

Kelly Weinberger, founder of  
WorldFinds with their artisans in India.



## INTERVIEW

# *Ethical Fashion:* Meet WorldFinds

BY THE EDITOR

**YOU MAY KNOW** WorldFinds for their colorful jewelry and covetable accessories and gifts. But their story is what really makes them stand out. They're women-owned and fueled and committed to empowering women and their communities. Their high-quality products are handcrafted, fair trade, sustainable and ethically sourced, using wooden scraps from furniture factories and repurposed Sari and Kantha textiles. We went behind the scenes with founder Kelly Weinberger to learn more about the ethos serving as the core of their brand.

**Retailing Insight — First of all, how are you doing?**

**Kelly Weinberger** — We are well! It's been a challenging year, but things are finally beginning to improve. We've been okay here in the U.S., but

India's second wave of covid has been just horrible for our artisan partners and they've had a very rough time. It is improving finally, and we're all determined to get through this.

**RI: Let's go back to the beginning a bit and tell us how the brand started?**

**KW:** It all began way back in 1999. I was in the middle of a 14-month trip backpacking around the world with my husband. We were in Nepal and a fellow-traveler friend from New Zealand mentioned she was going to visit a women's cooperative that day, as her mom was really into fair trade. I immediately needed to know more! I had my lightbulb moment after learning that it addressed so many of the root causes of poverty, acting as a tool to provide economic empowerment, ►



and was a way to connect with women in underserved communities. I thought perhaps some of my previous work experience in marketing might be useful to do something on my own in fair trade. I spent the rest of our travels completely obsessed with the concept of starting a 'business with a purpose', determined to learn as much as possible about artisan communities' needs in the different places we visited. When we got back home, I began testing out products at trunk shows friends kindly had for me, and when everything sold out, I thought I might be on to something. I quickly moved into wholesale by calling on stores as

the volumes were better and I could get more orders back into the artisans faster. There was a lot of just sort of figuring things out as I go, which we still sometimes feel like we're doing even today!

**RI: How did you find your artisan partners?**

**KW:** For me everything is about connections and relationships. Our artisan partners are a combination of World Fair Trade Organization members, small families of artisans, and women's cooperatives. We've been working with most of them for about 20 years. When I was first starting out, it was about finding groups that I felt a strong connection with, that were easy to

work with, had a solid foundation of social impact initiatives, who were keen to work on new designs, and had potential so that we could grow together. Plus, lots of trust and respect. We have so much invested in our partners, and they in us. I just love working with them on so many levels.

**RI: How are your designs sustainable?**

**KW:** Everything we design, source and sell is handmade by women artisans who work from their homes or in small workshops. We're definitely part of the small batch, slow fashion movement and with time, we've been able to scale up production and build capacity.

A majority of our designs are made using repurposed materials, like kantha quilts, sari pieces, wood scraps, and Kutch textiles. All are found in abundance in India and we're able to reimagine them into something fresh and beautiful! We're now beginning to work with recycled metals which is also exciting. We consider the environmental impact in everything we do.

*Statistics from the garment industry are simply staggering, fashion waste is having a horrible effect on our planet, and we try to do all we can to use materials*

*in existence, so we don't contribute to the problem.*

**RI: How large is your team?**

**KW:** We have an amazing group here in the U.S. Our office/design studio/warehouse is in the Chicago area, and we have a small but mighty team of eight people. Six of us are based here, including my husband and business partner (who is a master at reports, spreadsheets, IT and finances). Our product designer was our first hire back in 2007, she is just incredibly talented and also misses not being able to get to India. We also have a great warehouse manager, a brilliant marketing coordinator, and an amazing

account manager. Two of our team members work remotely, our sales manager is based in North Carolina, and our marketplace manager is in San Diego — so we're used to Zoom meetings and working with multiple time zones.

**RI: Tell us more your culture and philosophy?**

**KW:** So much of what we do with our artisan partners is collaborative, and I wanted that to be part of our office vibe here in the United States. It took several years before we had grown enough so that we could hire anyone, so every day I'm grateful that we have a team and it's not just me. I think kindness is important ►



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Keith "MuzikMan" Hannaleck Review Provided  
By New Age Music Reviews



in all relationships, as you never know what difficulty someone might be going through in their personal life. Also fun, creative, respectful, and thoughtful are other words I'd use. We bridge this interesting world between really challenging social issues in India and the fashion and trend space here in the U.S. Good design is the great equalizer, and we put a lot of time and effort into our new collections.

#### RI: What inspires you?

**KW:** From a motivation standpoint, our artisan partners are just incredibly strong, resilient and inspiring. I'm motivated every day to continue growing our business to keep the partnerships with

them going strong. In the "before times" pre-covid, I'd be in India at least once a year which helps to keep connections strong. Regarding what inspires me from a design standpoint, it's a mix of art museums, nature, traveling, architecture, and India itself. With museums closed and travel cancelled, I've been relying on nature quite a bit this past year. But normally I get a lot of inspiration in India.

#### RI: Where do you find retail partners?

**KW:** We love trade shows and have always found a lot of our partners that way. We can't wait to return to Atlanta and NY NOW shows this summer. Online

wholesale marketplaces like Faire and Abound have been great this past year with trade shows being canceled. We're also active in the Museum Store Association as well as the Fair Trade Federation. We find a lot of retailers through those communities.

#### RI: How about your involvement in fair trade?

**KW:** Fair trade has been the foundation of our business since the beginning. It's a 360° holistic approach to trade, with nine principles and practices at the core of what we do. These tenets include the basics like paying a living wage, preserving cultural traditions, respect for the environment, long-term relationships and much more. We're celebrating

20 years as vetted members of the Fair Trade Federation, and within that time I spent two terms on the board as well as serving on several committees. It's an amazing, collaborative community and we have made so many deep friendships — we all know how much work goes into what we do and have the utmost respect for one another!

#### RI: In terms of demographics, who is your customer?

**KW:** It's been a fascinating journey to figure this out. Our products do really well in art museum shops, and also in college towns. Two completely different demographics. We have a wide range of styles, so there are a lot of options available. We have

large, colorful statement jewelry that speaks to a certain customer, as well as more minimalist styles that work for a very different aesthetic. We love designing new, so are always expanding and building on our range. Our buyer is clever, adventurous, likes to travel, is curious, and likes their jewelry and accessories to reflect their personal style and or mood.

#### RI: Last question to wrap things up — has the pandemic made you re-think how you do business?

**KW:** It has been a year of lots of challenges to say the least. As we're primarily a wholesale brand, we didn't have a lot of revenue coming in when everything shut down. Thank goodness for the PPP and EIDL loans which helped get us

through those bad months. And as our artisan partners are in India, they've had a ton of horrible challenges to deal with from the initial shutdown to the deadly second wave that hit this April and May. Our core partnerships, principles and values will certainly not change, but we are looking at this as an opportunity to expand our artisan partners so we can add some new product collections and reach out to some new communities.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to share our story with your readers!

To know more about WorldFinds, please visit their website [wholesale.worldfinds.com](http://wholesale.worldfinds.com) or check for their latest collection on social media @worldfinds. •

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# Fair Trade Brands

By Hilary Daninhirsch

Fair trade brands impact the artisan communities by helping to provide economic security, and they impact the environment by being thoughtful stewards of the planet, using eco-friendly materials. Fair trade also helps consumers be socially conscious in their purchasing decisions.

Fair trade can trace its roots to the 1940s with the founding of Ten Thousand Villages, though the term 'fair trade' was not coined until the 1970s. Even then, the label referred primarily to such commodities as chocolate and coffee. Later, handcrafted products, such as jewelry, clothing, soaps and home décor were introduced under the fair trade umbrella.

### The Fair Trade Federation

The Fair Trade Federation, established in 1994, is a North American trade association with more than 300 members, comprising both wholesalers and retailers, all of whom commit to sourcing and selling ethically-made handcrafted products. The organization verifies that members meet nine rigorous principles of fair trade. And there are many more nonmember retailers who choose to stock fair trade items, knowing the difference that these goods can make in the world.

"We build equitable and sustainable trading partnerships borne out of a desire to alleviate poverty. The global fair trade movement is an approach to trade that values the health of the planet and the labor, dignity and equality of all people," explained the FTF's executive director, Chris Solt.

### WorldFinds and dZi

#### WorldFinds

It was during a 14-month, around-the-world backpacking trip with her husband in 1999,

that Kelly Weinberger visited a women's cooperative in Nepal. That encounter changed the trajectory of her life. She spent the remainder of the trip learning about the concept of fair trade and economic disparity, while meeting with and learning from artisans.

"I wanted to see where I could fill a niche in the market. I started to test products at trunk shows and at gift shops. It has grown organically from there. I became part of the Fair Trade Federation. That was really helpful, getting started by being able to talk to people who went through the start-up pains," said Weinberger, who lives in Chicago.

Today, WorldFinds distributes ethically-sourced fabric jewelry and accessories made by 700 to 800 women artisans in India, and their products can be found in more than 900 North American shops. She said that she sells to a huge range of stores, from museum shops to boutiques, and that the customer demographic range in age from 20 to 60.

#### dZi

Mac McCoy is the CEO and founder of dZi, a wholesaler that works with Tibetan, Indian, and Nepali artisans to create handmade, eco-conscious gifts. The name, dZi, is a Tibetan word that refers to a highly treasured Tibetan "eye bead" that is considered to be a powerful charm.

McCoy said that dZi maintains five lines, with the original line called the Tibet Collection. Other lines include Fair Trade Holiday, which includes handfelted ornaments, stockings and other holiday décor; Wild Woolies (animal-themed handfelted characters); Lunar Revolution Jewelry; and Fair Trade Home and Garden. The company works with approximately 15 groups representing 1,000



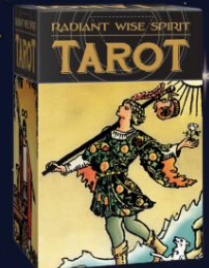
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plus artisans, primarily in handfelted wool, but also in jewelry and other products.

"Our primary goal is to provide steady orders to these businesses. To be able to help them provide steady jobs to their employees who then in turn can improve their own home lives. Any community does better when there is more work and jobs available to the people in that community," said McCoy. He added that some of the larger artisan groups have even launched schools in their communities.

## Storytelling

Unlike mass produced factory items, every fair trade product has a story, and perhaps that is the primary pull for consumers. Retailers often will place a story about the item and the artisan on the hangtag, or sometimes, customers will ask the shop owner for more information. Take WorldFinds, for example. Customers may learn that the kantha statement necklace is sustainably made with repurposed textiles and wood scraps. They may learn that the jewelry is handmade from repurposed saris and scraps from kantha. They may also learn that the woman who made this item is helping her family and sending her daughter to school and now has access to healthcare. "We have POS displays that help tell the story, helps make that connection more tangible. You know this person exists, that you're buying from a human and helping out the community," said Weinberger.

Paul Culler, owner of the retail store Fair Trade Winds, with four locations across the U.S., said that he provides background information about the artisans, such as a sign indicating that a particular item was made by a woman who escaped trafficking, for example. The more that customers learn, the more they're likely to return. "It's really powerful that those products mean something and are not just made on an automated machine," he says.

## Sense of Community

The opposite of competition is cooperation, and unlike many other facets of business, wholesalers and retailers devoted to fair trade practices actually help each other out.

Culler tells the story of how he sent a potential customer five miles down the road to another fair trade gift shop, as that shop had an item in stock that he did not. He said that when he attends the annual Fair Trade meet-

ings with two to three hundred retailers, "We don't shy away from telling people how our businesses are going or what works best for us. We give people ideas and really, anything can be on the table. There are no trade secrets—that doesn't happen in any business but fair trade," said Culler, who carries scarves, jewelry, clothing, household goods and much more.

Solt echoed Culler. "Collaboration is a huge feeling in the fair trade community. It is very much a group of friends and associates that has been given a lot of facilitation through the creation of the Fair Trade Federation. At their annual conference, like-minded individuals and businesses get together and share stories, share tips, share knowledge, and give support to each other in what is generally a tough business," he said.

Of course, there is some competition, as is the inherent nature of business, but there generally is a feeling of mutual respect. "We try to tread softly or avoid direct competition wherever possible; that is part of the ethic," said Solt.

Both Weinberger and McCoy agree that the fair trade world is a strongly collaborative one. "Most of us do different things, but we have so many commonalities that we bond immeasurably, which is one of the reasons we love being in the fair trade world," said Weinberger.

## Increased Interest in Fair Trade

Interest in fair trade and ethically sourced products is growing, both from the retailer and the consumer perspective, as awareness is gradually dawning about the impact of fair trade. For example, many customers who purposefully shop fair trade appreciate the supply chain transparency.

"I think it's that people are waking up to look at more what is going on globally. People are hearing about the environment and the ramifications of fast fashion. They are waking up to global systems that are harming people and planets and want to do something to help counter that. They're thinking, 'I can make a difference in the world with my purchasing choices,'" said Weinberger.

McCoy agreed, adding, "More and more, people are realizing the interconnectedness

of their consumer decisions, that they're not just buying a gift, but they are part of a supply chain that helps provide meaningful jobs to people that help support their families and communities," he said.

"There's so much good that happens because of one simple bracelet—it's doing so much good, and that is such a great thing for independent retailers to have. The retail landscape is really challenging, and this is a way to differentiate themselves from the big box stores," added Weinberger.

Solt said that the industry is evolving, with fair trade brands competing with top fashion brands, something he calls "...new and exciting."

For the retailer, McCoy said, selling fair trade items lays the foundation for building strong customer relationships, which ultimately translate into sales. "There are more people seeking deeper fulfillment in their work, and fair trade is one way to do it," he said.

It's not always easy, though. Culler said that, as a small retailer, his primary struggle is budgeting for marketing to get the word out about his fair trade inventory. He believes that the majority of consumers connect with the buzzwords 'ethically made' and 'environmentally sustainable' more so than the 'fair trade' aspect and all of its underlying principles. "That whole concept doesn't go that far, though we are making progress," he said.

Still, the fair trade business is a gratifying one. Culler said he enjoys "...the satisfaction of being able to talk to customers who come in to the store and tell us how much they appreciate that we're doing this."

Solt added that to be effective as a retailer, you have to make an emotional connection with your consumer by having a values approach to retailing, which gives you a competitive edge. "It is not enough just to be an efficient and effective retailer, which you have to be in today's marketplace, but it's the right thing to do."

Hilary Daninhirsch is a freelance writer based in Pittsburgh. She has written features and business profiles for dozens of trade and lifestyle publications. Hilary can be reached at <https://hilarydaninhirsch.journopotfolio.com>.

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Made from jacaranda wood hand-carved and painted by artists in Kenya. With each purchase, the company donates 10% to non-profit animal conservation programs. **Drinking Giraffe Bowl** by Acacia Creations



The company directly supports the artisans in India that block-print their fabric, and they also donate a portion of all profits to Global Fund for Women, a nonprofit foundation supporting the advancement of women's rights around the world. **Sierra Oversized Scarf** by Maelu Designs



Distributed by Kahiniwalla\*, Pebble products are made without the use of machinery or electricity in Bangladesh. Women of different religious and cultural backgrounds are brought together and work side by side! **Baby Blanket** by Pebble

Each piece is handmade from recycled textiles by women artisans in India! **Kantha Chromatics Collection** by WorldFinds



## Editor's Picks

# SUSTAINABLE & ETHICALLY MADE GOODS

## FROM BRANDS TO REMEMBER

Artistic bookmarks handcrafted by artisans in Colombia **Numbering Butterfly Bookmark** by Tulia's Artisan Gallery

Each product has its one-of-kind style, designed to carry a strong and beautiful message of hope, change, awareness, and kindness. So, be part of this *movement*! Celebrate the maker, the brand... support their products and their amazing work, and discover why they should be remembered!



The company uses ethically-sourced and sustainable natural ingredients and practices a zero-waste philosophy from product to packaging. Plus, 1 percent of their sales goes out to 1% for the Planet to help support environmental nonprofit programs. **Eucalyptus Shower Mist** by Terralite



This balsa wood kitty is hand-carved by Balinese artisans from Mitra Bali, a fair trade company that has been helping the Bali area since 1993. **Peeping Kitty** by SERRV



Each pair of these socks sold plants 10 trees through Trees for the Future, a nonprofit organization that helps communities around the world plant trees! **Socks That Plant Trees** by Conscious Step



For every towel sold, the brand plants a tree. They are also partnering with The Water Project, a nonprofit organization who helps to bring clean water to sub-Saharan regions in Africa! **Yoga Hand Towel** by Jade Yoga

An ethical fashion company merging uncommonly vibrant style with fair trade practices to make an impact on global poverty. **Vibrant Threads Bracelet**, Blue by Mata Traders



Made by Yanesha indigenous artisans and PaTS, a nonprofit organization that works with the Yanesha people in Peru, helping to develop a sustainable project model based on their forest resources. **Wine Rack** by Sobremesa by Greenheart



This basket was handwoven of pine needles and pajon, a native grass of the Guatemalan highlands. This basket is named for the young daughter of a Mayan Hands basket maker. Her mom's income through fair trade means Mayra will have the opportunity to attend school, something her mother was not able to do as a girl. **Mayra Basket** by Mayan Hands



# THE SPIRIT OF GIVING

## Gifts for Friends & Family

### EDITOR'S PICKS

*"Remember that the happiest people are not those getting more, but those giving more."*

— H. Jackson Brown, Jr

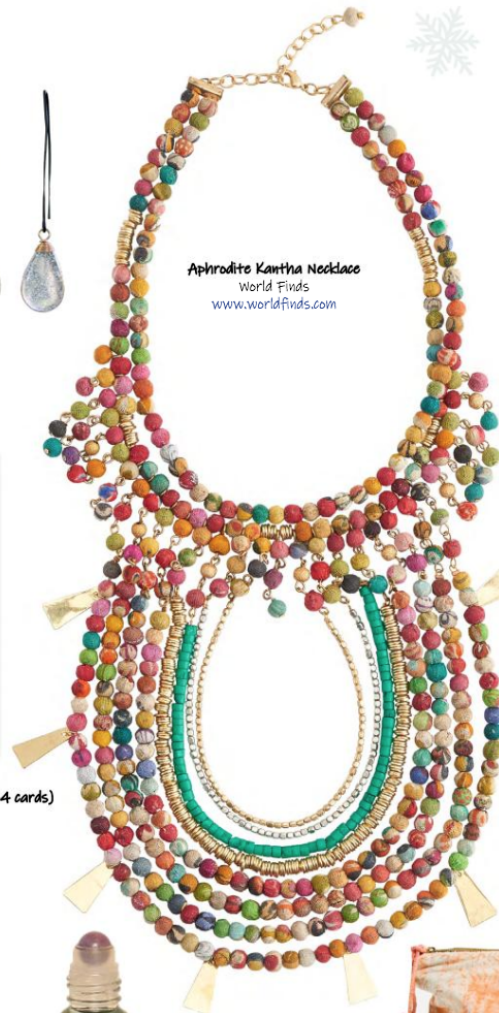
During this season let's expect less and give more... love, respect, smiles, and gifts! In this issue, we want to celebrate the "spirit of giving" by selecting meaningful gifts for the conscious living community of families and friends. We hope that our gift ideas can be the source of inspiration for you!



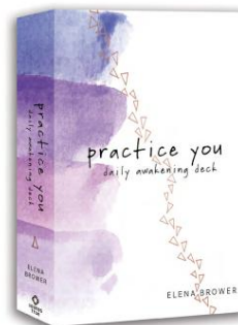
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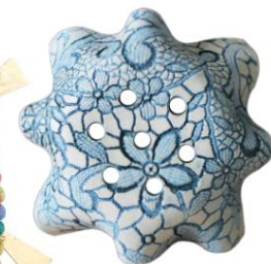
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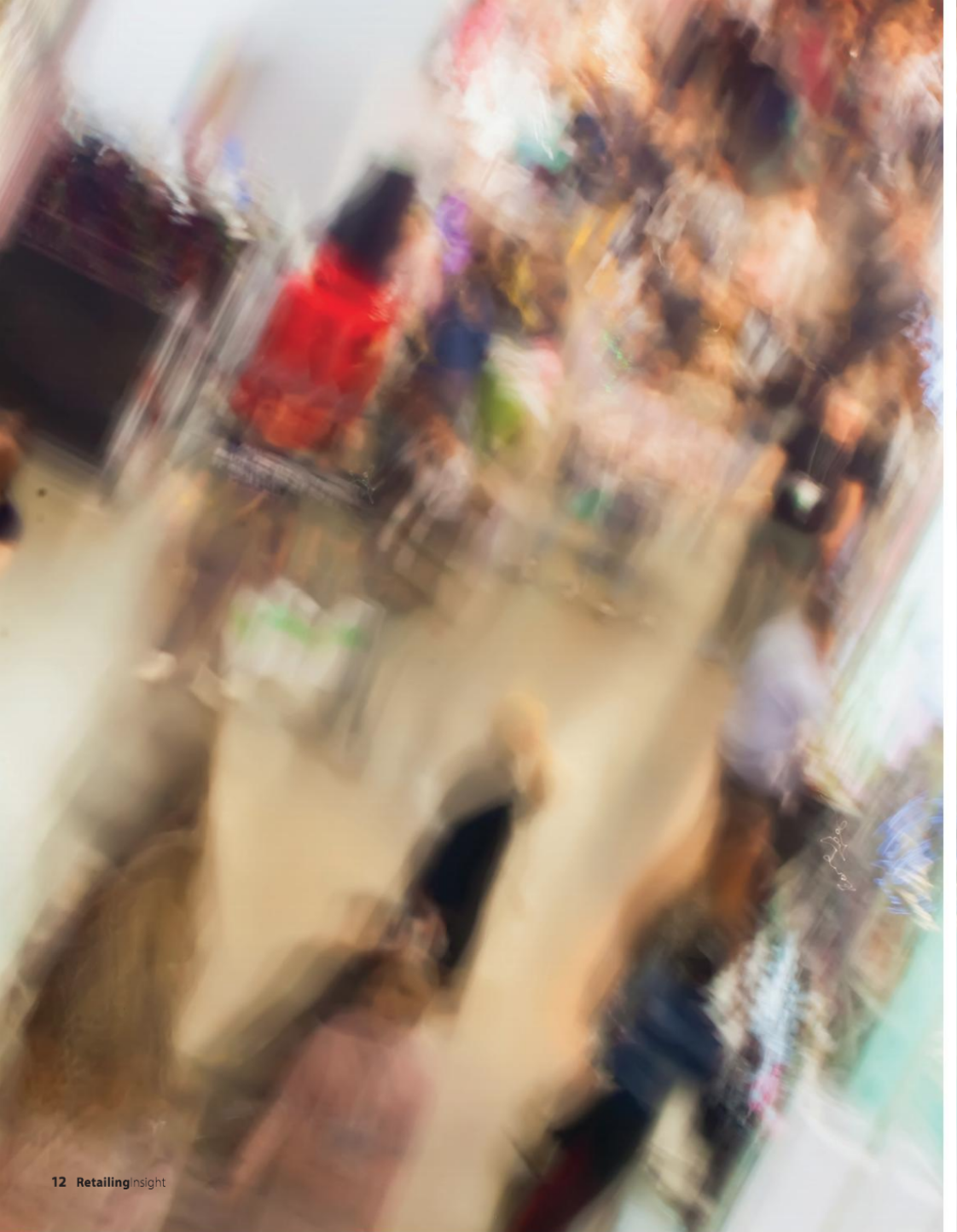
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# The Future of Trade Shows

By Megy Karydes

Normally, summer months are busy for everyone in our industry. Vendors are running from trade show to trade show while retailers are excitedly placing orders and managing busy shops back home. This year, due to COVID-19 and sheltering-in-place orders that have caused trade show cancellations and stores to close, the way we do business has shifted and we've been left no choice but to adapt to this changing landscape.

Trade shows as we know them, which have seen their own shift in recent years with the advent of digital trade show platforms and soaring costs to exhibit that don't match the return on investment many companies need to justify a presence, might be in jeopardy. But the gift and home industry is built on resilience and flexibility as well as relationships and community. While the trade show experience might not look the same anytime soon or possibly ever again, it is adapting to meet the needs of the ever-changing marketplace.

## The New Trade Show Experience: Digital

"The coronavirus pandemic created a forcing function for retailers and brands alike to reconsider the best and most efficient way to do business together in the absence of traditional trade shows," says Marcelo Cortes, co-founder and CTO at Faire, a wholesale marketplace that empowers small business owners and independent brands to buy and sell wholesale online.

"With crowded events raising new concerns about health risks, and store closures creating tighter budgets, it has highlighted the need for reliable digital tools that provide remote buying opportunities," adds Cortes. "In the future, as the functionality of these digital tools continue to improve, we'll see brands and retailers rely less on seasonal in-person events that require costly discretionary spending."

Bob Maricich, CEO of International Market Centers, which hosts AmericasMart Gift & Home Market, IMC High Point Market and Las Vegas Market, admits that while nothing can replace the in-person buying experience and the excitement of market, he sees emerging technologies as a complement to that in-person experience.



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"A recent survey of IMC's buyer and exhibitor universe shows that digital platforms will become an increasingly important element for market preparation, product discovery and order processing," Maricich says. "As such, we see the lines between physical and digital marketplaces continuing to blur, allowing buyers and sellers to connect wherever and whenever they wish to transact."

Something to remember, though, is that trade shows are not just about buying and selling. They're about community.

"One of the overlooked benefits of attending trade shows is the chance to be with other like-minded businesses," says Jennie Misner, owner of Venture Imports, an importer, wholesaler and retailer of fair trade products from Kenya.

"The networking that goes on at shows can be helpful from a business point of view, but psychologically as well. Running a business can feel lonely at times, so it's nice to bounce ideas off of other business owners, and just to commiserate with each other! Now that we don't have trade shows forcing us to be together, we have had to be intentional in keeping up with each other."

### How To Do Business Today

For both brands and retailers, trade shows afforded them the opportunity to establish contacts and relationships within the industry. So how do companies help translate that in-person experience online?

"Our mission at Faire has always been to empower our customers to chase their dreams, and during the COVID-19 crisis, that has meant building products to help them navigate a new path forward," adds Cortes.

Faire recently announced the development of new tools intended to build upon their online marketplace to bring the sense of community and connection of trade shows online to create year-round buying opportunities. These tools include:

- **Live streaming:** Brands can host livestream video to hundreds of retailers to debut new products and launch new collections. Retailers can ask questions through live chat and checkout directly.
- **1:1 appointments and collaborative cart building features:** Brands can invite

retailers to live video appointments to walk through product and merchandising options. During the appointment, brands and buyers can easily create orders together with collaborative order building.

IMC introduced a new digital innovation division, IMC\_di, in January to develop a seamlessly integrated omni-channel B2B e-commerce platform for the apparel, gift and home furnishings industries served by IMC's physical markets. IMC's new digital marketplace is expected to launch by year-end.

"In the meantime, as the COVID-19 crisis has created more need for enhanced online resources for our industry, IMC has leveraged existing digital tools – such as ShopZio and Catalog Connexion, which were acquired as part of our IMC\_di launch – to help buyers and sellers get back to business," notes Maricich. "Linkable directly from our market websites, these tools enable exhibitors to maintain visibility, showcase available products and transact business until physical markets resume."

Independent retailers are trying to run a business while figuring out how to place orders they can't touch or feel for the important fall and winter seasons. Rachel Hershinow, owner of Stella, an independent gift and apparel boutique in Evanston, Illinois, admits that she's been trying to take it day by day because otherwise she becomes completely overwhelmed. The problem, she says, is that buyers need to forecast and purchase or commit several months in advance for merchandise. Yet, without a decent road map based on previous trends and history, she feels like she's navigating in the dark. Not to mention Hershinow is a "touch and feel" kind of buyer and that's not possible to do online. "It's going to be super challenging to buy for fall and holiday without the 'tradeshow treasure hunt' that I have relied on for so many years," Hershinow says. "I will have to buy very thoughtfully and lean, which is opposite of my nature which is to go by gut (which has served me well in the past)."

Just as inventory management will be hard for retailers, it'll be a major challenge for wholesalers, too, since they have to project future inventory needs as well as

lead time. "It's difficult for us to predict how much inventory we're going to need," Misner admits. "Even if we could accurately forecast how the pandemic will affect sales and buying patterns in the months ahead, we may be struggling with a lack of cash flow due to loss of sales thus far."

Products that require extended lead time due to where they come from or because they're handmade may become harder for retailers to source once they're able to buy again, according to Misner. "This will be important to keep in mind for those attending trade shows that have been moved to October, for example," she adds. "Products may no longer be available in the quantities they desire that late in the season."

Meanwhile, wholesalers are re-evaluating how they introduce products and considering ways to make it easier for retailers to explore their lines and place orders for the upcoming seasons. In past years, dZi Handmade would launch new products at the trade shows first as an incentive to

attendees, and then post them online. "Now it's going to be the reverse as the online market place has become the primary one for sales," says Mac McCoy, CEO and

be more delighted to have their team marketing his company on their new virtual showroom platform. "We've also just on-boarded with Faire.com, and

*Independent retailers are trying to run a business while figuring out how to place orders they can't touch or feel for the important fall and winter seasons.*

founder dZi Handmade, a company that imports fair trade gifts and home accessories from India and Nepal.

McCoy also works with the Gifts of Nature rep group, which serendipitously just launched their new e-commerce site featuring all 50+ lines, so he couldn't

now that we have all those b2b materials organized we're going to join the RepZio.com platform," he adds. "I'm expecting these steps to help us bridge to 2021 when I expect the primary trade shows to slowly come back. It might not be what it used to be, but maybe the combination of a

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While all these online tools are great for many retailers, some buyers like Hershinow still favor paper catalogs, line sheets and cookbooks to help them visualize layout of products. Email pitches tend to get buried in the sea of regular daily emails, she says.

WorldFinds, a fair trade wholesaler that works with women artisans in India and Bali to produce handmade jewelry and accessories, is trying to meet their retail customers wherever they are: tradeshow, marketplaces, online, print catalog, and even on one-on-one Zoom calls any time. "And sample boxes!" shares Kelly Weinberger, founder of WorldFinds. Similarly, retailers have been experimenting and adopting new methods to sell inventory to customers at home.

"During this time, small businesses have demonstrated their ability to remain agile and innovative by adopting new savvy tools and strategies to help them compete and continue to grow their businesses," says Cortes. "On the retailer side, tactics typically deployed by big box chains like curbside pickup, buy online pick up in store, and selling through social media, are now being used by local retailers on a large scale. As of June, according to our survey of 100,000 independent retailers, 78 percent are offering now curbside pickup, and 68 percent are investing more in new or existing online channels. On the brand side, we're seeing incredible creativity in how entrepreneurs are pivoting – from a beauty and wellness brand creating hand sanitizer, to a gift brand designing face masks."

Hershinow has been hosting Facebook Live sessions where she showcases half a dozen to 10 dresses, outfits or jewelry, each associated with a number. Like a host on a television show, she shares details about each product, turns it around so viewers can see the shapes and cuts, and then encourages customers to comment or message her with the item number they want to purchase.

"All of us have had to be incredibly creative during this time," adds Weinberger. "Our retail partners have really hustled by offering curbside pick-up, personal

deliveries and selling on Instagram Stories and other social platforms. So many of our independent retailers are really resilient and will adapt to ordering in other ways if trade shows look different or aren't an option for them this year."

#### Relationships More Important Than Ever

Without physical trade shows, many won't be seeing familiar and friendly faces this year, as Misner mentioned earlier. Understandably, this is difficult for many who feel like attending trade shows is like a reunion of sorts. For others, the reality that they've had to suddenly and abruptly change course without a road map is unsettling.

#### Independent representatives are feeling it, too

"I feel sad because customers, businesses and vendors including myself have been thrown off our regular paths and we have all struggled over the last months to find our balance," notes Gina Lempa of Gina Lempa & Associates in Elgin, Illinois, an independent sales representative covering the Chicagoland area. Still, Lempa feels hopeful because she has seen how resourceful everyone is in getting right back to business and creating new ways to reach their customers through social media, email marketing and a variety of educational courses online.

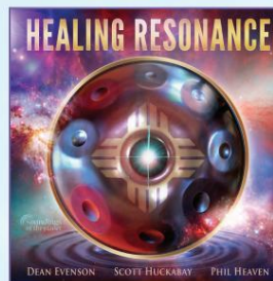
"I believe virtual showrooms will be a must," adds Lempa. "Vendors must provide a virtual way for customers to 'see' what's new. Buyers must be patient and willing to work the virtual showroom online similar to how they invested their time and walked and worked the showrooms in the past. Some retailers have had great success with Facebook Live events and I think wholesalers might want to take notice and offer some type of similar option. Recently, one of the companies I represent started a Private Retailer Only Facebook group so we can exchange information more openly and easily."

Teresa Hendricks, owner and goddess of Lucia's World Emporium and Lucia's Imports, agrees that online purchasing and selling will become even more prominent in the coming months and years. She owns two stores, one

continued on page 18

## soundings of the planet

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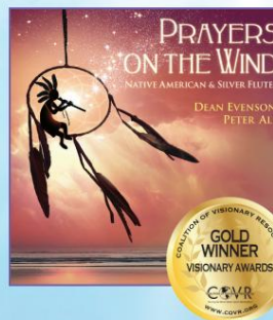


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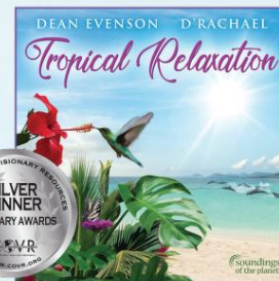
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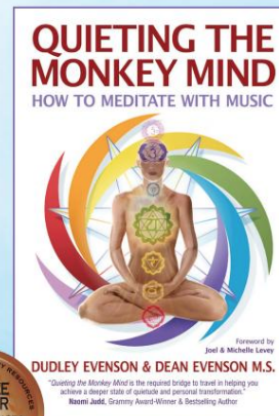


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in Kentucky and the other in Michigan, as well as a wholesale fair trade business that works directly with artisans in Guatemala. She used to do the trade show circuit for a decade, but pulled back after 2018 as attendance dwindled. Instead, she decided to switch course and focus on online sales and opening up a second retail store.

"I've seen wholesalers have to kind of sit back and regroup during the shutdown," Hendricks says. "We all kind of had to be mindful of our customers who were unable to open their doors. At the same time, I watched many of our retail partners, including myself, up their online presence. Many of us had great success with generating sales with Facebook and Instagram Live. Our communities of customers were really showing support for the local businesses."

#### What's Next?

Admittedly, no one really knows what the future holds as there are so many unknowns.

"I think everyone is looking at all possible scenarios as to how this year might play out," says Weinberger, who is planning to stay in close contact with her trade show contacts, artisan partners and retail partners and hopes to figure it out together with open dialogue.

Misner feels we must be realistic about the constraints on consumers both now and as we come out of this and hopes the time we have to reflect on our business this year will bode well for us in the future.

"We know what it's like to come back from a trip or vacation with all sorts of ideas about how we're going to change our lifestyles when we return," she says. "We also know how quickly that changes once we are faced with our everyday reality. During this time of being at home, many people are re-evaluating their lives and priorities. They may be thinking about how they want to buy more meaningful gifts, about how they want to support their communities. And they might have the time now to research how to do that."

#### Some companies already are seeing some positive news

"The biggest surprise to me is how quickly sales have begun to pick back up after going to almost zero in April," says McCoy. "We're almost to 50 percent of last year's June sales, and I'm super grateful!"

Lempa is proud of the retailers she works with and their "Gotta Get it Done" attitude, as she calls it. "Customers have shared with me how tired they are and how much harder they are working, but the best thing is their excitement about their businesses," she adds.

"They're telling me it's reminding them of how it was when they first opened and how they are inspired and turned on by the challenge."

**Megy Karydes** is a Chicago-based writer currently working on a book on behalf of a client that wants to use it to sell and promote their organization. Visit her website at [www.megykarydes.com](http://www.megykarydes.com).

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# ON THE GO

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## ON THE GO

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