Small retailers aim for emotional ties big chains may lack

By JOYCE M. ROSENBERG Associated Press

NEW YORK — Some smaller retailers will tug at shoppers' heartstrings during the holidays, trying to create an emotional experience or connection that a big national chain might not provide.

Store owners are going well beyond the usual holiday decorations and music. Among their plans: Parties where the focus is fundraising rather than profits, events with other stores to encourage shoppers to visit them all, and personal services like merchandise deliveries. The retailers are betting that their efforts — which for some are a year-round strategy will keep customers shopping long after the holiday season.

John Dudas, who co-owns Carol & John's Comic Book Shop in Cleveland, participated Saturday in Local Comic Shop Day, which he calls the comic book industry's equivalent of Black Friday. People lined up outside the store for limited-edition comics, and had a great time while they waited.

"They get to hang out with like-minded people," says Dudas, who estimates he made one-and-a-half times the sales he would see on a good Saturday.

Creating experiences and an emotional connection will help customers feel like they're getting more value from a retailer and that they're being valued and appreciated in return, says Syama Meagher, CEO of the Los Angeles-based consulting firm Scaling Retail. Small and independent retailers have a greater ability to create a bond with shoppers than larger competitors, she

Meagher's advice for store owners: "Don't think about your customer as someone who's going to buy something.'



Dudas has more events planned, including a sale starting on Black Friday during which he expects to sell 80,000 comic books at \$1 each. And on Dec. 16, he'll hold a party with artists drawing pictures of comic book fans. But Dudas won't look for a profit that day - he'll be raising funds for a

local charity, something he does periodically. In September, the store had a fundraiser in celebration of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Jack Kirby, co-creator of Captain America. These events help Dudas to expand his customer base.

"Put yourself into the community more and the money will come back to you," he

Independent retailers in Portland, Oregon, take part in Little Boxes, an annual alternative to shopping at big-box national chains that offer big discounts during the entire Thanksgiving weekend. Started in 2011, Little Boxes gives shoppers the chance to win raffle prizes according to how many purchases they make at participating stores. In its first year, there were 90 stores; this year there will be about 250.

Debbe Hamada, whose gift shop Tilde is participating, sees shoppers making an expedition out of going to Little Box stores, using an app to help them find as many as possible. Many people want to support local retailers the event overlaps with Small Business Saturday — and aim to visit as many as 10 or 20 in a day, she says.

"It's a real experience people are really happy that day," says Hamada, whose Black Friday sales have risen between 5 percent and 20 percent each year since Little Boxes began. The day after Thanksgiving has gone from one of the slowest days to one of biggest days of the season, she says.

Diane Roth uses service all year long to create a connection with customers. The owner of clothing boutique L'Armoire in New Canaan, Connecticut, Roth acts as much a concierge as a retailer. She'll allow customers to take several garments home to try on — or she'll send the clothes to their houses. She'll open as early as 5 a.m. so people can drop off unwanted items on their way to the nearby commuter train station. Customers send her photos of something they like, and ask her to find something similar.

'Customers feel like they're part of the story."

Zachary Quinn small-business owner

"I have a lot of executive women customers who don't have time," Roth says. "I'm like a personal assistant."

These services have helped Roth be less dependent on holiday shopping — unlike many retailers who expect to make up to half their annual revenue between Thanksgiving and Dec. 31. But Roth will have some events for the holidays, including bringing in a jeweler to help customers learn more about pieces they own, what



LEFT: John Dudas, owner of Carol and John's Comic Book Shop, poses during New Comic Day in Cleveland on Nov. 8. Some smaller retailers will tug at shoppers' heartstrings during the holidays, trying to create an emotional experience or connection that a big national chain might not provide. Dudas recently participated in Local Comic Shop Day, which he calls the comic book industry's equivalent of Black Friday. People lined up outside his store for limited-edition comics, and had a great time while they waited. ABOVE: Christy Abulaban and Abner Rondon look over new releases of comic books.

they're worth and how they should be worn. She's also creating a gift section with collectibles and other merchandise she doesn't usually carry.

"It gives people another reason to shop," Roth says.

Pigment, a gift shop in San Diego, provides activities for its shoppers — some tied to its merchandise, and some just for the fun of it, operations manager Tiffany Moore says. It starts outside the store, where a wall painted in graduated shades of pink is a favorite spot for people to take photos of themselves. Inside Pigment, there's a photo booth where shoppers can take pictures to immediately post online. People are having a good time, and the photos help increase the store's social media presence, Moore says.

"People who are shopping already notice the photo booth and say, 'This is cool,'" she says. "Others know it exists because a friend posts a photo on Instagram and they say, 'I want to go to that store."

On some Saturdays, as many as 100 people might get photos taken, Moore says. Meanwhile, other shoppers might be potting plants — the store's merchandise includes a large selection of plants, and customers can select their own and a container, get free potting soil and a trowel and create their own arrangements. Pigment also holds workshops to teach calligraphy, wreath-mak-

ing and other skills. Some online retailers look for ways to create an emotional experience even without a physical location. Love Your Melon advertises on its website that it donates half the profits from its sales of woolen beanies and other clothing, and gives surprise gifts to its big shoppers. The company donated more than \$400,000 from last year's Thanksgiving weekend, and this year's goal is \$1 million, including Cyber Monday sales, to be given to pediatric cancer research, owner Zachary Quinn says.

People posting comments on the Minneapolis-based company's Facebook page mention that helping children with cancer is one reason why they've bought from Love Your Melon.

"Customers feel like they're part of the story," Quinn says.

Good night, night: Light pollution increasing

By MARCIA DUNN Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. The world's nights are getting alarmingly brighter bad news for all sorts of tures, humans included. German-led

reported Wednesday that light pollution is threatening darkness almost everywhere. Satellite observations during five Octobers show Earth's artificially lit outdoor area grew by 2 percent a year from 2012 to 2016. So did nighttime brightness.

Light pollution is actually worse than that, according to the researchers. Their measurements coincide with the outdoor switch to energy-efficient and cost-saving light-emitting diodes, or LEDs. Because the imaging sensor on the polar-orbiting weather satellite can't detect the LED-generated color blue, some light is missed.

The observations, example, indicate stable levels of night light in the United States, Netherlands, Spain and Italy. But light pollution is almost certainly on the rise in those countries given this elusive blue light, said Christopher Kyba of the GFZ German Research Center for Geosciences and lead author of the study published in Science Advances

Also on the rise is the spread of light into the hinterlands and overall increased use. The findings shatter the long-held notion that more energy efficient lighting would decrease usage on the global — or at least a national — scale.

"Honestly, I had thought and assumed and hoped that

DECEMBER 2ND

2_{рм} AND 7:30_{рм}





NASA's Earth Observatory/Kyba, GFZ Photographs of Calgary, Alberta, Canada, taken from the International Space Station on Dec. 23, 2010, left, where residential areas are mainly lit by orange sodium lamps; and on Nov. 27, 2015, right, where many areas on the outskirts are newly lit compared to 2010, and many neighborhoods have switched from orange sodium lamps to white LED lamps.

with LEDs we were turning the corner. There's also a lot more awareness of light pollution," he told reporters by phone from Potsdam. "It is quite disappointing."

The biological impact from surging artificial light is also significant, according to the researchers.

People's sleep can be marred, which in turn can affect their health. The migration and reproduction of birds, fish, amphibians, insects and bats can be disrupted. Plants can have abnormally extended growing periods. And forget about seeing stars or the Milky Way, if the trend continues.

About the only places with dramatic declines in night light were in areas of conflict like Syria and Yemen, the researchers found. Australia also reported a noticeable drop, but that's because wildfires were raging early in the study.

SUNDAY

DECEMBER 3RD

 2_{PM}

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ter out the bright burning light. Asia, Africa and South America, for the most part, saw a surge in artificial night lighting.

Researchers were unable to fil-

More and more places are installing outdoor lighting given its low cost and the overall growth in communities' wealth, the scientists noted. Urban sprawl is also moving towns farther out. The outskirts of major cities in developing nations are brightening quite rapidly, in fact, Kyba said.

Other especially bright hot spots: sprawling greenhouses in the Netherlands and elsewhere.

Photos taken by astronauts aboard the International Space Station also illuminate the growing problem.

Franz Holker of the Leibniz Institute of Freshwater Ecology and Inland Fisheries in Berlin, a co-author, said things are at the critical point.

"Many people are using light at night without really thinking about the cost," Holker said. Not just the economic cost, "but also the cost that you have to pay from an ecological, environmental perspective.'

Kyba and his colleagues recommend avoiding glaring lamps whenever possible — choosing amber over so-called white LEDs — and using more efficient ways to illuminate places like parking lots or city streets. For example, dim, closely spaced lights tend to provide better visibility than bright lights that are more spread out.

The International Dark-Sky Association, based in Tucson, Arizona, has been highlighting the hazards of artificial night light for decades.

SELF-HELP GROUPS

Al-Anon (Astoria) — 7 p.m. Tuesday, Peace Lutheran Church, 565 12th St.; 12 p.m. Wednesday, First United Methodist Church, 1076 Franklin Ave. For information, call 503-325-1087; 7 p.m. Thursday, Crossroads Community Church, 40618 Old Highway 30, Svensen. For information, call 503-458-6467.

Al-Anon (Clatskanie) — 8 p.m. Monday, Faith Lutheran Church, 1010 N.E. Fifth St., Clatskanie. For information, call 503-728-3351.

Al-Anon (Nehalem) — 7 p.m. Monday, Riverbend Room, North County Recreation District, 36155 Ninth St. For information, call 503-

Alcoholics Anonymous - To find a meeting in Clatsop County, call 971-601-9220, in Tillamook County, call 503-739-4856, or go to www.aa-oregon.org

Celebrate Recovery — 6 p.m. Thursday, The Table Church, 852 Broadway, Seaside. Faithbased 12-step program designed to help anyone struggling with hurts, habits and hangups, including drugs and alcohol, anger, co-dependence, domestic abuse or sex, food or pornography addictions. Being religious not required. Free dinner and child care provided. For information, call D.B. Lewis at 503-741-5977.

Men's Sexual Purity Recovery Group — Tuesday nights. Part of the Pure Life Alliance (www.purelifealliance.org) Portland. For information, call the confidential voice mail at 503-750-0817 and leave a message.

TOPS (Take Off Pounds Sensibly) (Astoria) — 5 p.m. weigh-in, 5:30 p.m. meeting Tuesday, First Lutheran Church, 725 33rd St. For information, call Trisha Hayrynen at 503-298-9058.



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