

# GIFT SHOP

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Fresh Ideas for Retailing Success

**GREEN**Retailer  
Quarterly Guide  
Inside

## All-American Sales 'Made in USA' Delivers!

MADE IN  
AMERICA

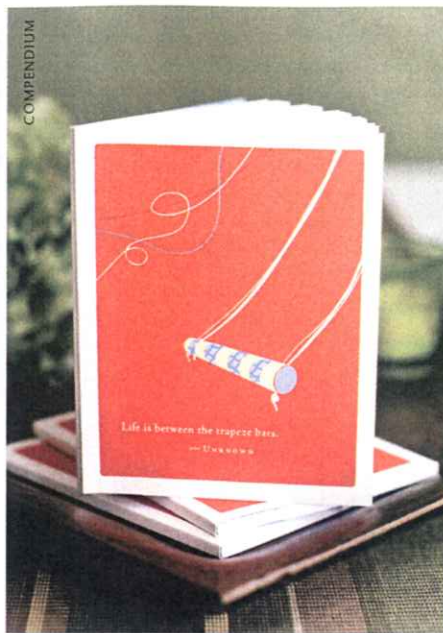
■ Garden Accessories ■ On Trend ■ Ultimate Makeover '09

# All-American Sells!

Your customers are showing a renewed interest in buying products made in the USA. Find out why and which products you can stock to cash in.  
Sue Marquette Poremba



CACTUS AND IVY



COMPENDIUM



SAVANNAH BEE COMPANY

## The basic reason behind the “buying American-made” phenomenon is pretty simple: consumers shop their values.

Lynn Switanowski-Barrett, founder of Boston-based Creative Business Consulting Group, points out that the bottom line for most consumers is that they want to shop at places where they know that you, as a retailer, care about the same things they do. Increasingly, that means supporting the American economy and keeping American manufacturing jobs strong.

### Preserving American jobs

“[Your customers] want you as the store owner to make them feel good about shopping in your store by showing that you support local businesses and made in America. It helps them have a better overall feeling about your business, even if [the products are] only a small selection of what you carry,” Switanowski-Barrett adds.



That’s what wholesaler Catherine Mariasch of Mariasch Studios in Lynbrook, NY, has found. The company offers an assortment of gifts and accessories. Mariasch says her top-selling products include

towels, pillows, tote bags, baby gifts, and wine accessories. “Our customers tell us they would rather support companies that offer made in America products,” she says. “Creating U.S. jobs is a wonderful feeling and we have much better control over the quality of the products we make,” Mariasch says.

### Economy’s effects

As a result of a challenging economy, retailers and vendors recognize that many consumers have changed their buying habits. Purchases tend to be more purposeful, and customers are trying to spend less. Traditionally, American-made products have a reputation as being more expensive than products manufactured overseas.

However, just because the price tag has a lower number doesn’t mean that consumers are getting the most bang for their buck. Value is important and is being prized. In other words, this is where “purposeful” purchasing comes into play.

“Products that are handmade in the United States and products that are mass produced and imported from China cannot be compared on price alone,” says Leslie Pozen, founder and designer of Ellu Bags. “A cheaper product is just that—cheaper. It often lacks quality, uniqueness, and design.” Ellu Bags is based in Chicago, and the company’s line of handbags and accessories are designed and handcrafted in the United States.

### Shopping for value

Sandy Comstack of Florence, OR, says that seeing ‘Made in America’ on a product gives the buyer confidence that



PUMPERNICKEL PRESS



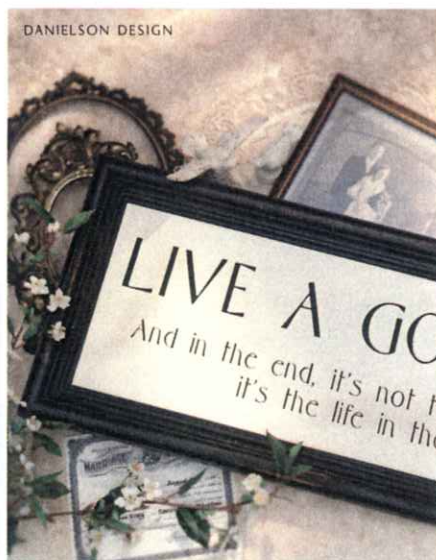
DANIELLE AND COMPANY



ELLU BAGS



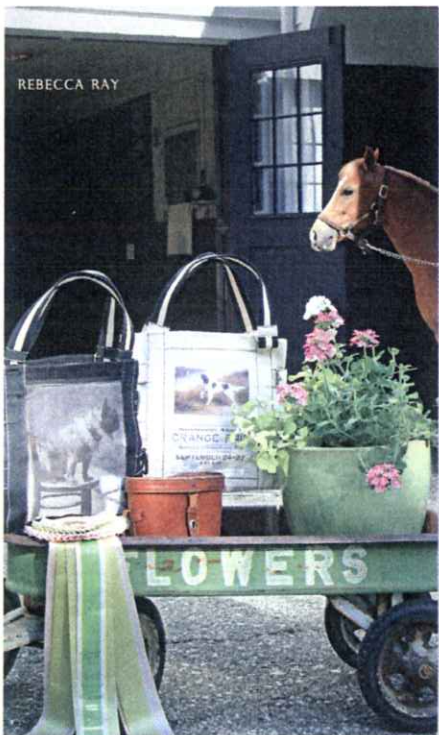
TOBY AND MAX



DANIELSON DESIGN



LIANE FRIED STUDIO



REBECCA RAY

they are getting quality. "Buyers expect a lot in this economy and don't want to buy something that will break or fall apart as many people have experienced with foreign-made products. I have found that 'you get what you pay for' is really true," Comstack says. Toby and Max wholesales handmade sterling-silver jewelry pieces with messages, such as "Believe in Yourself," "Be Brave," and "Thankful" inscribed on them.

Value is also an important selling point in toys from wholesaler D and ME Handmade Wood Toys in Stevensville, MT. The company handcrafts wooden trains, trucks and construction vehicles, push toys, and doll beds. Owner Mary Hurley says that the

company has seen "explosive growth" thanks to the lead paint scare in toys imported from China.

A popular seller at the company is a wooden toolbox and tools. Hurley says many of their customers come to them after buying a similar toy that was less expensive but poorly made—the company sells reasonably priced toys, Hurley says. Buying cheap, she adds, might save money initially, but not if the toy falls apart quickly. It's a point that Hurley and other wholesalers emphasize: The value of their products is in the quality of their construction. A wooden toy made at D and ME Handmade Wood Toys is expected to last for a generation or two, a price bargain in the long run.

Selling the red, white and blue Catherine Mariasch encourages retailers to make "Made in America" an important selling point in their stores.

Displaying signs and grouping products together in the store is one way to promote American-made goods. "We have found that customers will pick products that are made in the United States over products made overseas whenever possible," she says.

Pozen also believes that the idea of American-made reminds people of their connection to one another. "Even if the item isn't handmade in your backyard, it's exciting to know there might be a story behind the product."

Advertising that story is the best way for retailers to market their American-made products, says Cinda Baxter of the 3/50 Project, based in Minneapolis. "It's not enough to have a good product, but it also needs to have a good story," she says. "Retailers need to breathe life into each piece. And the stores that do the best are the ones who tell the product's story."

The 3/50 Project encourages consumers to shop locally whenever possible, which can be a perfect combination for vendors and retailers.

### Green values too

Include Danielson Designs, based in Trinidad, CO, among the companies that is seeing that being made in the USA is an attractive selling point for vendors and retailers. "It's a topic on everybody's mind today," says Clay Vordenbaum, director of marketing. Danielson Designs creates wall décor made of wood.

Vordenbaum notes that Danielson Designs also focuses on another issue that is of growing importance to Americans—being an eco-friendly and sustainable company. "Our products are not only made in the USA," Vordenbaum says, "but they are also made from recycled wood products, so no trees fall due to the production

of our goods. Striving to be a green company is crucial to our mission."

Similarly, Cactus & Ivy meets the need of consumers interested in environmentally aware and humane products. The Saluda, S.C., company develops spa, bath and body products that are, as owner Lisa Rodgers says, cruelty-free and vegan-friendly.



NASHVILLE WRAPS

### The American dream

Rodgers has a unique view on why American-made products are so important to not only retail but also to the overall culture. "The American dream is to own your own business," she says. "People are constantly looking for ways to make a business out of their hobby or skill. The American people aren't known for sitting on their hands. Most stay productive and continue to perfect their craft until one day they have created a business."

And that's really the most vital piece of "Made in America," says Switanowski-Barrett. Not only do Americans want to chase the American dream, they like to support the attempts of others.

"It all goes back to knowing what your customer wants and providing the right products for them," she says. "They will pay for quality and for uniqueness." When it's made in the United States, that's an attractive bonus. ■

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Isle of Candles, a gift shop in the beach town of Pawleys Island, SC, sells candles and other products made by local artisans. The store stocks products made by Lowcountry Artists—a co-operative art gallery comprised of South Carolina artisans.

Kathy Miller, the shop's owner says opening the store to talented artisans was an easy way for Isle of Candles to offer visitors a wider selection of locally-made products. "We give talented artisans a place to easily showcase and sell their products to a tourist demographic that might otherwise be hard to reach," she says.

Miller says the partnership has been a win/win situation for everyone. "The artisans share their craft with my customers," she says. "My customers have a nice selection of local, handmade products, and my store is wonderfully stocked with unique, locally, handcrafted pieces."

Currently, 65% of the merchandise in Miller's store is American-made, but Miller hopes to see that increase to 85% by the end of the year.

She highlights the Lowcountry Artists' products by grouping them together with a framed picture and biography of the artists. Following the advice of Cinda Baxter, Miller says the store tells something personal in the stories about the artists and gives reasons for shoppers to connect with the talented hands behind the work of art. "We also invite our artisans to keep their business cards on the shelves near their products so our customers can see that the artists really are local," Miller says.

The candles are displayed on long shelves that flank the checkout area, and each candle has a label stating it was hand-poured in Pawleys Island.