



POP GOES THE SHOWROOM!

Target does it. So does JC Penney. Why not an online company specializing in home furnishings and design?

By Stefanie Schwalb

Pop up stores have been a growing trend over the past few years, some with negative connotations of filling vacant storefronts for faltering urban economies or with seasonal merchandise. Others are dubbed flash retail, lending hip allure with popular brands. Many times the operations are associated with larger department stores or specialty shops. The urgency tactic of a limited run retail venture has been successful in prompting even today's savvy shoppers to make purchases.

One recent venture, however, has involved the online home décor advisor/resource Remote Stylist.com, which embraced this concept by outfitting a cottage in

Canada's popular summer resort area of Lake Muskoka full of new furnishings from its vendors. The items were offered at Remote Stylist.com for a significant per-

centage off suggested retail. The sale began in July in one cottage merchandised with chandeliers and lamps, beds, chairs, tables, vases, candlesticks, dressers, and pillows. The collection then moved to another cottage in August and opened to visitors through Labor Day weekend. After that, the cottage remained open on weekends through



Above: The luxury of space enabled stylists to arrange rooms as they would be lived in during the cottage pop up store run.

Top of page: The RemoteStylist.com pop up store at Lake Muskoka was a cottage that was on the market. It was merchandised with finds from the Web site's many vendors and generated plenty of local buzz, through Facebook announcements as well as old-fashioned word of mouth during its month-long run.



Thanksgiving weekend with visits by appointment only. Shoppers to the cottages could see the items – unlike viewing them online – and then order through the Web site and have the purchases shipped anywhere in North America (Islands included). Customers also had the option of buying the actual floor model at 15 percent off of the company's price. For those not in the immediate area, merchandise could also be viewed on the enterprise's Facebook page. "There was a big focus on that since we have a sizable network online," explains Kelly Fallis, CEO of RemoteStylist.com.

Networking innovation is nothing new to Fallis, who started RemoteStylist.com after the success of her home staging site, Organized Outcomes. The company motto, "Everyone needs someone on the inside," promotes its mission as a competitively priced, online furniture and accessories sourcing platform. The personalized and affordable service is an interactive project providing interior decorat-

Top left: Because the cottage was an actual home, merchandising each day became a creative exercise. Products were constantly shifted from room to room, to present a unique display daily.

Top right: The merchandise for RemoteStylist.com's cottage store was contemporary or industrial in style, promoting a trend, rather than following a typical traditional lodge look.

Above: The mix of rustic, contemporary, and industrial styles gave the pop up store a unique perspective and fashion-forward vibe.

ing assistance no matter where the customer is located. The process is simple: a customer e-mails the site with a link to the exact piece(s) she wants, and a stylist provides a quote (and opinion if needed) within 48 hours at no charge. If a

consumer isn't sure of her style or the type of furniture she should be looking for, she fills out a profile on the site telling her likes, style (taste), budget, size requirements, and photos of the room she is looking to furnish. For a \$49.99 fee, the stylists create a custom-tailored look book of ideas for the design-challenged space with a list of furniture choices. Customers are then encouraged to comment, discuss, reject, or add more information. Once a final decision is made, customers just order the items right through the site and RemoteStylist.com ships them directly to the client.

With online resources, how did the idea for the pop-up store come about? "Right now people are time-starved," Fallis says. "They always want to see what's cool, but they are inundated with magazines and Web sites and overwhelmed by search engine results. We came up with the idea of a curated, live catalog of products for them. We decided to take an empty cottage that was for sale and fill it with new pieces

from around the world.”

Fallis chose Lake Muskoka in Canada because “it is a similar audience to the Hamptons and Malibu Beach, which means it is a good opportunity and place to showcase new styles.”

Fallis and her talented staging staff quickly learned filling an empty house under a serious time crunch proved no easy feat. “Some of the challenges we faced included having no location up until the last second,” she discloses. “In January we started looking at cottages and specific builds for sale. However, once a builder completes a home they want to get it sold. Many of the properties we looked at were bought before our event started.”

Once locations were secured, there were the logistics of setting up the cottages: the picking up and dropping off of items on the shipping dock, getting things in and out of the spaces, and of course, navigating the roads to and from the sites.

There was also a concern about the best way to market the project. “Pop up stores are known in New York City, but not here [in Lake Muskoka],” Fallis notes. “People didn’t know what it was, and we were wondering, ‘Since this has never been done here before, how do we sell it? How do we get the word out?’”

“We used Facebook to spark interest, but we launched that part a bit late, so next time we will do it earlier,” Fallis admits.

It turns out attracting shoppers was no problem at all. “The cottages had about 4,500 visitors. Because people thought it was so innovative and cool, they came back and brought their friends. Some people spent hours here, and word of mouth just spread it around.”

Since many of the cottages in Lake Muskoka are passed down

through family generations, choosing the styles of items was significant. “We needed to pick pieces that would get exposure, but would also blend in with any cottage décor,” Kelly explains. “These weren’t cottage-specific pieces like a large overstuffed bear. We went instead with industrial contemporary pieces that would mix in and

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“We chose products we love. Our location was an actual home, so we needed it to look like one — room by room. We chose a wide range of styles and had lots of manufacturers to work with. We had a short time to put [the project] together, and we didn’t get all of the products we planned. Sometimes [merchandise was] swapped mid-process,” Fallis adds. “At one point, it had to do with inventory. When there was no time, we’d say to vendors, ‘What’s on your dock? Send us what you have.’”

Once the cottages were open

to the public, the challenge of re-merchandising each day became a fun one. “It’s not like a store. Once we sold something we didn’t have more pieces in a stock room, so we re-merchandized by moving products around and making the rooms look different. For example, we had an industrial shopping cart that we used in different ways in different settings. When visitors came back and brought friends, the spaces would always look different,” Fallis relates. “People don’t always think to move things or use them in new ways in their homes. You may buy a table for your house, put it in your living room, and never move it the whole time you live there. Items such as lamps are great because they are easy to move.”

For the cottages, Remote Stylist.com worked with two lighting companies: Currey & Company and Go Home Ltd. “The people at RemoteStylist.com saw us at a gift show and the owner contacted me,” says Liora Simpson, marketing director for Flushing, N.Y.-based Go Home. “We are always up for a challenge, and this process was made easy as they handled it all. We were very excited to have our product represented so beautifully in Canada, and we consider the project a big success. We look forward to working with them again in the future.”

And the future looks very bright for RemoteStylist’s next pop up store projects, based on the feedback from both manufacturers and consumers. “We are planning to do six pop up stores up and down the East Coast in 2012,” Fallis declares. “The first one will be in Florida in the winter. A pop up store is a direct-to-consumer marketing opportunity for us, and after shoppers experience them, they will know us in person and feel more comfortable ordering online.” ❖