



A MySTORE PUBLICATION BY



## ONLINE RETAILING: PART 3 OF 4

# Traction in the social sphere: building sales and nurturing loyalty

### How to engage customers and drive more traffic into the store

Nobody needs to hear the gospel of social media—we've heard it before and most of us have converted. Most retailers who have tackled social media have seen benefits, and like every technology, taking full advantage of the opportunities takes time, experimentation and education.

In this issue of ShopIntelligence, we'll share some great tips and tactical advice we've learned works especially well for independent retailers.

### Gotstyle gets it right

"We are in a business where you want to create desire," says Melissa Austria, Owner of Gotstyle, a Canadian men's clothing retailer. To create that desire, Gotstyle takes to social media every day to present new styles and apparel to engaged customers. Austria has advice to independents for how they can develop their social media presence.



"Curate differently for different social media channels." People in different demographics and age groups prefer different social media, says Austria. To help tailor messages to suit both demographic patterns and preferences, Gotstyle uses analytics available through various social media channels, as well as the store's own observations, to improve social media communications.

"Social media has to be done by somebody in company." Gotstyle's social media output has a flavour—a voice and visual style—unique to the store. This tone cannot be replicated, nor can it be put forward by an outsider. That's why Austria has social media messaging created in-house—because only somebody who knows the store, the product, and brand can capture the spirit of the brand. "You need somebody living and breathing the brand," she says.

"Don't forget lessons from traditional advertising." Social media may have transformed "old" media, but it did not erase long-standing lessons born from the discipline of advertising. The most important: repetition is key to a successful strategy. "A post needs to be seen ten to fifteen times before it sinks in," says Austria. That's why her store repurposes content from the store's magazine a dozen ways and disperses that content a dozen times across its social media channels. Fortunately—and this is what makes social media the independent retailer's key marketing tool—social media costs almost nothing. "You have to talk to customers wherever they are. You can't wait for them—that doesn't happen now," says Austria. "Get in their face."

## ReShift's tips for getting results

**According** to Steve Buors, CEO of ReShift, a marketing firm, the astounding number of Canadians on social media—Canada is one of the most connected countries in the world—makes social networks a huge opportunity for independent retailers who want to connect with their current or prospective customers.

“The people you’re wanting to reach are on social media,” he says. “Social media and web, that’s your digital storefront. More often than not people find you online, and if you’re not online, you don’t exist.” Buors’s years as a digital marketer have given him sharp insights into how independent retailers get more out of social media.

*“Don’t try to be all things to all people.”* Why? Because if you’re everything, you’re probably nothing. Buors encourages retailers to identify who is the most important customer and target those people specifically. Social networks like Facebook have sophisticated targeting parameters—retailers should use these to attract the people they want.

*“Use automation.”* Bours advises independent retailers who want to get the most from their social media efforts to use the various automated tools available for free through different social networks. With a few clicks of a mouse, a retailer can set alerts so they are notified whenever a customer writes or tweets and schedule posts to go live at a specified time—freeing up retailers to focus on other aspects of their store. “It’s less about brutal force and spending time on social media,” says Bours, “and more about using technology smartly.”

*“Mix it up.”* Monotony kills. Independents who want to keep top-of-mind with their network need to keep their postings fresh. Use different images, posts and channels—photos one day, the next day post a text message. Cover a variety of things and have a point,” says Buors. “Don’t get into trap of saying, Have a happy Monday. Nobody cares.”

*“Take smart risks.”* Independents should treat social media as the long game. They’ll need to invest time into learning these marketing tools, and eventually they’ll need to try some new things. The first risk might be striking out into a new social network—maybe committing to reaching customers through Instagram—or using videos for the first time. “Because one doesn’t work, doesn’t mean you’re not making progress. Keep at it,” says Buors. As he explains, social media is more about emotion and movement than perfect execution.



## Flip for Triple Flip

**One** of the most successful independent Canadian retailers has to be Triple Flip, a retailer with 12 stores across Canada that cater to tweens and young girls. The store has nurtured a strong customer base and established itself as a confident, professional voice in social media. Linda Maslechko, CEO and founder of Triple Flip, shares her tips for connect on social media.

*“Post often.”* Social media is like a cocktail party, and nobody notices silent wallflowers. Maslechko says her store developed a following on social media only after she made a daily habit of conversing with customers on social media. “I had to learn how to get into the daily mindset of social media,” she says.

*“Engage stories.”* One of the more inventive strategies Maslechko has taken is to give her snapchat over to a customer. For a weekend, the store let a girl “take over” their snapstory—a risky but profitable way of engaging and inspiring customers.

*“Know referrals.”* Maslechko advises independents to use tracking tools. Tracking tools will help them learn what posts drive customers to the store. “Know referrals and traffic patterns and email responses,” says Maslechko, “and use that knowledge to know how to craft more of the posts that work.”

## 5 Free analytics tools for every retailer

Who’s following you online? How do they behave? Free analytic tools can help retailers size up their social media following.

- 1. Facebook Insights**—lets retailers gather information about local demographics and competitors’ Facebook pages.
- 2. Twitter Analytics**—gives retailers a deep understanding of what tweets hit their mark with the target audience.
- 3. Google Analytics**—delivers granular details about demographics, geography, industry benchmarks and other information useful to retailers.
- 4. Hootsuite**—helps identify audiences, distribute messages, and more, while giving retailers a dashboard for automating and scheduling multiple social networks.
- 5. Social Mention**—allows retailers to analyze social networks for mentions, keywords and hashtags



# Municipalities look to set dangerous precedents

## Small changes can have a big impact.

That's Retail Council of Canada's response to a series of populist by-laws—notably taxes on parking spaces in Toronto and plastic bags in Brossard, QC—that will affect how independent retailers do business.

And the impact of regulation will increase if other populist-prone municipalities in other jurisdictions copy these questionable by-laws.

## Big changes

Two cities in Quebec—Montreal and Brossard—have regulated the kinds of plastic bags retailers can use—and created enormous confusion and red tape for customers and retailers.

Montreal's regulations specify the number of microns a plastic bag is permitted to have. The City of Brossard's regulations detail the types of materials—no petroleum derivatives, not cotton—permitted within city limits.

The bans on plastic bag are part of a larger push to reduce waste, and municipal politicians, eager to look decisive, have been buying into a movement to eliminate plastic bags from retailers—even though eliminating plastic bags hasn't been proven to cut waste as effectively as measures offered by the retail industry. But, because banning plastic is popular today, retailers outside Quebec can expect other municipalities to ride the populist wave and ban bags, regardless of whether bans are good for the environment.

## In Toronto, the story's different.

Facing a capital budget deficit of \$33-billion and a projected 2017 deficit of \$500-million, the City of Toronto is struggling to get back into the black. One revenue source under consideration is a tax on parking stalls that will unfairly affect retailers who will see retail traffic affected and the cost of business real estate increase.

Most municipalities in Canada struggle with budgets. If Toronto pushes through a tax on parking spaces, other municipalities will follow. That's because it seems like a small tax—a few cents. But it adds up.

Retail Council of Canada, along with other members of the commercial property owners' coalition, intends to push city councillors to institute sensible and fair solutions, such as user fees for services, rather than taxes that unduly affect retailers. If a city does introduce new funding tools—taxes, user fees, and the like—these tools should be equitable, transparent, dedicated to a funding objective (rather than being added to general revenues), and contribute to the economic competitiveness of city.

What municipalities shouldn't do is scapegoat or target a single sector, or ride the policy bandwagon. Rather, RCC would prefer to see the city exhaust alternative funding mechanisms—including selling real estate assets, raising user fees, and raising residential property taxes—rather than impose blanket taxes and bans that affect retailers, many of which are small, independent shops.

RCC will continue to work with local and provincial governments on similar issues as these to make sure that retailers' concerns are addressed and that the right precedents are set in order to protect and preserve the health and wellbeing of the Canadian retail industry. After all, it is the lifeblood of the municipalities and towns that we live and operate in.



## If you have retail operations in Quebec, here's what changes to the Charter of the French language mean to your business

**Mind** needs to be paid to operations, both front and back end, human resources issues, finances, strategy, investments, implementing the latest technologies and, of course, complying with any and all new government regulations and amendments to existing ones.

This past November, the Government of Quebec modified the Charter of the French language by introducing a number of new elements. The amended regulation came into effect on November 24, 2016, which retailers operating in Quebec have up to three years to comply.

Retail Council of Canada (RCC) was able to get the implementation deadline extended from two to three years and will continue to communicate with the Office québécois de la langue française, advising of any difficulty members of the association experience concerning the regulation. RCC has made available to its members a guide, in English, on the new regulations and is working on developing additional information and training tools to help understand and comply with these new regulations.

To read full text of the amendment, visit [www2.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSearch/telecharge.php?type=1&file=102772.pdf](http://www2.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSearch/telecharge.php?type=1&file=102772.pdf)

If you have any questions or concerns, visit [www.retailcouncil.org/advocacy/Quebecsignage](http://www.retailcouncil.org/advocacy/Quebecsignage) or contact:

Jean-Luc Benoît, Director, Government Relations at: [jlbenoit@cccd-rcc.org](mailto:jlbenoit@cccd-rcc.org) or 514-316-8913

# Faking it

## Trims Seasonal Home Décor revives itself and community

When Trims Seasonal Home Décor lost the space it had occupied for 26 years in Vancouver's Edgemont Village, people noticed. And they didn't like what they saw.

The store, owned and operated by Marlene Tate since 1990, had become a cornerstone in the community. People knew the business, even though the business might not, at first glance, seem like the kind of store that could become an integral part of a community's fabric.

That's because Trims sells artificial flowers. They're tagline is "Fake It."

But they did become community leaders because Tate and her family wanted to build the community. "It was our decision to become part of the community from the first day," she says. "We would ensconce ourselves in the community and build the brand in a supportive way."

The strategy worked, and Trims thrived.

And then a new landlord terminated the store's 26-year lease. For four months Trims was homeless but it was not down. Over the years, Tate had developed a reputation for quality by selling high-end artificial flowers, and using the internet, she expanded her business beyond the confines of the storefront to sell decorations to TV and moviemakers and department stores.

Tate and her staff, including her daughters who work for the store, eventually re-opened not far from their old location. The response from the community to the reopening of an artificial flower shop overwhelmed Tate. In one day, the store had 12,000 posts on its Facebook page.

"It was an unbelievable outpouring," says Tate. "It was fabulous."

Tate is excited for the future. Her store is a family business propelled by the next generation of her family, and with selling channels available through the web and a firm relationship with her community and wholesale customers, she sees a bright future for herself and other retailers.

That bright future is available to everybody, she says, and even with the shakeups occurring in the retail industry, retail remains vibrant and vital.

"Can we talk the truth about small business and not always be portrayed as victims, these poor mom and pop businesses?" says Tate. "We're so much more than that. We are the hearts of communities and cities. And I'm not just speaking to the bumper sticker appeal of that, it's the truth."



### Trims at home online

Trims spends nothing on marketing. Instead, the store uses a range of free online services to reach their customers.

Social media is a big part of the store's marketing. Customers can find store information and lots of product photos on the store's twitter (@trimsfakeit) and Instagram accounts. The store has a robust Facebook account featuring a wall of five star reviews from happy customers.

While Trims' product doesn't lend itself to selling directly to consumers online, the store does have a free Wix website advertising (<http://trimsretail.wixsite.com/trims/fakeit>) the store's services and product lines.

Not a member of Retail Council of Canada? Questions about your membership?  
Call 1-888-373-8245 or email [membership@retailcouncil.org](mailto:membership@retailcouncil.org).