

Poppin' Fresh

BY CLAIRE LUI

Hosting in-store pop-ups can help you capitalize on a trend and increase sales.

If you've ever attended a Tupperware party, shopped at a seasonal Halloween store or bought a Popsicle from an ice cream truck, you're familiar with one of the most popular trends in retail: the pop-up, a limited-time retail event. Pop-ups in the fiber world can encompass a range of temporary experiences, such as a one-day "pop-up" sale of an indie dyer's line at an established shop, a short-term appearance of a yarn seller in a bricks-and-mortar storefront or even a roving yarn truck that can appear in a different location every day.

Pop-Up Events

Pop-up sales hosted by a yarn shop generally are a one-day-only event for which a yarn company representative appears with a selection of yarns to sell. Sherri Hazen, owner of Rainy Day Yarns in Gig Harbor, Washington, started by hosting

Stephania Fregosi, the indie dyer behind Three Fates Yarn based in Salem, Oregon, who does one to two pop-ups per year, says, "I love meeting customers and seeing what they've made with my products," adding that the novelty of a pop-up "keeps everything fresh" for the visiting dyer as well as for the hosting store.

Pop-Up Stores

Instead of popping up at an established store, some business owners take it up a notch by opening an entire bricks-and-mortar pop-up storefront. Michele Wang, a noted knitwear designer, opened Gauge + Tension, a pop-up weekend yarn store in Brooklyn, New York, first from October–December 2014 and then in a different location from March 2015 to March 2016. Gauge + Tension curated a selection of hard-to-find yarns, featuring many

seven-week pop-up during the run-up to the 2018 holiday season was driven by a desire to connect in person with their customers. "Having a pop-up meant we had greater opportunities to meet and engage with people," Hoang says. The company was able to hold a number of knitting and crochet workshops, as well as to create custom kits for customers in the store. The duo also holds weekly pop-up workshops in London and plans to open another pop-up store this year.

Going Mobile

Dave Broughton and Erica Kempf Broughton, owners of Nomad Yarn, a yarn store housed in a truck that drives around Indiana, came to their pop-up from a different angle. While business owners often start with pop-ups to test the feasibility of more permanent retail solutions, the Broughtons started with a bricks-and-mortar version of Nomad Yarns in Indianapolis before they embraced the spirit of the name of their business and took their show on the road.

Spurred on by a buyout of their store's block by a developer, the Broughtons bought and retrofitted a 25-foot truck (similar to those used by food-truck purveyors) to become a roving yarn store. Dave Broughton said that with "so many local store owners retiring and us wanting to move more into our own hand-dyed yarns and designs," a nomadic pop-up truck seemed like the best next step. "We can reach more areas and customers who miss their local stores, and with shorter opening hours we can focus more on our production of unique items and on growing our online store."

The Nomad Yarn truck now appears in a different location in Indiana daily, visiting farmers' markets, coffee shops, pubs and breweries. "People are super-excited to see the truck is coming, and it's great to see so many happy faces, old and new."

With minimal investment and risk, pop-ups, owing to their short-term nature, let a brand test out a market, connect with their customers in person and add a promotional burst of excitement. Whether you're a yarn store owner or a fiber artist, consider adding a pop-up event or two to your calendar.

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• **Be clear about financial split and payment:** Make sure you have a written contract about how sales will be handled and make sure both parties agree. Most stores will ring up the sales for guest indie dyers, with a predetermined percentage going back to the dyer at the end of the day. Though the split will vary, it is often close to the wholesale price going to the dyer and the retail markup going to the store.

• **Create buzz with novelty and exclusivity:** The most successful pop-ups offer something that customers have never seen before. If a dyer's line is already sold in a store, make sure the pop-up sells different bases or colorways than the normal inventory.

• **Promote!** Make sure customers of both the guest pop-up and the host store know about the pop-up by creating social media posts and by featuring the event in newsletters. Indie dyers can help make an event successful by preparing promotional information for the host store several weeks in advance, including photographs, descriptive copy, a price list and any other necessary information so that the store can cut-and-paste it right into newsletters and social media posts.

• **Location:** If you're looking for a temporary storefront, check out websites including thestorefront.com or appearhere.us, which are like Airbnb for pop-up retail. You can also speak with other local businesses—not necessarily craft-related—such as farmers' markets, restaurants or cafés that may be willing to sponsor a pop-up from your brand.

trunk shows with established yarn companies, and in 2017 started inviting indie dyers to her shop for one-day pop-up sales. Hazen explains that the pop-ups are "beneficial to both the dyer and the yarn shop. The dyer gets to showcase her talents, with beautiful yarns and samples, and gets her name out in the community. The shop benefits from reaching new customers, adding income and having the chance to form working relationships with some wonderful dyers."

independent hand-dyers, essentially holding pop-up sales within a pop-up store. Gauge + Tension gave Wang a chance to experience the retail end of the yarn business. Wang says, "I surprised myself by how much I enjoyed having a pop-up shop. It allowed me to connect with knitters in a completely different way."

For Jennifer Lam and Jen Hoang, owners of the London-based Stitch & Story, a company that sells knitting and crochet kits along with their own line of yarn, the decision to hold a