

# SPECIAL Delivery

## Little bundles of joy can deliver big sales

By Abby Heugel | Managing Editor

First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes those moms-to-be looking to outfit their baby shower with the latest and greatest party products. The good thing about baby showers, for both retailers and moms-to-be, is that there are opportunities for multiple sales of different baby shower products, depending on the people involved.

A baby shower with close family and friends may include a half-day event of food, drinks, gifts, photos and games in which baby shower paperware, banners, centerpieces, gift wrap, gift bags, candles, invites, streamers, balloons, confetti and decorations are essential items to complete the celebration.

"The same mom-to-be is just as likely to have a smaller-scale baby shower with co-workers at the office, where time and space is more limited, and the decorations might feature just a banner and balloon bouquet," said Debbie Beer of Unique Industries. "If nothing else, sweets are served at every gathering, requiring attractive printed plates and napkins to commemorate the occasion."

Regardless of where or when the party is thrown, there are plenty of opportunities for savvy retailers to shower the guests and moms-to-be with a variety of (retail) bundles of joy.

### Warm & Fuzzy

Brenda Boyer of Carlson Craft noted that more and more couples are having "couple showers" and more showers are occurring after the baby is born — more of a "meet our new addition" shower. For a shower before the birth, ultrasound baby shower invitations or expecting parent announcements are becoming more popular, especially with more and more 3-D ultrasound shops opening.

But whether in the party's theme, presentation of the food, games or all of the above, hosts want their shower to be a truly unique experience, and that usually starts with a theme. If you've noticed more hedgehogs and owls invited to those parties as of late, you're not alone.



Creative Converting's Happi Tree ensemble gives the woodland creature party theme a sweet and updated look and also works as a gender-neutral theme.



Carlson Craft's newest product line is napkins printed in full-color that can include a photo to match a specific party theme.

Forest themes and woodland creatures like hedgehogs, deer, owls, and squirrels bring a sense of cute quirkiness and nostalgia to the baby shower.

"It's a fun throwback to childhood for the generation having children right now," said Kelly Karrmann of Creative Converting. "It reminds guests of the enchanted forests and whimsical scenes in Disney films like 'Snow White' or 'Cinderella'."

While animals have always been popular, those small woodland creatures have a certain charm and have been a popular theme for home décor in recent years. This has translated into a popular nursery design trend, which means that customers are looking to tie into this theme for baby shower décor as well.

"In the social expression industry, emotion and personality is at the center of all life celebrations," said Lisa Bennett of Pioneer Balloon Co. "Cute animal icons really play on our emotions and evoke that 'warm fuzzy' feeling, so cuddly characters are a natural pair with baby events because they make everyone smile."

"Parents encourage children's interest in animals and start the connection from birth with animal-themed baby showers and celebrations," Beer added. "The animals themselves provide easy inspiration for creating colorful, eye-catching product designs featuring a variety of poses, interesting color palettes and opportunity to integrate natural texture accents — lines, waves, circles, leaves and more."

### Trendy Tints

When it comes to the aesthetic elements, baby showers and "Welcome Home Baby" parties still reflect the overall "blue is for boys; pink is for girls" color schemes, but Beer added that refreshing, contemporary design is achieved by incorporating multiple shades of a palette and complementary accent colors.

"It's a Boy!" showers may incorporate sky blue, navy and turquoise, as well as splashes of lime green, emerald green or maybe tangerine orange. Similarly, girl parties feature bold fuchsia, bubblegum and pastel pink, accented by lavender, deep purple and hints of sage green.



Unique's new "It's a Girl" and "It's a Boy" bottle gift bags, gift wrap and foil balloons reflect the trend of bold, coordinating stripes with a baby bottle motif.

"The trend for layering coordinating colors together is great news for party planners on a budget who can splurge on printed decorations, accessories and plates, and save money on value priced, solid color napkins, cups and tablecover," Beer said. "Unique strongly recommends allocating store space for separate blue-boy and pink-girl baby shower sections. This will require stocking more SKUs and merchandise, but the reward comes in increased sales volume, as party planners will view your store as a destination resource for the complete party."

Jessica Benoit, art director at Amscan, agreed that soft pinks and blues are still valid colors, but that they've seen a brighter palette in the latest baby trends.

"We punched up our hottest ensembles and accessories with hot pinks for girls and turquoise blues for boys," Benoit said. "Touches of black also add sophistication to a shower, and chocolate brown is another hot color right now."

Bennett added that for gender-neutral celebrations, customers are looking for brighter colors instead of the classic pastel assortments. The gender-neutral color palettes will usually have a wider variety of colors associated with the theme, such as orange, teal and other complimentary colors.

## Little Details

Aside from paperware and decorations, it's the extras that can help take the shower and sales a step above. Games are consistent bestsellers at baby showers, and Benoit said that this year Amscan has introduced a new card game and an Inflatable Ball Toss — a group activity that encourages participation with dares. They've also done well in the wearable arena and are introducing more sophisticated wearables for the expecting mom, including a "Mom to Be" headband, sashes, necklaces, beads and a tiara.

When it comes to cards, George White of Up With Paper said that because they're a small line, they have more gender neutral cards for baby congratulations and showers that can be used for a boy or a girl baby.

"That certainly makes it easier for the retailer that needs to carry a smaller line," he said. "The pinks and blues can be added if there is room to add depth to the offering."

Boyer added that other hot new items are two sided announcements and invitations and post card invitations and announcements. Carlson Craft has added new two-sided baby shower invitations and birth announcements where the back is printed with a matching design.

"Another great add-on are personalized napkins printed in full-color to match the theme of the shower," Boyer said. "It's really fun to have napkins that are printed just for a specific party to match their theme or have a photo on them."

Remember that those who are expecting that bundle of joy are also expecting great service. As retailers, it's your job to deliver. **P**