



LOOKING UP TO 2013

Tints, twists and trends
for the year ahead

By Abby Heugel | Managing Editor

The past year in the party industry has seen its share of ups — superheroes flying up, up and away off the shelves — and downs — a helium situation deflating the spirits of many. But through it all, retailers have persevered and are all the stronger for it. Looking ahead to 2013, we can expect a bit of the same with a few new tints and twists thrown in and hopefully more ups than downs.

Seeing

The colors this year will be bright, with lime green, hot pink, teal, yellow and red continuing in popularity. According to Dawn Kirschner of Unique, orange and purple are no longer just accent colors, but colors making a statement.

“When it comes to design, dots and stripes are also becoming primary elements,” Kirschner said. “They’re being used in borders, backgrounds, within elements such as balloons, candles, cakes and presents — all adding to the appeal of the design and allowing customers to mix and match with solids and simple dot and stripe patterns.”



Hollywood Ribbon introduced a full line of Wild Animal print ribbon and bows that capitalizes on this popular trend.

Wild animal prints — zebra, hot pink zebra, leopard and tiger — will remain hot, and chevron, ombre, stripes, triangle/facet patterns and 3-dimensional finishes of the same will be seen on everything from paperware to things like centerpieces and lanterns.

“There’s also a movement towards a very clean look with simple graphics with lots of white, rustic with lots of wood and faux bois finishes and everything chalkboard — a trend that has been in the home décor world for a while and is used for everything from event signs to table covers,” said Susan Beer of Amscan. “In terms of icons, hot air balloons, owls, moustaches and pennant banners — not only as an actual decoration, but as an icon on invitations and decorations — will remain trendy.”

Sarah Davlin of Wally’s Party Factory agreed, saying one trend they literally see growing right before their eyes is that of the moustache craze.

“They are everywhere,” Davlin said. “People are using them in various colors to show their school spirit, as props in photo booths at weddings, at various charity fundraisers and events and even stuck on babies faces for adorable pictures. It isn’t just a gender specific trend either, both men and women are sporting the ‘stache!”

Doing

While product personalization was popular in 2012, there will be an even greater emphasis on this in 2013.

“This can mean a variety of things when it comes to party supplies, including finding new ways to “make-it-your-own” by adding special

embellishments or giving customers additional options to customize product,” said Kelly Karrmann of Creative Converting. “Either way, producers of all product types are going to showcase more creative ways to help bring forth a person’s unique style.”

Beer agreed, adding that thanks to creative party planning blogs, people want to create a completely original party. That can often mean simple patterns, solid colors and the ability to personalize.

“There is also a huge market for icon-driven design mixed with this look,” Beer said. “In addition, printed pattern tape — whether washi or duct tape — will continue to be a popular way to decorate everything from table covers to gift wrap to serveware. Sustainable product such as bamboo is also being used in very inventive ways to create everything from paper product to serving pieces that look very much like melamine.”

When it comes to bridal, Kim Meinzer of Carlson Craft said to expect a larger selection of destination weddings invitations and ensembles, mason jars and requests for a non-traditional guestbook, such as a bench for wedding guests to sign.

“In addition, birds are huge in home décor and fashion right now and that trend will carry over into weddings in 2013 as they make for a beautiful, natural wedding theme,” Meinzer said.

Buying

Many consumers will continue to give themselves a strict budget when it comes to party planning.

“On the flipside,” Karrmann said, “they still want to impress guests and make the party special. We’ve definitely had to take a step back and determine what



Creative Converting will be adding new products to their “Presentation Station” program, including a Cake n’ Take Carrier, Photo Cake Stand, Cupcake Favor Boxes, Large Cake Party Kit and Small Cake Party Kit.

is realistic in terms of the average consumer's budget in today's world and apply that to our overall pricing."

Davlin has seen this as an opportunity to get creative by offering customers deals with promotions like their "Discount Dungeon," that features Halloween costumes at 25 to 75 percent off. They also execute in-store sale campaigns like two-day deals and "item of the week specials" that have helped increase add-on and average sales.

Gregg Fresonke of Hollywood Ribbon suggests that one area that many party retailers can improve on is making sure their pricing is competitive.

"An independent party retailer can learn a lot by doing a price survey at Target and Party City and comparing to their everyday retail prices," he said. "With buying groups, retailers can compete with the large chains but they need to know where pricing should be and be consistent. Shopping the competition makes a retailer 'street smart' on merchandising, product selection and pricing."

Socializing

Social media isn't going away, and that's a good thing, seeing as it can give retailers an edge over competitors that are not embracing the opportunity to connect online and gain insightful feedback.

"One great mention or review from a top online influencer — whether a Facebook post or a product review on a blog — can create a buzz around your products and/or your business," Karrmann said. "My top advice would be to not focus on selling product 100 percent of the time, but rather engage, listen and respond. It's takes time and effort, but your business will reap the rewards in the end. You'll have loyal customers who will become your greatest word-of-mouth marketers."

Davlin agreed that people don't necessarily want retailers trying to sell them something on social media channels. Instead, it should be used as more of a place to develop relationships and share ideas with customers. She's found the platform that has shown the highest percentage of conversion to sales is Pinterest, something she considers an invaluable



Dots and stripes are being used more in design and creating a display—such as this showcasing product from Unique—allows customers to mix and match with solids and simple dot and stripe patterns.

site for party retailers, as many pin boards feature ideas for parties and weddings.

"Consumers are coming in armed with ideas to their local stores, searching out products that they have seen online and looking for unique ways to entertain," Kirschner added. "Retailers that can help stimulate these consumers either with sites of their own or in store merchandising displays will help to inspire and increase sales."

The Final Word

Fresonke said that the past four years have been difficult for independent party stores, dollar stores, craft and gift shops. Those that have persevered are the best in the business and have been the ones that have embraced change by experimenting and trying new things.

"Looking at my list of customers that have closed their doors, I see those that resisted change and did the same old thing year after year," Fresonke said. "Any manufacturer wants their customers to sell lots of whatever they make and they usually have the expertise to help their customers do more. Retailers that want to do more should challenge their best suppliers to give them their best ideas on how they can sell more — because they will." **P**