



August 2013



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on our cover

31 FLAVORS

Imperial Yarn's Bulky 2-Strand Pencil Roving is as light as just-churned ice cream and comes in a Baskin-Robbins-approved assortment of 31 sherbet and creamy colors (www.imperialyarn.com). Photograph by Marcus Tullis.

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SURVEY TIME!

We're still collecting responses for our latest survey on your store's approach to new yarns. Take it online at www.surveymonkey.com/s/YMNnewyarn.

At the Retailer's Luncheon at the TNNA show in June, I listened with interest to Whiz Bang! founder Bob Negen talk about his philosophies and his recommendations for surefire marketing success. His messages dovetailed nicely with the ones *Yarn Market News* has been imparting for eight years now. The crux? It's not about how much it costs; it's how much it returns.

That idea—of investing in your business, not just with your time and energy but specifically with your money—is a powerful one. It's hard, and scary, to spend when you're not sure how long it will take to recoup. But these kinds of risks are the way to reward, Negen emphasizes. It leads me, of course, to talk up the Yarn Market News Smart Business Conference, an investment I encourage all yarn stores to make.

We schedule sessions on topics relevant to you as a yarn store owner: concepts like branding and growing your business, and concrete ideas like improving your store's design and learning to work with people of all personality types. We hire experts in various fields and prime them with all sorts of yarn-related information. We host you in a nice hotel, with great meals and lots of time to network with other retailers and with our event sponsors. I even lead an optional yarn crawl to area LYSes if you're in the mood to shop.

Attendees tell me they return to their stores infused with vigor and enthusiasm. The atmosphere of non-competitiveness means more sharing of ideas and business practices, leaving you with so much more than the lessons our experts imparted. Registration for the 2014 conference is now open. I look forward to seeing you next March at the Omni Hotel in Chicago.

In the meantime, we strive to educate you with the information we pack into each edition of *Yarn Market News*. For this issue, Leslie Petrovski looked into the changing landscape for craft books: How does your shop fit them in? And Robyn Schrager, co-owner of Kirkwood Knittery in St. Louis, muses on the changes in the ways yarn is packaged and sold to shops, and how these changes have affected the LYS. Both articles are eye-opening. I hope you enjoy them.

For a while now forecasters have claimed that video is the next big thing in social media, and Maya Elson gives us a great primer on using Vine (and Instagram) video effectively (page 30). Of course, video will never truly replace face-to-face interaction. Perhaps a "knitting clinic" would work for you (page 26)? Learn more about the women of Koigu (page 44) and Eucalan (page 34) in two of our profiles. They've been investing in their businesses for years now. Have you?



Erin Slonaker,
Editor in Chief



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Photo: Robert O'Neil - Alamy Images

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—Ken Wing, *Lelani Arts*

“The Marketplace was **exciting** and **fresh**, providing a personal and friendly boutique shopping experience.”

—Pam Hoffman, *Indian Lake Artisans*

“We’ve done every show in the country, but I have never seen a show as good as this one. The **energy** and **excitement** were contagious; people were excited to see and buy new things. Our sales were great! We actually sold out of some yarns, and we always bring a lot.”

—Tess Bickford, *Tess’ Designer Yarns*

“Vogue Knitting LIVE attracts an **upscale, savvy customer**. This customer has a keen interest in fiber and a desire to make stylish, functional garments with an edge. On the whole, the Vogue Knitting customer is financially able to support luxury yarns.”

—Liz Tekus, *Fine Points*

“Vogue Knitting LIVE turned out to be even more of a **success** than we could have anticipated.”

—Tabbethia Haubold,
Long Island Livestock Company

For a vendor application or additional information, please contact Carol Buonanno at carol@vogueknitting.com

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Baby Blues (and Pinks)

You'd be hard-pressed to find more enthusiastic welcomers of new babies than knitters and crocheters. **Lorna's Laces** owner **Beth Casey** was so excited about the upcoming addition to England's royal family that she created two special colorways to honor the heir-to-be. "In 2011, we created a Royal Wedding colorway to [commemorate the nuptials] of Prince William and Kate Middleton as part of our Limited Edition series with Jimmy Beans Wool. After the pregnancy was revealed, we cooked up two colorways to celebrate the royal baby. Since the baby's gender is still under wraps [at press time, the future king or queen had yet to make an appearance], we created a colorway for each, keeping the nursery rhymes 'What Are Little Boys/Little Girls Made Of?' in mind," says Casey. Royal Baby: Snips and Snails includes traditional "boy" colors: light blue combined with darker teal, grayish-brown and taupe. Royal watchers predicting a girl can treat themselves to Royal Baby: Sugar and Spice, a blend of mauve, lavender and purples. The Lorna's Laces/Jimmy Beans Wool collaboration is especially fortuitous in light of British media reports that the duchess has been dabbling in knitting to prepare for the new arrival.

The Fine Art of Sock Yarn

The hand-paint revolution has swept through North America and is primed to take Britain and Europe by storm. Proof of hand-painted yarn's reach? Venerable British yarn company **Rowan** (www.knitrowan.com) recently introduced its first hand-painted offering, Fine Art sock yarn. "Rowan is known as a leader in the yarn world," says Westminster Fibers Consumer Marketing Manager **Linda Pratt**. "We had to make sure that when we finally did [introduce a hand-paint], the product would be worthy of the Rowan name." Fine Art sock yarn, which began shipping to retail stores in the U.S. in late spring, is well worth the wait. A blend of merino wool, mulberry silk, kid mohair and polyamide, the yarn was designed with socks and accessories in mind. It's milled in South Africa, where it's hand-painted by specially trained members of an artisan's collective. A companion pattern leaflet, *Fine Art Collection*, features thirteen designs created by Rowan's core group of designers. The yarn is currently available in eight multihued colorways, but plans to expand the line are afoot.



A WHOLE(SALE) NEW BALL GAME

Online marketplaces have permanently changed the way consumers buy handmade and artisanal goods. In the past few months, two marketplaces have announced plans to expand into a new area of the market, connecting artisans and other makers of handmade items to retail vendors instead of to individual consumers.

A Change in Focus

Rob Kalin founded e-commerce site **Etsy** in 2005 as a way for artists to exhibit and sell their work directly to consumers, allowing only handmade items to be sold on the site. Etsy's Terms of Service defined "handmade" strictly: no factory- or mass-produced items permitted, in order to keep the focus on small artisans and crafters rather than large commercial makers. Billing itself as an online crafts fair, Etsy has been very successful, reporting total sales of more than \$525 million in 2011 from more than 900,000 active "shops."

Despite its success, Etsy encountered growing pains as some of its more successful sellers were faced with a dilemma: Increased sales meant ramping up production to meet demand. But hiring employees or farming out a significant portion of the work ran afoul of Etsy's policies. Should they give up sales to maintain their status on Etsy or expand and lose the platform that was instrumental in their initial success?

Etsy recently announced new policies meant to balance the competing demands of successful sellers who need help running their small businesses and one-person artisans or hobbyists who place great value on Etsy's mission. A significant change involves its definition of a handmade item: Etsy's website now allows the sale of "hand-assembled" or "hand-altered" goods as long as a "substantial portion" of said items are altered or re-created, and permits some commercial and mass-produced items to be sold in its "vintage" and "supply" categories. But perhaps the biggest conceptual challenge to Etsy's handmade ethos is its decision to create a separate division to foster relationships between Etsy sellers and wholesale purchasers.

Etsy Wholesale is a new business-to-business program that Etsy hopes will create connections between its sellers—traditionally, small businesses and indie makers—and large wholesale buyers, including department stores and other large retailers. The program is currently in beta-testing mode but bills itself as a "private, juried marketplace where buyers can discover unique, hard-to-find products from artists, designers and vintage vendors."

Vendors apply for acceptance to the Wholesale program, with Etsy vetting applicants to ensure that they are capable of filling wholesale orders and have a "retail-ready brand." Buyers too are screened to ensure that they are members of the trade and represent an actual retail business. Items that qualify for the wholesale program include those either handmade by the vendor, designed by the vendor but made by someone else, or certain vintage items. Etsy is touting some big-name buyers that have already signed up, including Nordstrom department stores and West Elm. Buyers can participate in the wholesale program for free; vendors currently have free access while it remains in beta but will be charged for participation once the testing period is over. Learn more at www.etsy.com/wholesale.

A City-by-City Approach

Goodsmiths is a relatively recent entrant to the world of e-commerce—it began life as craft.ly in 2011, then quickly relaunched as Goodsmiths.com. Like Etsy, Goodsmiths bills itself primarily as a marketplace for people who create, offering a slightly different fee structure and touting its responsiveness and small size as an advantage to competing platforms. Although significantly newer and smaller in size than Etsy, Goodsmiths has announced a similar program, Goodsmiths Local, that seeks to connect makers of handmade items with bricks-and-mortar shops looking to sell such goods. The Goodsmiths Local program is still in beta testing; as of this writing it was being offered in three marketplaces only: Des Moines, Iowa; Omaha, Nebraska; and Kansas City, Missouri.

Tipping Their Hand

If you feel like Goldilocks when selecting a pair of knitting needles—this tip's too sharp, that tip's too blunt—you may find the **Susan Bates Tipping Points** needle set just right. The set includes the first interchangeable needle tips on the market, allowing knitters to select the best-



shaped tip for them, their yarn and the project. The Sharp tip, with its longer taper and pointy tip, is designed for finer yarns as well as lace and cable work; the Blunt tip is somewhat rounded, made for novelty yarns or ones with a low twist. The Medium tip splits the difference, offering a moderately sharp tip for general all-purpose use.

Each set of Tipping Points includes a pair of needle shafts, three sets of tips (one of each kind), a key and gripper pads to ensure a tight fit. Needles and tips are both made from anodized aluminum; both shafts and tips are labeled with the needle size, and tips are labeled with the point profile, making it easy to find what you're looking for. Needle shafts are also color-coded by size. Currently, the needles are offered in 10" shaft length, from U.S. size 4 through U.S. size 10½ (3.5mm to 6mm). MSRP ranges from \$24.99 to \$29.99, depending on needle size. Watch designer Kristin Omdahl demonstrate Tipping Point needles at www.redheart.com/learn/videos/introducing-tipping-points-knitting-needles-susan-bates; find out more at www.coatsandclark.com/tippingpoints.htm.



OFF THE CUFF

Grab-and-go kits are popular choices for customers who like the convenience of buying all of a project's components in a single package. Taking advantage of the demand for handcrafted jewelry—an especially hot trend at the moment—designer **Mary Beth Temple's** company **Hooked for Life** presents the Picot

Bracelet Kit, which includes rayon-metallic thread, a pattern, beading needle, Czech seed beads and jewelry findings—everything needed to create the bracelet except for a crochet hook and pliers (used to attach the jewelry findings). The Picot Bracelet Kit comes in 16 colorways, including monochrome ("Gold" comes with gold beads, thread and fittings) and multicolors ("Monet" combines gold thread and cornflower blue beads). Refill kits, which include beads, thread and jewelry findings only, are also available. Kits retail for \$18; refill kits are \$12. For more information, visit www.hookedforlifepublishing.com.



Knitting a Boyfriend

He doesn't hog the covers, eat the last piece of pizza or leave the toilet seat up. He loves to cuddle, and he looks exactly how you pictured him. *YMN* spoke with Dutch artist **Noortje de Keijzer** about the perfect man: My Knitted Boyfriend.

YMN: Exactly what is a knitted boyfriend, and why did you want to knit one?

NdK: My Knitted Boyfriend was a graduation project consisting of a movie, an illustrated book, the knitted boyfriend itself and knitted accessories for him. It is a cushion with a story and a personality. With a knitted boyfriend, you will never feel alone again.



YMN: How many knitted boyfriends do you have?

NdK: So far I've produced two knitted men: Arthur, finished September 14, 2011, has light skin, dark brown hair and black knickers. Steve, done on September 27, 2011, has dark brown skin, black hair and beige knickers. Arthur loves the camera; Steve is a little more shy.

YMN: Were the knitted boyfriends made completely by machine or was some hand knitting involved?

NdK: Apart from the prototype, Arthur and Steve were knit totally by machine, but all the details, like the faces and the hairstyles, were embroidered by hand.



YMN: How long did it take for you to make a knitted boyfriend?

NdK: Finishing Arthur and Steve on the

machine for the first time was a process of programming and trying different things, so I don't know exactly how long it took. But I think a man could be knit on a machine in one piece in about one hour.

YMN: What was the reaction from your teachers and classmates?

NdK: Very positive! They all really liked the idea. I graduated with all nines on my diploma for this project, which is quite high for a graduation project.

YMN: Has anyone asked about knitted girlfriends?

NdK: I've met a few men who've asked me about a knitted girlfriend, which I think



is really cool. I do notice that men respond differently to my project than women do: They tend to be a bit uncomfortable; some make sex-doll jokes.

YMN: Do you ever take him with you outside, and if so, what kind of reaction do you get?

NdK: We travel around to exhibitions together. But since the Knitted Boyfriend has to look good at the exhibitions, I wrap him in a sort of body bag, which looks a bit creepy, actually. Sometimes I transport him in a see-through bag, which always makes people giggle.

Learn more about Noortje and her work at noortjedekeijzer.nl. Photographs © Noortje de Keijzer.

Monetizing Experience

Author, teacher and spinner **Abby Franquemont** has come up with a creative solution to the common problem of customers who regularly use a shop as a community center but never make a purchase. **Stringtopia Fiber Arts Studio** opened in January in the business district of historic Lebanon, Ohio, as a space dedicated to community and classes, not retail.

Franquemont was intrigued by the business model of gyms: “A gym is community-based and operates as a lifestyle center—people can come in and use the equipment and get help from trained staff members. They want to take classes and do so routinely. But they don’t come in to buy things.” Franquemont adopted a similar business model for her spinning and weaving studio, offering monthly memberships that give clients access to studio-owned equipment and help from trained staff; retail sales are a secondary focus. “Everything we sell—items used as class materials, as well as tools and supplies that we know will be useful—supports our mission to run a community and learning center, not vice versa.”

Franquemont was inspired in part by her extensive experience as an instructor; she’s traveled across the U.S. teaching spinning, weaving and

other fiber-related classes at guilds and fiber festivals. “I saw that people are willing to take quality classes. I also saw that many guilds are not bringing in new members or offering an engaging selection of classes. And I thought about the reluctance of many people to join groups that are



primarily volunteer-run; they’d rather write a check than give their time. So we decided to try our own system.”

Franquemont’s studio offers three levels of membership depending on a customer’s desires. Those who wish to be casual members of the community (a “Free Range Stringtopian”) pay \$9.95 a month for priority event registration and access to members-only events but do not have regular studio access. The “Stringtopian All Access” level, which costs \$24.95 a month, is for those who plan to access the studio regularly; it offers priority event registration, members-only events, monthly pricing specials and discounts on regular in-studio classes. The highest level of membership —“Stringtopian Pro”—enjoys the same benefits as the All Access option, but for \$99 a month those clients can sell via Stringtopia’s online marketplace, which opened in July. (The new juried marketplace for members gives them a chance to develop their own indie fiber products with market support and product development assistance.)

Franquemont is excited about her loyal customer base’s desire to keep learning about fiber arts. “A key component of our vision for the studio is to offer classes on an ongoing basis rather than for a limited number of weeks. Students can work through whatever issues they face until they master the material, so everyone in the class ends up with a common base of knowledge. That allows us to offer classes that are tailored directly to what we know our members have learned.” For more information about the studio, visit www.stringtopia.net.



GOING GREEN GABLES

“It’s delightful when your imaginations come true, isn’t it?” said Anne Shirley, better known to generations of readers as Anne of Green Gables. And this November, author and designer **Joanna Johnson** will see one of her “imaginings” come true when her book **Green Gables Knits**, a collection of eight patterns inspired by the characters in Lucy Maud Montgomery’s classic 1908 book, is published by Slate Falls Press.

Johnson has long been a fan of the *Anne of Green Gables* books and toyed with the idea of working on a project inspired by them. “For me, it’s always more fun to knit something when there’s a story behind it,” Johnson notes, “and these characters and Anne’s story are so fabulous.” Montgomery’s literary estate, now controlled by her grandchildren, was receptive to the idea and granted Johnson permission to use the name, material and a few personal photographs. “I completely respect their desire to protect the heritage, tradition and spirit of Montgomery’s work,” Johnson states, “and there was no way I could move forward without their cooperation.”

A historic one-room schoolhouse in Johnson’s neighborhood was the perfect backdrop for the photo shoot, and Johnson’s 11-year-old daughter was pressed into service as one of the models. “She’s exactly the age Anne Shirley was at the beginning of the book,” Johnson points out. “She even let me dye her hair red!” Learn more at www.slatefallspressbooks.com.



Rest in Fleece

You don’t have to convince knitters and crocheters of the merits of wool: It’s a natural resource, it’s warm, it insulates even when wet. Now a British company is recognizing the many advantages that wool has—for making coffins.

The **Hainsworth Company** of West Yorkshire, England, now manufactures a line of eco-friendly woolen coffins as part of its efforts to expand its product base in the textiles market. Hainsworth, a family company that has been making woolen and worsted cloth for 230 years, already manufactures such diverse wool items as the felt lining used in pianos, the lining for the interior roof of luxury cars, and ceremonial uniforms for military units (including those worn by guards at Buckingham Palace). But the positive response to its woolen coffins has taken the company by surprise. “We expect it to become our biggest-selling product,” the company’s marketing director, Adam Hainsworth, has predicted. Introduced in the U.K. in 2009, the Natural Legacy line of coffins is now offered for sale in the United States, Australia, New Zealand and several countries in Western Europe.

Natural Legacy coffins are handmade in Yorkshire from completely biodegradable materials. Recycled cardboard is used to construct a sturdy frame with a waterproof bottom liner, while the exterior is made of 100 percent new wool (including wool from British sheep). The interior is lined with organic cotton, and handles and trim are made of jute fiber. To avoid leaching dye into the earth, only two undyed colors are offered: natural (off-white) and russet (brown). The movement for natural burials is growing in the U.K. and the U.S., and a woolen coffin offers a stylish and appealing alternative to cardboard, wicker and other “green” coffins. Learn more about the company at www.hainsworth.co.uk.

What's in a Name

This spring, **Schachenmayr Yarns**, distributed in North America by **Westminster Fibers**, announced a big change: The company has transitioned its SMC yarn collection back to the original Schachenmayr name. Schachenmayr yarns will now be comprised of three groups: "Schachenmayr Select" for yarns and designs inspired by global fashion; "Schachenmayr Original" for the key family yarns that have been the mainstay of the brand for decades; and "Schachenmayr Regia," bringing the pioneering sock brand back into the fold. The aim: a cohesive package of yarns and designs, all branded with the venerable Schachenmayr name.

Linda Pratt, consumer marketing manager for Westminster Fibers, points to the history of the Schachenmayr company as the reason for the change: "Schachenmayr has been selling yarn since 1822, and in Germany and the Central European markets, Schachenmayr is literally the household name in hand-knitting yarn. The Schachenmayr brand has been available in the North American market since the 1960s, when it was known as Schachenmayr Nomotta—"nomotta" means 'no moths,' an important product feature for the core consumer."

In 2011, Schachenmayr changed its brand name to SMC, with initials taken from the original company name, Schachenmayr, Mann & Cie. SMC introduced a fashion-forward "SMC Select" line of yarns, including yarns transitioned from its European-styled Gedifra brand. In 2013, Schachenmayr decided to reaffirm its traditional brand name and make it the center of all of its products. It's not only the ball labels and pattern books that will reflect the change; the product logos will be consistent in design and celebrate the brand's history and experience.

Pratt assures retailers that there won't be any disruption in product supply, since the yarns themselves haven't changed; new yarns already feature the Schachenmayr name and logo, and existing lines and products are in transition. Schachenmayr's MyMountain campaign, launched at TNNA, is an example of the revitalized brand in action, targeting new audiences for its core yarns. Visit us.schachenmayr.com for more information.



MOD POD

As CEO of **XXR, Inc.**, **Benjamin Levisay**

is involved in nearly every facet of the fiber world: book publishing, teaching, product sales and, of course, producing the company's flagship *Knitter's*



Magazine. One might think that's plenty to keep a person busy. But the gregarious Levisay decided he had something more to say—an hour's worth per week, to be exact. He debuted a new weekly podcast, *Fiber Hooligan*, in March on blogradio.com (also available for download via iTunes).

When a colleague suggested that Levisay would be good at podcasting, Levisay's reaction was to laugh. He recalls thinking, Who would want to listen to me? "But when I mentioned the idea to some friends, the response was [enthusiastic]," he says. So he went on a mission: "to share optimism and inspiration, and to bring stories of people in our industry to the public in a way that lets their wonderful character and creativity [shine through]." Although the podcast is only a few months old, Levisay has already featured A-list guests including designer/dyer Laura Bryant, the team behind *Ravelry.com*, and *Webs* owners Steve and Kathy Elkins. An episode highlighting a joint charity effort in Atlanta notched 24,000 downloads, suggesting that Levisay has found a sizeable audience of fellow fiber hooligans eager to hear what he has to say. Learn more at www.blogtalkradio.com/fiberhooligan.

Getting a Daily Dose of Craft

How-to videos for crafters are hot, whether they're homespun offerings on YouTube or snazzy productions created by publishers, yarn companies or magazines. Websites *Craftsy* and *CreativeBug* premiered in 2012; now **Interweave**, a subsidiary of **F+W Media**, has entered the market with its new **Craft Daily** website, which offers video workshops and tutorials on knitting, crochet, weaving, spinning and other crafts. At press time, approximately 130 videos, with more than 120 hours of crafty instruction, were available, featuring well-regarded instructors including Kristin Omdahl, Robyn Chachula, Lily Chin and Judith Mackenzie. Interweave plans to add additional workshops on an ongoing basis.



The Craft Daily site uses a subscription-service model rather than charging a per-video fee. That means subscribers pay for a monthly or yearly subscription and in return gain access to an unlimited number of videos while their subscriptions are active. Subscribers can opt for an all-video option, allowing them to watch videos regardless of category (\$19.99 per month, or \$199.99 per year) or select a topic-specific subscription (for example, access to all knitting and crochet videos for \$11.99 per month, or \$119.99 per year). Subscriptions automatically renew but may be canceled at any time. Video workshops are offered commercial-free and can be watched wherever a broadband Internet connection is available. Go to www.craftdaily.com for more details.



A DISTINCTIVE HONOR

Congratulations to **Felicia Lo**, owner and founder of **SweetGeorgia Yarns**, on being nominated for the Vancouver YWCA's Women of Distinction award. This award is one of Canada's most prestigious honors, given to women whose "outstanding achievements contribute to the well-being and future of [the] community." Nominated in the Arts, Culture & Design category, Lo was recognized for her entrepreneurial achievements—she began her business by dyeing yarn at her dining room table, and now has studio space, eight employees and an international customer base—as well as her contributions to the Vancouver community. Lo sits on the board of several nonprofit organizations, contributes yarn to a group that crochets hats for the homeless, sponsors a kids' knitting program at a local elementary school and teaches spinning and dyeing at a local arts center. She and 82 other nominees were feted at a gala dinner in late May.

In Memory: Kathreen Ricketson

The crafting world was saddened to hear of the sudden deaths of **Kathreen Ricketson**, founder of the influential blog **WhipUp.net**, and her husband, artist Robert Shugg. Ricketson, Shugg and their two children were traveling around Australia on a year-long family vacation when tragedy struck while the couple was snorkeling.

Ricketson began WhipUp, a popular crafting and lifestyle blog, in 2006; published *ActionPack*, an online magazine featuring activities for, as she put it, "curious kids who like to do stuff"; and wrote two well-regarded quilting books, *WhipUp Mini Quilts* and *Little Bits Quilting Bee* (Chronicle Books), as well as the *Crafternoon* series of crafting books for kids. Her third quilting book, *Brave New Quilts*, will be published this fall by C&T Publishing.

While providing a list of Ricketson's accomplishments is easy, capturing her spirit, her passion for crafting and her impact on a developing online craft

world is no easy task. Artist Chawne Kimber describes Ricketson as "a quiet leader who gently encouraged us to practice a craft with gusto and always fully engage with family and others. She didn't lead through commandments but rather by logical writing and by example. I admired the grace and humility of all our interactions, and I'm a better person for having her to emulate." Kay Gardiner of Mason-Dixon Knitting writes: "Her voice was strong and clear. Her writing on the WhipUp blog was smart, fair, kind and open. She showcased others' work with the best kind of generosity: offhand and matter-of-fact. She celebrated other crafters, writers and photographers and helped their work gain a wider audience."

A trust fund has been established for Ricketson and Shugg's children; for information on how to make a contribution, visit www.whipup.net/2013/05/17/how-you-can-help.

A Craft by Any Other Name

Government agencies the world over are tasked with the seemingly humdrum duties of measuring data, compiling statistics and issuing reports. But when a government agency's routine proposal on how it plans to measure data triggers a collective howl of social media outrage, perhaps deeper issues are at play.

In April of this year, the U.K.'s **Department for Culture, Media and Sport** issued what it calls a "consultation paper," basically a written proposal for changes to the way the agency classifies and measures certain data. The DCMS, an agency of the British government, is tasked with promoting and protecting Britain's cultural and artistic heritage and invests in certain industries—divided into categories called media, creative, tourism and telecom—to further that end. Part of the DCMS's job is to gather statistics from the industries that it serves and use that data to gauge the monetary value of specific industries relative to the entire U.K. economy. The current DCMS guidelines define "creative industries" to include 13 subcategories (Advertising, Architecture, Art/Antiques, Crafts, Design, Designer Fashion, Film/Video, TV/Radio, Interactive Leisure Software, Software/Computer Services, Music, Performing Arts and Publishing); the consultation paper proposed reducing the total number of categories to seven, consolidating some categories (for example, combining TV/Radio and Film/Video into a single category), but eliminating the Arts & Antiques and Crafts categories with the comment: "We recognize that high-end craft occupations contain a creative element, but the view is that in the main, these roles are more concerned with the manufacturing process rather than the creative process."

The U.K. crafting world reacted strongly, with blog headlines such as "Craft is not creative according to DCMS" and "DCMS reclassification...will make craft obsolete." Online petitions appeared on sites like Change.org and Epetitions.com, while Twitter and Facebook were abuzz. Julia Bennett, research and policy director of Britain's Craft Council, described the "disbelief and incomprehension" that many crafters felt upon reading about the proposed changes. Her organization's Facebook page received a spate of posts evincing, as she puts it, "frustration, a sense of feeling undervalued and a fear that this will make people invisible." Apart from the very real emotional punch felt by those who perceived a devaluation of their creative product were concerns about the effect the reclassification might have on policy and funding.

The DCMS responded to outraged feedback by assuring crafters: "The purpose of this consultation is not to redefine the creative industries. The definition of the creative industries will remain the same and continue to include crafts." Agreeing that its proposal had language that "could cause concern," the DCMS redrafted its consultation paper to emphasize its intent on changing measuring metrics, rather than eliminating any consideration of the crafting world.

The DCMS is currently soliciting more input, and is particularly interested in suggestions for how to accurately measure the precise economic contributions of those in the craft industry; we'll keep you updated on any significant developments.

YMN CALENDAR

Events to keep you in stitches this summer and early fall.
(For more, visit yarnmarketnews.com.)

August 8–11

Stitches Midwest

Renaissance Schaumburg Convention Center
Schaumburg, Illinois
www.knittinguniverse.com

August 14–18

Michigan Fiber Festival & Workshop

Allegan County Fairgrounds
Allegan, Michigan
www.MichiganFiberFestival.info

August 17–18

Mid-Ohio Fiber Fair

Reece Center
Newark, Ohio
www.MidOhioFiberFair.com

August 24–25

Great Basin Fiber Arts Fair

Salt Lake County Equestrian Park
South Jordan, Utah
www.GreatBasinFiberArtsFair.org

August 28–September 2

Monterey County Fair Wool Show

Monterey County Fairgrounds
Monterey, California
www.MontereyCountyFair.com

August 31–September 1

World Sheep & Fiber Arts Festival

Bethel, Missouri
www.WorldSheepFest.com

September 1

Running of the Sheep Sheep Drive

Reed Point, Montana
www.visitmt.com

September 5–8

Fiber College of Maine

Searsport Shores
Searsport, Maine
www.FiberCollege.org

September 6–8

Wisconsin Sheep & Wool Festival

Jeffersonville County Fair Park
Jeffersonville, Wisconsin
www.WisconsinSheepAndWoolFestival.com

September 7–8

New Jersey Sheep & Fiber Festival

Hunterdon County Fairgrounds
Lambertville, New Jersey
www.NJSheep.org

September 13–15

Georgia Alpaca Fiber Fest

Callaway Gardens
Pine Mountain, Georgia
www.GAFiberFest.com

September 13–15

California Wool & Fiber Festival

Mendocino County Fairgrounds
Boonville, California
www.FiberFestival.com

September 28–29

Vermont Sheep & Wool Festival

Turnbridge Fairgrounds
Turnbridge, Vermont
www.VTSheepAndWoolFest.org

September 29–30

Shenandoah Valley Fiber Festival

Clarke County Puritan Fairgrounds
Berryville, Pennsylvania
www.ShenandoahValleyFiberFestival.com

October 2–6

Fall Knit & Crochet Show

Embassy Suites Charlotte-Concord Golf Resort
Charlotte, North Carolina
www.KnitAndCrochetShow.com

Thinking Outside the Subscription Box

With the popularity of subscription boxes soaring (think beauty-product subscription site Birchbox or its canine counterpart Barkbox), it's small wonder that services catering to yarn lovers are popping up as well. The concept behind a subscription service is similar to that of sock clubs and yarn clubs: Members pay a monthly fee and in return receive a shipment of yarn, a pattern or both, sometimes with extras thrown in for good measure.

Hannah Thiessen of the new subscription service **Yarnbox.com** believes that the big difference between traditional monthly clubs and subscription services is variety. Unlike clubs that offer only a specific yarn or brand or products from a single designer, subscription boxes give recipients the chance to try yarns or designs from a variety of sources. "Many knitters like variety in their stashes," Thiessen notes, "or they may want to break out of a rut and find some new-to-them sources for yarn."



Andrea Raetzer, who with her husband Joe founded **KnitCrate.com**, agrees, citing the allure of the unknown. "Our subscribers tell us how much they love the surprise. It's a treat for them to get something in the mail, and it makes them feel special."

The boxes from Yarnbox.com focus on yarn over patterns, notions or other extras because, Thiessen says, "We believe that most crafters already have preferences for what kinds of tools and notions they like to use." Yarnbox promises that each shipment will include at least 200 grams of yarn and a "designer card" with a link to a designer's website and a code for a free pattern download or a coupon. While the occasional shipment may include an additional item, Yarnbox does not guarantee extras like notions or small food items. Costs range from \$33 to \$42 per shipment, depending on the length of the subscription selected.

KnitCrate, on the other hand, considers itself a project-oriented service. Each package comes with yarn and a pattern suitable for that yarn, along with at least two "extras," one "soothing or



sweet" and one "fun." Recently, subscribers received mini skeins suitable for starting the popular Beekeeper's Quilt modular knitting pattern, along with double-pointed needles and polyester stuffing, a bee-themed tape measure and herbal tea. KnitCrate allows subscribers to pick from five types of packages, each geared to a different category, sock knitting and knitting for babies among them (a crochet option is available as well). New this summer are special Limited Edition boxes, with all items curated by a well-known designer or knitting celeb. The first Limited Edition KnitCrate box features a new design by StevenBe and yarn from Be Sweet. KnitCrate prices range from \$23 to \$35 per shipment, depending on the type of subscription selected.

Book Reviews

BY CAROL J. SULCOSKI

Scottish Knits

By Martin Storey

Interweave Press/F+W Media;
\$24.95

ISBN: 1596688513

Renowned British designer Martin Storey, who spearheads Rowan's Classic line of yarns and brochures, explored Nordic- and Aran-inspired knits in previous books; his latest looks to Scotland for inspiration. In this collection, it's all about the tweeds. But don't expect to see



boxy rectangles or muted palettes. What Storey does so masterfully is put a modern spin on traditional yarns and tech-

niques. He blows up the argyle in the Aberdeen Argyll sweater, knitting the quintessentially Scottish motif large, in unexpected shades of tweedy rose and green. The Portree sweater focuses on one Fair Isle motif but alternates bright background colors for extra punch. He even mixes intarsia and stranded motifs in the same pattern in the Tay Tartan sweater and mittens. Cables and lace have their turn, too: The Pebbles stole mixes cable and lace motifs together, while the Highland tunic translates gorgeous cable stitchwork into a modern layering piece. Storey's experience as a designer shows in the thoughtful details and the clever ways of working decreases without disturbing stitch patterns. Traditionalists, take note: The garments are all knit in pieces and seamed, rather than knit in the round with steeks. And Storey doesn't stick with the DK- and fingering-weight gauges so often used in northern knits, opting for yarns from worsted and heavy worsted categories, too. Lush photographs of the Scottish countryside set off the textures and colors of the tweed yarns to perfection.

Just Like Me Knits

By Brandy Fortune

Potter Craft; \$19.99

ISBN: 0307587088

What could be cuter than your

favorite child wearing a sweater or vest that you knit? How about that same adorable child holding a doll in a matching sweater you also knit? Fortune, cofounder of the popular webzine *Petite Purls*, is an expert when it comes to kids' designs that are playful and practical, and her fresh but functional aesthetic is evident in her first book of patterns. You'll find 19 designs for kids from toddler to age 12: vests, cardigans, hats and more, each accompanied by a matching pattern for that special doll or toy. Her designs run the gamut from easy-to-knit pieces (a garter-stitch hoodie, a striped stock-



inette sweater) to items with cable or lace stitch patterns. She includes garments for

both genders: A skirt with scalloped edges will delight little girls, while a deer-motif vest has "boy" written all over it. And there are plenty of unisex options, like the charming sweater with colorwork owls. Fortune also takes warmer weather into account, offering a lovely patterned camisole and jumpers that would be perfect for mild days at the playground. Delightful photographs featuring adorable real-life children—including her own two daughters—add to the charm.

Knit a Monster Nursery

By Rebecca Danger

Martingale & Co; \$22.99

ISBN: 1604681497

Rebecca Danger knows all about plush monsters. Her first book was filled with the whimsical beasts, and now, inspired by her young son, she presents an entire nursery's worth of monster-themed patterns. Danger's offbeat, snaggle-toothed creatures are huggable rather than horrifying, so the notion of a monster-filled nursery isn't as far-fetched as it might seem. The book eases into its theme with a handful of clothing items, including an adorable hooded sweater with

a pocket especially designed to hold a wee stuffed monster; creature-themed hats, booties and blanket are just as darling. But it's the home-dec projects that really stand out: a mobile with little monsters perched on I-cord swings, monster-



shaped bookends to tame those piles of picture books, clever tissue-

box covers, a monster-shaped chair. Danger finishes with more soft toys, including stacking rings with monster faces, soft blocks and monster-shaped rattles. There's no danger that the patterns will scare you off, either; the book begins with detailed instructions for the techniques needed to mold your monsters, along with clear photographs of both techniques and finished items. Danger also offers tips and tricks for nursery décor to further the monster theme. Bigger kids are just as likely to groove on these adorable patterns: The home-dec items and toys would make great gifts for grownups with a sense of whimsy.

Convertible Crochet

By Doris Chan

Potter Craft; \$21.99

ISBN: 0307965708



In this book, Chan explores a series of "what-ifs": What if shaping could be done as part of a motif, rather than as an adjunct to it? What if you could add or take out sections or motifs, perfectly tailoring a garment to your body? What if a garment could be created and worn in different ways—as a skirt one day, a poncho the next? Chan starts with a creation called Entropy, a circular throw built of four crochet motifs; it's these motifs that are explored in greater depth in subsequent chapters. The designer begins with squares—

not granny squares but lace squares, composed of the four basic motifs she's chosen. Readers will see how she expands them, adding negative space and stretching them out to form building blocks. The Telesto stole is lightweight and airy, alternating two motifs in checkerboard style; Skyliner doubles as a skirt or poncho, joining squares to form an asymmetrical cone shape. Next up are hexagons, used to stunning effect in wraps, stoles and a vest. Polygons can sometimes challenge the crocheter with their tendency to curl, so Chan harnesses this tendency, using polygonal motifs to create shaping and adding other shapes to smooth out lines. She takes a break from all the geometric shapes with "Angular Momentum," a chapter that takes a more traditional shell stitch and explores its possibilities. For a no-holds-barred finish, the last chapter combines all of the above in showcase designs.

Knitting Clothes Kids Love

By Kate Oates

Creative Publishing International;
\$24.99

ISBN: 1589236750

Founder of the popular Tot Toppers line of patterns for kids, designer Kate Oates has four kids of her own to test patterns on. Her debut book presents a crayon-box collection of kids' accessories with a funky, modern aesthetic. You may end up humming the old children's song "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes" after skimming the table of contents, which is organized in just such a fashion, with chapters that include hats, scarves and cowls, leg warmers and leggings, and socks. ("Hands" get a spot too, with mitten and bracelet patterns.) Projects such as a two-color hat with chunky cabled brim,



slouchy leg warmers, Fair Isle-patterned socks and a zippered cowl will keep kids warm; knit-

ted bracelet covers, a mini backpack with a floral motif, and hair tie embellishments will keep them fashionable. More adventurous knitters can use the stitch “dictionaries” in the first chapter to choose their own motifs, individualizing the patterns to suit their kids’ tastes. Sizes range from toddler to teen, with a number of one-size-fits-all options for gaugeophobes.

Icelandic Handknits

By Hólène Magnússon
Voyageur Press; \$30.00
ISBN: 076034244X



When knitters think of Icelandic knitting, they often envision yoked sweaters knit in thick Lopí-style wool. But, Magnússon points out, this “traditional” style of sweater is a relatively recent development, appearing in the 1950s when yoked sweaters became popular in Western countries. In fact, this book of traditional Icelandic knits includes only a single yoked sweater, and it differs from most Lopí-style sweaters in that it’s worked in less-chunky yarn with a smaller geometric pattern in two somewhat subdued colors. Don’t worry, though—you won’t miss the Lopí sweater once you see the treasures featured within. The sources for the designs are knitted artifacts housed in the Blönduós textile museum, which has an extensive permanent collection of items hand-knit in Iceland, most dating from the 1800s. Magnússon reproduces a few designs fairly closely: beaded wrist warmers, the gorgeous Margrét triangular shawl in natural brown and cream wool, lacy caps with a tail called *skotthúfa*. Other designs use artifacts as a jumping-off point: A man’s sweater dating from the late 1800s inspired a charming child’s cardigan, while a petticoat called a *klukka* was the inspiration for a skirt with a zigzagging lace motif at the hem. Interspersed

among the patterns are photographs of museum artifacts, historical tidbits and recipes for traditional Icelandic dishes, all of which are sure to incite a desire to visit this Nordic paradise.

Blueprint Crochet Sweaters

By Robyn Chachula
Interweave Press/F+W Media; \$24.95

ISBN: 1596688289

Chachula has a degree in architectural engineering, so it’s understandable that she takes a builder’s approach to crochet design.

Breaking big projects into manageable bites, looking at how structure affects performance, an orderly approach to construction—all of these engineering skills are evident in her newest book. Chachula cleverly divides sweaters into four groups based on how they are put together. “Classic Construction” consists of garments made from blocked panels that are sewn together and includes various shoulder styles (seamed raglans, cap sleeves, saddle sleeves); accompanying patterns include the charming short-sleeve Cranberry cardigan, featuring alternating stitch patterns, and a striking dress with plaid color accents. “Top-Down and In-the-Round Construction” discusses design challenges



that arise with popular top-down sweater styles; the ruffle-accented Smoky cropped top

and lace-trimmed Rose Quartz pullover are standouts in this section. “Granny Motif Construction” is next, and Chachula offers up some easy fixes to turn a boxy shape into a tailored silhouette. She finishes up with a grab bag of less conventional structures in “Unique Construction”: a toga-style tunic, a one-piece cardigan, a dolman-style pullover. The designer’s clear writing and stylish, fitted designs will do much to further the art and craft of crochet.

Complete Knitting Skills

By Debbie Tomkies
Barron’s; \$24.99
ISBN: 1438001711



Tomkies’ *Complete Knitting Skills* aims to be a one-stop knitting-technique resource by

combining a comprehensive how-to book with newfangled video clips. It’s a clever concept: Provide the basics of various techniques in written form (along with lots of color photos) and supplement them with mini movies available via QR code or on the publisher’s website. The book covers just about every knitting-related topic one could think of, starting with tips for purchasing equipment and yarn, moving on to the basics of casting on, knitting and purling, then progressing to more advanced techniques like lacework, cables and *entrelac*. Just as helpful as the instructions, though, are the nuggets of knowledge that only an experienced knitter can impart: reading patterns, choosing the best increase or decrease for a particular project, avoiding common pattern-reading errors. Tomkies caps off the technical know-how with a short primer on the knitting community, from knitting groups to charity knitting. Video clips are clear and well-lit—a helpful bonus for visual

learners or those who can’t easily access in-person help.

Loom Knitting for Babies and Toddlers

By Isela Phelps
St. Martin’s Griffin; \$24.99
ISBN: 1250025141

Pegged knitting looms are an easy way to bring interesting fiber-adjacent equipment into your inventory, and author Phelps is at the forefront of this no-needle craft. Her latest collection focuses on the smallest wool wearers and showcases plenty of LYS yarn alongside big-box mainstays. There’s a healthy refresher course on using the looms. Then the patterns begin, featuring cables, jogless stripes, short rows, ruffles



and lots of other stuff you can normally unfurl from traditional needles. There are beanies

galore, including two yummy ice cream and cupcake toques, multi-colored Mary Jane booties, baby bloomers, a tulle-skirted ballerina dress and a buttoned bunting. Pacifier straps clip to baby’s clothes and are cheerfully decorated with a bunny, car, ladybug or blossom. For fun, whip up stuffed dinos, a sock monkey and a pirate eye patch and soft, safe sword—imagination looms large on a small scale here.

Bestseller Box



Here’s what was hot on the bestseller lists for the second week of June.

Amazon Needlecrafts and Textile Crafts list:

4. *Knit to Flatter*, by Amy Herzog (STC Craft)
5. *Free-Spirit Shawls*, by Lisa Shroyer (Interweave Press)
8. *60 Quick Baby Blankets* (Sixth&Spring Books)
16. *Crochet One-Skein Wonders*, by Judith Durant and Edie Eckman (Storey Publishing)

Barnes & Noble Knitting list:

3. *Knits for Dolls*, by Nicky Epstein (Sixth&Spring Books)
4. *Vogue Knitting: The Ultimate Hat Book*, by the editors of *Vogue Knitting* (Sixth&Spring Books)
6. *Knitter’s Handy Book of Top-Down Sweaters*, by Ann Budd (Interweave Press)

YARN FORWARD

Cashmere Cocktails:

By Leslie Petrovski

yarn-sipping the blends



Cashmere. The word itself is like a sigh. While there are notably finer fibers (paca-vicuna, anyone?), none carries the cachet or the bragging rights. But it comes at a price. Two ounces of DK-weight pure Mongolian cashmere retails for nearly 50 bucks. If you're buying a sweater-quantity's worth, well, you do the math. But add merino or cotton and suddenly the mixologist has a more affordable yarn branded with cashmere's prestige. Herewith, some yummy cocktails:

Yes, there's nothing new about **Debbie Bliss/KFI Baby Cashmerino (#6)** (68 colors; 55% merino wool/33% microfiber acrylic/12% cashmere; 137yds/50g), but it has staying power for a reason. How can you argue with a yarn in which the stitches line up like rows of corn? Or one that bounds from needle to needle as energetically as a gymnast? Or that takes to the wash (and your wallet) with little or no trauma? Resistance is futile. Soft as a babe's tummy, Baby Cashmerino is a go-to for bambino wear, and with all those saturated colors, it works for mama too.

Full disclosure: Cable-plied yarns are a passion over here, which is why we're head over turned heels for **Sublime Baby Cashmere Merino Silk DK (#5)** (40 colors; 75% extra-fine merino/20% silk/5% cashmere; 127yds/50g). The cable construction of six 2-ply strands creates a rotund, cylindrical yarn that knits up obediently into beautifully defined rows. And the delicious concoction of wool, silk and a touch of cashmere makes for shiny, springy string that sadly is likely to pill. Use it for infant wear (it's touted as washable, plus that kissed-by-cashmere thing will go over big at baby showers) or splurge for something larger that

will show off your stitchwork.

All cool and talcy and soft, **Lotus Yarns Autumn Wind (#7)** (25 colors; 90% cotton/10% cashmere; 175yds/50g) owes

more to the flora in its composition than the fauna—though that's not to say the goat in the mix doesn't rear its horns. At first touch, the yarn feels mostly vegetal, but with an animalic softness that tempers the papery crunch cottons sometimes have. There's also more loft: Where cotton can sag, Autumn Wind drapes. Put this lovely transition-season yarn to work in crocheted shawls, end-of-summer coverups or lace tunics.

Zealana Air (#3) (9 colors; 40% cashmere/40% brushtail possum down/20% mulberry silk; 191yds/25g) started as a good-natured challenge between Jimad Khan of Zealana, Ron Miskin of Buffalo Wool Company and Carl Koop of Bijou Basin Ranch: Who could produce the softest, most luxurious yarn? Khan took up the gauntlet and more than two years later debuted this interesting mix. Fuzzy soft rather than smooth, Air has the characteristic possum halo and delicious cashmere hand underscored by an eye-catching wink of silk. Touted as warmer and lighter than cashmere, this yarn needs good eyes and sharp points to wrangle its hirsute strands into stitches, but what lovely soft-focus stitches they are—ideal for lace projects for which you want a hazy, blurred finish.

The goal of **TSC Artyarns**—the collaboration between Tahki•Stacy Charles and the luxury hand-dyer Artyarns—was to create a line of high-quality hand-dyed yarns that qualify as affordable luxuries. Meet one of their progeny, **Tranquility (#1)** (16 colors; 60% extra-fine merino/25% cashmere/15% silk; 400 yds/57g), a fuzzy flirt of a yarn, dressed up kittenishly in merino, cashmere and silk. Composed of two loosely twisted strands—the silk adds a glamorous twinkle—Tranquility knits up into lovely laces and skin-friendly tops while also pairing beautifully with the brand's comparably hued merino, Zara Hand-Dyed. And you can get all this fabulousness—and 400 yards—for just under \$50.

Named after Montana Congresswoman Jeannette Rankin, the first woman elected to the U.S. Congress, **Mountain Colors Jeannette (#2)** (68 colors; 65% cashmere/35% cultivated silk; 158yds/50g) is a gorgeous tribute (1% of all proceeds from yarn sales are donated to the Jeannette Rankin Foundation, which awards college scholarships to women). Imbued with the drape and luster of cashmere and silk, this light hand-painted yarn is one of the splurges on this list. Save it for extra-special projects meant to evoke a knee-buckling response.

Constructed of four tautly spun plies, **Zen Yarn Garden Serenity Worsted (#4)** (60 colors; 75% superwash merino/15% cashmere/15% nylon; 175yds/100g)—similar in fabrication to the company's Serenity Sock—has all the strokability associated with merino and cashmere, plus a bungee-like bounce that makes it a joy to work with. Add eye-popping color and a drizzle of nylon for strength and you have one gorgeous yarn.

Jade Sapphire Sylph (#8) (20 colors; 58% cashmere/42% linen; 309yds/ 50g) is a quieter beauty. The yarn has the cool, dry touch of linen and the sweet softness of cashmere. In theory, it's an intriguing blend: In the ball, the yarn looks like a casual raw silk, but the cashmere buoys the heaviness of the linen, while the linen adds strength and informality. In practice, the marriage of the two fibers is a somewhat uneasy one. When it comes to the knitting, the plies seem to have a mind of their own and are loathe to cling to each other. Arm yourself with your pointiest implements, prepare for splitting, and reap the reward of a lovely all-season wrap.



Copyright: A Hot Topic in a Digital Age

The National NeedleArts Association has been an advocate of many industry issues over the years. One issue that's been front and center for a while is copyright protection, and TNNA is committed to educating people on the topic.

As we all know, free patterns are abundant on the Internet. However, not every designer of those patterns meant for them to be free. But that fact can be very hard to prove to Google, Yahoo and other web-search providers—especially for designers with limited funds.

In recent years, TNNA has had success with our "It's a copyright, not your right to copy" initiative, which includes a downloadable brochure on the topic. We also created a special logo that can be featured on designers' charts and LYS and wholesalers' websites to reinforce the idea that copyright infringement equals theft of intellectual property.

At our 2013 Nashville Needlework Market, we took copyright education to the next level:

We brought in Tammy Browning-Smith, an attorney who specializes in intellectual property rights. "Tammy is also a knitter and a cross-stitcher," points out Debbie Rowley, chair of TNNA's Counted Thread & Embroidery Group, which was instrumental in adding Browning-Smith to the Nashville lineup. "She's familiar with the specific needs of the needlearts industry and the fact that most of us are small businesses without the deep pockets you need to really pursue copyright infringement."

In her session, Browning-Smith walked attendees through the process of registering patterns with the U.S. Copyright Office. While copyright affixes to any tangible, written form the moment it is created—a scrawl on a cocktail napkin counts—it's much easier to prove you're the copyright holder if the work has been registered through the government. She went over the fine points of how to accomplish this on a budget and how attendees can protect themselves in the future.

Because retailers are asked to handle myriad copyright issues every day—everything from handing out free patterns in your store to photocopying out-of-print patterns—we've decided to keep the conversation going. To that end, we're using the TNNA Copyright Education Fund to bring Browning-Smith to future events. She hosted two copyright sessions at our summer trade show in Columbus; at press time we're looking to add her to the Fall Needlecraft Market in St. Charles, Missouri, as well.

"The more you find out about copyright, the more you realize you don't know," Rowley observes. With that in mind, TNNA will do all it can to ask and answer questions about this important topic.

TNNA, founded in 1974, is a professional organization representing wholesalers, manufacturers, distributors, designers, publishers and other companies supporting the needlearts industry. For more information, visit www.tnna.org or call (800) 889-8662.



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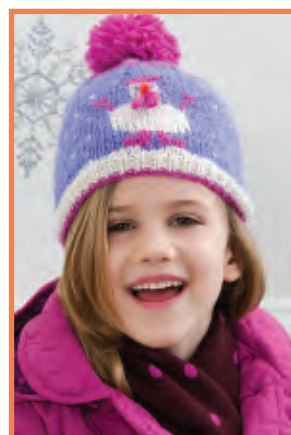
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Building Community

One of the strengths of the LYS is that it serves as a meeting place for people who love fiber. Classes, of course, are a traditional way for your customers to connect with other enthusiasts. CYC saw this firsthand when we conducted store intercepts—survey interviews conducted with customers in stores—as part of our research last year.

We spoke with one class group that meets up regularly in a local coffee shop to chat and knit, and another class group that's so enthusiastic that it even planned its own yarn crawl. We saw that friendship bonds provide ideas for new projects. It's clear that camaraderie develops among students; of course, having the right teacher, who keeps everyone challenged and interested in returning, is key as well.

Less structured events like Worldwide Knit in Public Day are another way to build community and a customer base that keeps coming back. For WWKIP Day in June, Molly Carlson, co-owner with her husband Michael of the The Urban

Sheep in Modesto, California, partnered with a local restaurant in the shopping center where their store is located. The restaurant set up tables and chairs under the awning outside The Urban Sheep, and customers were invited to sit and knit. Refreshments and a few surprises were planned.

Carlson has also promoted I Love Yarn Day for the past two years and plans to do so again on October 11, the date of the official event. "I Love Yarn Day has become a fun tradition at our store, with group knitting and other activities, and it's been very useful in helping us build a committed, loyal community," she says.

That's the type of clientele that Lea Vollmer, owner of The Modern Ewe in Mt. Vernon, Indiana, hopes to build for her shop. She opened the store last September, so promoting ILYD was a spur-of-the-moment decision. "With more time this year, I'm planning an in-store promotion in conjunction with ILYD. It's one more tool for getting the word out about the shop."

To assist retailers in promoting ILYD, CYC

will again be making postcards available (while supplies last). Orders can be placed by contacting CYC's office. Kathy Zimmerman, owner of Kathy's Kreations in Ligonier, Pennsylvania, has found the postcards very helpful in promoting the day. "They function as a great reminder to customers," she says.

After our successful efforts last year, the Council is expanding I Love Yarn Day's website and social media outreach. If your store has special events planned, post them on the ILYD Facebook page and at ILoveYarnDay.org. The Council is also setting up a special web page listing stores and special events related to ILYD. We want to know and share your news. Like the postcard says, whether you knit, crochet, craft or just adore fiber, October 11 is the day to affirm your passion and excite your customers about yarn.

The Craft Yarn Council was formed in 1981 to raise awareness about fibers. Visit craftyarncouncil.com or knitandcrochet.com for more information.



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This Old Shop

Spruce by your space with help from Uncle Sam.

BY MARK E. BATTERSBY

Recent legislation—the American Taxpayer Relief Act, enacted late in 2012 and commonly called the “Fiscal Cliff” legislation—renewed a number of enhanced tax breaks that yarn businesses can use to reduce the out-of-pocket costs of keeping premises fresh and attractive. Once you do the math, you may find that the cost of fixing up your yarn shop or business isn’t as steep as it first appeared.

Basic depreciation write-offs

The concept of depreciation is based on the common-sense notion that certain business-related assets lose their value over time. Federal tax regulations typically allow a business to deduct an annual allowance from its taxes to account for this depreciation. Buildings, certain types of equipment and other so-called capital assets are generally depreciated and written off a little at a time over a lengthy number of years. Yarn businesses that own the buildings that house their operations are required to depreciate remodeling and modernization costs over the same period of time as the building. Normally that means that the cost of, say, remodeling one’s sales floor or putting in a new bathroom for customer use must be deducted over as many as 39 years.

Those same tax rules also typically create a separate category of tax breaks designed for those who lease, rather than own, their business premises. Tax regulations traditionally have permitted a special shorter term—15 years—of depreciation write-off for what are called leasehold improvements, retail improvements and restaurant property. Depreciating over a shorter time period means that a business owner can take larger deductions each year, offsetting more of the business’s taxable income.

Section 179: deducting it all up front

When Congress passed the 2012 Fiscal Cliff legislation, it renewed an important tax provision known as “Section 179,” which improves upon a business’s ability to take tax deductions for depreciation by allowing the business to deduct the entire amount spent on improvements for the 2013 tax year, instead of gradually deducting portions of the cost over a period of years. Section 179 was intended to create a financial incentive for businesses to invest in new

equipment and other improvements by allowing them to realize the full deductibility of those costs in the same year they were made, rather than piecemeal over a number years.

How do these tax breaks work? As stated above, Section 179 applies to leasehold improvements, retail improvements and restaurant property. The restaurant property provision is unlikely to apply to yarn-related businesses, as it requires that more than half of the building’s square footage be devoted to the preparation of meals and seating for on-premises consumption of those meals. But the leasehold and retail improvements provisions may provide favorable tax treatment for yarn-related enterprises.

Federal tax provisions define leasehold improvements as those made to a nonresidential building’s interior (excepting elevators, escalators, enlargements, structural components benefiting common areas, and the building’s interior structural framework). The improved space must be occupied by a tenant, and those improvements must occur more than three years after the building was first placed in service. Thus improvements such as installing new floors or partitioning added to a yarn warehouse or shipping facility could qualify for the Section 179 tax write-off.

Since most yarn shops consist mainly of retail space, the retail improvement provision may also be applicable. This provision provides for faster depreciation based on improvements made to a nonresidential building’s interior when that building is open to the public and used by a retail business selling tangible personal property to said public—in other words, a retail shop. Thus improvements made to a retail yarn shop—adding counters or lighting, renovating a bathroom or even painting interior walls—could qualify for a more favorable write-off period, making them a more affordable option for a small business.

There are, however, a few limitations to Section 179. For example, a yarn-related business can immediately deduct a maximum of \$500,000 of expenditures in 2013, and the deduction is affected if total capital expenditures meet or exceed \$2 million. And if your business does not report a profit for the 2013 tax year, the deduction may not be taken (although it may carry forward to the next or subsequent tax years, depending on other factors). But the good news is that the Section 179 deduction applies to a wide range of new and

used business assets, equipment and property. Purchases that may qualify for the Section 179 include computers, most computer software (excluding custom-designed software); office equipment and office furniture. Certain types of purchases and improvements fall outside section 179, including air conditioning/HVAC systems and parking lots. If your business is located in the New York Liberty Zone, the Gulf Opportunity Zone or certain other enterprise and renewal zones, you may qualify for even greater deduction amounts.

As always, whenever tax or other legal issues are involved, it’s critical to check with your tax professional and/or attorney to get professional advice tailored to your unique needs, including any state or local laws that apply to your business.

Greater Access, Greater Deductibility

Thanks to U.S. tax laws, you can choose to deduct the costs of making your shop, warehouse or other facilities more accessible to and usable by those who are disabled or elderly. A yarn business can deduct so-called “barrier removal” costs as a current expense if the barrier removal meets the guidelines and requirements issued by the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board under the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990.

Small businesses with 30 or fewer employees or total revenues of \$1 million or less can also benefit from the Disabled Access Tax Credit. Eligible small businesses may take a credit of up to \$5,000 (half of eligible expenses up to \$10,250, with no credit for the first \$250) to offset their costs for access, including barrier removal (e.g., widening a doorway or installing a ramp), provision of accessibility services (e.g., sign language interpreters), provision of printed material in alternate formats (e.g., large-print, audio, Braille), and provision or modification of equipment.

Mark E. Battersby is a freelance writer based in Ardmore, Pennsylvania. For more than 25 years, his tax and financial features and columns have appeared in leading trade and professional publications.

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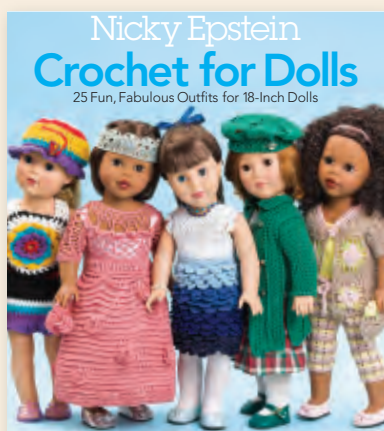


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Getting Engaged

Empowering employees with a sense of accountability to the store makes for a better business.

BY DARYL BROWER

Employee accountability. It's a buzz-worthy topic in today's business world: How does an employer get its staff to take on more responsibility, show initiative and "own" the projects, processes and problems affecting the company they work for? A 2008 Towers Perrin study showed that businesses with the most engaged employees enjoyed a 19 percent increase in operating income during the previous year, while those with the lowest levels saw a 32 percent decline.

The average LYS already has an advantage when it comes to getting employees to think of their jobs as more than just a means to a paycheck—or a discount on yarn. After all, the folks manning the registers, stocking the shelves and problem solving with patrons are usually passionate about the crafts and fibers their employers are promoting. Channel that passion into an invested concern for the store's success and you've got a truly engaged employee.

Each to her strength

At The Web•sters in Ashland, Oregon, owner Dona Zimmerman's staffers are each given a "piece of responsibility and a piece of the reward pie." New hires are trained for six months before they're put in charge of an area that corresponds with their particular skills and interests. "Let's say Erin loves to knit lace," Zimmerman explains. "She's consulted when we are ordering lace yarn and patterns, she oversees the lace yarn section, teaches lace knitting classes and would be the first choice to knit up a lace sample for the store." That approach, says Zimmerman, invests the employee in the sales performance of her area and helps build relationships between customers and staff. "Each of my staff has a following," explains Zimmerman. "Some clients come in only on days they know a particular staffer is working."

Mim Bird, who owns Over the Rainbow Yarn in Rockland, Maine, cultivates a similar environment. The shop offers one-on-one lessons, pairing customers with instructors who have an affinity for the skill or technique. "The staff is happy because they are getting to use their talents, and customers are happy because they're getting help from someone who obviously knows and enjoys what she's doing. It's a win for all of us."

Bird also issues business cards to her employees, all of whom she titles "associates." "It

shows we value them as professionals," she says, "and helps [the staff] build relationships with customers." The cards also serve a second purpose: as a motivator to get employees talking to potential customers, both in and out of the store. "There's a coupon for \$2 off your first purchase printed on the back," Bird explains. "For every card brought in, the associate whose name is on the front gets \$2 off her own store purchases in addition to the employee discount. If they engage a good number of customers, they can earn quite a bit of store credit."

Sales goals, the standard motivator in retail, aren't the norm among yarn shops—at least not the ones we talked to. "I monitor sales, but I don't set goals [for staff]," says Zimmerman. Instead, if numbers are low, "I might give a pep talk or solicit ideas: What can we do to get things moving? Should we have a sale? Move a display?"

At the Lion Brand Yarn Studio in Manhattan, manager Patty Lyons prefers to give staffers "satisfaction" rather than sales quotas. "Our goal is to make the customer, not the sale," she explains. "We want our customers to know we always have their best interests in mind, which means empowering the staff to recommend the right product, not the most expensive product." With the worry of meeting a daily dollar amount out of the way, staffers can concentrate on guiding customers to products and projects that will keep them engaged—and coming back to the store.

Ask and ye shall receive

Zimmerman, Bird and Lyons all say that the most effective method they've found for investing employees in the store's success is soliciting ideas and feedback. Zimmerman holds regular meetings at which each employee is required to give a report on her area of responsibility: an update on where new merchandise is located in the warehouse, what's coming up in classes and events, etc. "We discuss everything from policies and product selection to how we can be a better team," explains Zimmerman. Lyons too is a proponent of the staff meeting. "We discuss new products, and we pitch events and class ideas," she says, noting that she holds an extended meeting after she returns from trade shows and conferences. "We discuss ideas I picked up at the event and how they can translate to our store," she says. "We also take a 'learn more from success than

failure' approach. I like to reserve the end of the meeting for staffers to share difficult customer-service issues they came across that month and kick around ideas on how others might handle them.

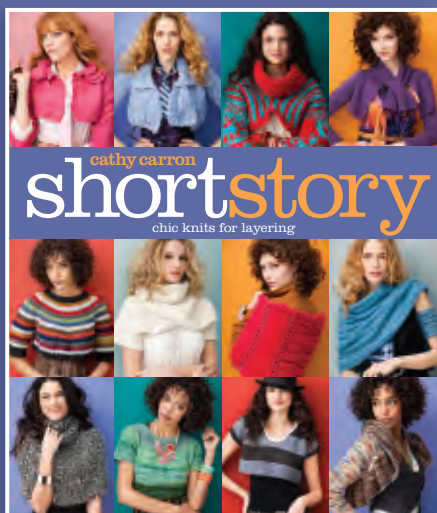
"The best thing you can do when you run any business," Lyons continues, "is surround yourself with people who are smarter than you are, then sit back and learn from them."

Rules of Engagement

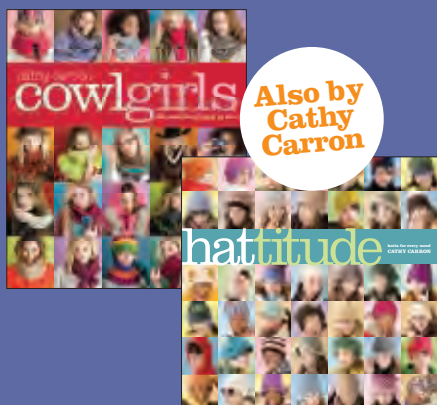
- **Clearly articulate goals and responsibilities.** Make sure employees understand what's expected of them, whether that means checking shelves for supply and neatness every hour or ensuring that every customer who walks through the door is told about new yarns and products.
- **Provide regular, constructive feedback.** Is Susan doing an amazing job with that beginner knitter's group? Were you pleased with the way Paul handled a difficult customer? Let them know. Likewise, if you're unhappy with Cindy's tendency to simply point and say "it's over there" when a customer asks for help, don't sit and stew. Let her know that you'd like her to take a more active approach—then offer suggestions on how she can do so.
- **Tailor responsibilities to employee strengths and interests.** Is Linda on the shy side? She may be happier—and more effective—designing displays, keeping an eye on reorders and running the register than actively assisting customers. Put a chattier staffer in charge of your drop-in knitting groups.
- **Make employees part of the decision-making process.** Thinking about increasing your inventory of higher-end yarns? Changing your class offerings? Reworking staff hours? Ask your employees for the pros and cons of these moves. You'll get a different perspective, and they'll feel more invested in the business knowing that you value their input.
- **Reward effort.** A raise is the obvious reward for good work, but if that's not in your budget, there are other ways to recognize employees who shine. End-of-year bonuses, extra employee discounts after a particularly good month, or a simple thank-you lunch for the staff can do a world of wonder for keeping employees happy and invested in your success.

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The Doctor Is In

Rather than helping walk-in clients one at a time, more and more shops are offering knitting “clinics” as an alternative for customers. Could one work for you?

BY CLAIRE LUI

Doctors are used to the social hazards of their jobs—acquaintances describing ailments and requesting instant diagnoses. Yarn store owners are no strangers to this phenomenon either, often encountering customers who come in with a problem project and need a cure, stat. For many shops with limited staff resources, offering immediate (and free) help is not a viable option. The solution? The knitting clinic.

Much like a hospital, most yarn shops perform triage when a customer comes in with an urgent knitting problem. Almost all will offer help on the spot, provided staff is available and the fix is a simple one. But more complicated questions often need a more dedicated teacher: “Sixteen years ago, in our first year of business, a woman came in with a project from another store. She’d been told that it was the custom, if there was a problem, to get help from the local yarn store,” says Marci Richardson, owner of the Elegant Ewe in Concord, New Hampshire. “We helped her, but it took more than an hour. That was when I decided that we needed a different solution.” And thus her knitting clinic was born.

Generally, once it becomes clear that a customer’s problem is more than a quick fix, the staff at Elegant Ewe will gently redirect the knitter to a scheduled clinic, pointing to a sign that explains the schedule and the concept. Richardson stresses the importance of charging for aid, pointing out that for-cost clinics help emphasize the value of professional advice and assistance; the clinic runs \$15 per half hour for individual help.

How other stores approach clinics varies: Some classes require pre-registration, others are drop-in; some are one-on-one, while others are designed as group sessions. Because clinics are generally cheaper and less formal than private lessons or regularly scheduled classes, they are a good way for customers to sample the store’s teaching methods.

The clinic at Gather Here in Cambridge, Massachusetts, charges \$25 for two hours; it has, on average, three participants who are taught by one teacher. Owner Virginia Johnson finds that most customers are amenable to the idea, because “it’s obvious in our shop when things are hopping. We also suggest private

lessons, which run \$30 per hour and take anywhere from a week to three weeks to set up. The clinic is more cost-effective and happens on a regular basis.”

Clinic costs vary from store to store, and though most find the setup mildly profitable, the primary economic value of each clinic is more subtle: “The class really does not provide a strong revenue stream for either the teacher or me. Its value is in creating a loyal customer base and acclimating customers away from the concept of ongoing and involved free help. We are able to keep our customers happy and in the store, and the teacher is able to market her classes,” says Micheline Golden of The Knit Addiction in Clovis, California. Karen Rumpza, owner of Needlework Unlimited in Minneapolis, puts it bluntly: “Classes never make money; selling products makes money.”

Why offer them then? “Clinics are an answer for someone who can’t work her own schedule around any of our class schedules,” says Rumpza. At her store, the clinics can cover almost any topic, except for learning to knit—true beginners must take a class. (“Frankly, some people need two hours of help, with someone to watch over every stitch,” she says.) Stores field a wide range of queries—at Elegant Ewe, students often need help with sewing together parts of a sweater, while customers at The Knit Addiction might need help understanding a pattern or learning Kitchener stitch. The final steps of a project seem to befuddle many knitters, and the intensive help a clinic provides can mean the difference between a WIP and an FO: “We offer these clinics because we think it’s important that people actually finish their projects. Those skeletons in the closet can keep us from moving forward and stunt our creativity,” says Virginia Johnson.

Diane Johnson, an independent knitting instructor in Acton, Massachusetts, who offers knitting clinics at her house, echoes the store owners when describing the target audience for clinics. “I find that folks want the flexibility of getting help on an as-needed basis,” she says. “For example, I run a five-week sweater workshop, but not every student finishes. She’ll attend one to three clinics for help to complete her project. Others like to attend class periodically, rather than sign up for a longer-duration class.”

Though many knitters now turn to Internet sites and videos to solve their knitting conundrums, there’s still a need and a desire for in-person help. Knitting clinics allow stores to continue the tradition of serving as a community center for knitting assistance without creating a financial and time drain on the store’s resources.

The Right Prescription

- **Money Talks.** Charge for clinics to establish the fact that the professional help you provide has worth, even if it won’t be a significant source of profit. “Your time and expertise are valuable. Figure out what you need to charge for both to feel good about it, make sure it’s fair, then figure out how to communicate that to your customers. This figure may evolve as you and your business evolve,” says Julie Petrella of Home Made in Swanton, New Jersey.
- **Gateway Drug.** Use the clinic as a lead-in or follow-up to classes and private lessons. At Boersma’s Knitting Basket in McMinnville, Oregon, all class students receive a voucher for one free clinic session to help with lingering questions.
- **Appointment Knitting.** Decide whether knitters will sign up ahead of time or if you can pay a staff member to run a drop-in clinic even if no one shows up. Micheline Golden of The Knit Addiction says, “You have to be patient with the time it takes to build the clinic. There are mornings when we have one or even no students. However, the Knit Clinic is a valuable resource for us, so I’m willing to stick with it.”
- **Make It Fun.** Colorful Stitches in Lenox, Massachusetts, held an Emergency Knitting Clinic earlier this year, a free three-hour Saturday event, complete with staff in blue surgical scrubs, masks and circular needles (instead of stethoscopes) looped around their necks. Co-owner Bonnie Burton held the event to create traffic during the winter months and reports that “the aided customers were so relieved and happy that they ‘went shopping.’” Now that’s a prescription for a happy store and happy knitters.

Claire Lui blogs at NewYorkMinknit.com and tries not to self-diagnose her medical or knitting problems.

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Stop, Collaborate and Listen

Working with other businesses can have positive outcomes—a healthier bottom line, more customers and much-welcome moral support.

BY CATHY RUMFELT

Collaboration can be a challenge. As an LYSO, you have specific ideas about your store: how it should look, what you should stock, how you should market your business. Looking to others for ideas, though, can give you a fresh perspective. If you find the right people to collaborate with, you may be able to boost your store's business.

Barter system

Laura Zander, co-owner of Jimmy Beans Wool in Reno, Nevada, and Shelli Westcott, owner of Knitterly in Petaluma, California, have discovered just such a partnership. Using their individual strengths to best advantage, they are strategizing ways to improve both stores. Zander's gift is organizing finances—helping a store make as much money as possible—while Westcott, in Zander's words, is a "merchandising genius." A former landscape architect, Westcott delights in setting up a beautiful store. "I want it to be welcoming and comfortable, like home. I use vintage items and furniture not usually found in yarn shops," Westcott explains. "Creating such a space drives me to stay in business."

Zander was interested in developing this type of atmosphere in her shop, so she and Westcott decided to trade: Westcott would bring her unique design sense to Jimmy Beans' store layout; Zander, meanwhile, would help Shelli with financial strategies. "Shelli has very healthy sales in her store, and I am going to help her track spending and ordering, expenses and buying," Zander explains. She believes that this kind of collaboration helps the fiber industry thrive. "When yarn shops aren't successful, the entire industry suffers," says Zander. Conversely, "healthy shops create a healthy industry."

The more, the merrier

Barbara Pushies and Maridee Nelson of the Yarnover Truck, a mobile yarn store based in the Los Angeles area, depend on partnerships. The mobile nature of their store makes collaboration with bricks-and-mortar shops a necessity. Says Pushies: "We and the other store plan and market and publicize an event to-

gether. Then we pull up outside the store and set up shop. The customers benefit, because they get to visit two stores in one location, and the stores benefit because together we draw a larger crowd." The Yarn Truck has standing invitations at a few places, but Pushies acknowledges that collaboration doesn't work with every store: "Some see us as competition."

Safety in numbers

Deb Gemmell, owner of Cabin Fever in Ontario, has also benefited from associations with other fiber professionals. Two years ago, designer and teacher Robin Hunter started a professional fiber-arts networking group in Toronto. Gemmell joined the group and immediately saw the benefits. "We meet once a month for two hours to talk about what we're doing and to discuss various aspects of the industry," says Gemmell. "This year, ten of us—teachers, designers, store owners, distributors, sample knitters, online retail salespeople—decided to run a retreat."

The first Yarnover Sleepover, open to all knitters, crocheters and dyers, took place in April at Fern Resort, with technique classes and a market for yarn and patterns. They are already planning their 2014 retreat. "We all know each other much better now and can count on each other for support even though many of us are competitors," says Gemmell. "We're now contemplating working on a book together. Exciting things have come out of this project."

Recently in Connecticut, four yarn shops started an LYS Council after the Candlewood Valley Knitters Guild invited a few local stores to host a market night to sell products to guild members during a meeting. "All of us were in communication before the event so we could bring different products; this later prompted us to form the council," explains Nancy Hamilton, owner of Black Sheep Yarns in Kent.

The LYS Council has discussed several ideas for collaboration. One is swapping knitted and crocheted store samples to keep each shop looking fresh; another is a yarn crawl to all of the stores. "We are looking into pooling our resources to bring a big name like Kaffe Fassett to an event. When the fees are large, we can all benefit if we [pool our resources and] host an event together," Hamilton says.

They plan to meet every few months to discuss ideas, as well as find ways for the council to benefit all members. Hamilton says, "I believe we all have the right attitude and are just looking to learn from each other."

Keys to a Rewarding Partnership

- **Work with people you like:** Working with people who have complementary personalities is key, says Laura Zander. "Like and respect each other so you can work together."
- **Think beyond the fiber industry:** Kris Gregson and Oz Barron of Ball & Skein & More in Cambria, California, work with area businesses to create events. "We bring in locally produced wine and beer and locally roasted coffee, which helps people connect to our shop and our area," says Gregson. "Since we are in a small tourist town, engaging with visiting guests becomes very important."
- **Figure out what works for you:** Donna Higgins of Deep South Fibers developed her network outside of her local area. "We share ideas, what's working and what's not," says Higgins. "Mostly our exchanges are over the phone, but on occasion we'll swap store samples."
- **Consider your needs:** Ball & Skein & More partners with a local clothing designer, using her dresses in the shop as displays for knitted garments. "It's good for us both, as it shows the knitwear in context, and we have been able to drive business to the designer," says Barron. Look for local resources that will help widen your customer base and expand your business.
- **Think about the value of a group dynamic:** Sometimes, working as a group is better than working alone. Deb Gemmell of Cabin Fever appreciates her new partnerships: "Most of us were working in isolation before we got together," she says, "so we are very excited about what this group has accomplished."

Cathy Rumfelt, a frequent contributor to this magazine, is based in Cumming, Georgia.

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Around the LYS in Six Seconds

There is much to love about your shop, so why not show it off with Twitter's micro-video app, Vine?

BY MAYA MACKOWIAK ELSON

From Ravelry to Facebook and back again, social media is a must for today's businesses. A new survey of almost 500 small businesses reported that 63 percent of owners are spending up to five hours a week on social media. They are increasing their social media budgets and scrambling to figure out which platforms work best for their companies.

Uncovering the platform that works best for your shop is key to maximizing efficiency and impact. As a marketing tool, social media is barely out of its infancy, so the answer may be less than straightforward. But since a yarn shop is a very visual, sensory place, it makes sense to try a new social media that allows you to show your establishment to best effect.

Plying on the vine

Enter Twitter's new free mobile video app, Vine. Launched in January, Vine allows you to create six-second, looping video clips to share on Vine's own network, as well as on Twitter and Facebook. It's a moving-picture twist on the micro-blogging, quick-pic sharing activities made popular by Tumblr and Instagram.

If the thought of shooting video and then posting it online seems like too much work, think again: The Vine app interface is sublimely simple and quick to use on your iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch or Android-based device, requiring only a quick download and easy tap-on, tap-off recording capability.

Six seconds of video doesn't sound like a lot—and it isn't. But that's the point. As Twitter described it when introducing Vine, "Like Tweets, the brevity of videos on Vine inspires creativity." Vine is not for posting a comprehensive how-to for a cable pattern or a detailed yarn overview (though quickies on such topics could be useful). Its greatest potential is as a powerful marketing tool, one that helps you engage customers by sharing images that evoke your shop's personality. [Editor's note: As this issue was going to press, we learned that Instagram had just added 15-second videos to its service—slightly longer than Vine but by no means lengthy.]

All types of small businesses are using

Vine in all kinds of ways. Steamed milk pouring into a cup of espresso. Stop-motion video of shampoo bottles falling like bowling pins, their labels displayed one by one. A quick hello from a CEO—and his dog. The only limit to how you choose to engage your followers is your own imagination. Here are a few ideas for putting short videos to work for you:

• **Introduce your employees—and yourself.**

More than most retail settings, yarn shops rely on relationships: Foster a sense of community among your clientele and you'll cultivate a loyal following. Put names to faces, especially if any of those names are known to the wider fiber-arts world. Show off your staffers' special skills or talents. Describe your areas of expertise. Talk about favorite yarns or products. Model a much-admired FO. Portray your shop as a friendly gathering place and customers will want to be part of your "family."

• **Tour the shop.** A short video gives just a peek at the store's interior, whether you choose to highlight a new display or reveal how cozy and inviting your space is. To show off different aspects of your shop, put together a series of tour videos.

• **Plan for projects that can be knit in a week-end.** Boost sales by highlighting projects customers can stitch up in a few days. Use quick clips of easy projects, new yarns or fun techniques.

• **Educate and create.** With the easy stop-start functionality of Vine, you can show step-by-step instruction for simple techniques—for example, mattress stitch, weaving in ends, the slipknot or single crochet. You can even use this sort of quick how-to to promote classes that incorporate the techniques.

• **Promote sales, contests or events.** Think movie teasers: Provide a taste of what's to come. You can give a glimpse of the volume of yarn included in an upcoming sale or create buzz about a new class.

• **Host micro fashion shows.** If you have samples that highlight new or exclusive sweater patterns you're promoting, video is a great way to show them on a person to give stitchers an all-angles view.

• **Reveal insider "secrets."** Go ahead: Open the doors to your stock room. Even if it seems

boring to you, customers love to look behind the scenes. Or get footage of an author before a book signing or reveal trunk-show treasures.

• **Post rave reviews.** Are die-hard fans willing to spread the word? A quick video of them sharing the love can say more than you ever could.

• **Attract an audience.** People shop at places they enjoy visiting. An amusing or heartwarming day-in-the-life video works like a charm to draw clients in.

To download the Vine app or to learn more about Twitter Vine, visit www.vine.com.

Inspiration Off the Vine

How are other businesses using their six-second Vine videos? Here are a few that are already making the most of the service. You can also search for any type of company or topic at www.twitter.com/vineapp.

ETSY: It's no surprise that Etsy, a business dedicated to DIY and all things handmade, has created simple yet useful how-to videos with Vine. They've also captured amusing—and colorful—slices of life at their offices.

ASOS: With one of its Vine videos, this online fashion retailer encapsulated the delight of unpacking a box of goodies just received in the mail. It's not hard to imagine the similar delight of opening a giant box of yarn.

DOVE: OK, it's not a small company, but Dove done some interesting things with Vine. Check out the playful stop-motion video featuring their products as well as hellos from employees.

GOGO: An in-flight Internet provider, Gogo effectively used Vine to create excitement for a giveaway by showing off the loot: laptops! You can give away smaller items from your shop—stitch markers, tape measures and the like—that will get your followers just as jazzed as Gogo's were.

Maya Mackowiak Elson's Vine account promotes her sons' endless silliness.

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Valencia

City of Knitting and Light

BY RUTH GARCIA-ALCANTUD

Valencia is “the city of flowers, light and color,” says its anthem. The third-largest city in Spain, Valencia enjoys approximately 330 days of sunshine a year. It’s a photographer’s dream come true in

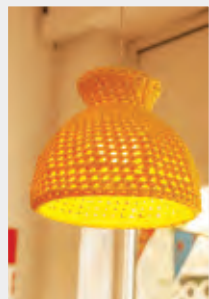
terms of light, and a nature lover’s paradise with its gardens and Mediterranean location. These conditions are perfect for fostering portable and colorful crafts—knitting, sewing, crochet and embroidery are staples in every home. However, until the last decade, these activities were mostly kept private.

Born in Valencia, I learned to stitch as a child from my grandmothers. When I moved to the U.K. and rediscovered my love of needlecrafts, I found a surprising amount of support from knitting groups and the ever-growing online community. On annual vacations to visit family, I missed my knitting groups, so I looked for a Valencia-based group to connect with. Valencia Knits had a handful of members when I first joined the group for coffee and stitching at a café in the center of the city in 2006. Its Facebook page (facebook.com/ValenciaKnits) now counts more than 500 members and hosts multiple meetings per month in different neighborhoods, all open to new members and visitors on holiday. There’s no doubt that once-solitary knitters are embracing a much more public attitude, enhanced by the number of specialty shops and events that have originated in the past decade.

Traditionally, yarn here was sold in dedicated shops—Spain loves small family businesses, and, unlike other countries in Europe, department stores have little or no craft sections, boosting LYS performance. Old shops that have stood the test of time have done so in style and stock; most sell yarn by weight—fine-gauge yarn for baby knitting is very popular—with precious, more valuable yarns kept behind the counter. Locally made bright, colorful plied and mercerized cottons are ever-present in these shops and are very affordable—this favorite of mine, which I use for crocheted blankets, can be obtained in abundance from shops at the back of the Mercado Central (Plaza Ciudad de Brujas), a unique marketplace where stunning architecture and food vendors delight your senses. A word of wisdom? Don’t go there when you’re hungry!

Yarn isn’t found only in markets, though. Shops tend to be hidden on off-the-radar streets. Valencia is a city with a well-connected public-transport system even to areas out of the city center, but it’s also made for walking. The women from QueCraft have put together a comprehensive list of shops for all sorts of crafty endeavors, complete with local area maps (quecraftvalencia.com/tiendas).

Take a stroll to Mikita Lapena (c/ Grabador Selma, 4). Opened in 2011, it sells European magazines and international yarns in a lively, sunny space. This little gem of a shop can surely cater to your needs—crochet and knitting mix in a friendly atmosphere, with workshops for beginners. The owner, Marieta Leyda, says, “My goal is to transform every student into an independent learner who enjoys coming back and sharing his or her progress,” and the former students in the shop the day I visited were



proof of that, showing me jewel-colored crochet in the making. In a sure sign that times are changing, Marieta mentioned that men are joining the workshops en masse, many learning to make amigurumi toys and chunky cowls.

Head into the commerce vortex of the city and visit La Tia Pepa (c/ Felix Pizcueta, 23), a crafty shop offering not just upscale yarns in delicious colors but also the cutest buttons, brooches and finishing touches. It’s been open for 20 years, and its staff is well trained and helpful—I left with a bag filled with buttons and quirky notions on my last visit. If you’re a knitter who also dabbles in quilting and sewing, this store has everything you could need. From there, go across the Gran Vía to the Ruzafa neighborhood and visit Derecho y Reves (c/ Musico Padilla, 4) for another dose of great yarns and friendly service in a tucked-away location that encourages learning.

One of Valencia Knits’ founders, Ana Mendieta, felt the need to expand the knitting and crochet presence in the city and so opened Tirando Del Hilo (c/ Sueca, 68), a shop/workshop space that not only sells handmade goods and yarns but hosts dozens of knitting and crochet classes, from one-day workshops to more intensive weekly courses. As if that didn’t take enough of her time, Ana joined forces with local illustrator and Knits attendee Eva Carot to create La Fireta (lafiretadevalencia.blogspot.com.es), a biannual craft fair (June and December) with a focus on knitting and crochet. This community-built and community-building event is now in its second year, with a careful selection of vendors selling goods that complement the free workshops and demonstrations taking place. The vendors present are all self-employed or very small businesses, selected carefully with a no-compete policy to ensure diversity and fun.

Non-crafters will also enjoy the bubbly city personality, with its many independent clothing and accessories designers and tucked-away bars and restaurants. Everyone will find it difficult to know which delightful neighborhood to explore first.

My one piece of advice to those visiting Valencia is to keep all your senses aware. Inspiration may strike you when you see the iron-wrought fences reminiscent of cables, gates that resemble sweeping shawls, as well as the sinuous lines of the Baroque décor that can inform your design work. Porcelain-covered walls, marble floors and neighborhood-themed graffiti murals surround the city, while the beach is washed in light, infusing a dose of pastel colors into your mind. Visit Valencia just once and I assure you, you will want to go back.

Ruth Garcia-Alcantud is a Valencian living in the U.K., where she works as a knitwear designer and technical editor. Find her online at www.rockandpurl.com.

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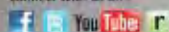
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Eucalan

Paris, Ontario

BY DARYL BROWER

Mary Ellen Edgar took a trip down under in 1989 and came home with more than just photographs of marsupials. She returned with a recipe for a no-rinse, all-natural laundry soap that an Australian friend assured her would change her life. It did, but not quite in the way the friend expected. Mary Ellen tried the formula out on a prized hand-knit sweater and was instantly smitten with both the result of the washing and the economical benefits of the washing method. (No rinsing meant less water used and less strain on her home septic system.) That's when her entrepreneurial wheels started spinning. She deduced that if she found the wash so fabulous, others would as well. She did some research, came up with a way to commercially produce the product and launched a no-rinse wool wash she dubbed Eucalan. North American hand knitters have been thanking her ever since.

The thanks are much reciprocated. "Knitters gave us our big start," explains Jennifer Edgar, Mary Ellen's daughter-in-law and now the company's managing director. "Our first wholesale accounts were yarn shops." But Eucalan didn't move from local start-up to multinational company overnight. Finding a wash product among the yarn and notions in local yarn shops was pretty much impossible at the time, so Eucalan started small. The family set up booths at fiber fairs and convinced hand knitters that their product was the best way to protect and preserve their creations.

"It's been a long process of education," explains Jennifer. "It's hard for some people to wrap their heads around the idea of not rinsing soap out of a sweater." To encourage sales, the family would ask people to try their product out for one wash and send the bottle back for a refund if they weren't happy with the results. Not one was returned. "We invested a lot in educating our customers about the product and still do," says Jennifer. "It pays off."

After a case of Eucalan sold to a company promoting hand knits at the Canadian National Exhibition, things started to pick up. Canadian yarn shops began placing orders, and the Edgars made their way across the border to TNNA in 1993 to explore the American market. "Things were so different then," says Jennifer of the trade show experience. "We were probably the only booth that wasn't selling yarn or knitting notions—the 'extras' market just didn't seem to attend TNNA then."

From there "things kind of grew organically," says Jennifer—a fitting choice of words for a company that was "green" long before the term became a marketing tag line. Twenty-three years on, you'd be hard-pressed to find a dedicated hand knitter who isn't familiar with the wonders of Eucalan, and the wash is making gains in the broader consumer market. Lingerie shops were the first non-knitting outlets to start stocking bottles on their shelves; baby boutiques soon followed. "It's just a natural match for the product," says Jennifer.

As the business grew, so did the offerings. Travel-sized kits, spot-cleaning towelettes and lint removers joined the line, as did new scents. (Grapefruit, unscented and Wrapture, a jasmine-influenced floral created in association with designer Kristin Omdahl, have joined the original lavender and eucalyptus options.) The packaging underwent a recent makeover, with a hipper look to the bottle, but the heart of the business is still small in scale and family-run. Everything—from the wash itself to the bottles and cases it's shipped in—is made within ninety minutes of the company's main office in Ontario. "You can't get much more local than we are," notes Jennifer. "It's important to us, and it's important to our customers. They appreciate that we're not outsourcing."

"It's not a marketing ploy," Jennifer says of the hyper-local and environmentally conscious aspect of the business. But it is something the company is now touting to its advantage. "This is the way we work; it's what we've always done. We're just making sure more people know about it." The company uses both traditional outlets like print advertising and giveaways to get information out, backing them up with a social media presence through outlets including Facebook, Ravelry, Pinterest and Twitter. The Eucalan website does out advice on everything from how to wash a specific item to tips on conserving water. It even includes links to a YouTube channel packed with how-to videos for safely and effectively laundering and pressing bulky hand-knit sweaters, slinky silk slips and more.

"We're very invested in educating our customers and responding to their feedback," says Jennifer. "And we try to incorporate all of that back into the business. If someone asks, 'Can I



What's in a name? The Eucalan brand name is combination of the two main ingredients in the delicate wash's original formula—eucalyptus and lanolin. Non-toxic and biodegradable, the formula can be used for both machine and hand washing.

use this to wash heirloom lace?' we'll experiment and find out—and then share that information with the rest of our customers."

They're also happy to share information with retailers, providing everything from help with buying decisions to advice on effective display techniques. "It's an expensive product, and we recognize that people can be put off by that," says Jennifer. "So we try to show stores how to educate their own customers to see the value in caring properly for something that they put so much time, effort and expense into making."

Conscious of constrained store space and budget, the company offers retailers a point-of-purchase display that includes a 12-bottle mix of different Eucalan scents and information about how to use the product. "It allows store owners to see which scents appeal to their customers," Jennifer explains of the displays. "They can see what sells and restock accordingly." The company helps local store sales by maintaining a list of stockists on the website and by using Shopatron. "We want to direct business to the stores," Jennifer says.

They're also looking to the future. Two decades since bringing the no-rinse concept to North American shores, Eucalan is still looking toward new horizons. "We've got a lot in the works," says Jennifer. "And the shops are going to love it."

Snapshot

Eucalan

P.O. Box 374

Paris, Ontario, Canada N3L 3T5

(800) 561-9731; (519) 442-2988

www.eucalan.com

Years in business: 23

Square footage: 5,000 (office/warehouse)

Staff: 5

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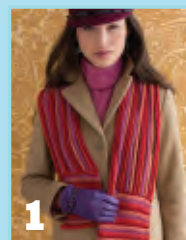
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Turning a **NEW PAGE** on Books

By Leslie Petrovski

Reports of books' demise have been greatly exaggerated.

At least that's the conclusion you'd draw from data released by the Association of American Publishers on the 2012 book-selling season. According to the AAP, books are alive and well and living on shelves and tablets near you. Net revenues for U.S. trade publishers climbed 6.2 percent over 2011. And the share of trade e-books? A healthy 22.55 percent in 2012, up from 16.98 percent the previous year.

The good news is people are buying books, both print and digital. The bad news: They're not necessarily buying knitting books or buying them from the corner yarn shop. Amazon, iTunes and other online sources are cutting into yarn shop book sales as more people opt for the convenience and savings associated with buying physical and electronic books online.

When Celeste Varner, owner of Loop and Leaf in Santa Barbara, California, opened her store six years ago, she did a brisk book business. "People asked for books all the time," she says. Since then, the economy has suffered a meltdown, and e-readers gained traction among bibliophiles and needleworkers after Amazon introduced the Kindle in 2007

and Apple unleashed the tablet revolution with the iPad in 2010.

"I've been stocking fewer and fewer books, because sales have gone down. People are looking at patterns online and for books online and at libraries, and I've responded to that. Fewer customers are asking for them."

Today Varner takes a curatorial approach to the books she selects for her shop, balancing her choices against the yarns she has in inventory. Since her customers tend to be more trend-savvy, she leans toward newer books with modern looks as well as titles she finds personally appealing. "I do go a lot by what I am interested in personally," she says. "That's my number one thing: I have to like it in order to sell it."

Varner is not alone. Publishers and distributors report that yarn shops overall aren't buying as many knitting and crochet books. Stephen Denkin, president of the distribution company Unicorn Books and Crafts, reports that book sales have plummeted since the glory days of the knitting boom, a fact he attributes to the cyclical nature of the industry, the tough economy and competition from discounters. "In 2004, 2005 and 2006,

ILLUSTRATION BY LISA HENDERLING

we had an almost vertical graph of increasing sales," he explains. "Then in 2007 it went off the cliff in terms of vertical decreasing sales. We're at the point now where 'flat' is the new 'up.' We're seeing single-digit percentage increases, but it's rebuilding at about the same pace as the economy, which is a pace nobody is enthusiastic about."

Publishers respond to a changing market

Unlike other craft categories, knitting and crochet book sales seem to have been especially hard hit, a casualty of a complex stew of factors ranging from the proliferation of free patterns on blogs and websites such as Knitty and Knitting Pattern Central to the availability of instruction on Craftsby, Creativebug and YouTube. Plus, there is no Ravelry equivalent for other crafts like quilting and embroidery.

Though Ravelry has gone out of its way to help local yarn shops with its In-Store Sales program, making it possible for Ravelry designers to sell individual patterns and e-books through yarn shops (LYSes get 40 percent of the action), the site nonetheless has become a clearinghouse for free patterns and low-cost downloads. Yarn companies and indie designers routinely offer free patterns via their websites, and one-off patterns can be purchased from sites such as Patternfish, Twist Collective and those belonging to print magazines.

"In the past, if you wanted to learn to knit [independently], you needed a book," observes Melanie Falick, publishing director for STC Craft/ Melanie Falick Books. "[Today] people don't need books to learn to knit. You can spend a lifetime knitting things you found for free on the Internet, or you can download a pattern for \$4.95." The ability to search for the perfect project by gauge, yarn, designer and more has all but obviated the need for those binders full of patterns lurking in the corner of many yarn shops. And it's rendered knitting books a tougher sell.

Karen Johnson, director of sales and marketing at Martingale & Company, says that in recent years her house has eschewed style-dependent pattern books in favor of technique titles with greater staying power, including the popular titles *Cast On, Bind Off, A-Z of Crochet* and *Terrific Toe-Up Socks*. "There's so much competition from Ravelry—it's such a fabulous resource, why *wouldn't* you go there first to get a pattern for free, or buy a magazine showing current fashions, or pay \$6 for a single pattern you like? We are quite conscious in our world that [certain] fashions date too quickly to be in a book."

Falick, a knitting author herself (of *Knitting for Baby*, among others), says she commits only to those books whose authors have a strong followings or are pushing the medium into new territory—Amy Herzog, author of the new *Knit to Flatter*, and Lynne Barr, author of the revolutionary *The Shape of Knitting*, for example.

"We've adjusted to the realities of the marketplace," she explains. "At this point, we're not likely to publish a book of 20 patterns that don't have something extra going on. I can click three buttons on my keyboard and have 20 patterns."

At Sixth&Spring Books (an imprint of SoHo Publishing, LLC, which produces *Yarn Market News*), Editorial Director Trisha Malcolm agrees that unless an author has a strong connection with an audience—Kristin Nicholas, Debbie Bliss and Nicky Epstein, for instance—pattern books don't work. What does work are collections that offer customers a great value that they can turn to again and again for patterns and inspiration.

Malcolm reports that the company has had great success with the *60 Quick Knits* series, a growing line of books featuring Cascade Yarns' washable wools fashioned into easy-to-finish accessories and baby knits by name designers. "They're selling like crazy," she says. "People can't get enough of them."

E-books too are affecting retail book sales, though less noticeably perhaps than in the general trade book market. Because of the photography-

heavy nature of knitting and crochet publications, digitizing them is time-consuming and confounding: With so many types of devices out there, which format or formats do you choose?

"The technology is just getting standardized to provide our kind of book—illustrated books—in a consistent format," Malcolm explains. "For a novel, it doesn't matter where the page breaks fall, but for a knitting book it does matter."

Sixth&Spring Books has an app through iTunes (Vogue Knitting Books) that allows customers to purchase digital books. STC Craft/ Melanie Falick has digital versions of older books available for the Kindle, Nook, iPad, the Kobo e-reader and Google devices, but they amount to only a fraction of sales. Customers who buy books directly from Martingale receive a PDF e-book with the print edition; the company is also piloting four titles through Amazon, Barnes & Noble and iBooks.

When publishers sell e-books directly, however, LYSes don't benefit, except to make yarn sales based on the books' projects. Though Martingale would like to package e-books with the print editions they sell in LYSes (like they do on their own website), Johnson says they haven't found a good way to make that happen.

Because she runs a small house, Shannon Okey of Cooperative Press (who estimates that about 45 percent of her sales are digital only) has found a way to make digital downloads available for LYS customers—under special circumstances. To stimulate book sales at the local level, Okey will send PDF e-books to LYS customers who buy print copies—if the LYS hosts an event featuring one of her titles. Customers who buy Cooperative Press books on Amazon don't get that service.

Books: The new frontier

In spite of the roaring success of trade e-books (traditional fiction and non-fiction), nobody is willing yet to sound the death knell for physical books, especially those related to the yarn arts. "The popularity of e-books is growing steadily," observes Malcolm, "but print books for knitting are not going away, not in this generation or possibly even the next—not until technology makes electronic books so fabulous that people no longer want the printed page."

Oz Barron, co-owner with his wife Kris Gregson of Ball & Skein & More in Cambria, California, sees the difference between print and digital tomes as one of utility. "It's so much easier to flip through physical patterns and books," he says, "than look at things on a computer screen."

That might change. E-books are no more likely to remain static than websites are. Industry experts postulate that audio, video, photography, social-sharing opportunities and non-linear forms of storytelling are coming to a tablet near you. "As publishers, we are working in the most exciting time since the invention of the printing press," Malcolm observes.

"The possibilities for thinking outside the box are endless."

"I don't think the solution is to give up," Falick says. "The idea that publishing is dead and the ship is sinking is one way to look at it. But you could also look at it that you're part of a revolution, and that's exciting. It will be different, but maybe I can be part of defining this revolution by what we choose to publish and how we present it as a single package."

Falick invokes the example of Katie Startzman's *The Knitted Slipper Book* ("the new frontier for sock knitters," she says), due out from STC/ Melanie Falick Books in November. To illustrate techniques knitters might be unfamiliar with, Startzman is producing a series of value-added videos referenced in her book, which will reside on her website, Duo Fiberworks. Suddenly the analog print product is a multimedia experience.

Making the sale

Selling books in this dynamic and challenging environment requires creativity and effort. It's no longer enough to place great titles on the shelf,

spine out, and expect them to jump into shopping baskets. Today, books must be linked to the entire experience of what it means to shop in your store and to be a needlecrafter.

Merchandising against the trend, Oz Barron of Ball & Skein & More has upped the number of titles in his shop to 250 and invested in special shelving. Though he admits books are a tough category, he also says “they sell yarn. I used to manage a music store in Massachusetts,” he explains. “We sold a lot of sheet music and books. What I learned from that experience is that you have to invest in selling books. If you have 10 titles, no one will buy them. The same thing with yarn. If you have only three colors, the yarn won’t sell. But if I have 16 colors, it’s a different story. You have to invest in them and dedicate time to them. The bummer is, you don’t make that much money.”

The “bummer” Barron references is the slim margin retailers get on books. The typical wholesale discount is 40 percent, which makes it hard for LYSes to compete with mega-retailers that buy in volume and may enjoy steeper margins.

Still, books can be strong revenue generators—and generators of excitement. At Ball & Skein & More, staff employ a variety of strategies that put books to work. Rather than stock the trendiest titles, which their customers tend to “showroom” (that is, peruse in the shop, then buy at a discount online), the shop “tries to find books that are unique, offer a lot of value or are important, like *The Principles of Knitting*.” The “one-skein” books, Barron says, move so well, the shop orders them by the dozen. They’ve also had great success with Sandra McIver’s *Knit, Swirl!* (they’ve hosted trunk shows and offer kits in the store) and local author Audrey Knight’s *Reversible Scarves*, a book with more than 30 patterns that offer something new to scarf knitters.

But you have to work it, he says. “We’re computerized, so I’m not guessing whether I need *Weekend Hats* or a dozen *Learn to Knit*. My system pulls up what we’re low on and I can adjust from there. You also have to spend time upfront selecting books that will work for your market. Then you have to know what it is about those books that makes them special, and make sure everyone on staff knows what’s in them. Then you need to allow customers to take the time to browse through them.”

At Midwest Yarn in Milwaukee, Melina Martin Gingras has had good luck selling copies of *Knit Noro: 30 Designs in Living Color* by merchandising it with a sample of Michele Wang’s dramatic cabled cowl-neck tunic and skeins of Noro Kureyon. “My aunt worked in retailing,” Gingras says. “She taught me to create interesting displays and put them in parts of the store people are drawn to.”

Publishers, for their part, are anxious to partner with yarn shops to sell books and offer promotions that range from shipping single titles to allowing shops to return unsold books in good shape. “We want to work with LYSes more,” Shannon Okey says. “The more ways we can find to make it easier on them and customers, the more it’s a win-win for everyone.”

Say a yarn shop is hosting an author event or trunk show. Okey says she is willing to help store promotions by e-mailing zip-code-appropriate folks in her 6,000-strong database. And if the shop doesn’t care to invest upfront in books, Okey suggests ordering samples and then taking orders at the event. Customers then have to return to the shop to collect their orders. “I’ll ship an LYSO what she needs and not some random number,” Okey says. “Plus there’s the bonus of the digital book.”

If a yarn shop has a track record of hosting successful events, publishers will often pony up some or all of the travel expenses for a popular author, Falick explains. Other stores co-produce events with knitting guilds as a way to share expenses. A store’s best bet, she says, is to contact a publisher before a book launches or early in its public life, “because that’s when dollars are flowing. It’s harder a year later.

“We are eager to team with yarn shops on those efforts,” Falick says. “There’s nothing we like more than sending an author to a store that hosts great events.”

Discounting is another option. Though margins are tight, a small discount on a book can mean the difference between a customer buying from you or from Amazon. “A lot of yarn shops take the position of ‘How can I sell that book when someone can buy it from [a mega retailer] for less than what I paid?’” Denkin says. “If a customer has a book in her hand, make a deal to make the sale. Give her a break.” Work the opportunity to suggest yarns featured in the book, throw in a pair of needles if the purchase is sizable, and be creative.

In addition to the immediate gratification of being able to take home the book and cast on, “what Amazon can’t do is hold a customer’s hand as she’s learning a new technique or help with a yarn purchase,” Johnson explains. “Even if I buy my books on Amazon, nothing replaces the experience of the yarn shop; the service you get there; the smell and touch of yarn.”

STACK UP those sales!

■ **Put on a virtual event.** If money’s tight and you want to hold a class featuring a new book, Trisha Malcolm suggests doing it with the author on FaceTime (Apple’s face-to-face calling app), Skype or Google+ Hangout. “Project it onto a screen,” she says. “This way, the author is teaching the class or giving a presentation and she can see what everybody is doing. It’s not difficult to set up, and it’s cheaper for the store. Plus it moves books.”

■ **Get a little help from your friends.** If you don’t want to make an upfront investment in books, consider partnering with a nearby bookstore and ask if they’ll market the event to their customers. Tattered Cover in Denver regularly sells its books to businesses (like craft breweries) at a small discount for author events; the rest can be easily returned.

■ **Curate your shop.** Choose books that help tell your story and inspire your particular clientele. For example, if your shop focuses on a more indie crowd, carry Ysolda’s *Whimsical Little Knits 3*, Japanese knitting books, *Retro Knits* and the like. “Make your shop enticing, like Anthropologie,” Melanie Falick says. “People want to visit stores like that for the experience they have inside.”

■ **Discount creatively.** Think of ways to discount books that work to your advantage. Institute a policy that states if a customer buys a sweater’s worth of yarn, she can also purchase the book or pattern at a 30 percent discount. And divest: Discount your oldies and move them out. Nobody wants to pay \$20 or more for a dog-eared volume.

■ **Create fabulous displays.** Auntie Wooly, the yarn-coiffed scarecrow at Ball & Skein & More, debuted as part the town’s Scarecrow Festival, complete with stuffed cat and basket outfitted with a copy of *Learn to Knit*. The store even got customers involved in stitching squares for her jacket, an initiative that moved granny-square books and stitch dictionaries.



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Yes Sir, Yes Sir, Three Bags Full

Adapting to a Changing
Retail Landscape

By Robyn M. Schrager, co-owner, Kirkwood Knittery

All things in the universe (and yarniverse) are subject to the theory of relativity, with some things seeming to change overnight and others remaining ever the same. In the days when Watergate was only a hotel, yarn was wool, acrylic or cotton—solid or tweed—and that was about it. You bought it at the department store, the discount store or the dime store depending on the size of the city in which you lived. Patterns were published in women's magazines such as *Good Housekeeping* and *Ladies' Home Journal*, and their offerings were as likely to be home decorations as garments. If you were lucky, you could learn from Elizabeth Zimmermann's growing bibliography. You happily stitched away in your home, and you worked on a single project until it was completed, then began another.

Along came the decade when girls just wanted to have fun, and yarn-shopping options changed. Specialty fibers became more common, and dedicated yarn shops dotted the landscape. The shops often combined their small retail spaces with another fiber craft like needlepoint or quilting. Pattern support began to reflect not only the classics but designs from the Paris runways—Missoni, Adrienne Vittadini and Anny Blatt became recognized names among knitters. Patterns were published by yarn companies as well. To be sure, the magazines were still including patterns, but now you began to have choices, and they were exciting.

This era also saw the beginning of the sit-and-stitch tradition—customers often worked their gauge swatches in the shop before completing their purchases to ensure a successful melding of yarn, needle and pattern; they made mostly sweaters, skirts, outerwear, afghans and baby clothes. Yarn shopping was an important destination social event.

Sock knitting never quite disappeared, but the more “modern” machine-knit socks became the fashion norm, freeing up knitters to tackle larger projects; yarn shops stocked their shelves to match. Best-selling yarns were DK and worsted weight, with individual skeins of yarn measuring from 100–140 yards in 50-gram skeins. They came in bags of 10—perfect, because most garment projects called for nine to 10 skeins.

During that period, manufacturers produced a widening, though still limited, variety of yarns, in small but thorough color ranges—you could make a sweater in blue, red or green, but you couldn’t choose between forest, kelly or seafoam. You could still choose wool or acrylic, but now you might also pick a bouclé. Yarn shops purchased entire product lines, and a knitter frequently worked her garment in the exact yarn and color featured in the pattern. This model was the norm for the next 25 or so years.

During the ensuing decades, less yarn was available in department and discount stores, finally disappearing altogether. Yarn shops, on the other hand, proliferated, even getting their own acronym, LYS, for local yarn shop. Stacy Charles became Tahki•Stacy Charles; Skacel began distributing yarns from Germany; Rowan Yarn Company introduced the British sensibility; Plymouth, Berroco and Cascade offered the LYS alternatives to the discount stores’ more utilitarian lines. Each distributor offered many varieties of fibers and blends, and as dyeing techniques became more sophisticated, the number of available colors increased for each variety. And stores continued to buy yarn in bags of 10 skeins.

Shape Change

During this time, though, the average-size sweater being knit changed from size 10 to size 16. This meant sweaters went from taking roughly 10 skeins of yarn to 16, and shops now found themselves with an average of four orphan skeins for every two bags of yarn—enough for two hats or one scarf, which worked out great when most knitters were making big projects. But then the world changed again.

In the new century, project polygamy was born as knitters got bored working on only one project. Stash-building became the norm. The new knitter was making scarves, cowls, hats, socks. The word “shawlette” entered the vocabulary, and one- and two-skein projects prevailed over larger and more time-consuming sweaters and jackets. Instead of suggesting small projects for the leftover skeins, shop owners now found

themselves selling yarn for smaller projects first—and therefore not having a sweater’s quantity on hand.

At the same time, the economy changed worldwide, affecting the yarn industry. Consumers grew more savvy thanks to new pattern magazines available in LYSes, book stores and online. Bloggers shared their experiences working with a multitude of yarns, and purchasing was just a click away. Yarn shops had to start making smarter buying decisions.

Paradigm Shift

Responding to these changes, the LYSes sought to carry yarns from as many of the major players as possible. The biggest drawback to this business model? They would need to purchase two bags of every color to accommodate sweater knitters. For that model to succeed, taking into account both square footage and budget, shops would have to order just a smattering of yarns from each company rather than entire lines. This would allow shoppers to see and touch many of the popular yarns, and as long as the color choices lasted, knitters could buy the yarn and cast on immediately.

While everyone was flush with cash and exuberance from the renewed popularity of crochet and knitting, mills produced their fibers in numerous colors and in large quantities. Distributors stocked their warehouses with dozens of fibers, in multiple shades, and re-orders were quick and easy. The LYS could order several yarns from a variety of distributors, knowing that owners could pull out their color cards and take special orders pretty easily. And customers who wanted more, or a different shade, could also be satisfied quickly.

Once the global economies tightened and the sheep shortage set in, all that began to change. Distributors had limited quantities of raw fiber available to them and so started producing fewer colors. Individual skein size doubled from 50 to 100 grams, and full bags now held five skeins instead of 10. We’re back to sweaters requiring seven to nine skeins—the total yardage hadn’t changed, but psychologically, the number felt better. Three full bags could now yield two sweaters. And one orphan skein would complete a hat or mittens, while two would produce a scarf.

When consumers switched their buying patterns from big sweater projects to smaller, one- or two-skein projects such as socks, shawls, scarves and cowls, the average ticket changed from a \$60 or \$80 sale to a \$20 or \$30 one—though that smaller sale was made more frequently.



This also meant that yarn shops had to offer a significant variety of yarns so customers had plenty of choice, and so the stock looked fresh and exciting each time the customer returned.

Doppler Effect

Among the first to adopt the five-skein bag were Universal Yarns, Skacel and Schachenmayr. The latter company put up many yarns in bags of five, and some in bags of six, but Linda Pratt, consumer marketing manager of Westminster Fibers, says that plans are underway to consistently use the five-skein bag to avoid confusing customers (not to mention their reps). The affordable worsted-weight acrylic by Schachenmayr is a popular choice for afghans; one full bag is enough for the popular new drag-along baby blanket, while two bags make a dorm-size throw. By making smaller bags available, Pratt says, stores can really target their color choices, buying heavily in white, pink, blue and spearmint, for example, while still offering the more sophisticated colors for a complete display.

Skacel's Chuck Wilmesher says that the smaller quantity bags encourage shops to be "stockists" of some of their yarns, including the new HiKoo line. A store can easily carry the entire palette of CoBaSi, for example, without breaking the budget, offering knitters the widest possible choice of colors. This array of yarns neatly fills an entire section of cubbies, creating a rainbow display with no extra effort from shop staff. Shop owners can also see at a glance which colors are selling well.

Designer Cornelia Tuttle Hamilton likes the versatility afforded by the smaller bags. Her designs for Universal Yarn's Poems line often combine different yarns and colorways in a single project. "I've never found a combination that doesn't look good together," she said. And shops benefit as well by offering another way to use the orphan balls from other projects.

This growing trend has changed the way LYSes order: Instead of buying small quantities from many vendors, the new put-ups encourage the LYS to buy deep from a smaller number of distributors. The store is assured that the yarns they carry will play nicely with each other, both

on the shelves and in most patterns. The consumer also has less to purchase if a special order is required for a project; the store still must buy full bags, but the bags are smaller.

Display versus storage space is another consideration for yarn shop owners. You want your cubbies to look full and inviting, yet not be so full that the balls of yarn continually jump off the shelves at the slightest footfall. The amount of overstock area in your shop no doubt informs your buying decisions. Having the flexibility to reorder frequently in smaller quantities neatly addresses that situation.

There's another branch of the industry that's now on a more even footing with the established companies: the independent dyer. Hand-painted yarns are often produced in smaller batches to maintain consistency and individuality. Rather than being afterthoughts to fill random areas in a store, these yarns are now key to rounding out the lines offered at the LYS. Consumer word of mouth both in real life and online has increased the demand for these boutique yarns, which in turn helps them to become bigger and better. They also fill the niche request for local products, a request that yarn shop owners say has become more frequent, especially among vacationing customers searching for a souvenir skein or two.

Colorwork projects have immunity from the five- or 10-skein dilemma. They represent the truly win-win-win for manufacturer, store and consumer. Whether it's simple stripes, mosaics, stranded or intarsia, these projects rarely use more than 500 yards of any given color; it's the combined total that makes the outcome so special. Depending on the project, the knitter can also combine solids with variegateds, self-stripers or even that special glitter-embellished yarn you couldn't resist. The smart shop owner can steer the client to changing that all-pink blanket to a chevron with alternating pastels, thus making the sale that might otherwise have ended with an apology: "I'm sorry, we don't have enough of that color in stock today."

By keeping the new retail landscape in mind, the LYS owner can always answer the question "Have you any wool?" with a resounding "Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full."

Notes From the Trenches

Sean and Amy Lobert of FiberWild in Galena, Illinois, see both benefits and drawbacks to the five-skein bag, clearly demonstrating that both put-ups have a place in the industry. FiberWild is both a bricks-and-mortar store located in the tourist section of town and an online shop. Sean says he "likes the flexibility afforded by the smaller bag size to respond to more customer requests"; however, Amy is concerned that this "can lead to dye-lot nightmares if a re-order situation is involved." She adds, "Many of our customers make small projects, so the put-up is less important to us." The couple does order with a full (largest size) sweater quantity in mind, even though that is not the largest segment of their customers' purchases. Explains Sean, "It's not as much about the monetary outlay as having a good display online and in the store. We want to have at least eight colors in any given yarn to make the display eye-catching and to offer the customer a good assortment for their project."

Vicki Sayre at Loopy Yarns in Chicago

echoes this sentiment. She opts for at least 10 available colors for her store whenever possible. "We have more sweater knitters visit our shop, which means at least 20 to 30 skeins on hand to keep us stocked with two sweaters' worth of yarn in each color. As you can imagine, re-ordering is important, and we're fortunate to be large enough to have that back stock available." The leftover skeins either go toward smaller projects "or we move them downstairs into our sale area, depending on the quantity." Another use for the broken bag is in teaching. "Two skeins of Cascade 220 are included in our beginner class, so we put the leftovers from the larger sweater projects into the beginners' hands."

Karli Capps, owner of Gauge in Austin, Texas, hadn't even realized how common the five-skein package had become until this discussion. Her biggest objection is "there is a lot of wasted packaging to throw away. But it's a nice way to introduce a line of yarn. I can carry more of the Jojoland and Universal yarns that

are very popular, keeping a big assortment of colors for the display, stocking more of the in-demand colors and less of the others. That helps the bottom line." As with Sean Lobert from FiberWild, flexibility is a key factor in ordering decisions.

"I don't care as much about how it's packaged," says Heather Zbinden of The Yarn Mart in Little Rock, Arkansas. "I just wish it were standardized again. It can be confusing to do the math while ordering if I don't pay strict attention. It all comes down to price per skein for me and my customer."

She stocks about 200 different yarns, and notwithstanding the specialty yarns that come two or four skeins per bag, she generally buys three bags of five or two bags of 10. This gives her one sweater per color, though most of her customers make accessories. "It's too hot down here for sweater knitters," she says. "Our customers are also doing the math per yard, and while the small skeins look nice on the shelf, they are drawn to that larger skein as long as the price is the same."



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Three Women

Koigu Wool Designs' legacy is more than just skeins of its coveted Koigu Painter's Palette Premium Merino (KPPPM): It's a women-run and -owned business that spans three generations. Yarn Market News's Erin Slonaker spoke with Taiu Landra about her mother, Maie, her 15-year-old daughter Kersti, and the family's beautiful yarn.



YMN: When did you establish the company? Tell me about its beginning.

TL: The Landra family initially lived in Toronto. On the whim of my mother, who wanted to raise wool sheep, the whole family moved in 1982 to a farm about 100 miles from Toronto, which she named "Koigu." Maie sheared her sheep and spun the wool, then either knit the yarn into sweaters or wove it into fabric for garments. She sold the fruit of her efforts at craft shows, but as you might imagine this was very labor-intensive and not very cost-effective. Thus the business began to move toward knitwear design and the hand-knitting market. It quickly became apparent that hand-spinning our herd's fleece was not a cost-effective means of production. So I went to the Ontario Agricultural College and majored in business to find ways to make Koigu Wool Designs economically viable.

Ultimately, in 1993, a partnership with a woolen mill brought our Premium Merino yarn into existence. In an age when thicker yarns that yield quicker results were all the rage, KPPPM was an anomaly. Koigu's signature yarn became legendary, known for its wearability, versatility and, above all, stunning colorways. For the first five years, KPPPM was actually dyed in the kitchen of our family farmhouse and dried either outside on the pine trees or hung inside over the bathtub. As demand for the yarn grew, we expanded by building a wool shed. That building is 4,500 square feet of yarn-creation paradise and is more lived in than the new log house we built for ourselves.

YMN: What is the origin of the company's name?

TL: Maie chose it to honor my father Harry's ancestral home village in their native Estonia.

YMN: How did you develop your unique method of dyeing?

TL: Maie's professional background in painting and color theory gave the roots and substance to Koigu colors. She compares hand-painting yarn with watercolor painting—she feels that a

successful dyeing should have light and depth, giving a three-dimensional effect. To repeat the colorways, I've recorded the process and results. With a lifetime of study beside my mom, I now create colorways too. I've realized that color and dyeing is an art—albeit one with a lot of chemistry and math.

From start to finish, it takes three days to create a finished dye lot, and each one is a unique work of art. There are many forces that can influence the final outcome: the personality and current mood of the artist painting the yarn, the weather, the temperature, the season. Our dye lots are small, consisting of just 1 kilogram of wool (roughly 20 skeins' worth). The yarn is carefully painted, subjected to heat to fix the dyes, then rinsed and hung on rods to dry. Once the wool has dried, it is reeled into 50-gram skeins, twisted and labeled with a color number and dye lot number and bagged.

YMN: Where do you get your color sense? Do you have any formal training?

TL: Maie graduated from the Ontario College of Art with a degree in drawing and painting, so she studied color, definitely. Her favorite mediums were watercolor and egg tempera, and the influence of her experimentations with watercolor are visible in the hundreds of colorways that she has created over the years. Her influence on me and our style is strong.

YMN: How are responsibilities split at the studio?

TL: Many of our functions have changed. In the initial years, Maie essentially ran the business with my help. Now I run the business, and Maie, in addition to knitting and designing, gives a hand in day-to-day production. Kersti pitches in whenever she has time from school, dance, piano lessons and friends.

YMN: How much of your time is spent actually dyeing?

TL: These days, most of the dyeing is done by our own trained technicians. Maie and I both

inspect and monitor the quality on the final outcome of each dye lot. Any new and special dyeing is still done by us, though.

YMN: What kind of knitters are you?

TL: We all knit Continental. This is how Maie's mother taught her and how she taught me and Kersti. Maie's mother was a weaving teacher, so Maie grew up in an environment of handicraft. My grandmother believed that a woman should never sit with idle hands.

YMN: Do you knit much for pleasure? If so, what are you working on?

TL: That's a nice dream! Sadly, there is not enough time in the day to think of pleasure knitting. Even Kersti's knitting goes into *Koigu Magazine*. We live Koigu 24-7.

YMN: What led to *Koigu Magazine*? Where do you find your designers?

TL: As a business, one needs to grow. We felt the time was right [in 2011] to celebrate a new look and provide new inspiration for ways to use our yarn. We have cultivated many of the designers through their love of knitting with Koigu yarn.

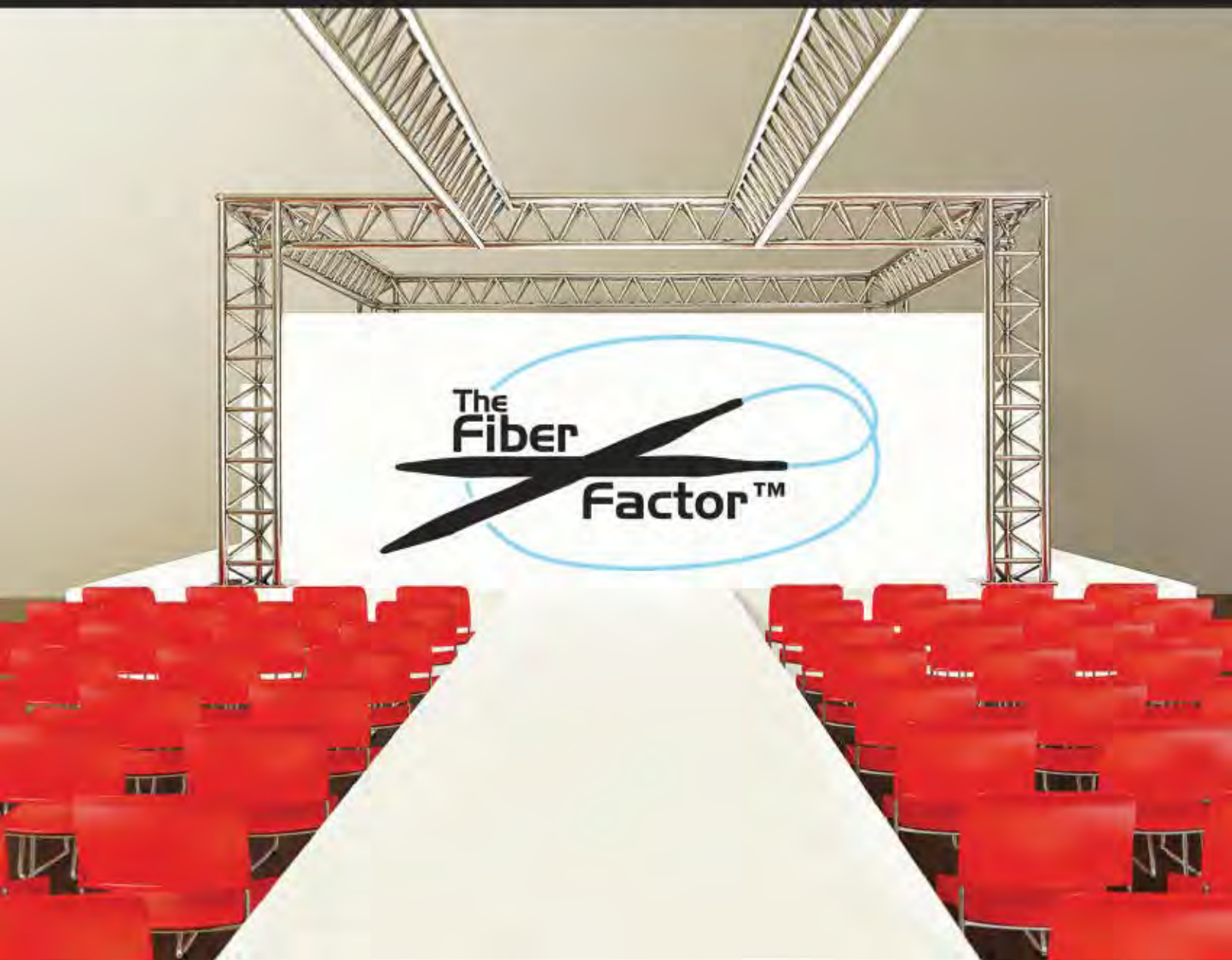
YMN: How do you see the company being handed down through the generations? What is Kersti's involvement now and, possibly, in the future?

TL: It is impossible to predict the future. Kersti models and designs for *Koigu Magazine*, and she's also a big help in the day-to-day operations. She also participates in events within the industry—she attends most of the Vogue Knitting LIVE events [of which Koigu has been a sponsor] and is excited to travel to TNNA next year, when she'll be old enough to attend.

YMN: What's on the horizon for Koigu? What new developments are in store?

TL: Expansion is inevitable: another building, new equipment, new yarns and new staff. And custom yarn and partnering to develop new yarn appear to be creeping in.

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