



September/October 2014

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on our cover

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These mysterious seed pods are filled with The Fibre Company's newest yarn, Knightsbridge. This 65% baby llama, 25% merino wool, 10% silk yarn, with its tweedy appearance, comes in 14 rustic colors. Distributed by Kelbourne Woolens; www.kelbournewoolens.com. Photograph by Marcus Tullis.

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I get most of my best ideas while at the Yarn Market News Smart Business Conference. Or in the shower, but mostly at the conference. Even though the sessions we schedule focus on small businesses, particularly small retail businesses, there's so much for me to learn as well—not just ways to help educate my readers, but also to help *Yarn Market News* and aspects of my own personal life. Branding, negotiating, trends—all of these things come into play.

Store owners who attend the conference tell me it changes their perspective on just about everything. The people who attend year after year keep coming back for that very reason (and it's a point of pride for us, too). In an atmosphere of support and openness, we can discuss obstacles and challenges, share thoughts and ideas and so much more.

Early next year we will return to Seattle for our annual meeting of the minds. A recurring "theme" for the shows has been "how to be successful in a changing economy." We know it's tough out there for all business owners. And with that in mind, I chose the articles for this issue based on ideas I had at last year's conference in Chicago.

Paula Giovacchini led a session on the last day called "Growing Your Business in Challenging Times: A Path Toward Profitability" in which she described the various types of customers who regularly come through your doors; she even invited two knitters who represented different types of customers to answer questions from our audience. She touches on all of those types and more in her feature article "Selling With Style" (page 40).

While on the yarn crawl that closed out the conference, I sat on the bus with Heather McVickar of Classic Elite Yarns, one of our sponsors. She and I talked about the issues that both yarn shops and yarn companies alike are facing, and she shared a few yarn-company "secrets" that she thought might benefit LYSOs. The interviews Leslie Petrovski would later conduct [see her article on page 36] came about as a result of that conversation.

On a more personal level, I love the conference for the opportunity it gives me to get to know my readers better. I learn about your lives outside the store and gain insight into what it is that makes you successful. Your "past lives" always seem to come into play in some way, which is why I asked Daryl Brower to find out more about a number of *Yarn Market News* devotees. (Read all about them on page 38.)

I hope you're making plans to attend the conference in Seattle next March and find that it sparks dozens of new ideas. Registration is open and early-bird pricing is available now. See you there!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Erin".

Erin Slonaker, Editor in Chief



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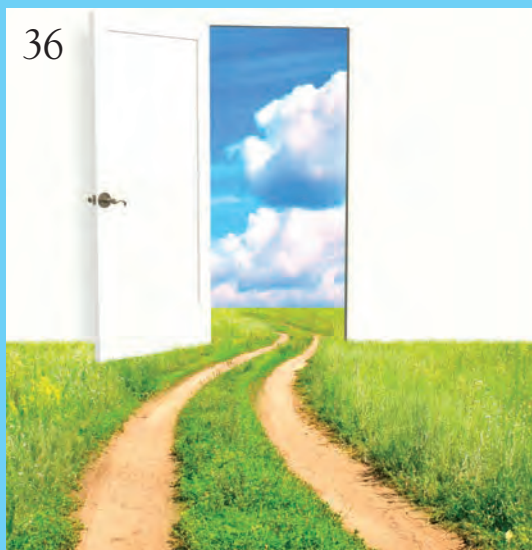

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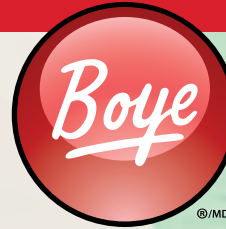
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board member of the National Small Business Association



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Photo: Pattern 157 A Touch of Lace Cardigan

Book Reviews

BY CAROL J. SULCOSKI

Entrelac 2: New Techniques for Interlace Knitting

By Rosemary Drysdale
Sixth&Spring Books; \$24.95
ISBN: 978-1936096633

Drysdale's first book on entrelac—with its clear instructions and fresh, stylish patterns—quickly established itself as *the* comprehensive reference on interlace knitting. But Drysdale has taken things even further with this sequel, which will appeal

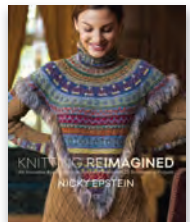


to entrelac veterans and newbies alike. She begins with photo tutorials that walk readers through the basics, then takes the entrelac stitch in new directions, adding beads, incorporating cables and lace, and using multiple colors in a single design. A second chapter shows knitters how to create stars, braids, even zigzag motifs with entrelac, then add stitch patterns, embellishments and contrasting colors to these new shapes. The last chapter incorporates the techniques into projects—more than 25 in all. With this valuable volume, Drysdale has solidified her status as the Empress of Entrelac.

Knitting Reimagined

By Nicky Epstein
Potter Craft; \$29.99
ISBN: 978-0385346252

Epstein shows the fiber world that the creative well need never run dry if you love what you do and aren't afraid to strike out in new directions. The book includes 25 projects featuring unconventional techniques



and one-of-a-kind shapes, grouped into four chapters based on method of construction. If you think there's nothing new under the knitting sun, consider the Weekend Warrior, knit in a circle formed from short rows and worn as a dress or capelet; the Shape-Shifter vest, formed from two rectangles with twisted con-

trast cord trim; and the Crisscross Weave tank, with flowing hem and braided straps. Epstein explores textural and woven design elements too, playing with tuck stitches, braided motifs, drawstrings and I-cord. She shares her insights along the way, offering suggestions for alternate color choices, substitute stitch patterns and pattern modifications to help readers reimagine their own one-of-a-kind garments.

New American Knits

By Amy Christoffers
Interweave Press/F+W; \$24.99
ISBN: 978-1620330999

The author is entranced with what she calls the "American look": simple but sophisticated, but with a few



unexpected touches. *New American Knits* includes 20 women's garments—cardigans, pullovers, vests, hats, wristers and more—each named for an American artist who has inspired Christoffers. A goodly number of the garments are predominantly stockinette stitch, while others feature interesting lace, colorwork and cable motifs, mixing up skill levels for wider appeal. The Rockwell hat, for instance, features a striking acorn-like motif; the Hopper cardigan is knit in dark emerald green with cleverly placed cable and lace motifs to give it extra oomph. This contemporary collection is sure to appeal to Christoffers' many fans and will certainly win her new ones.

Knits That Breathe

By Julie Turjoman
Passiflora Press; \$24.95
ISBN: 978-0991148608

In this book, Turjoman, author of *Brave New Knits*, turns her attention to that subgroup of knitters who avoid making sweaters simply because, for whatever reason, they find them too warm to wear. Using plant-based fibers like cotton, bamboo and tencel, Turjoman assembles an elegant collection of tanks, tunics, cardigans and other layering pieces



with shorter sleeves and a generous, relaxed fit. Strategically placed details like lace panels, ruffles and asymmetric fronts add flair and style. The transitional appeal of these sophisticated garments makes this a versatile collection for all knitters—not just the ones who'd like to take the "sweat" out of their sweaters.

Knit in New Directions

By Myra Wood
XXR Books; \$24.95
ISBN: 978-1933064284

Wood begins this celebration of the creative spirit with a thorough explanation of her working process, then offers tips on yarn selection, color, sketching, swatching and even ways to brainstorm ideas. Patterns are organized based on the method of multidirectional knitting: strips, modules and angles in one chapter, short rows in a second, and "crazy quilt" and free-



form knitting in yet another. It's an inviting book filled with tips, ideas, sketches, swatches and patterns, perfect for helping knitters unleash the creativity within.

Floral Knits

By Martin Storey
St. Martin's Griffin; \$24.99
ISBN: 978-1250049834

Storey seems to have an infinite number of elegant knitting patterns to share, and hot on the heels of his *Little Aran & Celtic Knits for Kids* comes a collection aimed at flower lovers. Colors are bright and the mood is playful: rose-colored gloves are embellished with embroidery; a polka-dot bag has 3-D blossoms sewn to the handle. Roughly a third of the 25 patterns are items for the home (we love the Herbaceous throw, featuring blocks with flowers constructed from cables and bob-



bles); a third are women's sweaters (a delightful row of colorwork flowers adorns the Fleur cardigan); and the remainder are women's accessories. Lovely photos, gorgeous Rowan yarns and Storey's beautiful designs make this a wonderful addition to your knitting library, even if your thumb isn't especially green.

60 Quick Luxury Knits

Sixth&Spring Books; \$17.95
ISBN: 978-1936096763

In this newest addition to the *Quick Knits* series, the focus is on luxury. The spotlight is on Cascade Yarns' Venezia, a lush silk/wool blend that comes in both sport and worsted weights. As the title promises, 60 patterns, designed primarily with women in mind (although a handful are unisex), show off Venezia's silken hand and crisp stitch definition. It's a fascinating collection that incorporates just about every technique—stranded knitting, cables, lace stitches, twisted stitches, drop stitches, bobbles, multidimensional diamonds. Hats, cowls and shawls are well represented, as are a few more unusual choices (leg warmers, a snood, headbands). Standout designs include Heidi Todd Kozar's Fair Isle-style beret, Jean Suzuki's Soutache capelet and Cheryl Mur-



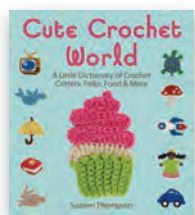
ray's mod mitts. Given the scope of the pattern collection and the sheer number of good-looking designs, this book provides a tremendous bang for the accessory knitter's buck.

Cute Crochet World

By Suzann Thompson
Lark Crafts; \$17.95
ISBN: 978-1454708063

There's just no end to the adorable

things one can make with just a small amount of yarn and a crochet hook. Thompson has created more than 50 crocheted motifs in the amigurumi tradition. A helpful introductory section lays out techniques, gives suggestions about tools and yarns, then offers ideas for using said motifs. Patterns are helpfully organized into six broad categories, including “Critters,” “Food,” seasonal motifs and home. The variety



is extensive: lamb, wiener dog, turtle or ladybug, glazed donut, palm tree, sea-

The Spinner's Book of Fleece

By Beth Smith

Storey Publishing; \$29.95

ISBN: 978-1612120393

Smith manages to cram a staggering



amount of helpful information about spinning specific breeds of wool in this, her first book. The noted spinner and instructor has made an extensive study of wool, working with hundreds of different fleeces, examining the interplay between the qualities of the wool, spinning techniques used and the resulting yarn. The result is a gorgeous book with enough beautiful photographs of sheep and wool to make any ovophile swoon. More important is the wealth of knowledge Smith shares: her philosophy about wool and spinning; reasons for spinning yarn; purchasing and processing one's own fleece versus buying already processed fiber; and plan-

ning and plying handspun. Smith is a wonderful writer, and the joy she takes in playing with wool is as inspirational as the vast amount of information she so generously provides.

The Knitter's Curiosity Cabinet Volume III

By Hunter Hammersen

Pantsville Press; \$26.95

ISBN: 978-0984998241



Hammersen is back with another volume of delightful knitted accessories modeled after Victorian curiosity cabinets: collections of unique, offbeat items meant to educate and intrigue. This particular volume was influenced by marine life, and Hammersen's focus is accessories: hats, socks, shawls and wristers, often pairing antique botanical prints with patterns to show the source of her inspiration. The curve of a shell, the texture of a sea fern, even the wavy tentacles of a jellyfish are echoed in the stitch patterns, texture or shaping of the pieces. Like the volumes that came before it, this eclectic book is a joy to behold.

Hello Kitty Crochet

By Mei Li Lee

Quirk Books; \$14.95

ISBN: 978-1594747083

When it comes to cute, the Japanese brand Sanrio—creator of the Hello Kitty franchise and purveyor of all things



twee—is an expert, and so is author and popular blogger Mei Li Lee. Lee's charming collection of crocheted amigurumi patterns based on Sanrio's popular characters hits the shelves just in time for Hello Kitty's 40th birthday (rest assured, Ms. Kitty, you don't look a day over 10). Start by hooking the whole Hello Kitty family: Mama, Papa, Hello Kitty herself, twin sister

Mimmy and their pal Dear Daniel, then branch out into other beloved *kawaii* characters, from Pandapple to Chococat. Directions are clear; specific notes on construction and embellishment help guide the process; and closeup photos give crafters a good look at tiny details. The small size makes this book perfect for slipping into a project bag.

Three Skeins or Less

By Tanis Gray

Interweave Press/F+W; \$24.99

ISBN: 978-1620336731

In this book, Gray has assembled a charming collection of stylish accessories that, well, take only one to three skeins of yarn to create. She taps an extensive network of designers, including Cirilia Rose, Susan



B. Anderson and Faina Goberstein, all of whom are eager to show knitters how a minimum of yardage can yield maximum style. Within you'll find fetching shawls, cowls, mittens, hats, shrugs and socks, all photographed up close to show off the details in each project. Yarns run the gamut from lace-weight to bulky. If you serve customers who often wonder what they can make with only a ball or two (or three) of a luscious yarn, this book will help keep their needles clicking all fall and winter long.

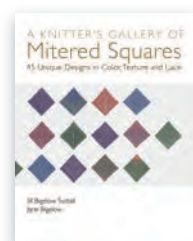
A Knitter's Gallery of Mitered Squares

By Jill Bigelow-Suttell and Jane Bigelow

Blue Cabin Press; \$26.95

ISBN: 978-0615942933

If you're under the impression that mitered squares are always knit in garter stitch, think again. Using the mitered square as their canvas, this mother/daughter team has created 45 squares busting with texture, lace and color. The authors assume that the reader understands the basic process of knitting a square, leaving room for experimenting with different



types of center decreases, adding eyelets, seeing how textural motifs play against the structure of

the square. Each motif is charted and is shown in a large photograph with clearly visible details. Four projects at the end provide a jumping-off point, showing how the squares stack up to create unique sweaters, stoles and other garments.

Mystic Shawls

By Anna Dalvi

Cooperative Press; \$26.95 (print), \$16.95 (digital)

ISBN: 978-1937513542 (print)

Knit-alongs have long been a way for a group of knitters to share knowledge, motivation and enthusiasm for projects by simultane-



ously embarking upon the same pattern. Designer Anna Dalvi got her start as a designer

by crafting a pattern for a KAL—the Mystic Shawl, which was presented as a “mystery” knit-along; that is, the pattern was presented in portions (or clues) spread out over a period of time and without a photograph of the final project until the very end. In this beautifully photographed collection, Dalvi has taken the mystery out, compiling all 14 of her mystery-KAL shawl patterns. She includes square, triangular, circular and rectangular pieces featuring intricate lace motifs and allover patterns, each more lovely than the last. Designs are knit predominantly in lace-weight yarns, with a few sport- and fingering-weight choices as well. Photographs of the shawls knit by actual KAL participants from across the country are a fun touch, showing alternative color and yarn options while highlighting the communal aspect of knit-alongs.

Irresistible to needlecrafters, brushed yarns come in every shape and size. Whether you enact a “please-don’t-squeeze” policy is up to you.

Soft Focus

By Christina Behnke

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Deep down, there's a part of every knitter and crocheter that wants only to pick up and cuddle skeins of soft, fuzzy yarn. Nothing calls out "touch me" as loudly as brushed yarns. The inimitable fluffy fabric they create is just the icing on the cake.

Traditionally, brushed yarns are constructed of fiber that's braided and then brushed, freeing a fluffy halo. Where yarns comparable to **Zitron/Skacel Collection Meister Stück (#1)** (93yds/50g) might add touches of wool and nylon or spin an all-mohair strand (with a price tag to match), this yarn strikes a balance, blending in a nearly imperceptible filament of 20% extrafine merino with 80% kid mohair. The merino adds structure and bounce essential for sweaters, but the real star here is the mohair, which flaunts its superior dyeing capabilities in five Rothko-esque colorways. The variegated shades shift and blend with the subtlety of paint on canvas—no wonder, considering the name translates literally to *masterpiece*.

Of course, mohair isn't the only brushable fiber. **Blue Sky Alpaca Brushed Suri (#3)** (15 colors; 142yds/50g) is a frothy confection of 67% baby suri—a rare breed of alpaca with lustrous, silky locks—bound by strands of 22% merino and gleaming 11% bamboo. Lusciously soft, it's also versatile: The staggering range of suggested needle sizes lends itself to everything from lightweight berets to sheer, slouchy pullovers. While it's not the best choice for cables and texture patterns, due to the preponderance of languorous alpaca, the merino content adds enough body that you can expect to get a surprising amount of mileage out of projects knit in this yarn.

Alternatively, brushed yarns can be made by brushing tufts of fiber enmeshed in a netted binder thread. This versatile method yields an even, lightweight strand (crocheters, take note). For its part, though **Rowan Brushed Fleece (#2)** (12 colors; 65% extrafine merino wool, 30% baby alpaca, 5% polyamide; 115yds/50g) has the rustic, woolly look of delicate spun singles or pencil roving, it's strengthened by a woven gossamer thread concealed at its core. The surrounding heathered fibers cling to one another, further bolstering structure. The resulting yarn resists the pilling associated with the yarns it resembles while maintaining the covetable loft. It renders cables remarkably well, with the added benefit of feather-lightness.

There's yarn that can be described as "elastic"—and then there's yarn that actually uses elastic thread as a binder.

Classic Elite Yarns Avalanche (#5) (8 colors; 42% alpaca, 42% wool, 16% nylon; 200yds/50g) is an airy brushed tube with a bouclé, rather than wispy, surface texture. Despite its translucent appearance in the strand, it's unexpectedly crisp and toothy in the hank thanks to its brushed fiber blend. As with any yarn with elastic content, it knits up best on disproportionately large needles, with stitches bouncing back evenly into place. Factor in the heathered colorways, and it's a winning choice for uneven knitters.

The popularity of lace-weight brushed mohair as a carry-along yarn might explain the recent trend of stranded yarns, plied of multiple textures, with at least one fine-weight haloed strand. Part of a collaboration between Tahki•Stacy Charles and Artyarns' Iris Schreier, **TSCArtyarns Tranquility (#6)** (26 colorways; 60% extrafine merino wool, 25% cashmere, 15% silk; 400yds/57g) strands together two base plies resembling Filatura Di Crosa's Nirvana and Superior. Luxuriously velvet, the duo features a downy cashmere halo that bonds each strand together, yet the plies remain distinct enough that the silk filament in the brushed strand casually dapples fabrics. The effect harmonizes nicely with the intricately marbled colorways.

During a visit to China, Craig Turner, founder of **MinkYarn**

(formerly Great Northern Yarns), discovered that the undercoat fiber gathered from brushing minks could be used to develop a humane new yarn. His newest offering, **Mink Haze (#11)** (13 colors; 80% mink, 15% mohair, 5% cashmere; 151yds/50g), is included here, however, for its brushed appearance. Two distinct plies—one primarily of mink, one of mohair—are stranded loosely together, allowing optimum expanse for the fibers to bloom. When washed per Turner's instructions, the firmly spun mink strand develops a hazy halo, and the mohair forms additional clouds of fiber over the surface.

A seemingly simple yarn stranded of three lace-weight plies, **Bergère de France Pure Douceur (#7)** (10 colors; 273yds/50g) is a multitasker that's more than the sum of its parts. Though a worsted gauge is recommended, the triple-ply construction is adaptable to a much wider range of gauges, shored up by 58% super kid mohair to expand or contract as needed. The 37% polyamide cores offer both strength and stitch definition, making this a natural for much-manipulated stitch patterns like cabling and trinity stitch. Rounded out with a touch of 5% wool, it's next-to-skin soft. Keep it on hand as an antidote for knitter's block.

Brushed yarns have also found a happy marriage with the emerging metallic trend: Though metallics are unavoidably scratchy, haloed fibers help to create a barrier between them and the wearer's skin. Such is the case with **Trendsetter Yarns' Diamond (#8)** (12 colors; 31% acrylic, 30% nylon, 24% mohair, 15% metal polyester; 95yds/25g), which boasts a robust halo, compliments of two fine-weight brushed-mohair strands that are plied loosely with a metallic-wrapped black thread. In addition to creating overall sparkle—especially where the metallic gathers into slubs—the latter performs almost like a stainless-steel yarn, holding the shape of every stitch for an idiosyncratic fabric.

Prefer haze over froth? Blending synthetic components into natural fibers keeps brushed unspun fiber in check, preventing shedding and pills while adding structure to knitted fabrics. The rounded construction of **AdriaFil/Plymouth Yarn Co. Riflessi (#10)** (35% wool, 31% acrylic, 18% polyester, 16% nylon; 164yds/50m) defines each stitch so crisply, the fuzzy patina works more as a finishing touch than as a feature presentation. The metallic element that forms the core is coordinated to each of the 10 available colors, blending it with the yarn. Obscured by the haloed fibers, it appears with quiet sparkle, like lights in fog.

Known for needlework threads, **DMC** has ventured into the hand-knitting market with a line of fashion yarns produced in Italy and grouped into five distinct collections. Part of the glamour-gal Metal Chic Collection, **Marquise (#4)** (8 colors; 45% hypoallergenic polyacrylic microfiber, 35% hypoallergenic polyamide microfiber, 15% wool, 5% polyester; 164yds/50g) produces a satisfyingly sturdy fabric despite appearing languidly plied in the skein. Four fuzzy lace-weight base plies cling tenaciously to one another, which not only allows each halo to bloom but also helps to insulate the fifth ply, a contrasting black thread wrapped with metallic that bunches intermittently into glittery slubs.

Rozetti Yarns/Universal Yarn Allure (#9) (34% wool, 34% acrylic, 18% polyamide, 14% glitter yarn; 109yds/50g) is the feather boa of brushed yarns: Big and fluffy, with a contrasting metallic-on-black netted core, it's unapologetically glamorous in a way that evokes silver-screen starlets and glitzy movie musicals. The four gently variegated colorways lend themselves to quick, uncomplicated knits, making this a must-have in your stash for gift knitting—one skein is even enough for a hat. On the other hand, its light weight and inherent structure are the perfect marriage for large-scale projects. Why not go all out and knit an evening-ready coat?



The National NeedleArts Association

BY PATTY PARRISH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Why TNNA?

What makes TNNA trade shows such special must-attend events in this Internet age? We all recognize that online interaction has usurped in-person interaction in many ways, by making communication (through email) so easy and by giving retailers the space (on websites) to market to their customers. So why go to the trouble and expense of attending a trade show? We thought we'd ask our members what they really think about TNNA.

Jeanne Carver, owner of Imperial Yarn and a TNNA member for five years, said, "Working to grow your business? TNNA plays a big part in helping you do so. I can't imagine trying to sell yarn right now without being a member."

I was truly moved by the honest, inspiring, humorous responses we captured on video, validating the value of TNNA membership and of our trade shows in particular. Says our most recent TEN award winner, Dona Zimmerman, owner of The Web•sters in Ashland, Oregon, and a TNNA member for 30 years: "An integral

part of my business plan [as a veteran yarn retailer] is to attend TNNA shows twice a year to stay in touch, keep learning, meet with my peers and have a good time. And TNNA is *the* place to go for help getting a new business [off the ground]."

Besides the business services the trade shows offer, there are other benefits to face-to-face interactions, such as making new connections and walking the floor to check out the newest trends. "I have met so many people through TNNA and have formed lots of wonderful friendships and business partnerships—people I can rely on to give good advice," says Karen Rumpza, owner of the retail store Needlework Unlimited and a TNNA member for 22 years.

The shows are essential not only for the wholesalers and retailers who attend; designers and other industry professionals find it valuable as well. Cat Bordhi, author, teacher, designer and TNNA member for 15 years, told us, "It's nice to be able to talk in person with others in

the industry. We are all so collaborative—we inspire each other. I can't imagine not coming to TNNA shows."

It was validating to hear that more than a few of our attendees believe our shows are "magical," "valuable" and "wonderful." One of my favorite quotes is from Kara Gott Warner, Executive Director of Knit and Crochet at Annie's: "The personal connection—getting to explore lots of ideas together because we're in one place—creates energy that we share. You can't do that sitting at your desk."

Save the dates for these 2015 TNNA trade shows, which we know you won't want to miss: TNNA winter trade show, Phoenix, January 10–12, 2015; TNNA summer trade show, Columbus, Ohio, May 30–June 1, 2015. We hope to see you there.

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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Year in Review

It's been a very exciting and productive year at the Council. In my last column, I talked about the launch of our new health initiative, Changing Global Health One Stitch at a Time, which was months in the planning. We began by aggregating data and then worked with journalist Leslie Petrovski to organize the information in an intelligent, readable summary entitled "The Truth About Knitting and Crochet...It's Good for You." From that research we prepared a video, which we introduced on Craft Yarn Council's YouTube Health channel.

Since then, we have been working diligently to share our powerful health message with the media and to reach a new consumer base. I'm pleased to report that the health stats and/or video have been mentioned in *Psychology Today*, *The Seattle Times*, *The Charlotte Observer*, *The Detroit News* and *The Washington Post* as well as on CNN.com—and that's just the beginning. We are reaching out to traditional women's and parenting publications as well as AARP, health-

care professionals and national television networks.

As we prepare for this year's I Love Yarn Day on October 10, we look back at last year's successful campaign. We doubled our Facebook likes and received coverage on three television stations: WFAA, the ABC affiliate in Dallas; WCNC, the NBC affiliate in Charlotte; and KPIX, the CBS affiliate in San Francisco. In addition, we introduced the first in a series of contests to maintain visibility for the Facebook page: "I Love Yarn Holiday" and "I Love Yarn in Bloom." Both received tens of thousands of views, and we plan more this year and next.

In other news, the Council's 2013-14 program Teaching Teens: Learn to Crochet delivered free yarn, hooks and instructional materials to more than 50,000 junior and senior high school students across the country, a 25 percent increase in the number of free kits members provided in past years. To date, the Council has reached more than 130,000 teens and 5,000 educators with free materials and curriculum-appropriate lesson plans.

Continuing our education story, we now have placed knitting and crochet instructors in more than 1,000 Michaels stores in the United States and Canada as part of our Discover Knit and Crochet Class Program. An amazing 39,600 students have taken classes. What's also gratifying is that hundreds of teachers now have jobs as a result of this program.

Finally, the Council continued its support of the Warm Up America! campaign by providing office space and support staff to continue the distribution of thousands of afghans and clothing items to people in need. This past year we also helped to expand the program into Canada.

These are wonderful accomplishments, but we are not content to rest on our laurels. Our mission continues: inspire current knitters and crocheters and encourage more people to take up these wonderful needlecrafts.

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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Vision Quest

With a renewed focus on increasing membership, Yarn Group hosted a few special events at the May TNNA show—and it paid huge dividends. The first was a scavenger hunt called the Quest that sent more than 100 LYS owners to the booths of 30 participating exhibitors. Laura Reed of Lion and Lamb Yarn Boutique in Troy, Ohio, took home the grand prize, winning round-trip airfare to and hotel accommodations at TNNA's Fall/Winter 2015 show, courtesy of Bryson Distributing and Hyatt Hotels.

For those seeking a respite from the gorgeous yarns, inspiring projects and must-have accessories shown by our exhibitors, we created the first-ever Yarn Group Lounge. Yarn Group members mingled with our sponsors, enjoyed a light breakfast and topped the show off with an ice cream social, where former TNNA President Joel Woodcock served as scooper-in-chief. The Yarn Group Lounge gave attendees a place to enjoy unstructured time—perfect for

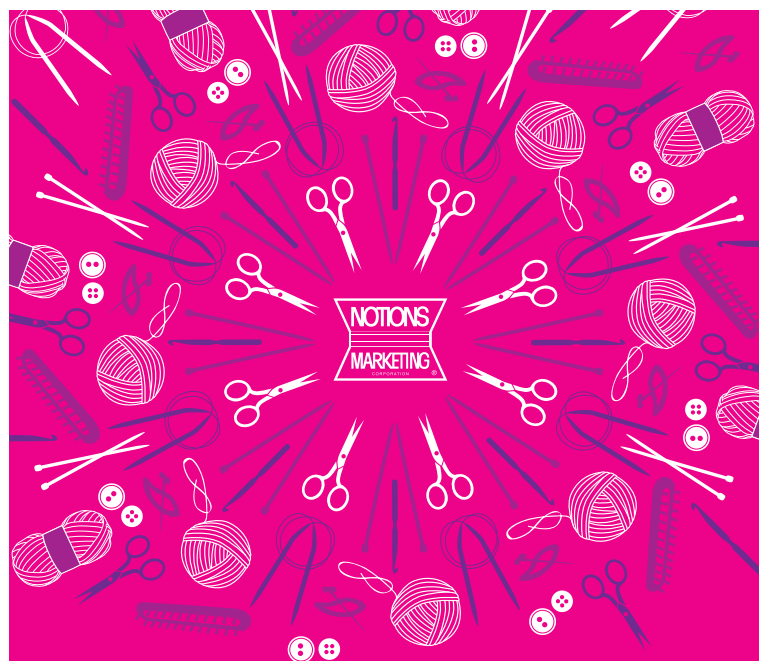
networking. Two panel discussions held in the lounge were well attended. Attendees also requested future opportunities to talk with experts on a variety of topics to help strengthen their businesses.

The end result of our efforts? The Yarn Group meeting was standing room only, and we welcomed nearly 60 new members. At the meeting we invited members to post questions to a message board. We received dozens on the topic of service: How do I handle customers who want help but don't buy? How do I get people to make return visits? How do I get people to buy from my online shop? How much customer service is enough?

Shop owners I have spoken with have a love/hate relationship with the idea of service. Has it always been true that consumers expect shops to offer high levels of service, sometimes for free? As an answer, I found two articles that reviewed local needlearts shops in New York City. A 1964 *New York Times* article gave readers a tour of Manhattan yarn

shops as well as the knit/crochet departments at Bloomingdale's, Gimbel's and Abraham & Straus department stores. In that piece and in a 1981 *New York* magazine article about the revival of knitting and crochet, the writers called out shop owners whose poor people skills left the writer wanting. Shops offering free patterns, design services, finishing, classes and dedicated time for help garnered the best reviews. Not incidentally, each store required that products or classes be purchased before dishing out the expertise.

Back in the day, service was king. And isn't that still the case? Customers seek us out for our expertise. They value our opinions. If you'll be attending the TNNA show in Phoenix in January, you'll experience firsthand Yarn Group's continued focus on service. We invite you to participate in our new full-day intensive on business and professional development and to join the Quest. To enjoy the growing benefits of Yarn Group membership, call TNNA headquarters at (800) 889-8662.



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Reset Your Thinking

How to avoid the most common mistakes made by women entrepreneurs.

BY LOIS P. FRANKEL

Despite the fact that statistics show women starting and succeeding in their own enterprises at a rate that exceeds men, if you're a woman in business for yourself (or thinking about starting your own company), the path to success is paved with pitfalls for the unwary or naive. The mistakes outlined below are common among novice entrepreneurs. Do any of them describe your business as well? If so, consider adopting a new mantra: Doing so will help you not only survive, but thrive.

Mistake 1: Focusing only on making money, not on making a difference

Your mantra: "I am pursuing my passion."

Most likely, this is already the mantra of most yarn shop owners. But if money is your primary motivator, you probably won't get a lot of reinforcement in those early months or years. Your focus has to be directed toward something you are so passionate about doing—and doing well—that nothing will deter you from finding success. Never be afraid to revisit the passion that brought you to this career in the first place.

Mistake 2: Having wishy-washy goals

Your mantra: "I have a clear vision and tangible strategies and tactics to get me there." Many entrepreneurs with great ideas fail because they think their product or service should sell itself. They work hard, but not smart. Your vision of where you want to be six months, one year or five years down the road will guide your day-to-day actions. Write down all of your ideas. Doing so makes them concrete, not just snippets of thoughts floating around inside your head. Then outline specific and measurable steps to help you achieve your goals. This is your blueprint for success.

Mistake 3: Failing to create a niche in the market

Your mantra: "My brand is recognized as distinctive." What distinguishes your company from your competition's? It may sound counterintuitive, but rather than try to be all things to all people, create a niche that makes you unique. For example, position yourself as the only yarn shop in town that offers free evening classes

for new knitters or as the first yarn shop to adopt a school and donate yarn to student knitters. Then be certain to talk about your brand and what makes it different with enthusiasm and pride. That's not bragging; it's marketing. It does you no good to have a great brand if no one knows about.

Mistake 4: Acting like a start-up

Your mantra: "I own a self-sustaining enterprise." Big is relative. You may not aspire to be the biggest yarn shop in the country, but you should act as if you already are. Doing so helps you see things and consider options you would otherwise overlook or think impossible. Invest time and money (wisely) in growing your shop into an enterprise that is not just a hobby but a full-fledged business. Think long-term rather than day to day.

Mistake 5: Lacking familiarity with the language of money

Your mantra: "Show me the money." In my book *Nice Girls Don't Get Rich: 75 Avoidable Mistakes Women Make with Money*, I talk about the fact that women in general tend to be less educated than men about the basics of money and investing. Regardless of the size of your shop, you need to understand how to make it profitable. As an entrepreneurial leader, you'll be involved with budgeting, investing, payroll and other forms of money management. Consider taking a course in finance for non-financial managers at your local community college, and definitely start reading *The Wall Street Journal* and other money magazines. While you're at it, remember that doing well and doing good are not mutually exclusive.

Mistake 6: Not anticipating setbacks

Your mantra: "Failure is not an option." When you're running your own show, you'll inevitably face bumps in the road. By anticipating them, you're more likely to view them as challenges to be overcome than insurmountable obstacles that cause you to fail. Developing a network of similarly minded friends and colleagues who can encourage you and help you over the hurdles is critical. Network within your industry and with local businesspeople to build that support system.

Mistake 7: Developing tunnel vision

Your mantra: "I am a curious and continual learner." Too often, entrepreneurs become so involved in day-to-day operations and challenges that they miss new trends or information that could help them remain competitive. Couple that with the fact that women often have additional family responsibilities, and it seems as if there's never enough time to stay current. Each week, schedule a 30-minute meeting with yourself during which you read a trade journal or spend time learning what's new and noteworthy in your field. It's the only way to stay one step ahead of your customers.

Mistake 8: Going it alone

Your mantra: "I build relationships that work for me." There's no need for you to reinvent the wheel when there are people out there who have been there, done that. Join a local association of women business owners, attend the Yarn Market News Smart Business Conference, and look for free services for small business owners in your city. And remember: It's best to establish a network of people you can count on *before* you actually need them.

Lois P. Frankel, Ph.D., is the author of the best-selling books *Nice Girls Don't Get the Corner Office*, *Nice Girls Don't Get Rich* and *Nice Girls Just Don't Get It*. For daily coaching tips, follow her on Twitter @drloisfrankel.

When It Comes to Being Entrepreneurial, Women Are Leading the Way

A report commissioned by American Express, *The State of Women Owned Businesses 2013*, reveals:

- There are more than 8.6 million women-owned businesses in the United States, and one in three is owned by a woman of color.
- Women-owned businesses are generating more than \$1.3 trillion in revenue annually while employing nearly 7.8 million people.
- Despite the economic downturn, in the past 16 years women-owned businesses increased profits by 59%—that's one-and-a-half times the national average.

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Going Back to School

Resources abound for small business owners looking to increase their knowledge.

BY PAMELA WYNNE BUTLER

The first thing Vivian Zagar did when she decided to open Tangled Purls in Salem, Oregon, was schedule an appointment with an adviser at her local Small Business Development Center. At their meetings, the counselor gave Zagar free advice and answered her questions about starting and running the business—crucial mentorship that helped her make decisions about the shop and connected her to an entire community of local business owners involved with the SBDC.

Like Zagar, Heather Zbinden worked with her local Small Business Administration when she became part-owner of Yarn Mart in Little Rock, Arkansas. Looking back, she wishes she had taken even better advantage of the classes and workshops the SBA offers: “Since I jumped in with both feet,” she explains, “I don’t have a lot of time to do that kind of stuff. But in many ways the shop can’t afford for me *not* to do those types of things.”

Whether your shop is brand new or has been around for generations, it always makes sense for small business owners to take advantage of all available resources. As trends, technology and economic climates change, there are always new challenges afoot, as well as new ways to grow, manage and improve your business. Local and online resources can help you with everything from organization and financing and the ongoing challenges of management and marketing to emerging technologies and social media.

Local education and mentoring

You might be surprised by the depth and range of learning opportunities available in your community. Many organizations offer free or low-cost continuing education and mentorship for small business owners.

• **Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs).** The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) is a federal agency that helps people start, build and grow businesses. The SBA administers local Small Business Development Centers, hosted by colleges and universities, at 900 sites across the country. Advisers at these centers provide free mentoring and training on topics ranging from business-plan development to market research to healthcare.

In addition to their free services, many SBDCs offer small-business-management education programs in partnership with the college or university that hosts the center. The cost is typically less than \$1,000 for a nine-month program; classes are taught by college faculty and local business leaders and cover topics specific to small-business ownership and management.

After Vivian Zagar enrolled in her SBDC’s Small Business Management program, she and a few of her classmates spun off into a separate learning group focusing on issues unique to retail businesses. For her, the experience and the connections it’s yielded have been priceless: “I can’t imagine how I would have survived the four years I have been in business without this great support team of trusted advisers and other small business owners.” Find a Small Business Development Center near you at www.sba.gov/tools/local-assistance/sbdc.

• **Colleges and universities.** Most public institutions have a school of continuing education that offers courses taught by their business and management faculty. The tuition can be steep, but the benefits include the chance to learn from and interact with expert faculty, a well-developed and cohesive curriculum, one-on-one support from faculty advisers, schedules designed to accommodate working adults, and the chance to meet other business owners and professionals in your area.

If you live near a community college or public university, check its website under “continuing education,” or call the public information phone line.

• **Local and regional chambers of commerce.** If you have a chamber of commerce in your area, chances are it provides free or low-cost educational opportunities for members. Check with your local or regional chamber.

Online and distance learning

Of course, many of the most flexible, accessible continuing-education classes available today come in the form of online learning. From webinars and massive open online courses (MOOCs) to interactive chats with personal mentors, the Internet teems with opportunities to educate yourself and improve your business.

• **SCORE** is a nonprofit association that partners with the SBA to help businesses grow and im-

prove through free education and mentorship. With more than 11,000 volunteer mentors from 62 industries, SCORE provides free services including business counseling via email, online webinars and a wide range of online tools and tips. You can get matched up with a volunteer mentor online, or, if you live near one of SCORE’s 320 local chapters, you can meet a mentor in person or attend free or low-cost local workshops. Get started at www.SCORE.org.

• **MOOCs** are free, publicly available online classes offered by large research universities in collaboration with a company that administers the courses. While there’s typically no instructor feedback on student work, and recent studies show that few students actually complete the courses, MOOCs can be a fun, flexible way to learn from leading experts. Search the course offerings of the three largest MOOC providers, Coursera, EdX and Udacity, at www.coursera.org, www.edx.org and www.udacity.com.

Continuing education programs at colleges and universities usually include courses delivered online. Typically, you’ll interact with the instructor and your classmates via video, chat and online forums all centered on a course website. Research your local college or university’s continuing education program to see which courses are available online.

Other online resources

• **The SBA Small Business Learning Center** includes online training exercises, webinars, videos and other tools for business development. www.sba.gov

• **The IRS** hosts a virtual workshop with nine video lessons on the ins and outs of small business taxes: www.irsvideos.gov/SmallBusinessTaxpayer/virtualworkshop.

• **The National Association for the Self-Employed** has an online business learning center with free educational tools. Members also have access to newsletters and other resources and publications geared toward small business ownership. www.nase.org

• Do a simple **Google search** for “adult education” to see what’s available in your area; many local organizations offer programs of their own.

Pamela Wynne Butler is a writer and knitter living in Flint, Michigan.

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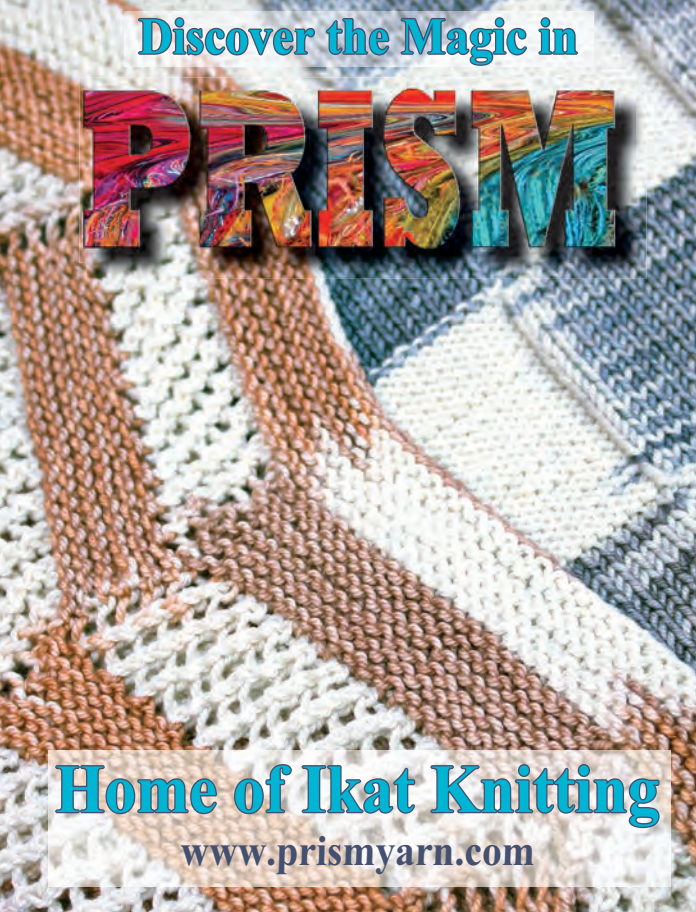
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All in the Timing

Scheduling part-time employees doesn't have to be a full-time problem.

BY CATHY RUMFELT

Handling vacation days for your part-time employees can be a consuming task. The approaching holidays inevitably bring time-off requests from your staff, requiring you to balance store needs with employee needs. With some advance planning, scheduling part-time staff can be stress-free.

In compliance

Sarah Keller of Knot Another Hat in Hood River, Oregon, does her scheduling in advance, a few months at a time. "I try to write the schedule for a three-month period," she explains. Her calendar is consistent month to month: "I work alone Tuesday through Thursday; I share Friday, often using it to catch up on back-office work; and I have my four part-time employees work the weekends." That consistency makes it easier to know which days and times need coverage from other staff members. To keep everyone on the same page, she creates a calendar in Microsoft Publisher and emails the pdf to her employees. "I also save a copy to the desktop computer that is our register," says Keller, "so everyone can check there as well."

Kris Gregson and Oz Barron, co-owners of Ball & Skein & More in Cambria, California, have their scheduling down to a science, and they involve the staff by making it easily accessible. "We publish a schedule, using Google Calendar to keep us all in sync," says Barron. "Only Kris and I can change it, but everybody can view it." They too keep a consistent schedule, "so the same people work the same days, as a rule. We book schedules and vacations as far in advance as possible."

During holidays or the summer, schedules will be more fluid, since there are bound to be more requests for time off. Planning is especially important when it comes to particularly desirable days or weekends, such as Mother's Day, and it can be beneficial for LYS owners to have a roster of back-up help who can fill in. At The Yarn Spot in Wheaton, Maryland, Lee Wittenstein knows when the requests will come in: "We joke that we close only for Thanksgiving Day, Christmas, New Year's day and the Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival." When Yarn Spot employees request time off around these days, other staffers make themselves available if at all possible, but

if necessary the three owners will step in, according to Wittenstein.

The holidays can also prove challenging at Knot Another Hat: "I take a lot more time off during the holidays, so the schedule does get mixed up a bit," says Keller. "But an employee who can do weekdays steps up, and one of my other employees is a teacher, so she has more free time over school breaks." Finding the right mix of part-time employees will certainly help make scheduling easier.

Working together

A staff that is willing to help each other out can also make part-time scheduling a less grueling task. "We have amazing employees who are willing to fill in for each other," says Wittenstein. "When someone needs time off, she emails the entire staff; someone always steps up to the plate." Similarly, Oz Barron sees the benefit of hiring staff that plays well together: "It helps that we all get along, so peer pressure works in our favor as well." Wittenstein credits their employees for making the store schedule work: "We have a staff of intelligent people who realize that if they pitch in for someone else, that person is likely to return the favor."

Sometimes, though, you just have to say no to schedule requests, especially during hectic seasons. Barron notes, "We're clear with our employees about busy times, and we ask that people refrain from taking too much time off during those periods." Setting a specific policy about requests for time off can help employees plan ahead for holidays and vacations. Requiring your staff to put in requests at least a few weeks in advance will allow you to work the schedule around those absences. Keller also plans her own time off in advance: "I make sure I put my vacation on the calendar well ahead of time so my weekday employee knows when she can plan hers."

Happy campers

Even if it is sometimes complicated, keeping your employees happy with their schedules benefits you as an LYSO. "Happy staff is productive staff, so we really do our best to accommodate time-off requests whenever we can," says Barron. Wittenstein agrees: "We have staff meetings once a quarter and always pro-

vide dinner," she says. "At those meetings we ask for suggestions about store policy, classes, yarns and more."

Most part-time employees realize that it's their job to adapt to the needs of the store, but showing that you value their time can help foster a greater willingness to pitch in. Wittenstein makes sure her employees are involved in store decisions as often as possible: "It means that we have talented, happy employees who bring enthusiasm and flexibility to the job." Sarah Keller also credits her part-time employees for their passion for the store: "Three of my four employees have full-time jobs outside the shop, but they all love what they do and insist that coming here does not feel like 'work' to them." Ultimately, advance planning and hiring a staff that works well together will help minimize scheduling issues.

Cathy Rumfelt is a writer living in Athens, Georgia.

Setting a Schedule

Consider these tips when staffing and scheduling your store:

- **Make expectations about schedules known:** "We're clear when we hire folks that they must be as flexible as possible," says Barron, "and understand that sometimes they'll have to cover for one another."
- **Hire more people to work just a few hours a week:** "We have a staff of nine or ten, some of whom work only two to four hours a week," says Lee Wittenstein. "Some of them are permanent 'subs' who fill in when they have time."
- **Require requests far in advance:** Oz Barron notes, "We try and book schedules and vacations months in advance."
- **Know that sometimes as an owner you may have to cover:** "We try to staff enough so that if one person goes away for a week or more, it doesn't kill us," says Oz Barron. "Sometimes that means we have to work long stretches, but as owners, it's ultimately our job."



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Cape Town

Knitting in the land of mohair

BY MARYAM SIDDIQI

ladies who knit for charity," she is increasingly catering to younger knitters. "Those in their twenties and thirties are quite keen on crochet because it's quick," she explains. "And one customer is teaching knitting at a school and says the students are quite enthusiastic—particularly the boys."

Douglas did offer group classes for a number of years but now offers one-on-one lessons. She staffs her shop with knitters with diverse skill sets—they're expert in everything from crochet to pattern design to toy making—which provides customers with "a different experience each time. In that way we are quite unique." The shop also offers informal monthly get-togethers, with knitters bringing in projects to work on or get help with.

Like knitters everywhere, customers newer to knitting are choosing scarves, cowls and beanies to gain skill. But, Douglas says, "equally, people are coming in wanting to do bigger things." As for materials, while some customers still ask for acrylic yarns, "more and more, people want natural fiber"—wool and mohair (local manufacturer African Expressions is responsible for an increasing percentage of sales), cotton and bamboo.

Sunelle Fouche, a Capetonian knitter and co-founder of Moss and Make, an online blog celebrating local wools, design and needlework, has also found that natural fibers are increasingly popular—"cotton works well in our moderate climate"—and likes to browse one of Cape Town's few inner-city shops, Orion Wool & Crafts, which is run out of the basement of the owners' house and has a selection of local and imported yarns, including Sirdar, Rowan and Schachenmayr. "The knitters here seem to keep up with the trends," Fouche says.

Like Douglas and Curtis, Fouche says local knitters find inspiration through online sources such as Ravelry; local and international craft magazines (*Ideas* and *Mollie Makes*); and the local cultures (South Africa has 11 national languages) and landscape, which Curtis describes as "so flipping beautiful." (She's not wrong.)

Community outreach is a significant feature of Cape Town's knitting scene. Inspired by International Knit in Public Day, Fouche and Moss and Make's co-founders organize Public Displays of Knitting. "People are often curious about the group of us showing up with our needles and yarn, but the general reception has always been welcoming," she says. They also knit on Mandela Day, an annual national holiday in which South Africans are encouraged to spend time giving back to their communities. Last year, Fouche explains, "I attended an event in which dozens of women knitted squares that were sewn into blankets for children receiving cancer treatment."

Douglas also organizes knitting initiatives on Mandela Day, inviting knitters to donate projects to worthwhile causes.

Isabeau Joubert's yarn bombings are her way of engaging fellow citizens. "My goal is to get people to use the city more, to walk the streets and to not be afraid of the experience," she explains. "By doing that we support our neighborhoods and uplift our environment and our local economy. The city streets should be alive and vibrant for everyone."

Nadine Curtis's business too was founded on the premise of giving back to the community, working with job-creation programs in the country to empower local artisans. "There's an enormous amount of vitality in the country," Curtis says, "and opportunity for creative knitting initiatives."

Maryam Siddiqi is a freelance writer and editor based in Toronto. She wishes she could see Table Mountain in person on a regular basis.

South Africa's Mother City has been in the spotlight this year. Eyes were on Cape Town, home of the federal parliament, during the first election year after the death of Nelson Mandela. It topped the *New York Times*' list of "52 Places to Go" in 2014 and held the title of World Design Capital. But amid the political battles, the allure of the Atlantic Ocean and Table Mountain, and the festivities associated with being a global hub of design, you'll find a knitting community that is growing in terms of both population and creativity.

"Cape Town has a big group of conservative hobbyist knitters, but it also has a dedicated segment of experimental knitters," says Isabeau Joubert, an art director, designer, crocheter and blogger by day and a yarn bomber by night. "These knitters are experimenting with techniques and bringing back the artisan angle of the craft."

"There's a lot of fashion-forwardness, though there's limited fiber available," says Nadine Curtis, the American behind Be Sweet, a line of yarns and knitted products made in South Africa. "While mainstream South African knitting is pretty conservative, there is an innovative craft movement happening," she says.

Despite producing 50 percent of the world's mohair (industry association Mohair South Africa, based in Port Elizabeth, offers factory tours for those interested in seeing how wool goes from goat to shop), Cape Town doesn't have a huge number of yarn shops—fewer than half a dozen in a city and suburban area with a population of just under

Above: Scenic Camps Bay, viewed from Lion's Head. Below, left: the vertical cliffs of Table Mountain; right: Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden, at the foot of Table Mountain.



four million—though the odd skein can be found in craft and fabric shops around town. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, however. Because exchange rates do not favor the South African rand, many knitters find using anything but local yarns prohibitively expensive and so harness their creativity, adapting patterns to what can be found nearby or simply improvising and interpreting pieces they've seen in-store or online.

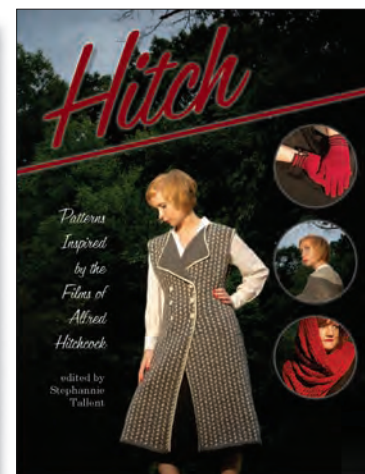
"There is much noise about knitting and craft," says Rose Anne Douglas, owner of Wool Boutique, located in the seaside suburb of Fish Hoek. Douglas has owned her store for about eight years and has seen Cape Town's knitting community evolve. While the city still has a strong population of "little old

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The Web•sters

Ashland, Oregon

BY DARYL BROWER



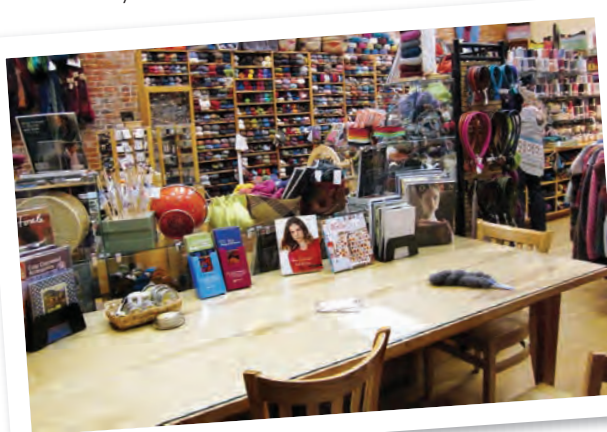
Thirty years ago, Dona Zimmerman decided that Ashland, Oregon, needed a yarn shop. Starting with yarns spun from her own flock of Romney sheep and gradually expanding to commercial yarns, Zimmerman grew her business, The Web•sters, from a small shop serving the needs of local fiber artists to a yarn mecca that supplies creative tools to knitters and spinners across the country. Established at the height of the first yarn boom, the store has survived the roller coaster ups and downs of the yarn industry, earning the loyalty of an ever-growing customer base along the way. Zimmerman's passion for promoting the fiber arts earned her the National Needlework Association's Tribute to Excellence in Needlework (TEN) award in 2014, an honor bestowed on individuals who represent the finest in the needlearts industry.

And The Web•sters is among the finest. Tucked inside a light-filled brick building that dates from 1903, the store has expanded multiple times (it now encompasses 2,000 square feet of space) and is stocked floor to ceiling with a dazzling array of yarns, knitting and spinning tools, books, patterns and a carefully curated collection of wearable-art items: clothing, jewelry, scarves and bags. "We mostly focus on natural fibers and higher-end yarns," Zimmerman says, "but there are some novelties and fun things in there too."

The Web•sters' clientele tends toward local artisans and tourists who flock to Ashland's annual Shakespeare festival—and the yarns on offer reflect that: count Malabrigo, Habu and Baa Ram Ewe among them. Sorted by source animal and gauge, the selection also includes a few lower-price-point brands like Brown Sheep and Cascade, which Zimmerman brought in to cater to the large number of Waldorf students in the area whose parents find their way to the store. (Waldorf instructors believe knitting teaches skills that students need to be good readers.) "We wanted to offer good-quality, good-price-point yarns for them," she explains.

After three decades in the business, The Web•sters has seen both boom and bust multiple times. "Every 10 years or so there's an up and a down," she notes. Her shop, Zimmerman

says, has survived and thrived throughout the years for many reasons. "We're in a tourist area, and that's a huge help," she points out. "We're guaranteed an influx of customers—new and old—each summer." The shop has also been flexible in its offerings. Weaving and spinning supplies are part of the mix, and about one third of the store is dedicated to clothing, jewelry and accessories, something that not only draws in non-knitting tourists but also appeals to fiber-oriented customers. "We added [the clothing] when people started wandering in wanting to buy sweaters rather than make them," Zimmerman explains. "People [in the yarn industry] told me not to do it, but it worked. Now our ideal customer buys a sweater's worth of yarn and adds in a pair of earrings or a scarf to go with it. The finished products and the raw materials complement each other, and the sales of those items have helped when yarn sales are slow."



As is the story with most successful shops, it's the service that keeps the business booming. "We listen to what our customers want," says Zimmerman. "We really get to know them, and we know how to find them something they'll both like and be successful in making." And what they want is personalized attention, something at which the staff of 13 excels. Everyone, no matter what her position, is encouraged to interact with customers. "We tell them, 'If you're walking across the floor on the way to answer the phone or to inventory the stockroom, consider yourself a salesperson,'" Zimmerman says. "Say hello. Ask if anyone needs help."

Hands-on Thursday-morning help sessions, a twice-weekly knitting circle and an impressive

roster of classes are part of that help. Classes, held in a dedicated room, are limited to about 10 students, not because of space constraints, but because Zimmerman believes that anything larger results in less personalized attention. "We want to nurture them," she says. "You can't do that with 30 people crammed into a room."

And there are always the tourists. The shop's website, launched in 2000, was originally geared to that base, allowing the store's summer visitors to virtually visit the shop after they'd returned home. "It helps keep us connected to both our regular drop-in customers and those we see only once a year," Zimmerman explains. It also keeps the cash flowing in leaner seasons—about 30 percent of the store's business comes from online sales. A firm believer in the adage that if you are going to do something, you should do it right, Zimmerman employs a full-time staffer to oversee the site, along with a consultant for tech and marketing advice. The shop's customer base hasn't changed much over the years—most are women in the 45–65 demographic with time and money to spare. Still, younger knitters are joining the ranks. "We do see a few young mothers; there's another generation coming along," says Zimmerman. It's a generation she is eager to guide: "There's so much potential for growth, and I'm excited about that."

Zimmerman still keeps the 50 or so Romney sheep that launched her store—she uses their roving to teach spinning and sells small quantities of their fleece—but she doesn't expect to start spinning for herself again anytime soon. "Maybe when I retire," she laughs. Not that she minds. "This job is a joy," she says. "Being creative makes people happy, and helping people be creative makes me happy. It's a good life."

Snapshot

The Web•sters

11 North Main Street
Ashland, OR 97520
(800) 482-9801

www.yarnatwebsters.com

Years in business: 30

Staff: 13

Square footage: 2,000

Hours: 10 A.M.–6 P.M. daily



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EVERYTHING

You've Always Wanted
to Know About
Commercial Yarn

But Were Afraid to Ask

Industry veterans
on the whys
and wherefores
of yarn making.

BY LESLIE PETROVSKI

Those of us in the industry think we understand yarn. We know a 2-ply from a 4-ply, alpaca from merino, angora goats from angora fiber. But unless we've actually developed yarn products for hand knitters, do we really know how commercial yarn is created, wholesaled and managed?

To demystify the process, we turned to a triumvirate of companies, small, medium and large, who actually have fleece in the game for their insights on what goes into bringing a yarn to market and keeping it there. For insider info, we spoke with Amy Hendrix, owner/founder of Madelinetosh, an independent hand-dyed-yarn company; Betsy Perry, owner/president, and Heather McVickar, director of sales, both of Classic Elite Yarns, a distributor of mostly international yarns; and Linda Pratt, consumer marketing manager for Westminster Fibers, the large U.S. distributor of major brands including Rowan, Regia and Schachenmayr.

How exactly is yarn born?

Amy Hendrix: It depends on what we think our customers would like to knit and what we ourselves like. We also try to take into account the things that annoy our customers—and annoy us. For example, we came out with our A.S.A.P. yarn because we had so many people asking for that specific yarn to be created: a super-saturated yarn that did not split. Our customers made that yarn.

On the other hand, we were once approached about dyeing a chain-style yarn. We took it to our test knitters and listened when they said, "Every time I insert my needle, it gets caught." So we didn't bring it out. It might be a great seller for another company, but for us it didn't work. Before we launch any yarn, we test it in our office, through the Magnolia Society [the company's yarn and sweater club] and Madtosh Crafts [the retail store in Fort Worth, Texas]. If knitters don't like working with it process-wise, we don't take it to market.

Linda Pratt: Typically, companies get samples from mills and knit them up. Maybe you like it. Maybe you get some feedback and decide to tweak it. As a yarn company, you understand your market and are looking to reinforce the values of your brand and take it to the next level.

Betsy Perry: A lot of it is a balancing act: You don't want all of the same thing. We ask, What are knitters and retailers looking for—and do we have it? It's like looking inside your closet. To fill out your wardrobe, you look at the trends and go from there.

Heather McVickar: We were looking for a machine-washable wool and found Liberty Wool (originally released in print colors). It was the perfect yarn for accessories, and it became a winner. It did so well, we brought it out in solids.

BP: We worked with the mill and tweaked the weight; we asked them to make it slightly lighter to be a true DK.

HM: Listening to feedback from customers, we came up with Liberty Wool Light, a finer-gauge yarn for baby items and shawls. It also makes a nice sweater, and you can throw it in the washer.

How do you make decisions about put-up? Ball or hank?

Linda Pratt: Not every mill has a factory filled with finishing equipment—some have a skeining machine; others have a machine that makes balls. That has a lot to do with it.

Heather McVickar: I've heard from retailers who say consumers prefer hanks. Some yarn shops love to wind the hanks, which gives customers extra time to explore the store and maybe buy extra needles, notions or bags. It gives retailers time to make add-on sales. On the other hand, some like the balls, because they don't have to do the winding. I hear both.

Betsy Perry: It's a long process between the animal and the yarn shop, and a lot of people have to make decisions along the way. Most Italian mills don't do twisted-hank put-ups. That's a function of their capacity, and they are making decisions like we are. Sometimes they offer to do a twisted hank, but it will add a dollar or two at retail, and we don't think it's worth it.

LP: If a mill is able to do both balls and hanks, and it's a fine fiber, you may want hanks so that when customers touch the yarn, they feel the lusciousness. But sometimes you'll get a yarn that looks scrawny in a hank, so you're back to a ball. On the other hand, if you have a slippery cotton or rayon yarn, it may fall apart if it's in a ball. You have to make sure it won't fall apart on a store shelf. Schachenmayr has come out with a special double ball band to keep its new Merino Extrafine balls together: Two ball bands loop around opposing edges of the ball, tucking into the ball's center to secure it. The company has also developed a new way—Easy Start—to help consumers find the end of the ball: They tape it to the band.

Ideally, a yarn company tries to put its best foot forward. You want that ball to look good on the shelf so customers see the value and think it's worth their time and money to purchase that yarn.

What goes into your decisions about yardage?

Betsy Perry: We don't make decisions frivolously, but we don't always make the right decision. A lot has to do with yardage, price point and usage. With sock yarn, it's better if you can get enough for a pair of socks into one hank, rather than two or three hanks that are each cheaper but require you to buy multiples. For colorwork, you want knitters to buy lots of colors, but you don't want them to buy 100g hanks, because that's a waste. We also worry about shelf appeal. We want the yarn to look nice.

Amy Hendrix: We try to base our decisions on what

a yarn is going to be used for, project-wise. With Tosh Sock we wanted to include at least a minimum amount for a pair of socks. For a DK weight, we think about yardage from a project perspective. For example, a DK weight with a put-up of 225 yards means that if you're going for 2,000 yards for a sweater, you could lay out eight skeins on the table and not end up with a large amount of leftovers.

Say you bring a yarn home and out of curiosity you weigh it and find it comes up short.

Why is that?

Betsy Perry: This is the nature of any business that involves weighing and measuring. A lot of this is done on machinery, and there is a certain amount of error in any process. The industry standard variance is 7 percent from what it says on the label, so a 50g ball could weigh 47g. I'm not happy with a 7 percent variance on a regular basis. But we don't weigh every bag and ball. If we hear that they're short, we address it with the mill. We make sure the mill is staying true to what's on the label, and we try to make our customers happy any way we can.

How do you decide to discontinue a yarn?

Linda Pratt: The major reason is that the yarn isn't selling well. But sometimes it's a supply issue—the mill can't get a filament or fiber they need. If they can't make it happen, you have to kill the yarn. Some yarns are just underappreciated, and it can be heartbreaking. Sometimes the market just wasn't ready for it.

Betsy Perry: Just like a yarn shop, we have to be able to turn over our yarn. If it's not moving, it's unfortunate, but it has to go so we can make

(continued on page 43)



Not many people say, “I want to be an LYSO when I grow up.”

Life Before Yarn

BY DARYL BROWER

Few in the yarn business take a straight school-to-shop-owner route. Indeed, the path to LYS ownership (or management) tends to be a circuitous one. Some first careers—accountant, retail buyer, store manager—have obvious ties to life as a yarn retailer. But environmental scientist, insurance agent or Broadway stage manager? As it happens, all sorts of careers can teach valuable fiber-management lessons. Here are the origin stories of a few owners and managers from a store near you.

A GOOD INSURANCE POLICY

Susan DellaRocco, Starstruck Cat Studio, Greenwood, Indiana
Past life: Insurance Agent

Susan DellaRocco wore many hats before taking over Starstruck Cat Studio—fabric store clerk and Mary Kay consultant, among them—but the one that sat most comfortably was that of insurance agent. She started as the secretary to a State Farm district manager, eventually getting her own license in property/casualty insurance. “I worked on both personal and commercial lines and was a customer service rep for a number of independent agencies,” she explains. Her job was to service the accounts that agents brought in, processing clients’ policies, answering questions and selling additional lines of insurance when appropriate. It was experience that lent itself well to retail. “One of the best things that the insurance industry taught me is that you have to keep your current clients happy, not just bring in new ones,” she says.

Following the birth of her first child, DellaRocco worked out an arrangement with her employer that allowed her to work remotely, processing insurance policies for the agency. “It taught me how to prioritize and focus on what needs to be done,” she says of those years. Three years later she was downsized and found herself looking for a way to get out of the house. She found escape at a local yarn shop, and on the suggestion of her husband, she signed up for a few classes. “My husband jokes that this was the most expensive course he ever encouraged me to take,” she laughs. “I became a regular customer, then an employee, then a business partner. I eventually purchased the business.”

The shop was on the verge of closing when DellaRocco came on board. “But I believed in the store, I believed in the community we were building, and I truly believed that with a bit more inventory, more classes—more everything—we could turn the business around and make it thrive.” To do that she adapted the customer service lessons she’d learned in insurance to the yarn world. “All knitting stores carry yarn; a few in the same area even may carry the same yarns,” she says. “It’s how you treat your customers that sets you apart from other yarn shops.”

She also employed another tactic from her past career: “State Farm had a program called Take Care +1,” DellaRocco explains. “You’d take care of the customer’s current need or question, then determine whether there was another need that wasn’t being fulfilled. For instance, if a customer called with an inquiry about an auto policy, you took care of the [immediate question], but if while reviewing the policy you noticed there was no rental-car reimbursement, you’d discuss that coverage as well.” The tactic led to increased sales and an extra level of attention to the

client. So when a customer walks into DellaRocco’s shop, she employs Take Care +1 for yarn. “If someone comes for a pattern or has a question, we take care of that need first. Then we suggest other patterns she may want to consider for the next project. When a customer purchases a pattern, we also ask if she needs needles or other notions [to complete it].”

That attention has paid off. “In the first year I was part of the business, we increased gross sales by 88 percent. I still have a long way to go with all the plans I have for the store, but I am continuing to see growth, and I know we will make these goals a reality.”

HOME SCHOOLED

Mim Bird, Over the Rainbow Yarn, Rockland, Maine
Past life: Stay-at-Home Mom

Mim Bird jokes that she doesn’t think that there was a “before yarn” era in her life, though there was certainly a life before LYS ownership. “I learned to knit when I was 7 years old,” she says. “So yarn has been a big part of my life my entire life.” By age 9 she was teaching friends how to knit, a habit that continued into her adult years as she picked up work teaching at grade schools, high schools and community-college continuing-education courses. Motherhood, however, consumed most of her time. “I was a stay-at-home, homeschooling mom for more than a decade before I decided to open a retail yarn shop,” Bird says. When her son was 12, he made the decision to attend public school. A year later, after time spent pondering what to do, Bird realized, “What I really wanted was to surround myself with knitters and lovely yarn.” So she did her market research, wrote a business plan and never looked back.

And though she’s now a successful proprietor, Bird considers herself to be, first and foremost, a teacher—a big plus for her customers. “I’ve spent a lifetime learning different ways of teaching, so when I meet students I’m able to figure out ways to help them ‘get it,’” she says. The challenges of planning a curriculum and the things she learned about herself while homeschooling her son have also paid off in the retail world. “When we started homeschooling, I was a little intimidated by the math and science part of the curriculum. I figured that if I could break the subjects down into really small chunks—the way I do when I’m teaching knitting—I could understand them and convey them to my son,” she says. “I discovered that I am not bad at math and that if I take things one piece at a time, I can understand almost anything. I gave up anxiety about my ability and started putting my energy toward figuring things out.”

She also learned to cultivate mentors and other resources, discovering that homeschooling doesn’t have to be an isolating experience. “I didn’t have to do any of it alone,” she says. So when she started the business, she followed the same path, breaking the process into small chunks and searching out mentors, advisers and helpers along the way. “It takes a village to raise a child—and to start a business,” Bird says. “Teaching knitting made me a better homeschooler, and homeschooling helped me figure out how to start a business.”

BUSINESS MINDED

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

Past life: Computer Programmer with an MBA in International Management

Janet Avila began her business career as a computer programmer, then got sidetracked teaching high school in Colombia for three years before earning her master's degree in international management. Eventually she landed a job with the accounting firm Arthur Andersen. Her entry into the yarn world came in September 2001. "I was laid off after thirteen years," she says. (Arthur Andersen dissolved a year later in the midst of the Enron scandal.) A day later, her brother was killed in the attacks on the World Trade Center. "While I grieved, I knit," she explains. "When I was ready to think about another career, I began to imagine all the ways a yarn store could make the world a better place. I'm a strong believer in the healing properties of knitting, and I believe that bringing peace to more people in my neighborhood can help bring peace to communities in faraway places." Hoping to support "good things"—women's cooperatives, companies striving to be environmentally friendly, fair trade, fiber artists, small farms, to name a few—she named the shop String Theory because "knitters know that everything is connected to everything else."

Avila credits her corporate experience for her mom-and-pop success. "It taught me to make decisions based on cost/benefit analysis and return on investment," she explains. "I understand that time is money, and I frequently ask myself if what I'm doing at the moment is the best use of my time."

A corporate business background also schooled her in the political force of economics. "People can vote very effectively with their dollars," she says. "If you want more of something in this world, spend your money on it. Businesses will start to pay attention and invest more in the things you want to see—like when Wal-Mart decided to carry organic produce. At String Theory, I spend my money knowing this and attempt to educate my customers to do the same."

Her programming background, though outdated at this point, has its benefits as well. "It gave me the confidence to embrace technology," she says. "I'm active on social media and I investigate apps to make my work more efficient." That teaching stint in Colombia also has applications in the yarn world: "I speak Spanish, so I can understand the Malabrigo color names," Avila jokes. "I also understand why the mills in South America don't run on my schedule." And as much as she loves her new career, she admits that it does have its drawbacks. "It used to be that I could compartmentalize my life," she says. "I worked at work and was focused on home at home. Now, it is much more difficult to balance my time—my head is always spinning with new ideas for the store."

A BETTER ENVIRONMENT

Annissa Essaibi George, Stitch House, Dorchester, Massachusetts

Past life: Air Pollution Specialist

A master's degree in environmental health sciences landed Annissa Essaibi George a job with the Environmental Protection Agency. "I was responsible for assessing industry compliance with the Clean Air Act across a five-state region," she explains. That meant conducting inspections at manufacturing facilities (mostly petroleum refineries), drafting reports and testifying in legal proceedings if her findings resulted in the government taking action against the polluter. She continued to work after her first child was born, but after the birth of her second she found that the demands of motherhood didn't mix well with the hours and inspection road trips the job demanded. So she switched gears. "I worked part-time in an upscale women's retail clothing store a few hours a week while I focused primarily on being a mom," she says. She discovered knitting around the same time—it provided work for idle hands during gymnastics classes and music lessons. When her youngest child enrolled in school, George decided it was the perfect time to open a yarn shop. "I suppose my love of art, fashion and knitting, along with my tendency to never do things halfway, contributed to my desire to open my own shop," she says.

Ever the environmental scientist, George gravitates toward yarns

that are processed in a way that minimizes the negative impact on the environment. "I prefer natural fibers, organic processing and natural dyes whenever possible," she says. Other skills used in her previous profession also come in handy. "Working as a team, paying attention to details, mitigating disputes, communicating effectively—these are beneficial skills for multiple professions," she says. "But probably the most significant overlap lies in the basic desire to help the world around me. As an environmental professional, I sought to reduce pollution and better the lives of people in communities at large. As a yarn shop owner, my focus is more microcosmic, but I still feel that I'm able to make a small difference for the better in the lives of my customers."

PRODUCTION VALUES

Robyn Schrager, Kirkwood Knittery, St. Louis, Missouri

Past life: Arts Administrator, Emmy-Award-Winning Producer, Chef

Robyn Schrager may need multiple pages for her CV, but the yarn love was always there. "I've always floated around the creative worlds, most of them dominated by women," she says. Describing her college years as "that weird time between the traditional TV sitcom family life and the daring debut of *Mary Tyler Moore*," she says her parents encouraged her to follow her bliss, with the expectation that she'd find a professional husband while at college. "I ended up with a liberal arts degree from a prestigious university, no husband and no real plan," she recalls. "My roommate and I had the notion that it would be fun to own a yarn shop where we could spin and dye yarn to order, and also own a dry cleaner next-door. Even then we must have been smart enough to realize that the real money would be in dry cleaning."

The roommate ended up in law school, and Schrager found a job as secretary for an arts foundation. "That was really my crash course in business," she says. "By evaluating the organizations requesting money, I learned a great deal about business strategies, finances and management. But it wasn't very creative." So she took video production classes on the side, creating everything from a music video (MTV hadn't been invented yet) to commercials to industrial training videos. After a stint at a small nonprofit production company, she jumped to a local cable TV company, running the local access channel and supervising two production studios where, in addition to creative duties, she advised the board of directors on budgeting, equipment and marketing. She loved the work but not the hours, and she left when she married. "It was around the time the Food Network launched, and I realized how much of my life had been filled with themed events and fun food presentations," she says. So she found work as chef, a job that fulfilled her creative side (designing menu items, making beautiful plating presentations) as she honed practical skills—managing a budget and people, keeping track of inventory and so on.

Again, the physical side of the work burned her out. "The hours got really, really, really long as on-demand became routine instead of occasional," she says. "I went back to the fine arts, but since I still couldn't draw or sing and didn't want to work the hours of an actor, I ended up on the administrative side again." Four years of struggling to keep two nonprofits funded and functional sent her looking for something new. And that's when yarn reentered the picture. "A new LYS had opened in St. Louis, Ravelry was born, and I wasn't working," she says. "So I became a Ravelry maven and spent a few afternoons teaching Brooke [Nico, her co-owner at Kirkwood Knittery] and her then-partner how to use the site." The store owners asked her to teach classes, which led to a part-time job in the shop and eventually co-ownership when Nico's business partner retired.

All the skills she'd acquired in her past careers quickly came into play. "By the time I [joined Kirkwood Knittery] I had a full history of working in small businesses where no one did just one job, where the primary customer/participant was a woman, and where creativity and business acumen were necessary in equal measure for success," she says. The following year, Kirkwood Knittery was named TNNA's Business Innovation Award winner and garnered press in *Vogue Knitting*, *Yarn Market News* and *Creative Knitting*. Schrager couldn't be happier. "My creative side is fulfilled by design work for the shop, magazines and

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Selling Style

WITH

Use Your
Customers'
Buying Styles
to Ramp Up
Sales

BY PAULA GIOVACCHINI

When someone walks into your store, what do you want their in-store experience to be? How do you want to be perceived by returning customers and prospective customers? I posed these questions to 100 needlearts-store owners at the Yarn Market News Smart Business Conference in Chicago last March. "Friendly," "knowledgeable," "fun," "professional" and "well run" were a few of the responses.

For the past 15 years I have been teaching people from various industries how to increase revenue and strengthen their relationships with customers. But I am a fairly new knitter, taking up the craft only four years ago, and I remain somewhat inexperienced, since I only make baby blankets. (A main reason I knit is for stress relief, as it was for my mother, an avid knitter and crocheter who often claimed, "It's my therapy.") As a new customer to yarn shops, I see many ways that store owners can use my tactics to increase sales and make better connections with customers. I spoke last spring to the attendees of the Smart Business Conference about just that. Here, I recount a few of those approaches.

Identify Your Target Market

How intentional are you when deciding with whom you'd like to build a relationship? It's perfectly understandable that you won't be able to build relationships with everyone who can buy your products and services, which is why pinpointing your target market is critical. A *target market* is a group of people who are willing and open to buying from

you. Think about who exactly you want to be selling to the most. Perhaps your target market is single moms, "snowbirds" who winter in your area or professionals who knit or crochet as a stress reliever.

Not only do you want to build relationships with current and prospective customers, but you also need to foster connections with *connectors* and *alliance partners*. Connectors are those who know people in your target market. Alliance partners are those who sell complementary services to people in your target market. For example, if your target market is single moms, then connectors might be knitting clubs or community organizations, places of worship or educational institutions that organize special groups for single mothers. Alliance partners could be stores that sell clothes, toys or books for children.

Start Asking Questions

Questions are used to diagnose needs, wants and problems and their causes, as well as the person's feelings about the need, want or problem. You want today's browse-only customer to return to your store when he or she is ready to make a purchase, based not only on your products but also on your service. Research shows that 68 percent of people leave a store without buying based on the treatment or service they receive. While people buy emotionally, they make decisions based on fact, so you will want to ask both fact-based and emotion-based questions of the customers who come in. This will give you the tools you need to better help them while they're still in your store.

ILLUSTRATION BY LISA HENDERLING

Fact-based questions bring out all sorts of information. People are able to answer fact-based questions with verifiable, objective information. These kinds of questions are easier to answer and can be less tension-producing, since they tend not to elicit a controversial or sensitive response. Examples: "What project are you currently working on?" "How did you hear about our store?"

and wants. When a person uses the words "want," "need," "wish," "hope," "would like" or "must," she is telling you exactly what she is looking for.

At the Smart Business Conference, I shared a personal example that generated a vigorous discussion among the audience. A friend and I visited a yarn store in the neighborhood she'd recently moved into. It



Along with substantive information, emotion-based questions aim at discovering what the person needs or expects. They ask a person to share opinions, doubts, feelings and concerns. It is just as important for you to discover *why* a person wants something as it is to know *what* she wants. Examples: "How do you decide what project you will work on next?" "What do you look for when selecting yarn/patterns?" New knitters especially can leave with more interest in the craft than they had when they came in, or feeling more confident about their developing skills. When someone walks into your shop, ask yourself, "What would I most like to know about this person as a crafter? And what would I most like to share?" Questions to build intentional relationships include: "What brings you to our store today? What types of projects do you work on? What do you enjoy most about knitting/crocheting?" In the sales process, questions are a way to diagnose needs and wants as well as determine how much time and effort you will put into the relationship.

Listening for the "in"

When you hear the answers to your questions, listen for the "in"—your way into their lives, into their shopping habits and into their wallets. People unconsciously tell you how you can help them when they express needs. It is important to learn the language of needs

When a person uses the words "want," "need," "wish," "hope," "would like" or "must," she is telling you exactly what she's looking for.

was early afternoon on a quiet Monday, and the owner and a staff person were sitting at a table when we walked in. They asked us if we needed assistance, to which we responded, "Just looking." I initiated a conversation and revealed that I don't know how to—but would like someday to—cast on (yes, it's true) and that a dear friend starts all of my baby blankets.

I asked the audience, "How would you respond had I been in your store?" Some shared that they would recommend I take a class. Others said they'd have asked me if I had a few minutes and would have taught me to cast on on the spot. I then asked if they would have charged me for that lesson. That question generated an interesting discussion. Some were adamant about charging me for the lesson so as not to diminish the value of the services provided. Others voiced an equally strong dissenting opinion: "No way would I have charged you. It was a Monday and no one else was in the store." What would you have done?

There really isn't a right or wrong answer. The key message I wanted to emphasize? See every interaction as an opportunity to build a relationship and turn a prospective customer into a paying one. As it happens, that store owner did suggest I take a class and graciously gave me a class schedule. But as a prospective customer, I would have been impressed had the owner offered to teach me on the spot. As a business owner myself, I often offer to help would-be

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clients without obligation by providing complimentary coaching services.

Learn to Uncover Buying Styles

People approach buying differently. Your job as a store owner is to identify, in a short amount of time, what that style is. Doing so is crucial when dealing with first-time visitors, but of course it's difficult when you have no history with the potential customer. The steps for doing so are: 1) engage with the person in a way that appeals to her; 2) learn her buying style; and 3) decide if you want to invest time in building a relationship. The more you genuinely show interest in and understand prospects and customers, the more your business will grow.

Besides buying yarn, people buy *you*. If they know you, like you and sense that you're interested in them and have their best interests at heart, they will buy from you. Once you understand a person's buying style, you can create strategies to increase her spending if the person is a customer or secure the person as a customer if she is a prospect. A few buyer profiles are listed below; you can add your own profiles based on your particular audience.

Budget Buyer: Spends only a set amount and is always looking for a bargain.

Next-Level Buyer: On the threshold of next level of skill; is thinking about designing and/or is looking for expert advice on materials.

Dependent Buyer: Finds expert, hands-on assistance and classes most valuable.

Situational/Purposeful Buyer: Buys only for current project.

Aesthetic Buyer: Binges on yarn for satisfaction, loves working with fibers and seeks a broad selection.

New Buyer: Knows nothing and not sure if she will enjoy the craft.

Social Buyer: Wants to hang out with others and may be influenced by others' purchases.

SABLE (Stash Acquisition Beyond Life Expectancy) Buyer: "What's one more skein?" Can't resist buying new and unusual products.

You can uncover a person's buying style by asking targeted questions: "What budget range do you have in mind?" "What is most important to you in your knitting right now?" "Is there something specific on your to-learn list that's a priority for you?" "What types of yarn do you most like to work with?" "How do you decide which project to work on next?" "If you were me and wanted to attract customers like you, what would you suggest I do?"

In an effort to introduce the audience at the Smart Business Conference to different buying styles, I invited two friends to join me on a panel. I asked the attendees to identify our buying styles based on our language of needs and wants. The small group discussion generated a mix of excitement and frustration as LYS owners learned to pay attention to the words spoken in a different way. My Aesthetic-Buyer friend talked about the look and feel of yarn and great variety of patterns available, while my Next-Level-Buyer friend revealed that she wants to broaden her skills and projects but is unsure not only about taking that next step but also about what the next step should be. I, on the other hand, am a Situational/Purposeful Buyer, only making one baby blanket at a time. Would you approach the three of us the same way if we visited your store? If not, what would you do differently?

Practice identifying buying styles of your current customers and of the people who frequent your store the most. Ask targeted questions to identify their buying styles. For a new visitor, ask a variety of questions and see which ones engage the prospect more, result in a purchase or bring the person back to your store.



Classify Prospects and Customers

Your time is valuable. Once you identify a person's buying style, you will then need to determine how much time you want to invest in developing a relationship and creating personalized interaction strategies. (Sending a mass email, for example, is not a personalized strategy.)

High-potential customer: Most attractive. Offers the highest future buying potential. Establish how frequently you want to stay top of mind—for example, once every two months.

Medium-potential customer: Moderately attractive. Offers a moderate future buying potential. Establish how frequently you want to stay top of mind—for example, four times a year.

Low-potential customer: Least attractive. Offers the least future buying potential. Establish how frequently you want to stay top of mind—for example, once a year.

The interaction strategies you identify are personalized based on buying styles and other information you learn about the customer. Your goals for creating interaction strategies to stay top of mind are to engage with them in a way that gets them to make a purchase, return to your store or tell others about your store. Staying top of mind is limited only by your imagination.

The follow-up must suggest a genuine interest in developing a relationship. Providing personal, regular contact with targeted customers and prospective customers shows interest. Some personal interactions include sending a handwritten thank-you note or making a phone call after a purchase; asking for a testimonial to post on your website; requesting feedback on a product or service; calling to announce she is a winner of a drawing; extending a personal invitation to an in-store event; sending an article of interest (not as a group email); making personal contact about a new service or product; sending a personalized birthday email or card; following up to see how a particular project turned out. The possibilities are nearly endless.

Building intentional relationships with the purpose of increasing revenue is not a one-size-fits-all process. Since it does take time and creativity, you'll want to be selective about the prospects and customers with whom you want to strengthen your relationships. Once you make your decisions, the following action steps will help.

Putting It All Together: Action Steps

1. Identify two or three questions to use as conversation starters to engage with the person.
2. Determine her buying style by asking targeted questions and analyzing past purchases and interactions.
3. Decide her potential and the amount of time you will invest in the relationship.
4. Identify personalized interaction strategies to grow the relationship.

Paula Giovacchini is the owner of Gio Group, Inc., a consulting, training and coaching firm that provides business development and leadership development training and career coaching services.

room for new yarns. We have to make hard decisions about what we might have to move away from.

Heather McVickar: Popularity changes. We shift our inventory to reflect what retailers and consumers are looking for.

BP: There are also minimum requirements we have to commit to from a mill. We can't just order one color. We have to buy very large minimums and large minimums per color. If it will cost a lot of money to stay in and is not wildly popular? It just doesn't meet the threshold.

What's your best advice to yarn shops regarding inventory management?

Amy Hendrix: Since we are a hand dyer and we dye to order, we always suggest that when you receive an order, you have another ready to fax or email to your account manager, so you know that within a certain amount of time you'll have inventory cycling in. We just finished moving into newer facility [during the early part of 2014], so a lot of people who haven't ordered from us recently will find that our lead time is back down to 10 to 12 weeks. Our capacity is greater, we have a lot more dyers, and orders are coming in a lot quicker. So no one is disappointed, we always say that we ship within 12 to 14 weeks.

Heather McVickar: We can't turn around quickly on one or two colors. Say we're out of black and white in a yarn. We can't just order black and white; we have to order three or four other colors to meet order requirements. That could push the delivery of that yarn into a new season.

Betsy Perry: Try to think outside what a pattern calls for. Maybe we don't have a particular pink, but we have these other pinks that might serve your customers just as well. Mills make the yarn when we place an order. Say we are out of some key colors in a popular yarn. If we place an order in May, it won't get here until September—and by then everyone will have moved on. It frustrates us too because that means lost sales. If an independent designer uses a particular color and we didn't know ahead of time so we could plan ahead, we could run out.

Linda Pratt: There's no crystal ball. You make the best-educated decisions you can. Nobody wants to be out of stock, and nobody wants to be holding a ton of stock that sinks them. Most companies will work really hard to make things work. We're all working toward one goal, which is to do well.

What is it that you'd like readers to know about your business?

Amy Hendrix: We've tweaked an existing yarn based on feedback from customers. We've added extra yardage or tightened the twist. We listened when we were told that one skein would be enough to complete a hat if we'd just add a bit of yardage. This pleases people. They are pleased with the brand, because we thought of them.

Linda Pratt: Sometimes it's hard to remember that yarn companies are run by human beings who are trying their best. The more communication companies have with their retailers, the better. We're always trying to figure out things to do for our retailers and work with them to help drive consumers into their stores. That's true. We are all trying to attract the attention of consumers and make stores successful and give them the tools, products and information they need to be successful.

Keep lines of communication open. If you have a problem with a company, let them know. If you are in a slow season and having trouble paying a bill, let a finance person know. Be up-front about it. They'll work with you. They *want* to work with you. Everyone wants to keep the relationship going.

Heather McVickar: We're not a big, bad yarn company! We love yarn. We love to talk to yarn shops about yarn. We don't bite. So please pick up the phone. We're here to support stores. We're in this industry because we love it. We really are enthusiasts.

books; the practical side gets to own a small business; and the nurturing side gets to teach classes and fix problems all day long," she says. "It took 30 years, but I finally made the college girl's idle dream come true."

ALL THE STORE'S A STAGE

Patty Lyons, former store manager, Lion Brand Yarn Studio
Past life: Broadway Stage Manager

Patty Lyons didn't get much downtime while she was stage-managing Broadway shows like *Jersey Boys* and *42nd Street*. But when she did get the opportunity, she knit. "The whole cast knit," she says of the latter show. "I'd give lessons in the green room." Lyons loved the work and the theater, but 22 years of working late nights, weekends and holidays, not to mention the travel when a show hit the road, took their toll. "It was Broadway; how could I not love it?" she says. "I'm extremely grateful for the experience, but it was hard work, and exhausting." When she decided to switch careers, LYS ownership was at the top of her list. She set the gears in motion by taking a class at SCORE, a mentorship program created in partnership with the U.S. Small Business Administration. "They offered courses in management and customer service," she explains, "but the biggest thing they stressed was that you shouldn't open a business you've never worked in." Taking that advice to heart, she found a job as a manager for a New York City yarn shop.

Lyons found the transition from stage to store to be a smooth one. "The stage manager is really the caretaker of the show," she explains. "You're taking care of the details, running reports, passing information along to the director and producers, and delivering it in a way they can understand and use. In a store you're communicating similar information to the owner." Accustomed to providing detailed reports ("You keep track of when the show started, whether it was raining, who was out and for what reason," she explains), Lyons began preparing similar daily reports for the store she managed, including sales figures for the day, along with what was made on the same day the year before. "That way you're comparing apples to apples," she says. She also implemented time sheets that showed not just who was scheduled to work but who actually worked certain hours. "That way you see on paper that when a particular salesperson is on, we bring in more sales," she says. "It helps identify what's working and what's not."

Theater taught Lyons perseverance. "I don't go away until things that need an answer get an answer," she laughs. The crazy pace of her former job also taught her the importance of preparation. "You don't have time up-front to put systems in place, in the theater or in the store," she says. "So if you have that done behind the scenes—forms for reorders, templates for emails or social media—you can get things accomplished more efficiently."

Lyons never did open her own yarn shop, but she has no regrets. In 2008 she joined Lion Brand Yarn, helping to create the Lion Brand Yarn Studio and serving as its director for five years. She has since established herself as a topnotch instructor, teaching nationally at guilds and shows around the country. It turns out that theater translates to teaching pretty well too. One of a stage manager's jobs, Lyons explains, is to deliver the director's notes to the performers, a task that takes some care and finesse, given actors' often-delicate egos and emotions. "The director would give his notes to me in his style, and I'd deliver them in a style that the actor hears," she says. "My delivery of the same information to one actor might be completely different for the next." Knitters can be equally fragile and require the same care. "Knitting is an emotional thing, and [customers] often come in with a lot of baggage," Lyons says. "Knowing how to say the same thing 107 different ways [and knowing which way will best suit a particular customer] is really helpful."

He's Got the Power

After establishing a shared love of Philadelphia sporting teams, Erin Slonaker and Richard "Dick" Power, Jr., chatted recently about his company—Bristol, Pennsylvania-based Plymouth Yarn—and what it's been like working in a legacy company for so long.



YMN: For those who might not know, please tell me a little about the history of Plymouth.

RP: We started in 1964, as Fidelity Fibres, Inc., which sold wool top, specialty top and synthetic top to spinning mills in the United States—all across the country, but primarily in the Northeast. As those spinning mills and U.S. textile concerns started going out of business, my father, part of the team that started the company, got more interested in the yarn business, forming Plymouth Yarn. At first, the easiest way to sell our yarn was through spinning-mill outlet stores, but those started going out of business too. So we segued into independent retail yarn shops, hired a small sales force, put together color cards, etc. We were learning as we went. These days we are a company that sells only yarn. Though Fidelity Fibres still exists, it has generated zero dollars over the past few years.

YMN: How many employees does Plymouth Yarn have now?

RP: Between office and warehouse, about 25, plus 16 independent sales reps. As you can see, we are a very small company. I'm a hands-on boss.

YMN: How old were you when you joined the company? What was it like for you in the early years?

RP: I graduated in 1976 from Ohio Wesleyan University with a journalism degree and hoped to find a job at a newspaper or even a television station in the Philadelphia area. When nothing came of those interviews, my dad suggested I take some classes at the Philadelphia College of Textiles & Science [now Philadelphia University], so I did, learning the basics of textile production. In less than a year I was working for my dad full time. Initially, I was just one of the guys unloading trucks or working in the shipping room. It took me a while to get into the office—I was in the warehouse for five or six years before I moved.

YMN: Has the journalism degree come in handy?

RP: It trained me to react quickly, communicate concisely and always listen, listen, listen.

YMN: What was it like working for your dad?

RP: I got a chance to really get to know him,

which I hadn't growing up—he was always working so hard. I liked that part of being in the company a lot. I played sports, and I think dad saw me play in only one state championship game.

YMN: What is your father doing these days?

RP: He's driving me crazy asking questions about the business! Plymouth was a big part of his life, and he's still interested in knowing what's selling, what's working. He fully retired about 10 years ago—he just turned 90—but I gladly put up with his questions.

YMN: What's the company's viewpoint when it comes to developing yarn?

RP: We're always watching trends and communicating with our mills around the world. Our traditional classic yarns—Encore, Galway, Alpacas, Dreambaby—are always being updated to follow color trends and receive new pattern support. Then we have our modern classics—WMSW, DKMSW, Happy Feet, Gina and Monte Donegal, to name a few—that supply knitters with quality yarns with sustainability in the fashion world, which means that after all the effort and care knitters put into a project, the yarns will hold up. And of course we're always cautiously looking out for the next craze with longevity. Plymouth was the first company to bring in the novelty railroad yarn Eros.

YMN: You were also the first to bring fine alpaca to the United States. How did that come about?

RP: We had been selling alpaca top from Peru to American worsted mills, working it into worsted yarn and knitting it into golf cardigans. Those mills started to go out of business, but we knew we had a good resource in Peru—Michel y Cia, the largest alpaca spinner in the world—and we'd just gotten into knitting yarns, so we started to bring in the hand-knitting yarns from them. They're a huge alpaca concern. We've been doing business with them for decades.

YMN: Was it hard to get the audience here to shop for alpaca?

RP: People scratched their heads and asked, "Is this camel? Llama?" It took a little educating of

the consumer. We got some literature from the spinner and relied on word of mouth. It's a lot easier to sell these days than it was initially.

YMN: What's it like for you to be working in such a female-dominated industry? Do you ever feel out of place?

RP: Truthfully, when we started in this business it was a male-dominated industry. As it has developed through the decades, the female influence has brought creativity and customer perspective to the forefront.

YMN: What is your favorite thing about working in the yarn industry?

RP: The balance of business and creativity.

YMN: Are your children interested in someday taking over the company?

RP: My daughter Carolyn just graduated from college with a double major in Spanish and Education, and she's planning to be a teacher. It's pretty clear her future lies outside Plymouth Yarn Company. My son, Richard Power III (shown top right), is a business major but still just a sophomore in college. So there's the possibility that he'll use that business degree for us, but I want him to explore his own path. During the summer he worked for us a few days a week, doing grunt work like I did when I was starting out, but no more than that right now.

YMN: What do you like to do in your spare time?

RP: I'm a sports guy. My kids are both very involved too. My son played baseball and basketball in high school and he currently plays baseball in college. Carolyn played softball and ran cross-country. For years my spare time was spent coaching Little League and softball, and then as the kids got older I was at all of their games and races. I'm also an avid boater—sailing, motorboating. My son does wakeboarding and I drive the boat for him. Most weekends we're out on the water. We have a place in Florida, and I'll steal a few long weekends in the winter to head down there to enjoy the weather and get out on the boat.



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