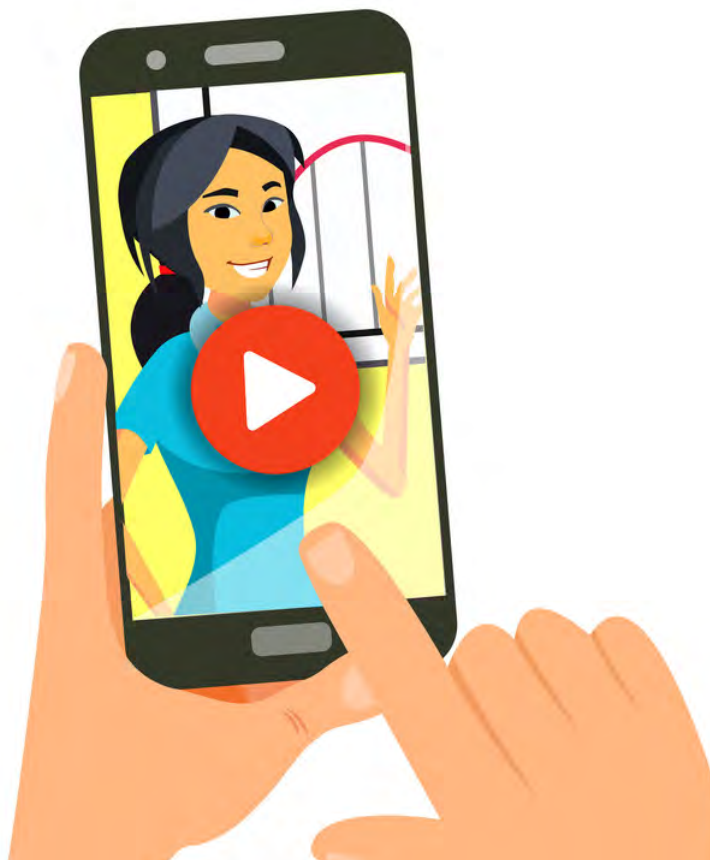
We've come a long way since those early bumpy days of dial-up internet, message boards, and chat rooms. But early websites were a hit and miss marketing tool. They were costly and difficult to maintain and update. The biggest issue was getting traffic to the website, and it was not possible to accept payment for classes or merchandise.

But, by 2008, our sewing world had been hit by a trifecta of digital marketing lightning bolts:

- Facebook had 100 million users.
- YouTube was born.
- Apple launched the first iPhone.

For ten years, sewing machine dealers and quilt shop owners had a LOVE/HATE relationship with social media. For years, a big topic of conversation at any sewing machine convention was whether or not a store had to post something new on Facebook every single week? Clearly, the stores that use social media to their advantage post every single day, often several times a day. They make it interactive, involving their customers by spotlighting their projects, offering virtual classes, flash sales, posting videos, or making podcasts.

But even a gypsy with a good crystal ball couldn't have predicted that by the year 2020, store owners would be able to post REAL TIME live events on their social media platforms, and get immediate customer feedback, all via cellphones.



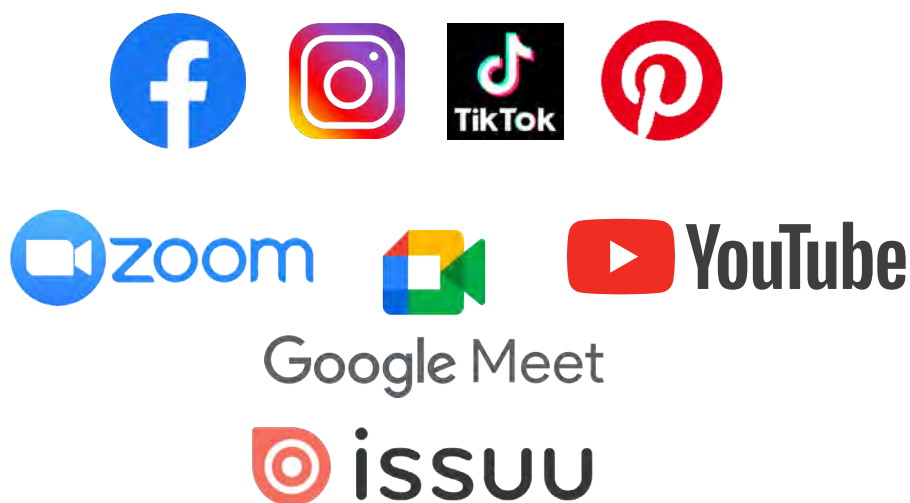
There is no doubt that Covid accelerated this process and shortened our learning curve. Many stores had to close their doors. They were forced to step up their social media game, via Zoom classes or Facebook LIVE events.

In March 2020, Rhonda Pierce had never done a Zoom class. One year later, March 2021, she's presented over 100 SCHMETZ Needle Classes on Zoom, Facebook Live, or other platforms. She has become an expert virtual teacher, presenting SCHMETZ seminars for stores, sewing guilds, quilt guilds, and museums. She was profiled along with her class outline in [*SCHMETZ Inspired to SEW* #86](#). Check Rhonda's 2021 virtual class schedule: [Sew More Stitches](#).

Rhonda says, *I never could have predicted how successful these classes would be. For example, Fabricana is an awesome brick*

and mortar store in British Columbia, Canada. My SCHMETZ class was their first virtual offering. They had so many people register, two classes had to be scheduled. We had over 350 live attendees between two classes.

[Quilting In The Valley](#), LaSalle, Illinois, was featured in [*SCHMETZ Inspired to SEW* #80](#). QITV didn't just survive the pandemic, they THRIVED. Owner Lisa Furleigh was already doing a weekly Facebook LIVE event. But when the store was forced to close, she stepped up her game and went LIVE on Facebook every day. Although, expanding a business during a world-wide pandemic might not seem like a good idea, Quilting in the Valley did just that. QITV recently opened their [sixth location in Door County, Wisconsin](#).



Debbie Byrne of [Byrne Sewing Connection](#) in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, said, *We were able to survive 2020 because of Facebook.* They used Facebook in many different ways to communicate and educate their customers. They had a virtual \$7 per yard sale for clearance fabric, and a *Flash Sale* of store class samples, including many finished quilts. Debbie says, *I used to do it all, but the internet and social media moved beyond my skill level. Windows 10 wore me out. The good news is that we have a wonderful young manager, Jessica Roberts, who comes up with all kinds of fun social media ideas. She's been working here since she was 13 years old (she's 26 now). We bounce around new ideas, then Jess conveys them to a woman we've hired (who works from home). Then, it all magically goes up on the internet.*

[Patched Works](#) in Elm Grove, Wisconsin, is a fabric store in business for 15 years. The heart of their classroom offerings were subscription club programs, partnering with Moda University, Aurifil thread, Tula Pink, etc. When Covid forced the store to close, Julie Karasek moved the club meetings to Facebook. But her customers missed their clubhouse, and the opportunity to show and share their projects.

Julie is in the planning stages of re-opening the classroom for club meetings, but struggles with the fact that with social distancing in place, the number of attendees must be limited, and the class would have to be repeated a dozen times or more. The answer could be to adopt a hybrid approach. She could make a video of the first session, then play that video for subsequent club meetings. The advantage, of course, would

 **Byrne** *Sewing Connection* **Fabricana**



Red Pine
QUILT SHOP

PATCHED WORKS
YOUR QUILT SHOP DESTINATION IN SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

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be that the video could go up on Facebook after the fact, and perhaps bring in some new customers.

And that seems to be the key to success. The stores that are adapting to the new technology are figuring out ways to use it to their advantage. That old Chinese proverb rings true today, *If you can't beat 'em, join 'em.*

[Sewing Concepts](#) in Woodstock, Illinois, does a brisk business in long-arm quilt machines. Those machines can have a steep learning curve, and owner Lynda Remmers says all the free classes on the internet are a huge benefit to her customers. *Of course, we set-up each new customer, and we take pride in the*

quality of our education. But the truth is, these are complicated machines and every long arm quilter, sooner or later, will encounter an issue at 1:00 AM. It is wonderful for them to be able to access a hundred free classes on the internet.

Debbie Byrnes believes there is still a place in the market for brick and mortar sewing business. *Sewing customers are a unique lot. It's hard to explain, but it's a home and hearth kind of thing. Women who sew are a caring bunch, and they love getting together to compare their projects and share knowledge. There are a lot of cooks in this world who will not share a recipe, but I never met a quilter who wasn't eager to show another quilter how to bind a perfect corner on a quilt.*

 — written by Rita Farro

Rhonda's 2021 SCHMETZ Virtual Schedule

• **January** 13, Quilter's Plus Quilt Guild; 16, Central Iowa ASG; 20, String & Story; 23, Pinwheels & Posies; 28, Hens & Chicks • **February** 2, SCHMETZneedles FBLive; 4, Creekside Fabrics; 9, Original Sewing & Quilt Expo; 13, National Make It With Wool; 24-27, Sewing & Stitchery Expo

• **March** 2-3, Bryne Sewing Center; 3 SCHMETZneedles FBLive; 9 ASG Central IL; 11, Hip Stitch; 15 Red Pine Quilt Shop; Wayne Highlands Quilt Guild; 16, ASG Plano/Hoopla Sisters; 25, Big Virtual Sewing Event; 31, Aurora Sewing Center, Rae-Bon Sew & Vac • **April** 1, Coastal Quilters of NE FL; 5, Hannah Dustin Quilt Guild; 6, Original Sewing & Quilt Expo; 7, Memory Makers Quilt Guild, SCHMETZneedles FBLive; 13, Quilty Pleasures, ASG Greensboro; 16, Greater Houston Quilt Guild; 20, Heritage Quilters Guild; 21, Itasca Quilt Guild; 24, Virginia Quilt Museum; 28, North Country Quilts; 29, Allbrands • **May** 4, Sewing Concepts; 5, SCHMETZneedles FBLive; 6, Sew It Fabulous; 7, Northern Neck Piecemakers; 10, Above & Beyond Creative Sewing; 10, QuiltCo Guild; 12, Fabricana, 13, ASG Greater Cleveland; 17, Common Threads; 18, Sandhills Quilters Guild; 19, ASG Albany; 21, Piece River Quilters Guild; 25, Sew Original Boone NC; 27, The Fabric Bin • **June** 1, Allatoona Quilters Guild; 2, SCHMETZneedles FBLive; 3, Stray Threads; 8, Original Sewing & Quilt Expo; 9, ASG Boston; 10, River Bend Quilt Guild; 14, SewingMachinesPlus; 15, Patched Works • **July** 7, SCHMETZneedles FBLive; 11-13, Bernina University; 14, Kindred Spirits Quilt; 17, Mulqueen's Sewing Center; 20, Capital Quilt; 20, Newton Quilters Guild; 22, Prince Edward Island MQG; 26, ASG Willamette; 28, NV Assoc Career/Tech; 29, Sew On & Sew North

• **August** 4, SCHMETZneedles FBLive; 11, Capital Quilt; 18, Notions Marketing; 25, Original Sewing & Quilt Expo; 30, Valley Modern Quilt Guild • **September** 1, SCHMETZneedles FBLive; 8-10, Janome Institute; 13, Friendship Quilters of San Diego; 13, SewingMachinesPlus.com; 14, BattingSuperSales.com; 15, Tailored Fit; 16, Hen & Chicks; 22, Middlebury Sew-N-Vac; 23, ASG Northern Virginia • **October** 5, NAMPA Modern Quilt Guild; 6, SCHMETZneedles FBLive; 12, Capital Quilts; 13, Country Thyme Vermont Retreat; 19, Original Sewing & Quilt Expo; 24, Threads to Success • **November** 3, SCHMETZneedles FBLive; 9, Quilter on Fire; 10-13, Allbrands; 18, Smokey Hill Quilt Guild • **December** 1, SCHMETZneedles FBLive





Needle Points with Rhonda



Book 2022 Now!

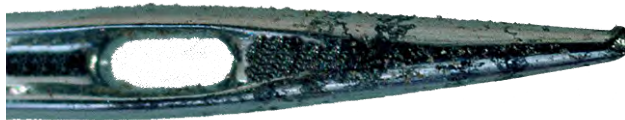
SCHMETZ Virtual Class with Rhonda



See pages 10 & 11 of [SCHMETZ Inspired to SEW #86](#) for class outline.

Contact Rhonda directly at rpierce@euronotions.com.

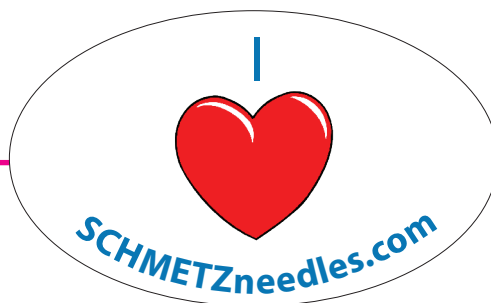




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