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SURVEY TIME!

Last issue's survey was enlightening. Let's do another one, this time on your store's approach to new yarns. Take it online at www.surveymonkey.com/s/YMNnewyarn.

The Yarn Market News Smart Business Conference, held this year in Baltimore, has just finished up, and once again I'm inspired and invigorated. I'm also struck by the thoughtfulness with which all the incredible people working in the yarn industry approach their jobs.

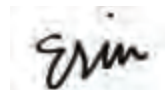
Thoughtfulness, intention—both are crucial elements for a successful business. After all, if your goals aren't clear in your own mind, how will you ever know when you've achieved them? When you were planning your store, you took the time to think through all the details. How long has it been since you sat down with the original documents to see if you're still on track? Cheryl Krementz spoke with two YMN Conference speakers, business coach Joe Grushkin and marketing expert Maria Ross, on best practices and shares some tips for staying on top of navigating your shop's direction.

Once you're clear on the direction for your business, perhaps you'll find a place for a store-branded product, which we're seeing more and more at yarn shops across the country. Rebecca Klassen explores ways to present these unique items to the world. The messages that come through in her article are so in line with the sentiments Maria Ross shared with us at the Four Seasons in Baltimore: Know your customers' preferences, and you can tailor your products to those who walk through the door.

We also ask you to think about other aspects of your business as you read the articles in this issue: Have you started a loyalty program? Are you planning to attend the TNNA show in June? Will your customers stay engaged and continue to grow as knitters through classes you offer? And I'd like to go back to the question posed in our last issue: Are you able to pay yourself for all your hard work?

Thank you to the 120 people who took the time to fill out my completely unscientific survey on LYSO salaries. Nell Merlino, head of Make Mine a Million and creator of Take Our Daughters to Work Day, spoke at the YMN Conference gala dinner about how common it is for small-business owners across all industries to forgo a salary. The results of our survey gave me a hopeful snapshot of the industry, indicating that most of those who responded do manage to take home some money—though perhaps not as much as they'd like. (See all the stats on page 9.) I also heard from others who choose not to pay themselves, using that money instead on programs meant to foster community. It's an interesting and, we've discovered, sensitive subject, one I'm positive that *YMN* will one day revisit.

I close this letter on a bittersweet note: This is the last issue of *Yarn Market News* for contributing editor Cheryl Krementz. For eight years, Cheryl has touched every page of the magazine, lending her keen editorial eye, her uncanny ability to turn a perfect phrase and her vast industry knowledge. She was *YMN*'s institutional memory, and I loved discussing with her everything from story ideas to the latest industry news to our favorite books. She moves on to helm *MetroKids*, a magazine for parents living in the Greater Delaware Valley area. I will greatly miss working with her, and I wish her all the best in her new role.





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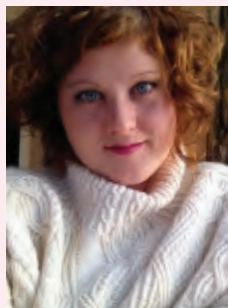
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Lisa Shroyer STEPS UP

There's been a masthead bump over at *Interweave Knits*. As of March 1, former *Knitscene* editor and *IK* senior editor **Lisa Shroyer** has moved to the top spot of the multimedia company's flagship title, replacing Eunny Jang, who recently ended

her six-year tenure at the mag. "Eunny left some pretty big shoes to fill. But when presented with the challenge of filling those shoes, I knew I didn't have to look very far," says *Interweave's* editorial director Karin Strom. "It was a big honor to be considered [for the position] so quickly," Shroyer tells *YMN*. "It's exciting, sort of like coming home." (She originally joined the company as an *IK* editorial assistant back in 2005.)

Given that magazines work on a lengthy lead time, Shroyer has the advantage of "inheriting" three upcoming editions that have largely been planned. "In the short term, I'm staying the course and wrapping up those issues," she says. "In the long term, my focus is to curate collections that knitters find exciting. The brand is really strong and one I want to adhere to by finding new talent and working with favorite designers to get the kind of projects that light up the airwaves." She also looks forward to "brainstorming what people want to read" as far as technique articles go.

Though *Interweave Press* is located in Loveland, Colorado, Shroyer will remain based at her North Carolina home, flying west monthly for photo shoots and meetings. "I'll be racking up the frequent-flyer miles," she says with a laugh, happy to travel for a job for which she's seemingly trained her entire life. The daughter of Nancy and Bob Shroyer of Nancy's Knit Knacks, Shroyer considers the industry to be "pretty much my home. I grew up in the back of yarn shops, and I helped at the booth when my parents were vendors at Stitches."

"Lisa has proved through the work she's done developing the *Knitscene* brand that she has an innate understanding of today's knitters. At the same time, she has a solid background in the yarn industry and knows the importance of retaining the core ethos of the *Knits* brand," says Strom. "I know she will bring her creative flair to both *Knits* and [special publication] *Knit.wear*, working to engage 'the thoughtful knitter.'"



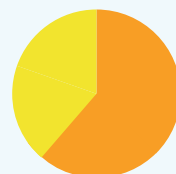
Three Million Knitters Served

A mere thirteen months after hitting the two million mark, **Ravelry's** subscriber ranks rose another seven figures, reaching three million members in March.

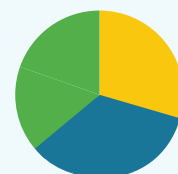
Here's to the continued exponential growth of the fiber fan's social media site of choice.

\$alary \$urvey

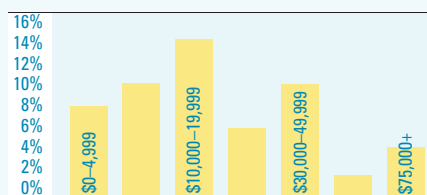
By now, we hope you've read our March feature article "The Earnings Report," an expansive look at the ways yarn shop owners pay themselves—or, in many cases, don't. While researching the piece, we relied on input from a small sampling of candid retailers, since there's no current industry-wide data on the salaries of LYSOs. To help us rectify that deficit, we asked you to take a short, anonymous survey. The results are startling.



64% pay themselves
36% do not



30% pay themselves consistently
34% sporadically
36% not at all

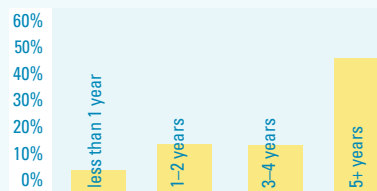
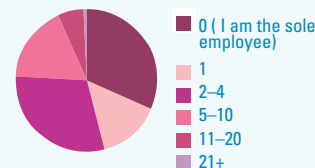


Most of those who pay themselves make between \$10,000 and \$19,999 per year.

26.1% of all surveyed have shops that make \$100,001–\$175,000 per year.

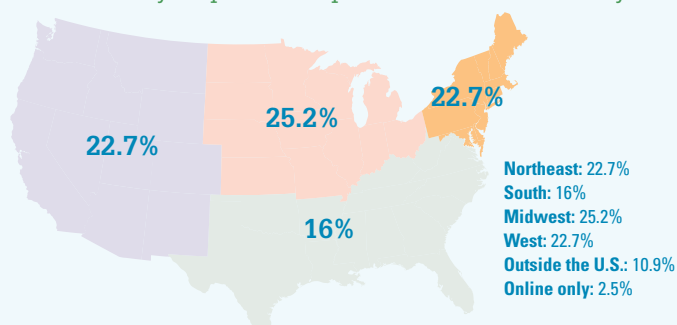


Most surveyed shop owners are also the sole employee.



Most surveyed shops have been open more than five years.

Survey responders represent the entire country





As is well known in the knitosphere by now, between December 21, 2012, and January 25, 2013, **Knit Picks** and other **Crafts Americana** websites fell victim to a security breach that led to many users' credit card numbers being hacked. On February 8 Knit Picks CEO Matt Petkun sent those affected by the breach a detailed letter in which he issued a heartfelt apology for the situation and outlined the exact steps the company was taking to rectify the situation.

Cyber attacks on small businesses are a costly and dangerous threat. According to a joint 2012 study by the digital security firm Symantec and the National Cyber Security Alliance (NCSA), most small businesses with e-selling components—83 percent—lack a formal cyber-security plan; 69 percent of that slice don't even have an informal plan. That's just not smart. Symantec and the NCSA found that in 2011, the aftermath of a cyber attack cost small- and medium-sized businesses an average of \$188,242; that works out to about \$318 per compromised record, according to the Ponemon Institute research firm. Worse, Symantec and the NCSA state that two-thirds of affected companies went out of business within six months as a direct result of the attack. How can you protect yourself from hacking?

- Make sure sensitive data—numbers from customer credit cards, business bank accounts and the like—is encrypted.
- Because many computers that are hacked are physically stolen, it's smart to secure your hardware by locking laptops in an office at night or to the cash wrap with a cable fed through the device's lock port.
- Change your WiFi network name and passcode frequently, to tamp down the vulnerability of wireless networks.
- Install anti-virus and malware protection.
- Make sure your staff is vigilant about protecting customers' private information.
- Talk to your insurance provider about whether you need breach insurance.

There's no guarantee your website won't get hacked, but if it does, at least you'll know you did all you could to protect yourself against this growing scourge.



Blogging 'Bout Books

St. Martin's Press has a new online outlet to promote the print output of its crafts-book group. **SMPCraft.com** features the latest on new and upcoming releases as well as a comprehensive blog that



highlights insider info on authors and provides free sample projects, recipes and DIY tips from the wide-ranging catalog. Recent knit-centric posts listed the dates of designer Sarah Hatton's blog tour to support her recent collection, *Scarves, Shrugs & Shawls*, and dug deep into the text of *Knitting With Icelandic Wool* and *Loom Knitting for Babies*; nestled among the knitterly content was multicraftual advice on painting a feature wall in your home,

among other topics. The blog also shares craft-adjacent memes and photos, like the delightful Scottish tourism campaign showcasing Shetland ponies wearing Fair Isle sweaters, and it hosts contests and giveaways of books and, sometimes, yarn; a recent example provided a lucky entrant with several skeins of Lion Brand yarn and a copy of *75 Floral Blocks to Knit*. An attendant Facebook page and Twitter feed (@SMPCraft) join MPCraft.com; connect with the publisher at your portal of choice.

Knitting, Writing, Arithmetic

We've been discussing the special properties of mathematical knitting and crocheting since featuring mathematician Daina Taimina's examples of hyperbolic space in the second issue of *YMN*, back in 2005. Between then and now, the act of rendering abstract mathematical concepts as 3-D yarn structures has become a practice worth touting, recently making the cover of *American Scientist* magazine with a full-color photo example and corresponding article. Author/mathematician **Sarah-Marie Belcastro** started stitching as a theorem-prover in grad school; in her feature story, she details her drive to knit geometric Klein bottles, an "infinitely thin" surface with a twist at the top whose inside is contiguous with its outside, as well as a torus, a surface shaped like a hollow donut. "Knitting multiple line segments into a curved surface is...quite difficult," she writes. "Abstract mathematical surfaces can be hard to visualize—but they are much easier to grasp mentally when they can be picked up and moved around." Read the piece at www.americanscientist.org/issues/feature/2013/2/adventures-in-mathematical-knitting.



A MULTI-Fassetted Exhibition

If you're in London anytime between now and June 29, drop by the **Fashion and Textile Museum** to take in "Kaffe Fassett—A Life in Colour." The first exhibition of Fassett's vividly prodigious *oeuvre* in his adopted hometown since his 1998 show at the Victoria and Albert Museum places 100-plus spectrum-spanning paintings and textiles in an interactive installation. The display features Fassett faves, items created exclusively for this venue and some that have never before seen public light. Among the vibrant highlights: 9-foot-wide knitted shawls, coats, throws and patchwork quilts, all rendered in Fassett's extravagant color-work, plus a special "feeling" wall where visitors can examine and touch the fabric for an intimate view of the colorscape and construction. Details are available at www.ftmlondon.org/ftm-exhibitions/kaffe-fassett.



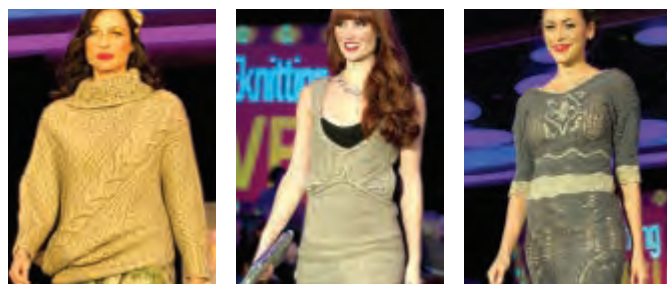
Factor Facts

Move over, Tim Gunn. The knitting world now has its own version of *Project Runway*. **The Fiber Factor**, a long-conceived reality knitwear-design competition, sponsored and run by the folks at **Skacel Collection**, is well into its second of six semifinal challenges.

At press time, however, producer **Chuck Wilmesher** was knee-deep in contestant applications. "There are some crazy-creative people out there," he told *YMN* 10 days before the application deadline. Wanna-compete from every state in the nation vied for just a dozen spots in the nine-month-long competition. The decision on whom to accept into the stitchiest throw-down this side of Seventh Avenue was based 75 percent on the skill and creativity evident in each hopeful's three-design submission and 25 percent on an accompanying video—a particularly important component given that key aspects of the competition, including the completion of garments and judging of challenges, will be filmed and posted episodically on the Fiber Factor website. "Not only do we need contestants who are talented, but they have to be charismatic and interesting to follow," explains Wilmesher.

Now that the contestant slate, announced in April at Vogue Knitting LIVE in Skacel's hometown of Seattle, has a challenge under its collective belt, the format for the remainder of the Factor will be familiar to viewers. Skacel head honcho **Karin Skacel**, a chief judge along with creative director **Cirilia Rose**, announces each challenge and two- to five-week deadline (depending on the complexity of the individual task) by video. The challenges remain a secret until unveiled to the field—"there will be some curveballs, some unexpected turns," Wilmesher promises—but all will be completed with yarn, tools and Addi needles provided by Skacel. The winner of each challenge, chosen by Skacel, Rose and a rotating roster of top-tier guest judges (actress **Karen Allen**, for starters), wins \$500. Unlike on *Project Runway*, however, immunity isn't necessary for the winner, because no one will be eliminated until after the sixth challenge, a rule that allows competitors to survive a whiff and, Wilmesher hopes, come back stronger for it. After the penultimate challenge, the field will be winnowed down to the three finalists with the highest overall cumulative scores; they'll vie for the grand prize, a five-day all-expenses-paid trip for two to Germany to tour yarn production facilities and the Addi needle factory. The ultimate winner will be crowned at Vogue Knitting LIVE in New York in January 2014; given the spread-out proximity among the contestants and arbiters, the majority of the judging will be conducted via video, though Wilmesher says there should be some in-person Fiber Factor events at a Stitches event and TNNA market as the contest unfolds.

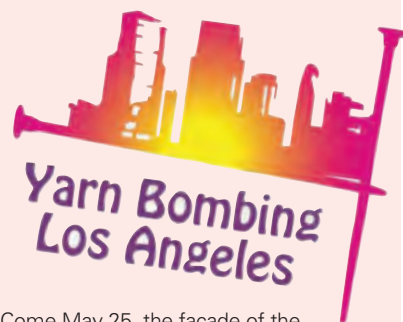
Based on the number of contestant applications he's received and the general buzz in the knitosphere, Wilmesher expects the Fiber Factor to fully capture the community's imagination. Individual stitchers can vote for their favorite design submissions online, challenge by challenge, and yarn shops are encouraged to host Fiber Factor knit-alongs with patterns Skacel will write up based on challenge-winning items. Some shop owners have already told Wilmesher that they're planning to host parallel mini competitions among their customers once each Factor challenge is announced. "The idea is that this is a big, fun event for knitters," he says. "We actively want our yarn shops to be involved and to show everyone how cool knitting can be." Follow the Factor results at www.TheFiberFactor.com; *YMN* will introduce you to the contestants in our August issue.



Zealana's A-Listers

The most recent design competition whose winners were announced at a Vogue Knitting LIVE event involved **Zealana** yarn. Sixteen talented finalists saw their garments walk the runway, and the top pieces will be featured in an upcoming issue of *Vogue Knitting* as well as the Zealana website. Kudos to grand prize winner Sanae Gunji, who will be taking an all-inclusive trip to New Zealand, for her asymmetrically cabled sweater, and to first runner-up Nicole Feller-Johnson, for her Downtown dress. The student prize went to Lilia Bormann-Van Maanen's Midnight in Paris lace dress.

To Live and Ply in L.A.



Come May 25, the facade of the **Craft and Folk Art Museum (CAFAM)** on Los Angeles's Museum Row will be blanketed in granny squares. "CAFAM Granny Squared" is an enormous undertaking by the three-year-old guerrilla group known as **Yarn Bombing Los Angeles (YBLA)**, meant to publicly show-

case the work of artists who normally are not invited to exhibit within the museum setting. The temporary installation is the collective achievement of 500 crafters from all 50 states and 25 foreign countries who together crocheted 12,000 5-inch granny squares that YBLA members assembled into larger blankets. Conceptually, the project is meant to visually shrink the humble CAFAM building to "dollhouse" proportions in relation to the "grandiose structures" surrounding it, commenting on "the artistic and institutional identities associated with craft, a lesser art form, by manipulating architecture, often regarded the highest art form." After the temporary installation is taken down, the granny-square blankets will be donated to the Los Angeles Poverty Department and distributed to residents of L.A.'s Skid Row. For further details, visit www.YarnBombingLosAngeles.com.

featured in
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Magazine 4

Dark Night
Rose Jacket

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Bugging Out.

creativebug

Creativebug is the latest site to capture the attention of knitterati intrigued by teaching access-anytime video

courses. Since launching quietly a year ago, the small San Francisco start-up has been building buzz, luring high-power names like **Kristin Nicholas** and **Kaffe Fassett** to star in professionally filmed multisegment project or technique how-tos.

Adding to the draw of high-powered instructors, the site's progressive subscription model is ample attraction for multicrafters who like to dabble in a variety of media for a single fee. Though individual classes may be purchased for a one-time fee starting at \$9.99, subscribers who purchase any of a trio of month-based packages (\$24.99 for month-to-month service; \$19.99 per month for three months; \$16.99 per month for six) have unlimited access to as many classes as they have time to watch across all Creativebug categories—knitting, crochet, quilting and other needlearts, but also collage, ceramics, stamping, gift wrapping, home décor, screen printing, bookbinding, apothecary and more.

"It breaks down the barrier of risk," says COO **Julie Roehm**, who estimates that more than half of all Creativebug users have selected a multi-month plan. "People who are attracted to the site because they wanted to take all of Debbie Stoller's classes, for instance, are now exploring because of the nature of the subscription," Creativebug editorial director **Kelly Wilkinson** continues. "It's fun for us to see the audience jump around." Classes—two new workshops are added weekly—are designed to be short, the majority featuring a pattern viewers can

finish over a few nights or a weekend. Segments are broken down into natural step-by-step sections and tend to last between five and ten minutes each, for palatable bite-size consumption. Instructors design classes to play to their expertise and are paid royalties based on the number of viewings their workshops garner.

Speaking of viewing, in-LYS Creativebug viewing is encouraged as part of the site's two-pronged retail-affiliate program, launched at January's TNNA market. On the instructional partner track, retailers can purchase a subscription license (ranging from \$100 to \$125 a month) to screen classes in their shops. According to Roehm, popping a Creativebug class onto an iPad screen is an effective way to offer in-shop instruction without eating up staffers' time; some shops also develop kits based around specific courses, and Creativebug supplies licensees with "a full suite of supporting tools" that can be customized, including PDF patterns and materials lists. A second retail option, a value-add partnership, allows shop owners to introduce customers to Creativebug; if this leads to a purchase, the client gets a discount on her subscription and the shop takes a share of the fee as a thank-you.

"The site is aspirational, a chance to become friends with an artist and to learn one-on-one," says Roehm. "It's designed to give confidence, so crafters who start with inexpensive acrylic yarn will be drawn to the local yarn shop for more expensive yarn as she learns." Creativebug is accessible via mobile phone, iPad (there's a free app for subscribers) and computer. Learn more about the site and the retail affiliate tracks at www.creativebug.com/site/retail-program.

The Spin Cycle

Jacey Boggs is no newcomer to spinning up excitement. The influential hand-spinner/author/instructor behind the **Insubordiknit** brand is about to launch **Ply**, a quarterly magazine for hand-spinners, spun up by a wildly successful Kickstarter campaign. *Ply* reached its goal of \$25,000 in start-up funds in just seven days, within five weeks reaching \$34,455 pledged by 366 backers, most of whom ponied up more than \$100 each. Says Boggs, "\$25,000 isn't a lot to launch a magazine, but it is a lot of money to raise. With Kickstarter I didn't have to stress" about the financial logistics. "It's a good way to start."

Ply, debuting in June, is tailored to "an intermediate and beyond audience. So much is geared to the beginner; we wanted something meatier," Boggs explains. "The articles are really diverse, all within a particular theme." The premiere's theme, fittingly, is "firsts"—the origins of spinning, buying your first spinning wheel or fleece, the first breed new spinners should work with, knitting your first handspun shawl. In every edition, "There are very technical how-to articles. My favorite stories involve how we got where we are, the history of spinning told in a fascinating way."

Spinning archaeologist Christina Pappas, a textile specialist, is penning an ongoing series; physical therapist/knitter Carson Demers will explore spinning ergonomics on a continuing basis; and Franklin Habit will contribute his signature cartoons, targeted to the handspun audience.

Included projects—all knit to start, but crochet and weaving are slated for the future—will adhere to the overlying theme and a given color palette. All yarn featured is custom-spun and -dyed by artisans according to the designers' specs; at press time, Boggs had yarn sent to Amsterdam (for a Stephen West exclusive) and Scotland, to be knit up into one-of-a-kind projects. Twelve months after publication, the design rights revert fully to their creators, allowing designers to rerelease the patterns using a more widely available commercial yarn.

Not widely available will be *Ply* advertising. Boggs is minimizing advertising to just 10 percent of the issues' pages, sold on a first-come, first-served basis and starting at \$75. Subscription levels allowed Boggs to limit advertising and pay "a little more across the board than is standard" to the magazine's contributors. "We're a small staff with no overhead," she says. "We're in a small enough industry that every company's an indie. I wanted to price the ads so that very small fiber artists could afford it. That used to be me—for four years, I supported my family just by selling yarn."

Boggs' ground-up perspective on the topic has made her entry into editorial production natural, she says. "What you can't teach is passion for the fiber arts," and she has that criteria covered. *Ply* will be wholesaled to yarn shops; digital subscriptions are in the works, and the print edition will have a printable spine, for easy reference on a shelf. Go to www.PlyMagazine.com for details.

An Odd Ovation



To a knitter, the importance of the tea cozy is anything but odd. To the wider world, however, this humble beverage warmer is barely a blip on the cultural radar. Hence the

inclusion of Aussie author Loani Prior's *How Tea Cosies Changed the World* on the Diagram Prize's shortlist of oddest book titles of 2012. This collection of 24 décor designs joins *How to Sharpen Pencils*, *Goblinproofing One's Chicken Coop* and *God's Doodle: The Life and Times of the Penis* on the slate.

This is not the first time a knitting volume has made the oddest-title shortlist; in 2009, *Knit and Strip With Style*, a paean to knitting in strips that sounded like something out of *Magic Mike*, was also cited for its unconventional moniker. The purpose of the Diagram Prize, says award custodian Horace Bent in an interview with *The Guardian*, is to "draw attention to authors not called Hilary Mantel that may need a little help in gaining column inches and subsequently entering public consciousness and bookshop bestseller bays." By press time, the Diagram winner will have been chosen by popular vote and posted at www.welovethisbook.com/diagram-prize-2013.



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Dewey Decimal Digital

The digital library available to screen-reading crafters grows larger by the month. **Inkling**, a digital publishing company, has just released iPad-, iPhone- and Web-optimized versions of a host of knitcentric bestsellers: *Knitting for Dummies*, Debbie Stoller's complete *Stitch 'n Bitch* series, Leslie Ann Bestor's *Cast On, Bind Off* and Edie Eckman's crochet-border and -motif series. (Multicrafters, take note: *Jewelry Making and Beading for Dummies* is also available.) The e-books can be purchased by the chapter (from \$2.99 to \$4.99) or in full (from \$9.99 up).

Each title is packed with interactive capabilities. Readers can zoom in on high-res images as they follow step-by-step pattern instructions or use a viewer called SlideLines that allows them to visually isolate the stitches in a given round as they progress through motif diagrams. There's a robust search function and notebook with bookmarks, a note-keeper, links and highlights. Stitch abbreviations are tappable, for instant image and text definitions, and embedded social media features enable users to share their on-page notes with and invite feedback from their online circles. For more info on the Inkling titles, visit www.Inkling.com.

A Royal Pain

On April 2, the U.K.'s Royal Mail service—Britain's counterpart to the U.S. Postal Service—hiked prices on “small parcels” that weigh up to 250 grams. Rates for international Airmail, Airsure and International Signed services have also been boosted. These increases, which represent a price rise of up to 38 percent per package, are angering small businesses that previously relied on Royal Mail as a less expensive alternative to private shipping companies like FedEx. Bricks-and-mortar and online yarn shops and Etsy sellers on both sides of the Pond that ship internationally are sure to be negatively affected by the price changes. Nearly 2,000 small-business owners have signed a petition urging Royal Mail to reconsider the decision in light of its expected effect on independent retailers, but at press time the rate changes were still on course to go up. Will your business be affected by the new Royal Mail rates? If so, let us know how you're planning to deal with the shipping news at ymninfo@yarnmarketnews.com.

Weave Only Just Begun

Schacht Spindle keeps making it easier for LYSOs to introduce weaving to customers interested in knit-adjacent yarn crafts. The Zoom Loom is the most compact entry loom yet, resembling the tabletop pin looms schoolkids and campers have always used to make potholders, just in a more efficient, ergonomic and portable package than those clunky old metal frames. The square loom, produced in Boulder, Colorado, measures less than 6 inches per “graceful, extended” side. It has a sloping interior edge to guide a weaving needle, a slot to hold the starting yarn without knotting and molded-in instructions on both the front and back. It comes in its own carrying case, accompanied by a 6-inch weaving needle, a 3-inch yarn needle and a full-color instruction book with three projects; an instructional video is viewable online. Go to www.schachtspindle.com/our_products/zoom_loom.php to learn about the company's latest, littlest loom.



Call to Arms: Go the Extra Smile

This issue, we introduce a new Market Report feature, highlighting easily implemented, reader-submitted ideas guaranteed to brighten a retail space. The first call to arms is so basic, it's often overlooked; it comes from **Kim Lui**, a Midwest yarn rep: “No matter your mood, smile as a welcome to everyone who enters your shop, and make sure your staff does the same.” Send your own Call to Arms advice in to ymninfo@yarnmarketnews.com and you may see your tip in a future issue.

Good Fortune

Vanna White's known for her acumen with letters, but it's a particular number with which the *Wheel of Fortune* cohost/crochet ambassador is associated that caught our eye: \$1 million, the sum of the contributions to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital generated to date by sales of White's



eponymous yarn line with **Lion Brand**. Since the 2007 launch of the Vanna collection—which now incorporates the original Vanna's Choice along with Vanna's Choice Baby, Vanna's Glamour and Vanna's Sequins—Lion Brand has been donating a portion of all proceeds from sales of the

yarn to the Memphis hospital, which never charges patients' families for its cutting-edge pediatric care. White is a longtime passionate crocheter who's equally enthusiastic about the St. Jude mission.

“When Lion Brand approached me about working with them on my own line of yarn, it was important to me that a portion of the proceeds go to a cause dear to my heart,” White recalled at an event she and Lion Brand president/CEO David Blumenthal attended to celebrate the landmark figure. “It is so incredible and gratifying to me that we've reached this amazing milestone. We will continue to donate, doing our part to help so many kids and families.” For more on White's ongoing collaboration with Lion Brand, visit LionBrand.com.

Farewell: Windsor Button

Windsor Button, the sewing, notions and yarn emporium that has been a touchstone of Boston crafting for generations, is shuttering its doors. The 77-year-old store has lost its lease due to landlord renovations, and current owners **Susan and Stanley Baker** have decided to close shop rather than relocate. Once a 10-store empire, the Boston flagship has been the sole Windsor Button location operating over the past two decades. The Bakers brought knitting and crochet firmly into the merch mix after they bought the business in 1998. “We realize that Windsor Button holds a special place in the minds and hearts of many New Englanders,” the couple wrote to their loyal customers on making the decision to close. “Over the years, many of you have shared stories and reminisced about shopping [here] with your mother or grandmother. Almost every day, someone will say ‘I don't know what I'd do without you.’”

Place your order on Saturday June 22nd at TNNA until 1pm and get free shipping!
Booth numbers: 551, 553, 555, 557, 559, 650, 652, 654, 656, 658



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WWW.UNIVERSALYARN.COM

Available exclusively in local yarn stores.



Spiderweb Boot Toppers

YMN CALENDAR

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

May 10–12

Minnesota Shepherd's Harvest Sheep & Wool Festival

Washington County Fairgrounds
Lake Elmo, Minnesota
shepherdsharvestfestival.org

May 11

Michigan Fiber Fiesta

Klackle Orchards Pavilion
Greenville, Michigan
mifiberfiesta.yolasite.com

May 11–12

New Hampshire Sheep & Wool Festival

Deerfield Fairgrounds
Deerfield, New Hampshire
nhswga.com

May 16–19

The Northwest LYS Tour

Puget Sound, Washington
lystour.com

May 18

Rhode Island Wool & Fiber Festival

Coggeshall Farm
Bristol, Rhode Island
coggeshallfarm.org/sheep&fiber.html

May 18–19

Kentucky Sheep and Fiber Festival

Masterton Station Park
Lexington, Kentucky
kentuckysheepandfiber.com

May 18–19

Long Island Fleece & Fiber Fair

Hallockville Museum Farm
Riverhead, New York
hallockville.com/fiber_fair.html

May 18–19

Snake River Fiber Fair

Idaho Falls, Idaho
srfiberarts.org.p9.hostingprod.com/fiber_arts_fair_2013

May 19–22

TKGA Grand Retreat

Michigan's Grand Hotel
Mackinac Island, Michigan
tkga.com/?page=tkgagrandretreat

May 24–25

Middle Tennessee Fiber Festival

Dickson, Tennessee
tnfiberfestival.com

May 25–26

Great Lakes Fiber Show

Wayne County Fairgrounds
Wooster, Ohio
GreatLakesFiberShow.com

May 25–26

Massachusetts Sheep and Woolcraft Fair

Cummington Fairgrounds
Cummington, Massachusetts
masheepwool.org

June 1–2

Maine Fiber Frolic

Windsor Fairgrounds
Windsor, Maine
fiberfrolic.com

June 2–3

Flagstaff Fiber Festival

Flagstaff, Arizona
aztourist.com/2012/05/23rd-annual-flagstaff-fiber-festival

June 5–9

Squam Art Workshop Retreat

Rockywood-Deephaven Camps
Holderness, New Hampshire
squamartworkshops.com



Booting Up Connect-ivity

With 2.75 million friends and fans across multiple social media platforms and 200,000 class enrollments in January alone, **Craftsy** is proving to be an undisputed online force. Now that the two-year-old DIY distance-learning site is well established in the digital domain, it's partnering with indie yarn, quilt, craft and bake shops to show customers that e-tail and retail can indeed coexist.

Craftsy Connect is a digital program that allows participating bricks-and-mortar establishments to promote Craftsy classes through their e-newsletters, websites or social media channels. For every client who signs up for a Craftsy course through a custom-coded shop link, that store earns \$10, paid monthly to the retailer's Paypal account. The enrolling customer then gets a "bounce-back coupon" for \$5 to the originating shop, footed by the retailer (acting on the thought that the crafter will spend a good deal more than the floated \$5 on class supplies), and including Craftsy-crafted language extolling the virtues of supporting indie businesses.

The program launched in October, and according to Craftsy director of marketing **Lisa Anne Logan**, it's appealing to retail shops of all stripes. "For tiny shops with no educational programs, this is a lifesaver. We also have lots of larger shops with robust, active education calendars. Even if your shop has 10 classes a day, there's always a subset of customers you're not reaching.

We offer teachers whom shops wouldn't necessarily be able to bring in, niche techniques they might not be able to teach and no scheduling conflicts," as the customer can view (and review) the class on her own time, 24/7, via tablet, mobile phone or laptop. Since starting up, the program has been refined based on feedback from pilot shops; in just six months, activity has been so robust that Craftsy has hired a dedicated point person, Ashley Smith, to connect with existing and potential Connect shops.

There's no fee for retailers to sign up for the program, lending a "no-risk" incentive to the endeavor. Once a shop is registered, Craftsy provides digital marketing materials—images optimized for websites and social media outlets as well as for e-blast managers—that the owner can tailor to fit her shop's online strategy. A dedicated sign-up link is programmed on the back end to credit the shop each time a customer utilizes it, so retailers are automatically compensated without having to keep track internally or invoice Craftsy. Customers who enroll this way can take a class in any Craftsy category; yarn shops are paid equally whether their clients choose a knitting class or, say, a cake-decorating class. As a bonus for touting Craftsy at least once a quarter, member owners have free access to the site's entire educational catalog, which increases by four to five classes every week, so they can sample the product and be knowledgeable about exactly what they're promoting. Connect with Craftsy Connect at www.craftsy.com/connect.



YMN CALENDAR

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

June 8–9

Estes Park Wool Market

Fairgrounds at Stanley Park
Estes Park, Colorado
estesparkcvb.com/events

June 8–9

Iowa Summer Sheep and Wool Festival

Dallas County Fairgrounds
Adel, Iowa
iowasheep.com

June 8–16

Worldwide Knit in Public Week

Multiple international locations
kipday.com

June 14–16

Big Sky Fiber Arts Festival

Ravalli County Fairgrounds
Hamilton, Montana
bigskyfiber.com

June 17–22

Sheep Is Life Celebration

Diné College, Tsailé Campus
Navajo Nation
navajolifeway.org

June 20–24

TNNA Trade Show

Greater Columbus Convention Center
Columbus, Ohio
tnna.org

June 21–23

Midwest Fiber and Folk Art Fair

Lake County Fairgrounds
Grayslake, Illinois
fiberandfolk.com

June 21–23

Black Sheep Gathering

Lane County Fairgrounds
Eugene, Oregon
blacksheepgathering.org

June 21–24

Alice Springs Beanie Festival

Araluen Arts Centre
Witchetty's, Alice Springs, Australia
beaniefest.org

June 28–29

Woolfest

Mitchell's Lakeland Livestock Centre
Cockermouth, Cumbria, England
woolfest.co.uk

July 17–21

The Knit & Crochet Show

Sheraton Suites at Keystone Crossing
Indianapolis, Indiana
knitandcrochetshow.com

July 19–21

Australian Sheep & Wool Show

Prince of Wales Showgrounds
Bendigo, Victoria, Australia
sheepshow.com

July 27–28

Fibre-East, A Celebration of British Wool and Natural Fibres

Redborne Community College
Amphill, Bedfordshire, England
fibre-east.co.uk/Fibre-East/Home.html

July 28–August 3

Maine Fiber Arts Retreat

Medomak Retreat Center
Washington, Maine
medomakretreatcenter.com/newenglandfiberartsretreat.php



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Book Reviews

BY CHERYL KREMENTZ

The Shape of Knitting

By Lynne Barr

STC Craft/\$29.95

ISBN: 161769021X

Deconstruction is fascinating from a technical standpoint, but let's face it—avant-garde tactics employed solely for their own sake can lead to some odd-looking garments. Not in this case. Barr's deconstructionist tendencies yield garments that are chicly wearable in the real world. As she proved in *Knitting New*



Scarves and Reversible Knitting, Barr is happiest when she's inventing sculptural elements:

CAPs ("continually applied pieces") is an innovation that utilizes short rows and decreases to knit multiple sections, layers and separate units with a single continuous strand of yarn; the speed increase, worked over successive rows with a double strand of yarn, is another imaginative method that lets her pleat, tuck, tube, twist and flap with artistic abandon. And the results are really cool. Totes fold and fan at the sides for expandability. Square- and open-toed slippers have mod strappy segments traveling over the foot. Headbands, hats, cowls, scarves and mitts all pop with 3-D elements. It's a no-holds-barred approach to design.

Knit to Flatter

By Amy Herzog

STC Craft; \$24.95

ISBN: 1617690171

That old trope "size doesn't matter" cuts to the very heart of Herzog's



how-to. She asserts that a flattering knit fit depends on properly dressing your body type, not your weight.

The book starts with a friendly primer that shows you how to suss out said type and then measure accordingly, minus the dressing-

room angst that typically accompanies such efforts. From there, patterns are generously scaled—from X-Small (for a bust as small as 28 inches) to 5X (up to 62 inches)—and categorized as ideal for women who are top-heavy, bottom-heavy or proportional; a bonus bevy of versatile garments follows, all of which can be adjusted (with ease, length, darts) to suit any silhouette. Photos of the sweaters (and one skirt), modeled by "real" women of all shapes and circumferences, are embellished with a Telestrator-like overlay pointing out why certain details work particularly well for certain body features. For example, the peacock-colored Flutter pullover with belled, cabled three-quarter-length sleeves balances a bottom-heavy figure by adding width to the shoulders with a boat neck, deemphasizing the hips with a plain-faced hem, and narrowing the waist while drawing the eye upward with those focal sleeves. The rest of the pieces are just as knittable, modern takes on tried-and-true classics designed to fit without frustrating.

Fresh Designs: Hats/Men/Scarves/Shawls/Sweaters

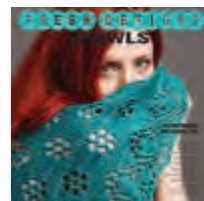
Cooperative Press

Each volume \$22.95 (print plus digital); \$16.95 (PDF only)

ISBN: 1937513139/0979201790/

0979201782/1937513047/
1937513054

Very few book series start life with a built-in fan base. But that's what *Fresh Designs* has, thanks to its Kickstarter-funded roots. Cooperative Press mastermind Shannon



Okey had hoped to raise \$5,000 to launch a multi-volume collection

featuring the work of emerging designers; that figure was blown away by the eventual total of \$12,480. Now the first five editions of an expected ten are here, each including ten designs rendered in (mostly) indie yarns and covering a different knit category. As was the intent, the books breed familiarity from the get-go, with every designer's name gracing the front cover; the contributors all receive royalty shares. Their output ranges from fashionable to funky. In *Men*, you'll find a buttoned Steampunk-inspired convertible scarf/cowl and a pullover with diagonally laddered colorwork livening up a garter rib, while *Scarves* offers a cabled/dropped-stitch number described as having a "vampiric punk edge" and a paneled piece featuring arrows like those on the Dance

Dance Revolution platform. *Hats* has a pretty tonal entrelac earflapper and a tasseled toque; *Shawls*, a lacy half-octagon and a Tyrolean capelet with embroidery; and *Sweaters*, a slew of sexy stuff, from a shapely surplice wrap to a curvy saddle-yoke, top-down skimmer. As with all CP titles, these are available as a print/digital combo or solely as a PDF; find out more at CooperativePress.com.

Classic Knits

DK Publishing; \$40

ISBN: 1465401938

This coffee-table book is an attractive tool for those stitchers who seek only the most basic of patterns, despite its coffee-table price. For the money, just-the-facts-ma'am crafters will find a



whopping 101 staple projects (average it out to 49 cents per pattern)—women's, men's, kids' and babies'

garments; scarves, hats, mitts and socks; décor, blankets and more. Things start with an entry-level crew-neck pullover in stockinette with ribbing at the edges. A simple cardi with lace piping and fluted cuffs is described as "fairly elaborate." Periwinkle bird's-eye flecks stripe a boxy cardigan. A swingy smock top gathers from the cabled neckline down. There's a shawl-collar Aran and V-neck vest, kids' hoodies and sailor sweaters, a loop-fringed kids' poncho and daisy-embroidered toddler dress. The most adventurous project is a boys' pirate beanie with intarsia skulls and crossbones. A hefty tutorial section at the back is anchored by a swatch reference, furthering the bang for the bucks.

500: Crochet/Fun Little Toys

By Hannah Eligie and

Kath Webber/Nguyen Le

Sellers Publishers; \$18.95 each
ISBN: 1416208836/1416208844

These chunky little volumes pack a great deal into small spaces. As

Accent Marks

Two new books feature accessories that top the torso—and top knitters' project lists. For shoulders, there's *Sock-Yarn Shawls* by Jen Lucas (Martingale & Co.; \$24.99; ISBN: 1604681942), with fifteen wraps

using skinny string. The first chapter uses lace as an edging device; the second, lace as an all-over



fabric. The third concentrates on nontriangular shapes. The yarns utilized mix indies like Hazel Knits and Lizard Toes Art with LYS faves like Madelinetosh, Classic Elite and Spud & Chloë. *Scarves, Shrugs & Shawls* by Rowan vet Sarah Hatton (St. Martin's Griffin; \$24.99; ISBN: 1250024943) gets the neck into the act. A softly cabled rectangle with armholes does double duty as a swingy vest or an oversized scarf. A buttoned lace stole can be styled as a shrug, cape, poncho or vest. And a mohair/alpaca number has ribbons running its length that adjust the ruches up close to the skin or elongate them into a gentle wave. The color- and openwork throughout is varied and interesting, making for a collection that's knittable from first project to last.



The Little Prince

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"I need to put up with two or three caterpillars
if I want to get to know the butterflies."



Book Reviews



promised in the series' titles, each book includes 500 quick-finish items.

Crochet is a

swatch collection at heart, focusing on blocks, triangles, circles and heart motifs that can be combined myriad ways. A smattering of attendant projects—a French-press cozy, a bolster pillow, potholders, a bunting—all come with half a dozen variations on the theme.

There are no swatches whatsoever in *Fun Little Toys*, just a ton of crafty miniature playthings that are knitted, crocheted, sewn and/or felted—hand and finger puppets, mobiles, stuffed animals, dinosaurs, insects and food; dress-up crowns, masks and capes; soft checkers, ring toss, bowling and board games. Think of it as Richard Scarry's *Best Rainy Book Ever* for crafty caretakers.

60 Quick Baby Blankets

Sixth&Spring Books; \$17.95

ISBN: 1936096463

Naptime for newborns is knit time for moms. The latest in the 60



Quick Knits series featuring the rainbow spectrum of Cascade Yarns' 220 Superwash

and 128 Superwash tucks into the baby blanket in all its giftable glory. Counterpanes are solid and striped, textured and lacy, zig-zagged, geometric, even Union Jacked. One bright-yellow blankie spells out in intarsia letters the enlightened baby's credo—Eat, Play, Love—while another breaks the stash while nodding to the current mustache meme. Animals are everywhere—a lambie rendered in loop stitch, a bunny in bobbles and cables, a googly-eyed gator, 3-D turtles, a wise old owl, a leaf-grazing giraffe, a tree-hanging monkey and a spouting beluga whale worth singing about. Night Houses presents a twilight town-

scape with bright doors; Monster Mash, a quintet of intarsia critters that mash up a Keith Haring figure and one-eyed Mike from *Monsters, Inc.* Thomas the Tank Engine fans will fall for Choo Choo, with a train tracked in eyelets, and tots who spend hours being strolled around a museum get the Mondrian-inspired Modern Art. An extra 61st pattern, a snugly stuffed sheep, completes the theme.

Knitting Pattern Essentials

By Sally Melville

Potter Craft; \$24.99

ISBN: 0307965570

The follow-the-leader approach



to knitting directly from a pattern makes many stitchers comfortable, but it can result in finished garments that don't fit ideally, however they may resemble the project photo. Melville's latest book intends to give knitters the confidence they need to modify existing patterns to suit their measurements through drafting. Lest the math-averse cower, the method used here is gentle—detailed fill-in-the-blank templates do the lion's share of the number-crunching (stitches, rows, circumference and length) once the drafter plugs in inches and decides on the garment's bones. These plans encompass a variety of basic silhouettes (set-in sleeves, raglan, drop and modified drop shoulder), sleeve alternatives, necklines, hems and cardi fronts, and are accompanied with text, photos and schematics that describe every permutation. Eight sample patterns deploy many of the techniques covered in the primer portion; they include a diagonal-hem pullover with a bow at shoulder, waist and hip, a raglan hourglass jacket with a double row of buttons on the wide lapels, and a boxy vest with Escher-inspired stripes. Especially cool is the assortment of illustrations showing how different top and bottom combos look together.

Medieval-Inspired Knits

By Anna-Karin Lundberg

Trafalgar Square; \$24.95

ISBN: 1570765618



If tapestry-rich colorwork is your knitterly grail, this book is a revelation. The brocade and swirling-vine patterns within are interpretations of the artwork gracing medieval churches in Lundberg's native Uppland, Sweden. The designer focuses not on the human figures painted on these edifices' walls and ceilings but on the motifs, backgrounds and hues that fill in the frescoes. For example, the grapevines on a pair of half gloves come from one church's roof vault; other pullovers, all worked circularly in Fair Isle and steeked at neck and armholes, take their floral-based decorations from garments rendered in the centuries-old murals. The Arch Panel vest includes architectural texture, filling in open cable wreaths with tricolored leaves. The Angel Wings cardigan features white spheres surrounded by green curlicues, forming an impression of folded wings taken from the age-worn image on the vaulted ceiling of the Lot Church. And the trio of Verdigris sweaters—for women, men and children—translate the time-tested iron oxide red and soft turquoise so prominent in the source material. It's a literal way to make history.

Crochet-opedia

By Julie Oparka

St. Martin's Griffin; \$24.99

ISBN: 1250020336

Claiming on the cover to be "the only crochet reference you'll ever need," this spiral-bound book is a tutorial, stitch dictionary and project collection all in one. It's certainly a colorful volume, with large illustrations and photos allowing for close-up learning and fabric inspection. Liberally sprinkled tip boxes give elucidating advice—increases should sit above each other while working in the round, for example. The patterns are broken into skill categories: Beginners get to practice



on potholders, a bobbled scarf, the requisite striped phone cozy and even a trio of Russian nesting amigurumi. Intermediate loopers are challenged with a nifty intarsia pillow with interlocking graphic squares, a black-and-white chevron rug and a lacy beret. And advanced crocheters are thrown into a gauntlet of technique, courtesy of a hairpin-lace Möbius wrap, a filet thread table runner, a Tunisian neck warmer, a broomstick-lace clutch and beaded earrings. The swatch section includes instructions in both text and chart form, so readers can pick their preferred way of following along. On the whole, it's an easy-on-the-eyes resource.

Bestseller Box



The last week of February 2013, here's what was hot on the online bestseller charts.

Amazon Needlecrafts and Textile Crafts list

2. *Cast On, Bind Off*, by Leslie Ann Bestor (Storey)
6. *Knit to Flatter*, by Amy Herzog (STC Craft)
9. *The Knitter's Handy Book of Top-Down Sweaters*, by Ann Budd (Interweave Press)

Barnes & Noble Knitting list

5. *One + One: Scarves, Shawls & Shrugs*, by Iris Schreier (Lark)
6. *Crochet Boutique*, by Rachel Oglesby (Lark)
7. *Vogue Knitting: The Ultimate Hat Book* (Sixth&Spring Books)

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designer Kristin Omdahl at TNNA and get
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YARN FORWARD

U.S.A.-Made *for You and Me*

By Christina Behnke



We reported in our August 2009 issue that domestic yarns were on the rise; four years later, not only has the list of U.S.-made yarns grown, but many brands from our last overview have endured in their own right. Nebraska's **Brown Sheep Company** knows that to reach 33 years in business takes a little innovation along the way: In 2004, owner Peggy Jo Wells began replacing the textile equipment, in use since the Eighties, with modern machinery; in 2010, the company developed a way to recycle up to 90 percent of its daily waste water. Now, Brown Sheep has announced a new yarn for fall that is its most fashion-forward yet: **Lana Bouclé (#2)** (25 colors; 100% wool; 180yds/100g), made of a narrow roving strand plied with a finer strand into a supple corkscrew. The roving ply imbues the yarn with a natural springiness; its mate provides structure and durability.

Over 32 years of operation, the employee-owned collective at Vermont's **Green Mountain Spinnery** has continued to add more yarns to its 100 percent U.S.-grown, -spun and -dyed line. (The newest, Weekend Wool, is sourced from farms throughout New England and blends the fleeces of six sheep breeds.) Just as enticing are the multifiber blends, including 60% wool/40% mohair **Simply Fine (#8)** (22 colors; 450yds/100g), a crisp 1-ply that's been washed using the Spinnery's Greenspun vegetable-based soaps. The blend marries the gleam and crimp of gently processed mohair and wool to great effect: You haven't seen garter stitch until you've knit it with this yarn.

Bijou Spun by Bijou Basin Ranch opened a new chapter this year by joining forces with distributors **The YarnSisters, Inc.** **Bijou Bliss (#7)** (2 natural and 13 hand-dyed colors from Lorna's Laces; 150yds/57g) is a true American original with its 50/50 blend of Colorado-grown yak fiber and American Cormo wool. Blending yak (a luxury fiber known for warmth and softness on par with cashmere) with long-staple Cormo not only adds bounce and body but also helps to make this yarn one of Bijou's most affordable. The hank boasts a buttery hand and distinctive sweet scent; knit up, it yields a pebbly-surfaced, drapery fabric.

Another purveyor of bovine fiber, **The Buffalo Wool Co.** (formerly Buffalo Gold) offers yarns spun from the downy undercoat of the all-American bison. Hypoallergenic and completely machine wash- and -dryable, bison fiber is remarkably hard-wearing and warm. New to the collection is **Buffalo Skies Light (#5)** (5 colors; 400yds/62g), a fingering-weight version of an Aran-weight 50% bison down/50% superwash merino blend. With a heady, sweet scent from the skin-softening oils that cling to the strand, it's oh-so-squeezable in the hank and toothy and firm on the needles; one wash results in sumptuous drape.

The first thing we want to do when we see one of **Imperial Yarn's** generous hanks is to give it a hug. Perhaps that's because we can feel the love that the Imperial Stock Ranch—a sustainable and historically landmarked operation in Oregon's high desert—puts into every step of processing the fleece from its Columbia herds. More likely, however, it's because the lofty, spongy wool (Columbia fiber is so lightweight, it takes a lot of yardage to reach each

hank's 113-gram yield). Case in point: **Tracie Too (#3)** (9 colors; 100% wool; 450yds), a 2-ply, worsted-spun sport weight, blooms so much after washing that it can be knit at up to a light worsted gauge.

If America is the land of plenty, then **Savannah (#10)** (50% wool, 20% cotton, 15% linen, 15% soya; 150yds/50g) from **The Fibre Co./Kelbourne Woolens** is a tribute to its bounty. Spun and kettle-dyed at textile mills in eastern Pennsylvania, the fibers unite to make a glossy, lightweight blend that takes dye with a heathered effect and has enough crunch to make stitch patterns pop. The yardage and surface tooth are even better suited for color-work (a yummy prospect, with 16 natural and sherbet shades to choose from). The well-defined plies, with their linen threads and occasional slub, create an inherent patterned patina even in stockinette.

The hand-woven wool blankets from **Swans Island** of Maine built up such a following that late in 2009, the company released **Natural Colors Fingering Weight (#4)** (20 colors; 100% organic merino wool; 525yds/100g) and worsted-weight yarns for purchase. (They've since added a bulky weight to the line.) Made from organically grown South American merino—warm, dry Merinos are happy Merinos!—the yarns are spun at a historic Maine textile mill, then dyed at the Swans Island Studio in the company's famously rich, naturally derived palette. Thanks to its eco-friendly processing, this yarn enjoys an itch-free, velvety hand.

A working farm in addition to a spinnery, **Stonehedge Fiber Mill** in Michigan offers custom spinning services and even sells custom-built machinery to spinners looking to start their own venture. The company's line of merinos, **Shepherd's Wool**, has a skin-pleasing softness that's unparalleled for a wool this firm. (It's shown here in **Fine (#1)**; 56 colors; 100% wool; 230yds/45g.) A smooth, springy worsted-spun, this multi-tasker sculpts perky stitch and cable patterns, constructs crisp lace, and outlines vivid color-work as well as it felts (reportedly, even the white shades will felt). Keep it on hand for when you need a yarn that's up to almost any task.

Why can't buying a U.S.-made yarn support all Americans at the same time that it supports local growers and mills? That's the thought that inspired **Kollage Yarns' USA Yarn Project**, the program through which the Alabama company produces 100% U.S.-made cotton yarns, 10% of the sales of which benefit U.S. charities. **Hope DK (#9)** (100% organic cotton; 160yds/57g) is a worsted-spun 2-ply; the spinning process creates a glow that accentuates the fiber's natural ivory hue. But most notable about this yarn is its uncommonly soft hand. (Tiny specks of vegetable matter are embedded deeply enough in the strand to be purely cosmetic.)

Quince & Co. was started with the goal of producing affordable natural-fiber yarns sourced from American wool and sustainable, humanely sourced materials from overseas and spun in a historic Maine mill rescued from disrepair. If this seems like a tall order, just see what it's done with **Chickadee (#6)** (100% American wool; 181yds/50g). Springy doesn't begin to define the high-octane twist of this cushiony, forgiving 3-ply; it puffs cables, stitch patterns, even the positive space in lace, to comparably pillowlike proportions. The wide array of fresh, wearable colors—41, to be precise—is just the icing on the cake.

As the locavore movement goes ever more mainstream, the yarn industry has risen to the occasion, fostering a new crop of yarns grown and/or spun and dyed across these United States.

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"I take away a lot of information not only from the excellent speakers but from the other attendees as well. It is definitely worth the effort to attend."

—Mary Klaneski, New England Yarn & Spindle,
Bristol, Connecticut



"This conference is an opportunity to get away from my business, but also to think about it in a critical way."

—Annissa George, Stitch House,
Dorchester, Massachusetts



The YMN conference offers incredible return on investment. After just two days, I have tons of ideas for improving my business, new contacts that I can consult with throughout the year, and the energy to get it all done.

—Janet Avila, String Theory Yarn Company, Glen Ellyn, Illinois

The Yarn Market News Smart Business Conference

During closing comments at this year's Yarn Market News Smart Business Conference, Annissa George of Stitch House in Dorchester, Massachusetts, raised her hand. She told the group that she had attended all six conferences (one of two six-time attendees, with Pearl Chin of Knitty City in New York City), but that this year's hotel, the Four Seasons Baltimore, was the very best of them all.

The lovely hotel catered to our every need as we raptly listened to talks on topics ranging from crafting a social-media policy to handling copyright issues to understanding color theory. We got tips on how to negotiate and were encouraged to think long and hard about customer profiles and how best to market to these clients. For the first time, *YMN* suggested topics of conversation during lunch (sponsored by Classic Elite Yarns); each table was able to share its findings on community engagement, social media, inventory and advertising with the whole group afterward.

The shop owners in attendance made new friends and reconnected with old ones at the cocktail party (sponsored by Skacel), as well as before the gala dinner (sponsored by Westminster Fibers), where we heard an inspiring speech by Nell Merlino, founder of Make Mine a Million and creator of Take Our Daughters to Work Day.

On the last day I took a few dozen attendees on a Yarn Crawl to four area stores. Those on the crawl went home with—what else?—even more yarn; I'm not sure how they managed to fit their purchases in their already stuffed gift bags.

—Erin Slonaker





"As a small business owner, it is all too easy to get stuck in my own experience, and that can be lonely. Having other LYSOs to bounce ideas off of has energized me. I'm excited to get back to work and implement new ideas, tweak old things and breathe new life into my shop."

—Mim Bird,
Over the Rainbow Yarn,
Rockland, Maine



I took away so many things that I can apply to my shop. The conference also gave me a renewed vigor for my business. I am already planning to attend next year's conference.

—Judi Hederich, My Sister's
Yarn Shop, Green, Ohio



"I was really glad I took the time to step away from my business to attend the YMN conference. I came home with renewed enthusiasm and fresh ideas—an excellent way to start the year. Well worth the trip."

—Barbara Parry,
Foxfire Designs





Remember: Members Benefit

According to attendees of and exhibitors at our trade show in Long Beach, California, in February, our needlearts event over Super Bowl weekend truly was super: The schedule included a huge offering of technique and business classes; an inspiring fashion show, refreshed with a *Project Runway*-style catwalk; an amazing array of designs at the Needlepoint Showcase; and the ever-popular Sample IT!, where retailers purchased sample products from participating exhibitors. Those new to our ranks proudly donned the new-member ribbons they found in their registration packages, allowing us to give them an extra-special welcome to TNNA. For three days the show floor buzzed with business activity and surely reinforced our new membership slogan: "You'll Profit From the Partnership."

If you work in the needlearts industry and are not yet a member of TNNA, please consider joining. The services offered are designed

with you in mind. Every other year, TNNA members look forward to participating in and receiving the results from our State of the Specialty Needlearts Survey—an invaluable business tool. Conducted by a third party, Hart Business Research, this in-depth report, free to members, disseminates the data from surveys given to industry insiders as well as to average needlearts consumers. Research collection for the 2013 report has concluded, and preliminary results will be presented at the June TNNA trade show. (The complete report will be available to members in September.) These results provide useful information you can use for business planning and forecasting. We've also added a new element this year called 20 Business Tools, which will provide even more benefits to members.

I would also like to remind you of one additional special program in which we are involved. TNNA supports and works with the Needle Arts Mentoring Program (NAMP) of

the Helping Hands Foundation. This program is designed for anyone interested in mentoring/teaching children any one of the needlearts under the TNNA umbrella. Retailers, encourage your customers to become mentors and help create future clients—as we all know, today's young crafters are tomorrow's loyal consumers. Free supplies are provided for each student along with a TNNA how-to book. If you or someone you know would like to share your expertise and love of the needlearts, please visit www.needleartsmentoring.org for more information.

We look forward to hearing from you and seeing you on June 22–24 in Columbus, Ohio. Visit www.TNNA.org for more details.

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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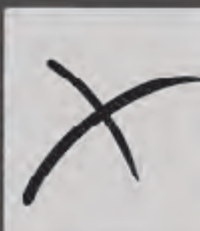
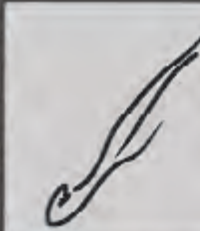
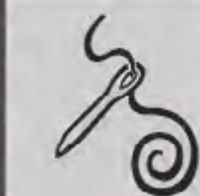
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Reaching Out to Teens

We all recognize that education is critical to the long-term survival of our industry. The Craft Yarn Council believes that educational initiatives are important at many different levels for the yarn retailer, who spends so much time dealing with everything from helping frustrated customers with pattern questions and developing programs to entice newbies to learn to knit and crochet to encouraging current customers to expand their skills [for more on the topic, see Cathy Rumpf's "Smart Education" column on page 36]. Another important consideration is long-term educational investment. The Craft Yarn Council's Teaching Teens program is one such endeavor.

The council started this initiative three years ago, when we worked with global media company Scholastic and Jo-Ann Fabric and Craft Stores to distribute 40,000 free learn-to-knit kits to junior and senior high school students across the U.S. We learned a lot from this knitting-focused effort—notably, that there

are thousands of teachers who recognize that teaching knitting provides valuable life skills but who have no access to resources, and, just as importantly, that students are excited to learn this craft.

That's why we're so pleased to announce that with the support of Jo-Ann stores, we were able to roll out phase two of the program in January: teaching teens to crochet. As with the knitting program, the Craft Yarn Council contributed yarn, hooks and supporting patterns—more than 40,000 kits—to high schools across the country. Teachers received a large full-color poster with how-to illustrations and graphics on the front and, on the back, national standards and benchmarks for teachers created by the CYC; three detailed lesson plans; and three easy crochet patterns with illustrations. In addition, the package included information about Warm Up America, a natural tie-in for students who are required to participate in community-service projects.

Not every teen who receives a free kit will

become a lifelong crocheter, but all of these participating students will be exposed to basic techniques as they attend at least several classes developed around the program. We also know from our Learn to Knit initiative that many of the students will be so inspired, they'll start after-school clubs in their schools.

Teens may put aside their hooks and needles later in high school, when the demands on their time increase, but we hope they'll pick them up again in college or later, when they are out in the work force. More than fifteen years of research has told us that knitters' and crocheters' passion for their crafts grows stronger as they grow older. If we expose teens to all the possibilities of these needlecrafts, we are hopeful that they will become passionate consumers as well.

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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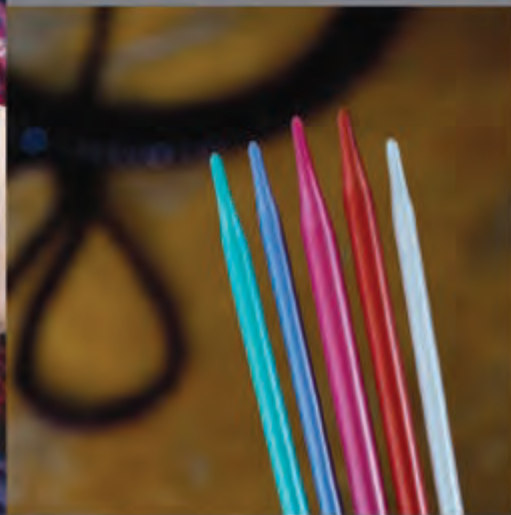


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Crochet Guild of America

BY CARI CLEMENT, PRESIDENT

Bi-Stitchuality: Marrying Knit and Crochet

As a former yarn shop owner, I've seen crochet go from being a very small blip on the LYS radar screen to a real force in the fashion world.

This is especially true in urban areas and with the under-40 crowd, who are quick to embrace both knitting and crochet. In fact, we've found that many new stitchers focus on crochet first, often because there's just one loop to drop.

But whether it's knitting, crochet or some combination thereof, the bottom line is just that—your bottom line: A yarn customer is a yarn customer. You never know when a new crochet customer will become a crochet teacher, help you crochet store samples or even become a potential employee, attracting more crocheters along the way. So many crochet designers today work their magic using the yarns you already carry in your store—and yarn company creative directors are increasingly adding crochet designs to their pattern lines.

Knowing the types of yarns crocheters like to use and how to sell them in crochet terms is

important. As an example, lace- and sock-weight yarns crocheted with relatively large hooks make for gossamer fabric, and often one skein of lace-weight will be enough for an entire shawl or at least a lacy scarf. What crocheters often don't realize, though, is that one skein of LYS-quality lace-weight is no more expensive than three skeins of a heavier craft-chain yarn purchased to make a similar item.

So where does CGOA fit in? We have big plans for 2013: CGOA's goal is to be *the* go-to organization for all things crochet. It's a big task that will require plenty of work, but it's a challenge we're embracing. Ideas include building ourselves up as a resource, which means creating databases, including a significant state-by-state teacher listing and one for contract crocheters who can create sample garments for your shop. We also aim to be the source for information on how to cater to crochet customers, creating free syllabuses for use at in-store crochet classes, online video technique classes and much more. This goal is now possible

thanks to CGOA's new website, www.crochet.org, which is gradually being populated with more useful content.

On a personal note, many of you may be aware that prior to being named president of CGOA in January, I spent much of my professional life focused on knitting. I am more of an intermediate crocheter at present, but I love a challenge: learning new techniques, combining knitting and crochet in a single project, learning the different structures of knit and crochet, etc. These days, when I go to my local Knit Night (at the Knitting Studio in downtown Montpelier, Vermont), I always bring a crochet project—and my fellow attendees always remark that they would love to learn to crochet. Owners Lee and Leslie recently started offering crochet classes and are learning to crochet themselves. Why not do the same at your shop?

For more information about the Crochet Guild of America, visit crochet.org or e-mail CGOA@offinger.com.

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If you know of Drew Emborsky, aka The Crochet Dude®, you know that he has been crocheting since he was five. He makes it look so fun and easy with his own line of signature hooks and tools by

Boye. One thing led to another and before he knew he was designing knit and crochet patterns full time and writing his wildly funny and popular blog. Drew has nine books published to date and appeared in four seasons of the PBS TV show Knit & Crochet Now as the crochet expert.

He teaches at fiber-related conferences and cruises, and just recently formed his own yarn company specializing in fine yarn hand-dyed in the USA.



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No Show?

Trade shows can cost a pretty penny. But can you really afford not to go?

BY DARYL BROWER

Elaine McArn recalls the awkward moment when, singled out for an extra security check before boarding a flight to Long Beach, California, a TSA agent opened her suitcase to reveal what was essentially a convenience store condensed into a rolling suitcase—string cheese, trail mix, crackers, you name it. “Cream cheese?” she recalls the agent asking. “Really?” The contents of McArn’s carry-on were not the result of special dietary needs but a cost-cutting measure she employs to make trips to trade shows more affordable. The owner of the Needlecraft Center in Davidson, North Carolina, for 42 years, McArn has never missed a TNNA market.

“Some years it’s a financial struggle,” she says, “but I always find a way.” That way often includes packing her own lunches, using frequent-flier miles for airfare, doubling up on hotel rooms and sometimes slipping breakfast bars from the buffet into her tote bag. “I’m not going to pay \$15 for a sandwich on the show floor,” she says, laughing.

McArn’s willingness to look a little, dare we say, cheap is fueled by her staunch belief that attending the knitting industry’s biggest trade show is an essential part of doing business. “Yes, I can see all the big-brand yarns through my reps, but I like getting to see all the different lines at once, to compare vendors,” she says. “Plus, often all you get to see from the rep is a color card. At a show I see what the colors look like in a full skein and how they work with the rest of the yarns in the line and with yarns from other companies. It’s a much bigger and better picture.”

Vivian Zagar, who opened Tangled Purls in Salem, Oregon, in 2010, skipped the shows in 2011 and 2012, not wanting to spend store profits on travel. In January, she decided to take the plunge and attend her first TNNA. “I felt that my shop was in a good position to absorb the expenses of a trade show,” she says. She couldn’t be happier with the decision. “I found great value in actually seeing garments and accessories produced from the yarns that I already carry. It gave me solid ideas for my next shop samples,” she says, noting that she was particularly enthralled by Sample IT!, a TNNA initiative that lets shop owners try and buy sample products on the spot. “I got to try out new yarns and patterns

without having to bring in a whole bag or line.”

More than yarn

Margaux Kelleher, who owns Knits and Purls in Coral Gables, Florida, relies on shows to keep her informed. “I’m an online store, so attending a show is really the only chance I have to see the products,” she says. “Reps don’t call on me.” Even if they did, Kelleher says it would still be worthwhile make the trip to market. “It’s great being able to meet vendors and designers face to face—you learn so much just through casual conversation,” she notes. “I walk away full of enthusiasm and infused with information and new ideas.”

With their spring and summer buys pretty much set for the season, John Koval and Kit Hutchin, owners of Churchmouse Yarns & Teas on Bainbridge Island, Washington, say they considered skipping January’s market but changed their minds at the last minute. “We shot down from Seattle early Saturday morning, and we’re so glad we did,” says Koval. The reason? “We really wanted to chat with our vendors about our purchasing strategy going forward. And that’s so much better done face to face.” Koval also says he and Hutchin would have missed the opportunity to visit with fellow shop owners that TNNA provides. “It’s always valuable to share experiences and ideas with each other,” he says. “Brilliant ideas [flow] nonstop—it’s like drinking from a fire hose!”

Elaine McArn too says the opportunity to connect with fellow store owners is one of the highlights of her trips. “We’re all dealing with similar issues, and it’s great to get someone else’s perspective,” she says. “I also like to see what other people are gravitating toward and get their reactions to new yarns, colors and products. It’s always good to get another opinion.” But the main reason McArn makes sure to schedule the shows? “I’ve been doing this for a very, very long time,” she says. “And it’s very easy to get too comfortable in your own little bubble. Getting out of the store and dedicating a weekend to seeing what’s out there and what everyone else is doing clears my mind. I always come back with new ideas and a fresh approach to my own store. It keeps things from getting stale.”

No Excuses

Quick comebacks to the reasons some shop owners give for staying home.

- **“The hotel is too expensive.”** Doubling up with an employee or another shop owner can cut room costs, as can bypassing the host hotel for less-expensive lodgings a bit farther from the convention hall.
- **“The airfare is beyond my budget.”** If the show location is within a reasonable distance, consider driving to your destination. You’ll be able take along an employee or two at no extra cost (save food and room) and arrive and depart on your own schedule. The size of your trunk is the only thing that will limit what you can take home.
- **“My reps have already shown me everything new—and if not, I’ll see it online.”** Reps are a wonderful resource, but shows offer the chance to connect with companies (old and new) that may not have a sales force in your area. Even if they do, seeing and touching the full line from your favorites, along with sample garments, is very different from looking at a color card or website picture.
- **“I’ve finished buying for the season.”** New inventory isn’t the only take-home from a trade show. Face time with vendors, the chance to swap advice with other store owners and take in display ideas are priceless opportunities.
- **“I can’t afford to close up shop.”** If there’s really no one who can keep things running while you’re out of town, shorten your stay to one or two days or consider sending an employee in your stead.
- **“I went last year; I don’t need to go again.”** Don’t shrug off the value of spending a weekend (or even a day) with others in the industry. The show floor changes with every season and offers unique opportunities for networking, socializing and energizing your business. If you really feel jaded about making the trip, consider sending one of your staffers.


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Level Up

You've attracted customers with learn-to-knit classes. How can you keep them engaged? By expanding their skill sets.

BY CATHY RUMFELT

It's always rewarding to watch novice stitchers find success—mastering elementary skills, discovering favorite yarns, finishing first projects. The challenge, then, is to keep these neophytes engaged. While project-based classes are exciting for beginners, technique-specific classes may better hone the skills they need to move forward. Entice these customers by making your techniques classes engaging and accessible.

Knit more

Beginning knitters often lack the confidence and knowledge that come with experience. While a single class won't make them experts, newer stitchers can learn tricks that will help them better understand their craft. Encouraging them to knit as much as possible is a vital first step. "I often tell my customers that there is one sure-fire way to become a better knitter: Knit more," says Wendy Ellis, owner of Lancaster Yarn Shop in Intercourse, Pennsylvania.

But beginners can become easily frustrated if their fundamentals—understanding a pattern, knowing how to read fabric or fix a dropped stitch—are shaky. Teaching your beginners these basics will help them want to knit more.

At the Yarn Spot in Wheaton, Maryland, the most successful class is actually a techniques series. "It's not project-based, even though people do bring projects that feature applicable techniques," says co-owner Victoria Rothenberg. The two-hour class covers a variety of topics, everything from short rows and fixing mistakes to reading charts and patterns. "I think being able to read your knitting is essential to moving forward, as is knowing how to read patterns," Rothenberg explains. "As knitters think about their work and what they want to accomplish, they will search for techniques that meet their needs." Giving beginners an arsenal of techniques prepares them to succeed.

Tucson Yarn Company in Tucson, Arizona, focuses a series of classes on these kinds of skills. "Our specialty is growing confident, competent beginning knitters. In addition to our skill-builder classes, we've branched out with workshops on yarn substitution and reading patterns," explains co-owner and instructor Cyd Engel. "One of our most popular classes

for new and experienced knitters alike, Mapping Your Knitting, greatly improves outcomes by teaching knitters how to preview, prepare for and execute projects.

"We decided that growing knitters was really important to what we wanted to do as a shop," Engel adds. "Then we worked backward to figure out our classes. Mainly we asked ourselves: What are the big questions that people always come in with? Often, knitters start a project and then set it down for a few days or months. When less experienced knitters try to start knitting again, they realize that they are lost in the pattern. Teaching knitters how to figure out where they are on their own is a big step toward helping them become more independent, advanced knitters." These types of classes give beginning knitters control over a project, which in turn gives them more confidence as they continue.

Of course, some newbies may not want to commit to a class series. Consider offering a one-day class that will give them much of what they need in a single sitting. Lancaster Yarn Shop offers such a class, called Absolute Beginners' Knitting Workshop, for free. "The limited commitment of a free workshop that meets once for only two hours allows people to dabble," Wendy Ellis explains. "We hope it encourages them to knit more and then to take additional workshops and classes."

Play with your plies

Sometimes, beginners need to be reminded that knitting is fun. "It's no fun at all to make a mistake you can't fix, to knit something you don't understand or can't complete—or to get to the end of a project and not be able to finish it well," says Ellis. "Our classes and workshops are designed to focus on building skills so that knitting is an enjoyable activity."

Emphasizing the fun can also encourage beginners to take classes. A class on yarn substitution, for instance, may not sound exciting at first, but there are many ways to make the subject engaging. At Tucson Yarn Company, "We set the class up as a game show, with teams of students, and go through the system of how yarn is divided by weight," says Cyd Engel. "Then they sort a basket of yarn by weight and actually manipulate the yarn themselves."

Getting to explore the yarn in the shop is an added bonus and can introduce the wide world of fiber to beginners.

Novices can also be inspired to learn from a welcoming community of knitters. Victoria Rothenberg knows how important it is: "I think one of the best ways of encouraging knitters to learn is to keep learning ourselves." It can also be reassuring for a beginner to see that even the most experienced knitter can still learn something new. Says Rothenberg, "I am very thankful for my customers who teach and encourage each other to challenge themselves."

Creating Successful Classes

Ways to Encourage Beginning Needleworkers to Move Forward:

Work with your customers. Not everyone can commit to a lengthy class, so do what works for your customer base. "Many of our customers are retirees, so an eight-week class doesn't make sense since they travel quite a bit. But a three-to-four-week session is perfect," Cyd Engel of Tucson Yarn Company explains.

Make it cheap. The Yarn Spot prices classes aimed at beginners more affordably than other classes, while Lancaster Yarn provides free workshops with a yarn purchase, making it more likely that beginners will give them a try.

Help your beginners to try new things. Wendy Ellis offers a wide variety of classes at Lancaster Yarn Shop for knitters of all skill levels: "Most of our classes offer project-driven instruction with at least one or two novel or tricky techniques to pique interest." While beginners might be afraid to try something difficult on their own, in a class with an instructor, it won't seem as daunting.

Use your community of knitters. Tucson Yarn Company's Mapping Your Knitting class caters to both beginning and experienced knitters. "It's great for beginners to see that even people who have knit for a long time don't know everything," explains Cyd Engel.

Cathy Rumfelt is a writer from Cumming, Georgia, who is still trying to figure out how to read a cable chart.

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The Vacation Situation

You know you deserve a break. Don't let shop responsibilities prevent you from enjoying the rejuvenation time you and your business both need.

BY MAYA MACKOWIAK ELSON

It wasn't easy, finding the time, planning, leaving the laptop behind. But after five years of working as a mostly one-woman operation, indie designer Ysolda Teague finally took a vacation. "I couldn't have done it when I first started, because [my business] was just me," says Teague. "But I've been trying to figure out ways to run my business more sanely."

Vacations are integral to preserving a business owner's sanity. The 2009 Vacation Deprivation Survey conducted by Expedia.com revealed that after taking a vacation, 53 percent of employed adults in the U.S. reported feeling rested and refreshed as well as reconnected with their families. And 87 percent reported that things like visiting another state or country or trying new activities and food helped them feel as though they were truly away from work.

But as any small-business owner knows, it's not exactly easy to take a vacation. Who will run the show in your absence? And how? And if you're the type of person who feels odd *not* working, how do you step away from the yarn, even for just a few days, and unwind?

Train—and trust—your staff

When you've invested so much time, money and energy in your business and its success, the need to entrust the shop to someone else for a spell can become an excuse to not take a vacation. Judi Hederich, owner of My Sister's Yarn Shop in Green, Ohio, worked every single day for the first year her shop was open, until her sister reminded her: "You know, you can take a day off." Soon after, she began assigning more hours to staff and taking two days off every week. Within two years she was taking annual seven- to ten-day vacations, once to Norway.

"When I'm not in the store, I check in," Hederich says. "But when I went to Norway, I couldn't do that as easily. I left detailed lists and the name of someone who could take care of the computer if it broke. I'm lucky I work with really good people I can trust."

Slow time is go time

When summer arrives and the yarn isn't flying off the shelves, it's easy to assume you should

spend the downtime doing more work behind the scenes. In reality, it's the perfect time to get away.

Janet Avila, owner of nine-year-old String Theory Yarn Company in Glen Ellyn, Illinois, takes an extreme approach to making sure her slow season is rejuvenating for both her and her business: She closes shop for three or four weeks every August.

"I've done it since I first opened," says Avila. Admittedly, she doesn't spend the entire time on vacation (she devotes about half of that period to preparing the store for the fall season), but the total shutdown causes a ripple of positive effects. Staff and customers are supportive and even admire the example she sets, and she is able to create buzz for the shop's reopening.

"My August break is the key to my sanity in this business," she adds. "It's a chance to start over every year, with new ideas and new energy."

Let go and get moving

Yarny business owners tend to love their work—and they spend a tremendous amount of time doing it. For many, the idea of "sitting around" doesn't seem like much fun. "What makes me good at being self-employed—the urge I have to be working most of the time—is the only real issue [I have with planning a vacation]," says Adrian Bizilia of Hello Yarn, a fiber- and yarn-dyeing business.

But "vacation" does not have to be synonymous with sitting still. If lounging on a beach for seven days sounds like the epitome of boring, try something more active. *Psychology Today* recently cited research showing that infusing a vacation with new-to-you activities, sights and experiences is actually good for your brain, building new synapses and often creating the most memorable moments.

For Ysolda Teague, a vacation adventure at a surf camp in Mexico was the enticement that got her to take a break from work. "I'm not very good at doing nothing," she says. "I had to go somewhere that would let me do something."

Don't forget to have fun

Once you've kissed your ball winder good-bye and your support system is in place for your absence, kick back and do what you set out to

do on vacation: rejuvenate and reconnect.

Though it can sometimes take a few days to get into true relaxation mode, do your best to get there and then allow the time away to work its magic on your mind and body.

"I think vacations are so important, particularly if, like me, you have a hard time separating work from personal life," says Adrian Bizilia. "It's tremendously energizing to get away, go somewhere interesting and inspiring, and experience new things. I come back ready to work even harder."

For Maya Mackowiak Elson, vacations mean family visits stateside, but she dreams of a trip to Peru.

There's No Place Like Home

Can't afford to travel? Don't like sleeping in hotels? Find airplane flights a bit too unnerving? Why not take time off at home? Try these tips for making a "staycation" feel like a real getaway.

- **Exercise your mind.** You may not be off boosting your brain power by circumnavigating Mexico City, but there are plenty of other ways to spark those neurons. With all the freedom vacation allows, you'll have plenty of time to read a few books, start learning or relearn a musical instrument, visit a museum or take a class.
- **Rethink routines.** Try staying up late and sleeping in. Eat new-to-you foods. Go to the movies in the middle of the day and see something you normally wouldn't. Shaking things up makes day-to-day life different, and thus more vacation-like.
- **Become a tourist.** Imagine you have never been to your town before. Take the time to explore. Go for walks. Take pictures of the sights. Send a scenic postcard to a friend. Pick up a souvenir at a gift shop. You may just discover a new appreciation for your own backyard.

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There's an App for That

Smart phones and tablets are the new *modus operandi* in today's workplace. Do you have the right apps to make your device a truly useful tool?

BY STEFANIE GOODWIN-RITTER

It's estimated that 50 percent of Americans currently own smart phones, a number that increases daily. Tablet usage, meanwhile, is projected to rise sharply in the next three years. These devices are served by thousands of applications, enabling everything from game-playing and word-processing to social media access. Knowing the app landscape can give you an edge in customer service and marketing and help you make the most of your time.

See and be seen

Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest have mobile apps to make networking easy while on the go. Photo-sharing apps such as Instagram and Flickr are excellent ways to connect with your customers; though they might seem like yet another social-media task to add to your already full schedule, think of them as an opportunity to add a more personal touch to your online presence. As Kate Gagnon Osborn of the Fibre Company and Kelbourne Woolens explains, "Instagram is a great way to connect with customers and other companies that we're fans of in a way that doesn't scream, 'Buy our yarn!'"

The photo-sharing phenomenon is also a boon to designers. Mercedes Tarasovitch-Clark reports, "I enjoy an uptick in pattern sales when I show designs on Flickr or Instagram. Candid shots, rather than the ones that may have already been seen on Ravelry, give knitters a good behind-the-scenes look at a pattern."

Several threads on Ravelry are devoted to apps favored by knitwear and crochet designers: SketchBookPro, Inkpad, Skitch and Adobe Ideas are among those frequently mentioned. Paper by FiftyThree, a free iPad app, allows users to share ideas, sketches, notes and drawings easily. Hundreds of options for non-designers are available as well; just type "knitting," "crochet" or "yarn" into the iTunes or Google Play stores and you'll find countless free row counters and gauge calculators as well as apps to convert measurements, keep track of your projects, or look up tips and techniques. As a yarn store owner, try out as many as possible so you can make educated recommendations to your customers, establishing yourself as an invaluable "in-the-know" resource.

Though not specific to knitting or crochet,

the YouTube app is one to download. If you or a customer comes across an unfamiliar technique, chances are there's a video tutorial a few keystrokes away. Craftsby has developed an app for the iPhone and iPad that allows users to access its video classroom while on the go.

An exciting new app, Knit Companion, turns your PDF library into an interactive experience: Users can mark their place in written instructions and charts, add notes and highlight details within the pattern. This free app has received rave reviews from Knitty.com and the CraftLit podcast. Yarnshopper is another consumer-oriented app that allows users to estimate how many skeins are needed for a project and how much it will cost.

A few innovative iPhone apps, available for a nominal fee, are also worth trying: Knit Evenly calculates how to increase or decrease evenly in a row when the pattern instructions do not specify how to do so; KnitSpeaker, a finalist for last year's TNNA Business Innovation Awards, allows users to input pattern instructions to be read aloud at a controlled rate, allowing them to knit at their own pace.

The business end

When it comes to more practical apps for business owners, Square—which turns any enabled iPhone, iPad or Android into a portable credit-card reader—is perhaps the most revolutionary. "I use Square when I'm selling my kits and patterns at crochet shows," says Stacey Trock, the designer behind Fresh Stitches. "It's an easy way to accept payment, and since so many customers are looking to use credit cards, it has significantly increased my sales."

Square also has the capability to act as a POS system. "When a customer makes a purchase, I know not only that she purchased our Lhasa Wilderness yarn, but I know what color she purchased too," explains Carl Coop, owner of Bijou Basin Ranch. "The CSV file that I download weekly integrates into my inventory system, and I know exactly how much of that color I have left and when it is time to reorder." [For more on Square, see *YMN's* January 2013 issue.]

Quickbooks offers a free mobile app that syncs to your existing account, so you can keep tabs

on your retail sales even when you're not at the shop. Small business owners will also appreciate apps such as Todoist and Wunderlist, which help manage tasks and prioritize to-do lists, sending e-mail reminders to keep due dates in check. Both apps sync with multiple devices as well as Google calendar.

Data backup is another important topic: Enlisting the help of web-based services such as Crashplan and Carbonite is a great way to avoid a total loss should disaster strike; most services offer smart-phone apps that are free for subscribers, which means that your data is always at your fingertips. Google Drive and Dropbox provide secure web-based storage with the option to share with others, and everything is easily accessible via their respective apps.

Knit Apps to Try

iPhone/iPad only:

- **Knit Evenly** (Jakro Soft LLC)
- **Knit Companion** (Create2Thrive LLP)
- **KnitSpeaker** (Fiber Fantasy Knitting Products)

iPhone, iPad and Android Apps:

- **Knit Counter** (Crazy Fiber Lady Software)
- **Yarn Store GPS** (Sutro Media)
- **Knit Handy** (Interweave)
- **Raglanify** (ShhStudios)

While Ravelry hasn't created its own app, opting instead to focus on a mobile version of the site, there are independently developed apps that allow users to access their Ravelry information:

- **Wooly** (Ravelry Companion App by White Mountain Whiskey LLP, iPhone/iPad only)
- **Ravulous** (Ravelry Companion App by Polly McEldowney)
- **Ravelry Photo Uploader** (Polly McEldowney)

Stefanie Goodwin-Ritter is a team member of The Wool Wide Web, a consultancy firm to the yarn industry. She also spins, designs and blogs at handmadebystefanie.blogspot.com.

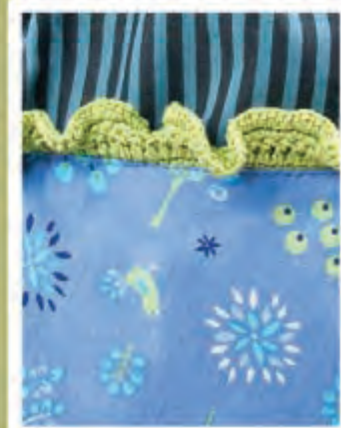
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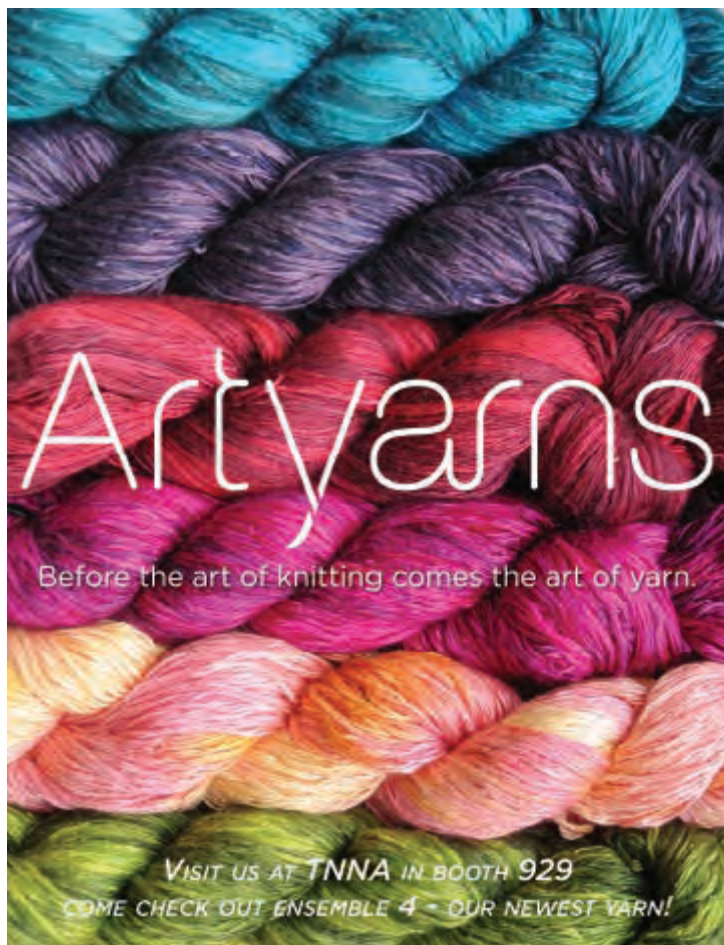
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Spinning Straw Into Gold

The stats speak for themselves: Adding spinning to your merch mix is a winning sales strategy.

BY LIZ GIPSON

According to the most recent TNNA survey, 21 percent of canvassed knitters spin, and 25 percent of those surveyed who don't spin say they would like to try. Two thirds of yarn shops that sell spinning and weaving gear reported that these products provided growth in recent years. There are other indicators that the number of spinners continues to grow: Ravelry has hundreds of groups devoted to spinning, and 11 percent of Ravelers who use the "stash" feature list hand-spun in their personal yarn collections.

Shop owners know that "new" sells. These statistics make a compelling argument for making spinning your something new.

Know the numbers

How much would it cost to add spinning to your mix? In general, minimum orders for tools and accessories such as spindles, carders and niddy noddies average about \$500; for wheels, the minimum rises to \$750–\$900. An average markup for a wheel is 30 to 40 percent. Decide how many wheels you'd need to sell in a year to make the investment worthwhile. Some retailers are happy to sell two or three in a year, while others need to move one or more a month.

Based on her customers' buying habits, Susan Post of A Good Yarn in Sarasota, Florida, turns product over every two or three months, "with heavier sales in the winter." Her store had been in business for more than three years when she introduced spinning supplies and classes, a response to customer requests. "I'm pretty pleased with our sales," she says.

In addition to spinning-specific tools, you'll need to provide roving with which to spin. Many established yarn vendors also offer roving; contact your existing accounts to explore those options. A realistic budget to bring in two wheels, fiber, instructional books and DVDs, and a few accessories is approximately \$2,000.

Members of TNNA have access to a list of vendors who sell spinning-related products; it was created by the Spinning and Weaving Group, one of the association's product segment groups (e-mail info@spinweave.org to get a copy). Keep all your chosen accouterments—fiber, bobbins, kates, threading hooks, fiber, whorls, niddy noddies, yarn gauges, ball winders, swifts, books,

magazines and patterns—in stock and up to date. Consider devoting a special merchandising area in which to showcase all of your spinning products in one place. Jolene Mosley of Cloverhill Yarn Shop in Catonsville, Maryland, puts her wheels on top of her displays to save floor space. "If a customer wants to try them out, she only has to ask."

Once a wheel has been purchased, recurring materials sales provide steady spinning-related income. "To help my customers envision what the fiber will look like as a yarn, I spin a hank to display next to the fibers," says Mosley.

Steven Berg of Yarn Garage in Minneapolis has been developing his spinning program over the past four-and-a-half years. He had a steep learning curve getting to know the product line: "Your energy goes with your expertise, and mine is not in spinning." He stuck with it, however, using consulting staff to fill in the gaps. Berg found that catering to felters as well as spinners was key to driving sales of fiber.

Educate

Teaching is a vital component to promoting any product line, but many shop owners get discouraged because spinning classes don't traditionally fill. You may have to schedule a class two or three times and at different times or days before you find its sweet spot. Offer incentives such as bring-a-friend specials or include product discounts with the purchase of classes. Private lessons are another way to go. "Most of our students opt for private lessons rather than classes," says Susan Post. "It's just too hard to get everyone's schedules to line up, plus students like the personal attention."

For spinning as well as knitting, personal attention is what separates the LYS from web outlets. "I'm providing my customers with an invaluable service, letting them try the wheels firsthand," Post says. "They can't get that online." As an added bonus, she offers a free lesson with every wheel purchased. Another smart idea is to have a handout ready stating your spinning incentives, be it a free beginning class, a pound of roving with wheel purchase, free equipment tune-ups, social spin-in times and the like.

A shop owner attuned to the needs of her customers can increase her bottom line by

introducing spinning no matter her expertise. As sales become more dependent on offering unique products or experiences, spinning just may give you that extra edge.

Finding Spinning Support

Nothing beats in-person customer support. If your expertise is not in spinning, consider hiring a person specifically for her skill with a drop spindle or a wheel and her ability to work with customers. Susan Post didn't know the first thing about spinning when she decided to introduce it at A Good Yarn. She contacted her local spinning guild and found a spinner to come in one day a week to provide customer support. "[She] has been the key to my program's success. Customers plan their visits for the day they know she will be in the store," Post explains.

Recruit from multiple sources: Post your listing on your shop bulletin board, in the local newspaper, on Craigslist and with your local guild. Because many spinners own fiber-bearing animals, try finding a source for grain feed to see if they know anyone who'd be interested. Ask other fiber mavens to spread the word that you're looking for a skilled spinner. Area spinners are sure to hear about it.

Ask all potential support employees to fill out an application and check their references. In your interview, find out if they have the communication skills to work well with you and your customers. Make sure that the candidate has expertise in the brands that you carry and knowledge of both spinning wheels and spindles in addition to knowing how to make yarn.

It is important to have good open communication with this hire. Share with her your goals. Offer incentives: As your sales grow, so will her remuneration. Once you get an expert on board, treat this person well. She is the key to future sales.

Liz Gipson (www.lizgipson.com) offers content marketing to the yarn industry; she specializes in video production, workshops and staff training, market planning and pattern support.



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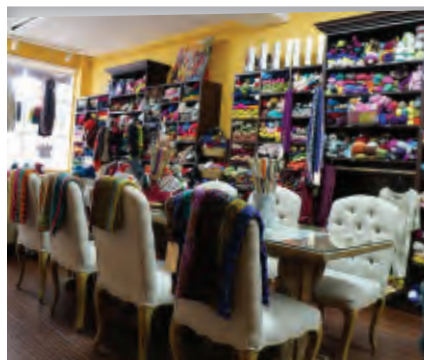
The Knitting Place

Port Washington, New York

BY DARYL BROWER

Old school. That's how Dina Mor describes The Knitting Place, the yarn shop she runs in Port Washington, New York. With 16 years in the yarn business under her belt, Mor is hardly the new kid on the block, nor is her mentor, Rose Girone, who just turned 101. Good yarn, sound technical advice and a welcoming sense of camaraderie is the tried-and-true formula Mor uses to keep customers engaged and her store thriving.

In 1997, Mor was that new kid—one of the youngest faces on the floor at the first TNNA trade show she attended. "It's become the norm now, but there just weren't many young



women opening stores at that time," she recalls. Mor picked up needles during her first pregnancy and found solace in stitching after a subsequent miscarriage. "I needed to do something for myself," she says. She toyed with the idea of opening a jewelry store but decided knitting would be a better fit. "It was something I loved and a business that I thought would allow me to work and be with my kids," she says. She turned for advice to Girone, who'd owned a shop of her own for 40 years before retiring (the two met in a yarn shop in Great Neck when Mor was seeking help with a project). "She told me, 'Open the store; the customers will come,'" Mor recalls.

And come they did, drawn by the inviting atmosphere and the shop's custom pattern design and finishing services. "I'm a firm believer in helping knitters turn out projects that look handmade, not homemade," Mor declares. "A professional-looking sweater is a walking advertisement for the store." She admits to doing a lot of customer handholding, encouraging them

to try new colors, mix yarns from different fiber companies ("You'd be surprised by how many people are afraid to do that," she says), and writing patterns specific to her customers' styles and measurements. The custom work, she says, is key to bringing shoppers back to the store. "Some knitters like to figure things out for themselves, but we cater to the ones who want the guesswork taken out of the equation," she says. "They bring in a picture from a magazine, and I write them a pattern they know will fit when they've finished knitting it. We check their gauge, check their measurements and often do the finishing for them. It builds loyalty and gives them a reason to keep coming back."

The Knitting Place offers a solid class list, but Mor says it's been a challenge to keep the classes filled. "We have a diverse group of customers with different interests and different schedules," she explains. "Finding a time slot that will work for retirees, stay-at-home moms and working women alike is tough." Her solution has been to offer private lessons. "The customer gets exactly what she wants with one-on-one attention—or one-on-two-to-three in the case of private group lessons," she explains. "It's a better fit for most of the customers."

Between the hours of 11 and 1 on days the shop is open, customers can reserve 15-minute appointment slots for free help; anything longer gets billed at a rate of \$15 for 30 minutes. "Of course we won't say no to helping a customer outside these hours, but there has to be the understanding that we may have to stop to assist other customers," Mor says. "Most people are respectful of that, but we found it best to set parameters for dedicated help."

The store stays open late on Thursdays for a knitting night where customers can stitch and socialize in the shop's living-room-like setup. (No food or drink, though, as Mor believes that coffee and cashmere don't mix.) Special events like trunk shows and guest speakers are often on the agenda, but Mor avoids running sales. "I think sales train customers to hoard yarns and to wait for [price reductions]," she says. "And I don't think yarn really has a shelf life. If a particular yarn isn't moving, I come up with a new project for it and make a sample—that usually gets it out the door."

Mor claims to be a bit tech-averse but under-



stands the necessity of an online presence and social media in today's market. In January, she set up a booth at the Vogue Knitting LIVE event in New York City, seeing it as an opportunity to get the store's name out to a wider audience and build interest in the e-commerce site that was in the works as this issue went to press. She's also been using the store's Facebook page, Instagram and Pinterest to further foster the sense of community that's been the backbone of her business since the get-go. "I'm posting pictures of customer projects, tagging them in photos, with permission of course, and giving people a personal stake in the store," she says.

"It's a challenge," she says of running the shop. "This is a much different business than it was when I started. You have keep trying new things and reinventing yourself to keep up. There's a big learning curve, but I'm still willing to learn."



Snapshot

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Port Washington, NY 11050

(516) 944-9276; www.theknittingplaceny.com

Years in business: 16

Square footage: 500

Staff: 3-4 part-time floaters

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Thursday: 11 A.M.-6 P.M.

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The Knitting Culture of Amsterdam

BY NANCY MARCHANT

When I think of my current hometown, Amsterdam, I think of rain, bicycles, small houses, rain, houseboats, historical canals, the flower market, rain, French fries with mayonnaise, narrow streets, more bikes and more rain. But also yarn. With its cold and damp weather, Amsterdam is a great city in which to snuggle up with a cup of *snert* (green pea soup) or *warne chocolade melk met slagroom* (hot chocolate with a mountain of whipped cream) and knit.

I have lived in Amsterdam since the 1970s and have seen yarn stores, and the popularity of knitting, come and go. The Dutch used to knit out of necessity: It was common for mothers to knit socks and hats to keep their families warm, and it was cheaper than buying readymade. I don't need to tell you that things have certainly changed.

Yarn stores in Amsterdam today are a reflection of how Amsterdammers live: small. The Dutch prefer the word *gezellig* (cozy). Most of the 7,000 buildings in the city were laid out in the 16th and 17th centuries, when you paid taxes based on the width of your house. As a result, buildings were kept lean. This gives Amsterdam its overall character but limits the amount of space available to shop owners, requiring them to be selective and innovative in their inventories and merchandising.

One never knows what one will find at the popular yarn shop Penelope Craft. Owner Malia Mather began her business as a web store but in 2011 opened a bricks-and-mortar location; she's since moved to the current location (Kerkstraat 117) to accommodate the growing request for classes and room for customers to sit and knit—they now meet every Thursday night. The shop offers yarn from all over the globe, reflecting the international population of the city: Madelinetosh

and Cascade from the U.S., Lopi from Iceland, Skein from Australia, Malabrigo from Uruguay. Mather stocks yarns from Germany and Denmark as well as those designed by the fascinating Belgian boys Bart & Francis and dyed by Amsterdam's own colorist Loret Karmin. If you happen by, chances are that you'll see resident designer *extraordinaire* Stephen West (pictured top right with Mather) voraciously knitting his latest piece.

De Afstap, at Oude Leliestraat 12, opened more than 40 years ago; today the knowledgeable staff sells yarns from England (Rowan), Japan (Noro and ITO), Chile (Araucania), Sweden (Mora Redgarn), China (Lotus) and Estonia (Aade Long), as well as kits by Christel Seyfarth. Carla Meijssen and Hilly van der Sluis, known as "The Dutch Knitters," teach classes there, specializing in Estonian, Scandinavian and advanced knitting techniques. The walls are covered with hand knits that are for sale and for inspiration. Large overflowing shelves filled with books and magazines have been installed under the steep Dutch staircase that leads up to the classroom.

The natural, neutral palette of Weldraad (Haarlemmerdijk 147) is a calming backdrop for eye-candy yarns that are also offered at the nearby organic market on the Nieuwmarkt. Owner Anna Amenta specializes in environmentally friendly brands of wool, including sustainable, Fair Trade, ecologically produced and dyed yarns. You'll find Icelandic Lopi; mohair from South African angora



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALEXANDRA FEO

goats; organic wool from Denmark; Fair Trade alpaca and Pakucho cotton from Peru; Zitron Nimbus, an organic merino from Germany; and Garthenor Organic Pure Wool from traditional and rare breeds of British sheep. Amenta's customers appreciate the purity of the natural-colored yarns arrayed on the walls. (She keeps the dyed yarns in drawers under her wall display.) With the coming trend for simplicity, she has certainly met the mark for fall.

There are more than 20 different knitting groups around Amsterdam. Some meet in the afternoons at community centers, others are organized for working lunches, but most meet in the evenings at a café or yarn shop. Groups are generally small because the places where they gather cannot accommodate large numbers. Again, the word *gezellig* comes to mind.

The city's first knitting group started in 2004, when Annemarie Borst, a Dutch woman who had belonged to a group in Atlanta, could not find anything similar when she returned to Amsterdam. Stitch 'n' Bitch Amsterdam—English-speaking knitters of different nationalities and of all ages—meets on



Monday nights at a café. The group has an active Ravelry forum at stitch-n-bitch-amsterdam.com.

Another group that meets regularly is Stitch 'n Bitch Amsterdam De Pijp, which meets at a café in De Pijp, a neighborhood most famous for its outdoor market, the Albert Cuypmarkt. The group maintains a blog (snbamsterdam.blogspot.nl) and sponsors knit-alongs that are joined by nonmember and international knitters through the Ravelry group stitch-n-bitch-amsterdam-de-pijp.

Katie's Cozy Crafts Corner is a once-a-month craft club. Hostess Katie Holder offers a craftini bar (DIY cocktails) and cupcakes; she opens the doors to De Nieuwe Anita, a community center, to anyone who wants to get crafty. This highly attended event attracts as many men as women. According to the group's mission, "We welcome crafters of all persuasions: knitters, stitchers, hookers, jewelers, weavers of bellybutton fluff.... Heck, you into something kinky with string? Who are we to judge?"

If it is diversity you are looking for, Amsterdam yarn stores and knitting groups certainly oblige. You'll find veterans and beginners, knitters arriving on their bikes or coming by tram, speaking every language under the sun.

Nancy Marchant, a native of Indiana, has lived in Amsterdam for more than 35 years. It was there that she discovered the brioche stitch. She is author of *Knitting Brioche*, teaches Explorations of Brioche Knitting on craftsy.com and is queen of the domain briochestitch.com.

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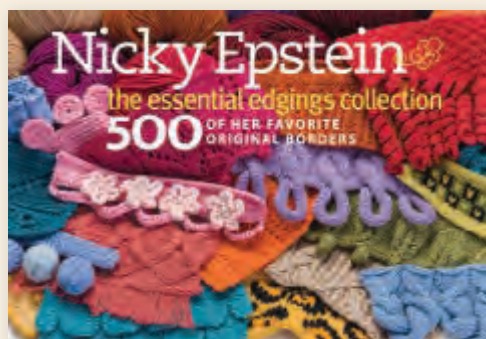


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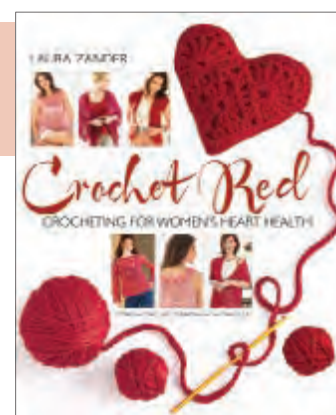
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YOURS TRULY

By Rebecca Klassen

On the scale from small and local to major player, where does your store fall? By cultivating branded product, a handful of LYSes occupy both ends of the spectrum.

Creating your own store product as a marketing strategy is familiar retail territory. From holiday kits to patterns to logo-emblazoned tote bags, devising fun ways to sell while building loyalty—indeed, a community—is your trade concern. As entrepreneurs, LYSOs provide creative tools for people to make things, so it stands that you might make a few things yourself. What takes these items from localized promo to the buzz-generating next level is a strong brand vision backed by compelling design and the means for reaching a broad audience.

Branded products can be potent ways for customers to engage emotionally with your store. By reinforcing or forging associations, it's entirely possible to expand consumer awareness of your business to national and international levels while staying true to your small retail identity. Several LYSes have found a way to strike this balance by selling their distinctive products online.

Destination: Your Store

"Small retailers need to differentiate themselves, because they can't compete on price against the bigger retailers," says Randi Kofman, vice president of sales and marketing for Vianza (vianza.com), a web-based marketplace and platform for small retailer and wholesaler collaboration. Exclusive or store-brand products "take price-price comparison out of the equation, because the consumer isn't buying the exact same thing at 20,000 stores."

Linda Morse of String in New York City agrees: "The more exclusives associated with my brand that I have, the better off I am." String has been at the store-brand product game for eight of its eleven years, offering a range of 100 percent cashmere yarns dyed in trend-based colors, as well as silk and silk blends. Morse has also done co-branded exclusives with Koigu, Zealana and Artyarns. "Our whole strategy is to be the high-end luxury store," she says. "Having yarn of this caliber and quality feeds right in, associating our brand with very special yarn." Within her model, price wars are "not really appropriate." Plus, she says, there was a cashmere niche to fill, the margins are better, and there's greater pricing flexibility. String also releases a few kitted designs each month in its "classic with an edge" New York style,



typically using its exclusive yarn though often providing a more affordable merino alternative in the same gauge.

Product mix plays a pivotal role in communicating the personality of your store, reflecting your tastes, habits, hobbies, ethics and values. Are you multicraftual, sock-centric or an earth-aware store? As sociologists and anthropologists who study consumption theorize, customers form emotional responses to the goods they encounter as they decide whether they want to incorporate what they find into their own identities and everyday experiences. “Is this me,” they might ask, or “Is this an aspect of the person I want to become?” After all, they’re choosing what to wear, put in their homes and show off to their knitting groups. Consider how your store’s personality can win friends and influence people while passionately rocking out to the beat of a different and memorable drummer.

Darcy Cameron, owner of Knit Purl in Portland, Oregon, describes the store’s ideal customer reaction to its product mix as a “relaxing and luxurious shopping experience filled with surprise and delight. We want people to gasp, ‘Oh my gosh! Did you see this?’” Under consideration is an exclusive Knit Purl brand yarn line, which would reinforce that image. She views her wholesale yarn brand, Shibui—founded in 2007 as a separate company but recently incorporated under the Knit Purl banner—as a distinct yet complementary brand. It’s “more visually vivid and much more cutting edge,” she says, but the store clearly benefits on an aesthetic, experiential and awareness level from the association (even though “family eats last” in terms of fulfillment). “Shibui is becoming more widely available but still fits our model with its uniqueness. That’s what we’re looking for in our product mix: to find things that are interesting and exciting for our customers so that when they want something special, they come to us.”

In short, products play a major role in constructing your brand image. Your own brand products can reflect and reinforce that image and allow customers to link their specific needs to your location. Take Churchmouse Yarns & Teas in Bainbridge Island, Washington, as an example of how that can work in tandem with a clear brand vision. When Kit Hutchin opened the store in

2000, “She wanted a yarn shop that wouldn’t be like any other, just so people would remember it,” recalls John Koval, her husband and store co-owner. With a mind for detail, Hutchin formed the store’s visual vocabulary—black ribbon with white printing, natural linen and English pine fixtures—to create a signature aesthetic. Churchmouse is “personal, kind, beautiful, traditional, welcoming and utilitarian,” says Koval.

Hutchin’s keen attention to branding and the retail “experience” has helped the store become a tourist destination, through word of mouth, key editorial coverage and traveling knitters’ propensities for visiting unique yarn stores, despite its geographic isolation—a small-town location a half-hour ferry ride from Seattle. And, says Koval, “We want to make sure that when people come to visit, we have something they might not find anywhere else.” Beyond their logo-marked tins of notions, Churchmouse goods include wholesale pattern lines, lanolin soap from Yorkshire, linen project bags and linen tea cozies made by a local seamstress, and four custom, season-themed co-branded tea blends by Tazo Teas founder Steve Smith. All work within the shop’s brand identity.

Going on Experience

Store brand products allow customers to consume the store’s specific image, to bring the embodied lifestyle into their own homes and lives. Whenever they look at, think about or use that item, they will tie it to a specific location: yours. Good products help customers recall positive feelings about your store. For instance, a Yelp reviewer of Churchmouse says, “Every time I make myself a cup of their special Summer Tea, I think of our fabulous trip!” That’s a very deep form of loyalty.

For Loopy Mango in New York City, the decision to sell yarn was a survival strategy, but one that owners Waejong Kim and Anna Pulvermakher have maximized through a constellation of store-brand products and multiple channels. They opened the store in 2004 to sell their hand-crocheted jewelry; three locations later, Loopy Mango had morphed into its current lifestyle format with an eclectic assortment of antiques, gifts and ready-to-wear,

reminiscent of a Paris flea market. When they found their current SoHo spot, scaffolding covered the block. Realizing that knitters go to great lengths to find yarn regardless of street visibility, they added the category in 2011 and broadcast the fact via Google AdWords. That year, they brought in Loopy Mango branded yarns: a thick-and-thin and a super-bulky in alpaca and merino versions.

Why create a store brand? “When people buy it, you want them to associate your name with that product so you can sell more,” says Pulvermakher. “If it’s a good quality product, they associate that idea of good quality every time they see ‘Loopy Mango’ on something else.” This concept became part of their big-gauge, big-results yarn pedagogy, as well as their fashion-forward yet beginner-friendly kits, marketed as “haute couture in a bag.” A fashion photo shoot for their initial collection, styled using items they carried, was key: “A lot of people say they want to make the project because the image appeals to them so much.” For non-stitching customers, the partners have returned to hand production. They’ve also developed store-brand 30mm crochet hooks and U.S. size 15 circulars to work their super-bulkies.

Strong customer response led the Loopy team to remodel the store layout, giving yarn pride of place, and the category is the best-performing on their website. Four dedicated flash sales on design-oriented Fab.com for their kits and garments gave them great national exposure; because Fab members browsing the sales tend to do Internet searches for the companies and products, Loopy Mango site traffic spiked with each flash sale. However, “at this point, we’re not a yarn store,” Pulvermakher emphasizes. “We’re a lifestyle boutique, and our lifestyle happens to include knitting.” This perspective works well for them, though, because customers can see how Loopy’s edgy designs could work for their own lifestyles.

For Suzanne Middlebrook, who opened Hill Country Weavers in Austin, Texas, in 1981, differentiation through product has been reinvigorating. “For a long time, I was the only store in town, so it was easy to open the door every day and not have to do a lot to be successful,” she says. “Then I got in a rut. Now that ‘the Internet’ is such a huge competitor, you have to step up your game, figure out ways to stand out or be noticed. That’s one of the challenges, but it’s also the fun of it.”

When Brooklyn Tweed approached the store to be among its limited number of yarn retailers, Middlebrook seized the opportunity by gathering local designers to create a pattern collection around Shelter—giving the Northeast-pedigreed yarn a southern twist—and added an online shop in 2010. The patterns, distributed wholesale as PDFs and books, now include other, more widely available yarns and a few rigid-heddle weaving projects, recalling the store’s roots. They’re still in what Middlebrook considers an Austin style: feminine, vintage-inspired modern. “We have a look that’s different. I wanted our patterns to reflect our world, and for people to absorb it on more than one level,” she says.

Grab Your Partner

Alternate routes to unique product, aside from goods that you sell wholly under your brand, are maker- or manufacturer-labeled exclusives and co-branding. When missions are complementary, co-branding can be a great way to take advantage of respective strengths in order to extend the brands or expand audiences to mutual benefit. For instance, String’s cashmere cachet meets the well-known Koigu hand-paint KPPPM in the co-branded

Koigu Cashmere yarn sold exclusively by the store.

Teaming up with companies in your area to create exclusive or co-branded items can give out-of-towners a sense of the local flavor while supporting the local economy. Knit Purl, for example, worked with Flora, a fellow downtown Portland boutique, on a Knitter’s Hand Butter whose label bears Flora’s graphics but includes the words “made exclusively for Knit Purl.” “We get a lot of tourists, and they like to see what’s local,” says Darcy Cameron. “We can bring some of that to them and also have unique products that are fun for knitters.”

The Yarn Company in New York City has used exclusives, both co-branded and maker-branded, as part of its brand and mission overhaul. When Tavy and Assaf Ronen bought the 33-year-old store in 2011, the siblings inherited the stock, original fixtures and poor Yelp ratings, which, says Assaf, “was liberating because we felt free to make really big changes.” Though they were sentimental about the store’s historical importance, Tavy says the

existing product mix and business model “just wasn’t our taste.” The store now encompasses a full range of fiber techniques, and though the Ronens carry some of the same yarns, “conceptually our focus is on indies rather than the previous stock,” Tavy says. They describe the brand personality as “colorful individualism” and “whimsy” and are aesthetically inspired by downtown New York City culture during the 1970s and ‘80s (think Keith Haring and graffiti art).

Assaf’s initial instinct was to create new products with small, socially conscious companies. But store-brand product has proved less appealing to the Ronens than leveraging the maker’s brand, either entirely or with a “made exclusively for” copy line. The approach also meshes with their values. “We believe in collaboration,” says Tavy. “We want to excite the knitting world a little bit.” At the New York International Gift Fair, they found Queens-based First World Trash, which worked with Assaf on a series of co-branded knitting bags using recycled billboard materials; a social

enterprise that manufactures their store brand project bags in New Orleans; and Chilean eco-company Costavolcano, which makes an exclusive, co-branded organic alpaca lace yarn. A partnership with Soul Wool, an Israeli yarn company that works with Bedouin women, reflects the Ronens’ Israeli-American heritage. They also work with dyers on exclusive colorways, which they give brand-evoking names. A nine-colorway collection by Koigu named “Space Dust” was inspired by the palette of David Bowie’s facepaint on the *Aladdin Sane* album cover. “Customers who follow independent dyers know that if they come here, they can see a pretty extensive collection of their favorites,” says Tavy. Another contingent responds to patterns by established and rising star designers, kitted using the exclusive colorways.

Fancy Tiger Crafts in Denver, Colorado, takes a different approach to co-branding with its new Heirloom yarn, a 100 percent American Romney worsted that debuted at TNNA in February with a display in the Elemental Affects booth. Jeane deCoster of Elemental Affects handles sourcing, production and wholesale orders; Fancy Tiger owners Jaime Jennings and Amber Corcoran developed the contemporary color palette and handle marketing and promotion, including pattern support. Jennings describes the Fancy Tiger aesthetic as “clean, modern design” with “old-timey” touches, such as the store’s hand-painted signage and antique windmill as ceiling fan. “Americana and the prairie are big inspirations.” The labels bear the store’s



Branded products mean engaged customers.

branding—particularly with its hand-drawn elements—but credit the maker: “Milled and dyed in the U.S. by Elemental Affects for Fancy Tiger.” “It’s great to work with her and promote her yarns, too,” says Jennings. Heirloom’s rustic texture, which fits both companies’ homegrown sensibility, is “not for everyone, because people are into very soft yarns these days, but we’re into educating the customer on the value of a coarser wool, which holds up to wear better.” Primarily, they see Corcoran’s graphic design skills as a vehicle for telling the yarn’s story. “It’s exciting for us to get the Fancy Tiger brand out there,” says Jennings. “We really believe in the yarn and in supporting U.S. mills and farmers, so it’s important that yarns like this are on the market.”

Closing the Distance

Unique products can play a critical role in making a store a capital-D destination that’s not only worth the trip but worth returning to. And the truth is, e-commerce makes that easy. At Churchmouse, says John Koval, they realized that “in order to share this experience with a wider audience, we either had to bring them to Bainbridge Island or reach out to them on our website,” which the couple enabled with e-commerce in 2012. Travelers can maintain relationships with discovered shops, whether they’re replenishing items or couldn’t get them the first time around. Linda Morse at String estimates that 30 percent of the shop’s sales come from online shoppers. “We want customers who come to New York to have the String experience and, when they go back home, to order from us,” she says. “We have customers who we’ll see maybe once every two years but who order month after month.

“It was clear to me that we weren’t [only] a neighborhood business, because what we were selling was something that people all over were interested in getting,” continues Morse. The luxury market, though “not very deep,” has enough demand and few purveyors, so String launched its e-commerce website around the same time the exclusive yarns debuted. “To be a major player in that market, in my opinion, you have to make your product available to anybody worldwide who wants it, so we did,” she says.

Social media’s advantages come into sharper focus when shopping carts are a stone’s throw from the “share” button. “Our customers are from around the world now,” says Tavy Ronen, largely due to The Yarn Company’s highly active Facebook page. In two years, the page has amassed nearly 37,500 likes, particularly from Latin Americans. Recently, the Ronens have begun reaching out to these areas by offering free shipping to specific countries for a month, starting with Argentina.

If e-commerce is a daunting notion, online marketplaces can be a way to ease in. Fancy Tiger sells patterns, Heirloom yarn and store-brand needle-felting and felt stitching kits through an Etsy shop that is linked to from Fancy Tiger’s website. Revamping the site is on the docket, but for now, “We can put stuff up without having to do web development,” says Jaime Jennings. Marketplaces can also expose your store to a broader audience.

Selling on the Internet is not for everyone, of course, and neither is product development. As Morse says, “It doesn’t come easy or cheap.” Or you may feel it doesn’t jibe with your values or aspirations. Yet locavore values have diffused from food to other sectors, especially for consumers in search of distinctive products—something we see reflected in the rise of indie dyed and heritage breed yarns—so that for consumers with tight schedules, patronizing small bricks-and-mortar retailers, albeit online, can still make them feel they are “shopping local.”

For Suzanne Middlebrook of Hill Country Weavers, the bottom line is that “you have to have a relevant reason to get someone in, whether it’s that they know they’re going to see something different or the most current, asked-for yarn. Our biggest challenge regarding this new way of shopping is that there’s not a lot of local yarn shop loyalty: It’s so much easier to shop on your iPad or computer sometimes than it is to actually go somewhere. All we can sell is an experience, and I think that’s why we’re doing as well as we are right now—we’re selling our style. People are buying an experience more than they’re buying a product.”

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Hopefully Devoted

Find out why so many LYSOs are dedicated to loyalty programs that reward their true-blue regulars.

By Leslie Petrovski



About six months after opening, Kelly Dolan, owner of Wild Yarns in Denver, Colorado, launched a loyalty program. Because of her location in the Mile High City and her store's emphasis on local and regional products, she decided to reward loyal customers after they purchased 5,280 feet of yarn.

"After people buy a mile of yarn, which is 1,760 yards, they get 15 percent off their next purchase," she explains. "It really benefits people who buy sock yarn and who knit sweaters, because it doesn't take that long to get to 1,760 yards. If you're a sock knitter, that's just a little more than four skeins of sock yarn."

In the year since the program has been in place, Dolan has signed about 1,000 yarn buyers into the program. "I have this really great customer," Dolan says. "In a month and a half, maybe two months, she's reached a mile twice."

In an era in which consumers can compare prices by snapping product photos with their cell phones and snap up digital deals through services like Living Social, engaging customers is more important than ever.

"This is a marketing age, and engagement is really important," says Leanne Pressly, marketing consultant to the fiber industry and founder of the Wool Wide Web. "Loyalty programs are great for that."

An article in *Retailing Today* called loyalty programs "one of the hottest trends for retailers in 2013," citing the success of Starbucks' revamped program, My Starbucks Rewards, as an example. *Forbes* chimed in with "Will 2013 be the year of the loyalty program?" discussing the evolution of programs that reward customers not only for purchases but also for engaging in social media (a free coffee for liking one's Facebook page) or registering on a website (a free knitting pattern).

"Providing rewards around engagement online," writes *Forbes* contributor Kelly Clay, "encourages users to come back to the site outside of advertising campaigns, which benefits the business beyond a tangible purchase while also benefiting the customer with a tangible reward."

Yarn shops offer reward programs for a variety of reasons. Sandy Gray, owner of The Yarn Haven in Knoxville, Tennessee, instituted a loyalty program to differentiate her shop from local competitors and to "incent" strong buyers.

"I wanted to encourage more people to come in more than anything, and I also wanted to give a little bit back," she says. "There are several shops in the area. If you offer something, you make it easier for customers to be loyal."

The Knitter's Edge in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, launched its Edge Dollars Rewards Program on February 1 to replace the 10 percent materials discount it used to offer students in classes. For every \$50 a customer spends on anything (with the exception of shipping), she receives a \$5 store credit, which can be used after 30 days; the customer then has 60 days to use the reward. (The 30-day wait is to discourage customers from returning merchandise immediately after collecting the reward.) Everything is tracked on the store's POS system, QuickBooks Pro, which prints receipts detailing when a customer can spend the reward and when it expires.

"We wanted to find a way to reward good customers and thank our better customers, and this was the perfect solution," explains Amanda Johnson, who owns the store with her mother, JoAnne Turcotte. "It doesn't add to our workload and it gives our customers a 10 percent discount, which is what we were doing for our classes. We decided this was a better route to take."

Loyalty programs come in all shapes and sizes, from paper punch cards to virtual loyalty cards that live on customers' smartphones, a tactic that takes advantage of the so-called digital wallet concept.

The Portland-based yarn shop Happy Knits did away with its own loyalty program after adopting a POS system—Merchant OS—that didn't manage rewards. Instead it joined a shop-local program called Supportland, a rewards system (card and upcoming iPhone app) that serves 149 Rose City businesses. At Happy Knits, customers earn digital "punches" for every \$15 spent there. (Customers also get "points" for shopping at other participating businesses.) Their tenth punch earns them a Happy Knits Knit Kit Bag with "scout book" (a Happy Knits-branded graph paper journal) and tape measure. Customers can also redeem 300 points to get a private knitting lesson.

In addition to its Supportland participation, Happy Knits randomly gives prime in-store and online customers goodies, such as a new yarn to try or a project bag. "We love giving away stuff," says shop manager Tai Faux. "We have a really good regular customer base, and we try to build relationships with our customers in any way we can. We try to give them little things here and there; plus, it's fun to give presents away."

At 3 Kittens Needle Arts in Mendota Heights, Minnesota, current owner

Laura Rasmussen scrapped the previous owner's old-school program that asked customers to save receipts for the promise of a 20 percent discount. Knowing she didn't want to tie up staff with tallying old receipts and reluctant to offer a full 20 percent off, Rasmussen decided to structure her program like a club, contracting with a company called Valutec, which tracks loyalty offers and supplies swipeable gift, loyalty and reward cards.

To enroll, 3K Club members pay a one-time fee of \$9.95; this entitles them to earn a \$50 gift card after spending \$500, a 15 percent off birthday coupon, free monthly patterns, early registration for special events like the recent Nancy Bush workshop and other perks. In the six years since implementing the program, the shop has signed up about 2,600 members out of an e-mail database of 3,500.

The 3K Club Valutec loyalty card systems works much the same way as a POS-based program. Every time a customer makes a purchase and the card is swiped, earned points (one for every dollar spent) display on the receipt. When a stitcher hits the \$500 mark, 3K staffers bang a small gong in the store, an event that happens two to four times a day. The gong also provides an opportunity to begin the conversation about the 3K Club with stitchers curious about why folks are getting gonged.

"It's the only time you get gonged, and it's a good thing," says Rasmussen. "It really livens up the store."

Yarn shops with loyalty programs maintain that they're effective. "For me it's worth it because it makes customers feel good," Kelly Dolan says. "And 15 percent off is not a huge discount."

At the year-and-a-half-old Stash in Ardmore, Pennsylvania, owner Joann Zimmerman, who uses the cloud-based POS PayGo to manage her loyalty program (for every \$200 spent, customers get a \$10 gift certificate), thinks her 5 percent reward system definitely motivates customers. "For us the purpose wasn't to bring in new customers; we're a new shop, so we get new customers anyway. We want to reward them for coming into the shop and to recognize people who make larger purchases. Some get reward points every month."

Amanda Johnson at The Knitter's Edge has discovered that her loyalty program has spurred customers who live at a distance to stock up, so they'll have a credit waiting for them in turn. On the flip side, she's also discovered that the automatic tracking on receipts shows customers exactly how much they're spending on yarn, which has pulled some stitchers up short. "Before, they had no idea what they were spending," she says. "There was a lot of impulse buying. Now they can see."

Though Rasmussen estimates that the Valutec program costs her \$150 a month in addition to the cost of the cards—about \$600 a year—she

In an era in which consumers can compare prices by snapping product photos with their cell phones and snap up digital deals through services like Living Social, engaging customers is more important than ever.



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thinks the outlay is “worth it, and I’ll tell you why: There are 30 yarn stores in the Twin Cities. I think it brings people back to our store—they know they will get something back if they buy something here. It makes them think twice about buying something at another store. Otherwise, our gong wouldn’t be sounding every day.”



Planning to
start a **loyalty**
program?
Here are some
ideas to get
you started:

Rewarding Your Besties

Ask customers what they want.

If you’re considering a loyalty program, conduct an unscientific poll on Facebook or a short SurveyMonkey questionnaire asking customers what they would like to see in one. You may think they want discounts, but they may prefer other benefits.

Make it easy.

If you have a card-based system, consider keeping the cards on site; that way, customers don’t lose out on points if they forget their cards. Kelly Dolan of Wild Yarns, who has a paper-based system, says, “Customers are always relieved when they hear I’m going to keep the cards.”

Train employees.

Most rewards programs have a few rules, and the last thing you want is a customer who thinks she’s entitled to something she isn’t. “Make sure your employees understand it,” says Amanda Johnson of The Knitter’s Edge. “I wrote it all down for them and still found some employees were explaining the policy incorrectly. Make sure customers understand. You don’t want them to feel like they’re getting ripped off when you’re trying to do something nice for them.”

Make it earn its keep.

Use your loyalty program as an excuse to personalize e-mail messages to customers. If someone is \$20 away from a gift card, remind her that she’s just a skein or two away from a treat to get her back in the shop.

Manage program changes.

Before making any changes to an existing program, let people know early and often—and explain your rationale. Customers get cranky and vocal if they perceive that a perk is being taken away.

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The Best-Laid Plan...

An LYS business plan isn't carved in stone.
Revamp yours to reflect retail reality and reap the benefits.

By Cheryl Krementz

Business plans start out like the Declaration of Independence—defining in no uncertain terms the what and why for of your shop. But once you're operational, your business plan is more akin to the Constitution—an adaptable, amendable reflection of the goals you expect to meet, as well as those to which you aspire. Too lofty a metaphor? Marti Lawrence of Needles in the Haymarket in Haymarket, Virginia, likens her business plan to "a pirate's code."

Lawrence bought the existing shop last May, in what became a "time-is-of-the-essence deal," she says. Though she did attempt to start with a fully written business plan, the hurried nature of the transaction led her to begin instead with only a bare-bones plan. "I view my basic plan as a starting point that is not set in stone and is constantly under revision. It's more like a set of guidelines"—hence the pirate's code analogy, Lawrence says. Since opening, she's learned the shop business on the fly, tweaking her business plan "mainly on what I changed to renovate the interior of the shop," she explains. "Moving out old stock and bringing in a few new lines have been my main focus, along with maintaining a constant supply of needles and notions. I've had to revamp space allotment for cross-stitch and needlepoint (inherited with the shop) several times, and I may finally have that figured out."

"In reality, my sales are moving closer to my original plan and vision for the shop," Lawrence continues. "I do need to do some thinking and rewriting and focus on several areas I didn't consider as closely in my original plan." For example? "I have a better idea now of how to plan and manage the budget. I had to put off [purchasing] a new computer and POS but hope to have them by July of this year."

In contrast, Lisa Ruesch and Kristine Porritt of Cream City Yarn in Brookfield, Wisconsin, opened shop two years ago, bolstered by "a very lengthy and thorough business plan. We used the plan to acquire financing for both start-up expenses and an operating line of credit. The creation of our plan was critical, since it helped us put together our vision of the LYS we wanted. It explained our vision and communicated our proposed financial success based on its implementation."

The partners have revisited their plan annually and will continue to do so. "We treat it as a living document and use it to measure our success," Ruesch and Porritt write. "We have made many adjustments, most of which are based on our experience and marketing focus. We use statistical data to analyze events and set goals for future events. Most of our adjustments have come from our classes/teaching model and related sales. Initially, we didn't realize how significant a factor our classes would be. We're also seeing success from the implementation of event-type programs—trunk shows, vendor presentations, anniversary events—which were not part of our original business plan."

Perhaps because of these pleasant surprises, Cream City Yarns is exceeding its original model, and the owners were able to pay off their loan within 18 months of opening. Ruesch and Porritt use TNAA-provided financial data (available to all members) to support their number-crunching, which they say has been "very helpful. Much of the data and statistics we used are in line with our experience. Accuracy has been plus/minus 1–3 percent."

"A business plan is a guideline to get you started on the right

path, but as it happens, you come to unexpected crossroads and detours along the way, both positive and negative. The business plan never looks the same after a few months of reality,” says Joe Grushkin, founder, CEO and president of B2B Global Network (www.b2bglobalnetwork.com). “Revisiting your original plan can be a good thing and a bad thing. Being too rigid can cause you to miss huge opportunities. At the same time, not knowing your plan can put you off-course, which can be costly. My advice is to know your plan at a visceral level and make decisions with the plan in mind, but with an eye out for opportunity.”

Grushkin offers an example: “Your plan might call for only three employees, and you have them in place. But as it happens, that fourth person comes along who you know will increase your sales [because she has advanced skills, a network of clients or a large following],” he elaborates. “It’s OK to take a short-term risk on this person, even though [the hire] is outside the plan. But you need to monitor her results or determine if someone else should be cut to keep you within the plan. That said, as sales increase, so should your plan.”

Let’s take a three-part look at how best to revamp an LYS business plan. The first—“The Bones of a Business Plan,” right—breaks down the structure of a basic plan. The second and third feature Q&As with experts who advise retail clients on how to make the most of their ever-changing business plans.

An Expert Analysis

As a longtime business coach and serial entrepreneur, Joe Grushkin has helped plenty of retail clients through the ins and outs of updating business plans. As the husband of an LYS store manager—he’s married to Pam Grushkin of Westport Yarns in Westport, Connecticut—he has even greater insight into yarn retailing than most small-business experts. He’s been a popular speaker and participant at past YMN Smart Business Conferences. For this article, we asked him what LYSOs should consider when looking to revamp their business plans.

YMN: When revamping a business plan, what are some subjects retailers should be most conscious of?

Joe Grushkin: Sales, staffing, inventory, personal income, personal expenses paid by the business. That said, you don’t want to “revamp” for revamping’s sake. Change is hard, and hard on a business. Your business needs continuity; make changes in stages, gradually, so that they are seen as enhancements by customers and staff. When making a change, be sure that all the “legs of the table are the same style and length”; otherwise the table will look funny and be uneven.

YMN: What kind of benchmarks should be built into a revamped business plan?

JG: This is all determined by the needs of the business and the ownership. They can be financial, personnel, products or guided by an exit strategy. Every LYS will be different and unique.

YMN: What aspects of a business plan do independent retailers often forget to include—or don’t realize they should include?

JG: They always seem to forget to pay themselves. Build in vacations, admin time, creative time and time to work on your business, not just “in” your business.

YMN: What are some mistakes you’ve seen small retailers make with their business plans?

JG: Being too detailed, too rigid and over-projecting sales (and under-projecting expenses). I like to set goals and projections in a range.

• **Forecast:** What I know will happen no matter what (financially I need this to happen).

(continued on page 60)

The Bones of a Business Plan

Before you revamp a business plan, you must have a base from which to work. Because every shop is unique, every shop’s business plan will look different, even if it’s developed off the same template. Many business-plan templates exist on the Internet; the one available from the Small Business Association (www.sba.gov) is often cited by prospective LYSOs as their base. Grushkin says the reliance on this particular template “is usually done to qualify for an SBA loan, so it ends up being in this format.” TNNA also offers a template in its *Starting Out Right* publication, available to members for free and to nonmembers for \$25. No matter the source of the template, all business plans should include the following sections:

The executive summary. This is where a shop owner declares her mission statement and identifies her niche. A company description—when the business was founded, by whom and where—goes here, along with important shop milestones, a sentence about the product line and the shop’s financials (how it was funded). Start-ups in search of financing and existing shops keeping current with local competition may also include a market analysis here.

Organization and management. This is where your shop’s organizational chart goes. From yourself on down, detail who does what in your store (include all staffers, even contract instructors and sample makers), what their duties are and what you pay them, including bonuses, incentives and yarn discounts. What the SBA calls the “legal structure of your business” is also part of this section. Detail your ownership information, whether you’re a sole proprietor, in a partnership or part of an S corp.

Service/product line. This is the meat of what you do. What’s on offer in your shop? Get specific. If you cater to sock knitters, talk about your stock of artisanal skinnies. If you’re the only shop in the vicinity to carry certain brands, say so. If you design house patterns protected by copyright, insert that info here, too.

Marketing and sales. What’s your overall marketing and sales strategy? This includes market penetration, growth potential and customer communication. Shop owners are usually strong on knowing their sales strategy; the marketing piece, however, has historically been confounding for the majority of LYSOs. As such, we asked expert Maria Ross to weigh in on how to revamp this section of your business plan; see her answers on page 60 in “Brand and the Plan.”

Financial projections. How much are you expecting to take in? According to the SBA, you should base this on historical financial data, including income statements, balance sheets and cash-flow statements for each year you’ve been in business as well as forecasted income statements and capital expenditure projections.

The Best-Laid Plan...

- **Projection:** This is my target, what I want to happen.
- **Goal:** This is what can happen if everything comes together at the highest levels possible.

By setting the above range, a business owner can gauge his or her level of activity and move within the business plan, knowing that each action, strategy and decision will be based on the targeted range for sales production, profitability or expenses.

YMN: How often should you measure retail realities against a business plan to know that things are working?

JG: A business owner should know her profitability on a daily basis. Although it makes you crazy after a while, at a minimum of once a month you need to see a P&L (factoring in inventory, etc.). Knowing where you stand is critical to success.

Anything measured can and will be improved, so measure everything, not only against your plan but against your expectations and your gut instincts as to what should be happening. If it's an expense, always look for ways to reduce it; if it's sales, always look for ways to increase them. Use relationships with other LYS owners to provide ideas and benchmarks that can prove beneficial. Retail realities can be excuses for poor performance, lack of planning or sales apathy. I always encourage a business owner to look into the mirror to find the true realities of the business.

YMN: What do you tell your clients about working up and reworking business plans?

JG: If you aren't looking to raise capital for your business, a business plan can be written on a cocktail napkin or the back of a diner place mat—some of the best ones are. It's more that the business owner takes the time to write it down, think big, set a strategy and then take action on it. A plan is only as good as the people who put it into motion.

As a sales manager, I would take a 4" by 4" piece of scrap paper and write down the key metrics (derived from spreadsheets and analysis) for my business—for example, number of sales recruits, average sales per rep, projected expenses, profits, etc.—then fold it up and slip it behind my driver's license in my wallet. A year later I would review it and check my results, and without exception, year after year, the results would be plus or minus 10 percent of what was on the paper, which still amazes me today.

There is a powerful energy in writing down your desires and goals and keeping them with you all the time. The universe will take over and bring it to you, if you are taking action on it. The trick is to write it, believe it, never doubt it, take action on it daily and allow it to happen—by getting out of your own way and not sabotaging your own success with doubt. Doubt and failure to take action are the ultimate business killers.

Brand and the Plan

Branding and marketing can be slippery catch-all concepts, difficult to define in a cut-and-dried business plan. Maria Ross, author of *Branding Basics for Small Business* and creator/chief brand strategist of Red Slice (www.redslice.com), was one of the most popular speakers at the YMN Smart Business Conference in Baltimore in March. Here, she gives expert advice on revamping the marketing/sales section of your business plan.

YMN: We've often heard that yarn shop owners haven't worked marketing into their original business plans or have given the area short shrift. What's the best way for a retailer who has concentrated on other aspects to integrate marketing into his or her business plan?

Maria Ross: I'd suggest first sitting down and thinking through a brand strategy for the business. Take a step back and look at the business as

a whole and how it is perceived from the customer's point of view. What value or benefits do you provide and for which would you like to be known? How are you different? Who is your ideal customer? What is the personality or "brand vibe" you are trying to convey? Answering these questions will help you clarify your brand, articulate your value more clearly and focus on your target audience. It will also enable you to begin seeing which marketing activities you may want to invest in and which ones would be a waste of time and money.

YMN: How should marketing and branding be broken down in a business plan?

MR: Branding and marketing are slightly different things but both should play a role in your business plan. Your brand strategy is the soul of your business. It includes mission, values, positioning and messaging. Once you determine your brand strategy, you can then build out your marketing plan: pricing, products/services offered, promotional activities, events, social media, advertising, even visual identity—logo, colors, design, signage, etc. In addition, outlining your brand strategy, mission and values will help you hire the right people, partner with the right suppliers and make all of those decisions more easily. With a clear brand strategy as your foundation, your marketing plans will be a lot more effective, streamlined and easier to pull together.

YMN: How specific do retailers need to get in their plans—down to, say, the number of Facebook posts a day? Or is a broader overview more helpful, as it lets shop owners tweak their strategies in real time?

MR: Take a broader view first and determine where you need to be before you dive into marketing tactics. You can set your scheduled activities based on what is doable for you, but you want to measure results, not actions. For example, first determine what tactics you will employ based on the brand strategy. Let's say you want to stay active on Facebook and Pinterest. Next, determine your goal for that marketing activity (foster community, build the fan base, increase referrals, etc.). Next, determine how often you will engage in that activity (once per day/twice per week). Finally, you can measure results based on your goals: number of shares, number of likes, number of new followers, etc. Marketing is all about tweaking and testing. Looking at the results and analytics will help you then tailor the plan up or down. Metrics matter in terms of seeing if you are making progress and if your brand is resonating with people and translating into more shop visitors or sales. But start with the goal first before determining frequency or metrics to measure.

YMN: What are some benchmarks niche shop owners should be striving for in their business plans?

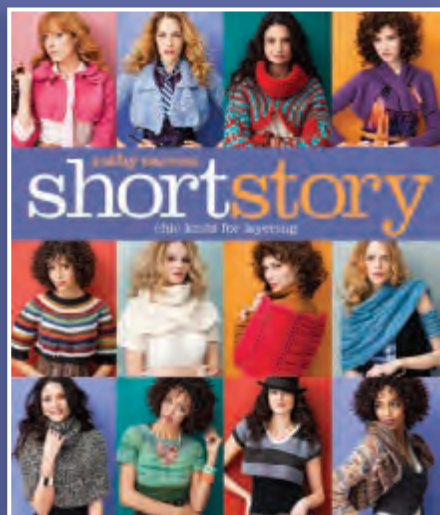
MR: Purely from a marketing perspective, the ultimate goals are awareness and sales. But creating a strong brand and reaching those goals takes time, so you'll want to track the stages to success along the way: daily store visitors, class signups, website visits, referrals, coupon redemptions, event attendees, press mentions, social media shares, e-mail newsletter signups, things like that. Set incremental growth goals and track progress along the way to ensure you're moving in the right direction.

YMN: How often should independent retailers revisit their marketing business plans?

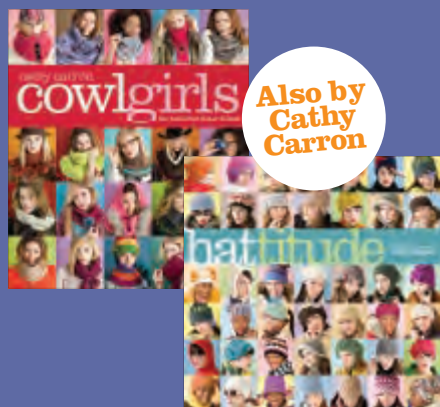
MR: You may want to revisit the marketing plan quarterly or twice a year at least. Markets change, new opportunities pop up. You want to ensure you are assessing results and success before moving on to the next thing.

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Chasing Betsy

Betsy Perry came to the knitting industry just ten years ago—the same amount of time she's been with Classic Elite Yarns.

Now the owner of the company, she sat down with YMN's Erin Slonaker to talk knitting, Twitter and yarn.



YMN: What brought you into the yarn industry?

BP: I was actually late to the work force. My generation [assumed] we'd be stay-at-home moms. I did that for a while, but it wasn't for me, so my mother suggested I look into computers, which in the early '80s were still relatively new. I took a class, took a bunch more, and got into IT. I was a project manager for a long while and then transitioned into sales. Eventually I got my MBA.

I got in this industry because I was looking for work. I had been in shoe sales but my department was eliminated. I saw a tiny ad in the *Boston Globe* for a sales manager for a yarn company. The interview process took about a year; [former Classic Elite Yarns owner] Pat [Chew] and I danced around it for a while, and I even took another job. But Pat tracked me down and asked me if I liked my new job. I had to admit I didn't, and she brought me in again to meet with her. For the second interview I went on a photo shoot, which was so interesting—seeing the product from a different vantage point.

YMN: What led you to buy Classic Elite?

BP: I started at CEY in 2003, and almost from the get-go Pat made comments about me buying the company. We always laughed about that, but when she got sick, we started talking about it more seriously. When she died, in 2008, we had a handshake agreement; it took another year before Pat's daughter and I completed the sale.

YMN: CEY has been around since 1980. What's it like to be at the helm of such an august company?

BP: There's a lot of responsibility to stay true to the brand, to stay true to our heritage while still moving forward.

YMN: Classic Elite was a family company until you took over. Will it continue to be?

BP: My children haven't expressed interest, but I'm hoping my [7-year-old] granddaughter will! It was important to Pat's daughter, as we negotiated the sale of the company, that I understood the family start that CEY had, and I value that. One thing that I always try to emphasize to people is that although CEY is no longer family owned, we're not a huge company. We're 12 people who all love yarn; 99 percent of us are

knitters, and we aim to produce things we like as well as things retailers, knitters and crocheters will like. We love that every time you call, you get the same people on the phone. We know our customers really well.

YMN: In Karin Strom's interview with Pat in 2007, she mentioned La Gran as a top seller. Does it still hold that status?

BP: La Gran has come and gone in popularity over the years—worsted-weight mohair isn't as popular as it once was—but it still sells very well, though not like it did in the Eighties, when Kristin Nicholas was designing those oversized mohair sweaters. It's actually used quite a bit by weavers, so it will always have a place in the marketplace.

YMN: You mention Kristin Nicholas, who was an early designer for Classic Elite. Patterns are such an important part of your company. How are you evolving your designs?

BP: We put out two collections every year that feature two designs in every single yarn we create—about 200 patterns a year. On top of that we put out a weekly web letter that also includes a free pattern. That's a lot of patterns. We still create hard-copy patterns, but we recognize that digital is important to the world of knitting, so we offer our patterns to retailers to sell as pdfs and through Ravelry.

YMN: What's new from CEY?

BP: We are always innovating within our existing lines and developing new yarns, and we like to take bestsellers and make them even better. We add three or more colors to every line each season, and we are always looking at our colors to be sure the options are current, retiring colors regularly. Plus, we have three new yarns and one line extension planned for fall.

YMN: You are now a regular on Twitter. What are your thoughts on social media?

BP: I really like it. I don't post a lot, but at least once I day I check Twitter and Facebook to see what people are saying. I feel connected to the outside world, and especially the outside knitting world, by doing it. I subscribe to business blogs as well as fifty or so craft/knitting blogs. I like seeing what shops are doing, and I like seeing what new yarns are out there and what cool

things other companies are doing.

YMN: What's the significance of your Twitter handle, knittingchase?

BP: When I was creating my Twitter account I chose Chase in honor of my paternal grandmother. She wasn't a knitter but was a huge needlepointer. My other grandmother was a rabid crocheter—she could crochet a blanket in about 10 minutes. When I bought CEY, I had to change the parent company name and chose Robertson-Chase in honor of my grandmothers.

YMN: How did you learn to knit?

BP: My mother taught me when I was about 10, but it was really solidified with the Girl Scouts. I have always been crafty in some way; I did a lot of needlepoint in the '80s. Even when knitting/crafting by professional women was a no-no, I was a closet knitter.

YMN: Continental or English?

BP: I'm a thrower [English]. People say I'm pretty fast, but I don't think I could compete with some of the really fast ones.

YMN: Are you a monogamous knitter or do you date more than one project?

BP: I usually have two or three projects going at once—a complicated project, a car project and a third. Tomorrow I'll be on a plane and will start a new project today so I'll have something to work on while I'm traveling, something that's interesting but not so complicated that it needs all my attention. That means I'll have four projects on the needles, which is not typical.

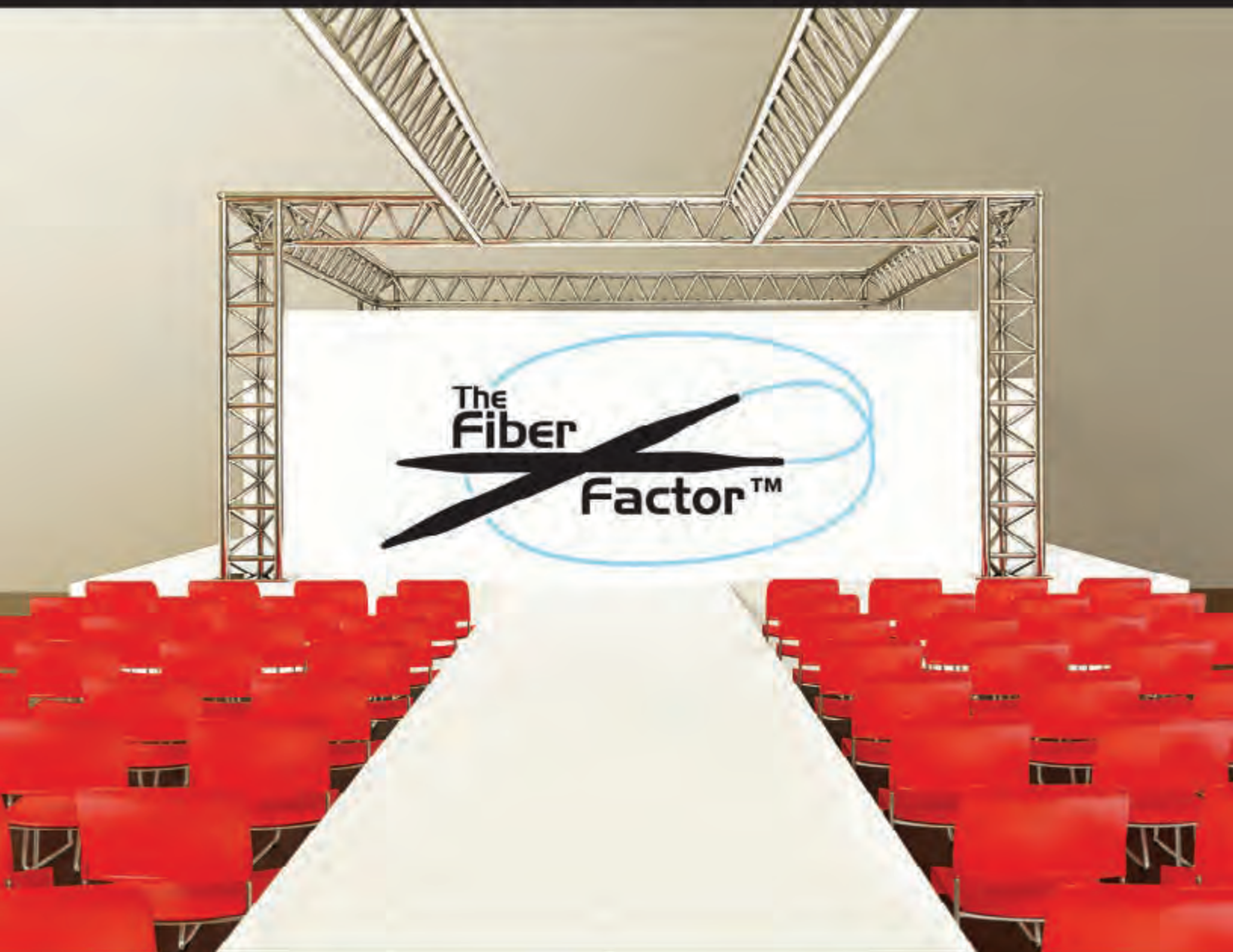
YMN: Are you a social knitter?

BP: I'm part of a knitting group that's been together for almost twenty years. We all wish we could meet more regularly.

YMN: Favorite yarn? Maybe that's not a fair question. How about favorite yarn weight?

BP: I love DK-weight yarn. I can never find available size 5 or 6 needles because they're always in use. My current favorite yarn is Soft Linen. It's a firm wool, alpaca and linen blend that makes an amazing fabric. Cables and lace look great in it. I just love it.

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Classic Elite Yarns

Stop by the CEY booth (832-837) at TNNA to see the great things we have in store for fall – including over one hundred awe-inspiring designs and four exciting new yarns! (The Pinna Pompon shawl in Chesapeake is just one of the beautiful pieces in the Fall collection.) For information on where to buy CEY, contact your sales rep, visit our website or call us at 800-444-5648 • classiceliteyarns.com. Classic Elite Yarns is a proud member of TNNA and The Yarn Group.