LEMON TREE

PROMOTIONAL CALENDAR IDEAS
Use these calendars as a springboard for planning theme events and classes in your shop.

ON OUR COVER
Lemon Tree by Canvas
Fabrics for the fashionista who likes to quilt and sew, from Canvas in association with Benartex.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CUSTOMER RELATIONS
"No Thanks, I'm Just Looking"

SECRET TO SUCCESS
IN THE EARLY YEARS
The Importance of a Good Newsletter
In this age of electronic communication, Susan McLaughlin makes the case for a print newsletter and outlines ways to minimize costs and maximize impact.

BECOME A SAVVY BUYER
Supersize Your Sales
Let your customers in on the bulk-buying trend by implementing these strategies to increase the average customer sale—and your gross profits.

INVENTORY MANAGEMENT
An Art and a Business
Love of quilting prompts many to open a quilt shop, but it’s not enough to keep it going. Debi Linker emphasizes the business acumen that’s needed to weather the competition.

SALT & PEPPER
The Elephant in the Room
Are you willing to finance someone’s criminal activity and lose money? Of course not. Learn what you can do to prevent shoplifting in your store.

SET THE STAGE
For the Love of Foamboard
Devising a new display? Kelly R. Davey advises that your first question ought to be: How can I use foamboard to achieve this? And he shows you the ways.

TRADE TALK
Pioneers & Rebels
Meet industry leaders who are breaking the mold, daring to think outside the box, and boldly taking the quilting industry in unexpected directions.

SOMETIMES A GREAT NOTION
Introducing products for fusing batting scraps together, marking fabrics with disappearing ink, and creating pinwheels and more pinwheels.

BIZ NOTES
Short takes on business issues in the news that may affect how you run your shop.

FabShop EVENTS

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Carolie Hensley
The Cotton Patch, Lafayette, Calif.
Pioneers & Rebels

Quilt shops have their favorite suppliers, companies, and individuals that they know to be both creative and reliable, season after season. But while “business as usual” is generally a relief, there’s a special sense of excitement reserved for people who break the mold and dare to think outside the box.

Shopowners were surveyed just before Quilt Market and asked to name some “pioneers and rebels” who have recently introduced new ideas and products that are boldly taking the market in unexpected directions. Here are profiles of six people who are quickening pulses at quilt shops across the country.

Debra Gabel of Zebra Patterns: Savvy New Strategy for BOM

You might say that pattern designer Debra Gabel of Baltimore works “like there’s no tomorrow,” and that’s partly because there almost wasn’t.

In 2004, the mother of three boys was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma and endured chemotherapy and a bone marrow transplant. She’d been an art quilter for some time, but had a dream to run a quilt pattern business. She decided that if she lived, she would fulfill her dream and, being a focused person, determined to do it in a very targeted manner.

“Art quilters mostly don’t want a pattern, so I wanted to target the traditional quilter and I saw that they liked birds, butterflies, and flowers. I decided to feature those in raw-edge appliquéd pieces that look harder than they actually are,” Gabel explains. She then determined, after talks with quilt shops, that she wanted to focus on block-of-the-month patterns, but she wanted to make the process as simple and practical for the shops as possible, saving them steps and costs.

“My mantra is more bang for your buck,” says Gabel, so she created a system of options for shops that can considerably lower their wholesale costs for her projects. “Say I am doing a block-of-the-month sampler with birds. Shops have to buy 12 packs of each bird to get my price. Say they buy 12 packs of the first bird, a cardinal. I will provide them 12 patterns and sets of instructions for the cardinal, plus a plastic bag for each bird that can double as the kit bag. They just cut the right amount of the fabric they choose, and add that to the bags.” Also, the kits come with full-size appliquéd pieces and a placement sheet for each design.

Typically, says Gabel, the wholesale cost of each of those bags with a pattern and directions would be $4.50. If shops want a full-color cover inserted in each bag, that is what they pay her. If they decide instead to print their own color covers, then the bags cost just $3, and Zebra Patterns offers them a complete set of 12 color covers on a CD that costs $15. What’s nifty about the CD option is that it’s a customized CD in which all covers have been designed to include the name of the shop. The same CD also includes posters and other signage the shop can use to publicize the BOM program.

Gabel introduced this idea at her very first Quilt Market, in Houston in 2009. She called her Schoolhouse “Make Block-of-the-Months Profitable,” and about 10 people showed up. A year later, her talk was standing room only, because word had gotten out and shops were loving the program. Checker signed on as Gabel’s distributor, and C&T Publishing came calling. Her first book, Blocks Across America, came out last December, and her next, Blocks Around the World, will be out soon.

Another of Gabel’s outside-the-box ideas was to design preprinted color panels that look like stamps celebrating each state. These are like cheaper cloths: the design is printed on a panel 18 by 21 inches, and features the state bird and flower and a few well-known landmarks. Gabel tried to get fabric companies interested in printing, but they wanted to print it by the bolt and didn’t understand her concept. “It’s all about packaging,” she insists. “I put one state stamp in a plastic bag by itself, the equivalent of one fat quarter of fabric, and people pay $20 for it!”

Gabel started off with about a dozen states and they sold like gangbusters. Over the summer, she has finished designing the rest of the states, so buyers at Quilt Market can now order any states they wish to stock in their shops.

Gabel is also savvy about today’s quilters and crafters wanting to make something other than quilts. So her new BOM program is called Holiday Houses. Rather than quilt blocks, it’s a series of banners or hangings featuring Victorian houses, tailored for each month. For October, it’s a haunted house, and for March, an Irish pub, and so on. She’s doing preprinted panels for added details like shutters and silhouettes of people at the windows.

Harmony Susalla of Harmony Art: Pioneering Sustainable Fabrics

Organic cotton is now sweeping through the quilt market, with more