



ICBA Networking Calls Recap Store2Store and Buyer2Buyer October 6-8 and October 20-22, 2020



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Store2Store Recap

A prevailing theme as store leadership adapted to the pandemic was how the new normal will be forever changed by the shift in shopping behaviors. Have students been trained to shop online for course materials exclusively? With the rapid shift to digital and inclusive access models, several participants indicated they are rethinking selling course materials in-store in favor of an out-sourced model. The apparel/gift category and course materials categories are faring the best in the stores while supplies and food/beverage have fared the worst due to traffic declines.

While a handful of stores remain closed with online sales only, more than 80% are open to the general public; however, traffic on campus is very slow. Similarly, about 80% of stores offer some form of Buy Online Pick Up In-store services with a handful hoping to implement.

Sales

On the optimistic sales side, down 5% in sales is the new up! Polling responses to total store sales trends YTD:

- About 10% of stores experienced some positive sales trends
- For smaller stores, responses were between the range of being down 5-30% (36%) or being down more than 30% (45%)
- For medium size stores, perhaps because not reliant on division 1 sports team sales, none reported sales being down more than 30%. Stable sales -5 to +5% (40%) versus down 5-30% (60%)
- For larger stores, the vast majority reported sales down in the 5-30% range (67%) with some reporting more than a 30% decline (22%)
- The outlook for 2021-2022 is only slightly improved.

Overall Concerns

- Financial health of the store
 - Concerns that leasing will become attractive to administrations (two mid-size stores facing RFP)
- Traffic
 - Long winter break for some (after Thanksgiving to mid/late January)
 - Even with limited stadium attendance (where games are being played), stores need to be diligent about maximum capacity for appropriate social distancing.
- Supporting staffing levels with declining sales
 - Concerns over mental & physical health of the store team
 - Intermittent closings due to COVID outbreaks
 - Concerns over student health and safety practices
 - Continued concerns about COVID numbers and possible impact of new closing mandates
 - Looking for cross-training and cooperative opportunities on campus for keeping staff employed & busy
 - Looking for new opportunities in lab supplies, departmental fund-raising initiatives (t-shirts), grad initiatives, specialty bundles (art, chemistry, automotive kits)
- Managing operational issues
 - Processing online orders
 - Additional shifts needed in some cases

- Needed to re-assign roles to answer incoming customer phone and email inquiries
 - Managing online pick-ups
 - In retrospect, one store cited that moving pick-up out of the store created loss of incremental sales and hampered efforts to troubleshoot problems from a remote location (previously logged in 3,400 online orders – fall BTS generated 18,000 online orders - Illini)
 - Closed textbook sales floor in many cases or counter service
 - Managing on-campus deliveries (one school noted 400 orders delivered to dorms on one day)
 - Managing rental returns since students will leave campus before end of term
- Continued need for support services; supply channel challenges
 - Expanding c-store options due to closed food service options
 - Product shortages, particularly in tech and supplies

Promotions / Marketing

Visit Buyer2Buyer Categories for product specific promotions.

- Rapidly expanded online GM offerings
- Focus on moving slow turning or clearance merchandise in promotions
- Transition to more “lifestyle photos” and short videos in marketing
- Starting holiday sales early
- Offering coupons to various departments (admissions, grad, etc.)
- Communications challenges, particularly for freshmen & pick up in-store
- Using Chat feature on website to engage with customers
- Focus on parents through various online parent/campus groups
- Parent outreach for home and small business tech needs
- “Telling the Story” about Inclusive Access

Smartest Thing

- Student loaner laptops
- LMS link to VitalSource

Buyer2Buyer Recap – Course Materials

The rapid shift to online selling and digital delivery has many course materials staffers concerned about the future of in-store course materials sales. At lower prices points but disproportionate work/hassle, the digital explosion has raised significant concerns about the future of physical books. In some cases, faculty are resistant to the change to digital and new initiatives around Inclusive Access. Several stores reported the need for even more communication with faculty during the challenges of remote teaching , especially with last-minute class changes.

The shift to digital has also raised renewed concerns about the prevalence of pirated or counterfeit books. Many of the operational adapting and challenges referenced in the Store2Store calls were mirrored by this Buyer2Buyer group. Digital sales represent a growing percentage of the business with about 40% of stores reporting more than 50% digital, about 30% in the range of 25-50% digital and about 25% in the 10-25% range. Only a handful of stores reported digital adoption at less than 10% of sales. Inclusive Access continues to gain traction with one store reporting IA tripled for fall 2020.

Smartest Thing

- One store reported using the store closing to reorganize the text area to alpha by author
- Buyback:
 - With the shift to digital and the adjusted school calendar (students not returning after Thanksgiving), a number of stores are doing away with physical buyback.

- Online buybacks are being considered but CM buyers are adjusting purchases of physical inventory to be a declining part of the business.
- One store reported shifting in-person buyback to January when students return for second semester (large student dorm population).
- All are considering “cash-less” buybacks
- Rentals
 - A couple of stores reported moving away from the rental of physical books due to the challenge of getting returns and the shift to digital.
 - Continued rentals created challenges for pick-up locations, customer return mailing options, isolating product before returning to shelf, etc.
- One store distributed apparel “rewards” coupons in coordination with getting the course list available online in July with pick-up in July / August.
- Working with marketing for better faculty outreach, particularly for low-adoption departments as well as reviewing inclusive or equitable access options.
- One store reported charging campus departments a distribution fee for science/lab kits which ended up bringing students in-store.
- Campus-wide, multi-publisher, flat-fee programs, such as the Equitable Access program at UC-Davis, being considered for future viability and potential implementation.

Buyer2Buyer Recap – Supplies

Supply buyers love their writing instruments and were delighted to share their favorites! Top mentions went to the Pilot G2, FriXion Erasables and Schneider. Other notables: Sarasa by Zebra, Clear-view Sharpie highlighter, Pentel EnerGel, Zebra G350, Uniball JetStream, Bic Cristal, old school Pilot Roller Ball, PaperMate Ink Joy, Pentel Sparkle Pop, cheapies! There were two shout-outs for mechanical pencils: Sakura Sumo and Staedtler. Bonus points to Aicha at Minnesota for using burgundy school color in her favorite G2.

To the more practical standpoint of what’s happening with writing instruments in the store, several buyers commented on adding more carded stock over open-stock and “pen wall” displays.

One of the hardest hit areas in the store, supply departments are having a tough go of it. Institutional requests from various campus departments are keeping the store afloat. In the area of supplies required for art classes, kits are definitely the way to go. The challenge for many is getting the cooperation of faculty on getting the item lists. Many stores are building their own art kits but some are sourcing from ICBA Vendor Partner, SLS Arts. Art kits can also be sourced through MacPherson, Pacific Arc, Dick Blick, PA Distribution (out of Oregon). University of Northern Iowa reported more than doubling the number of kits they have for classes (previously 8-9, now 22). Other course related options mentioned: horticulture, design, architecture, nursing, chemistry, mechanical engineering, automotive, and “teacher” classroom supplies. CSULB reported charging campus departments a distribution fee for science/lab kits which ended up bringing students in-store.

In the category of basic school supplies, kits seem to be hit or miss with some stores reporting excellent sell-through and others, lackluster results. These kits, whether school logo products or basics require assembly by the store staff.

Buyers commented on a number of supply chain shortages. Distributors have also commented on product shortage issues to ICBA.

What’s Selling Online and In-Store?

- Journals (including upgraded styles like Leuchtturm, wooden covers, Moleskine)
- Miquel Rius notebooks
- Rocket Journals – University of Northern Iowa

- Academic planners, including Payne
- Spiral-bound comp books – Missouri State, UW Madison
- Decomp books
- There is still a demand for paper products with recycled content – UW Madison
- Whiteboards (all sizes and calendar styles) – Gustavus Adolphus
- Accounting students required to use two webcams and whiteboards (sold 150) for testing – Arizona
- 3M hooks – Gustavus Adolphus, Arizona
- G2 pens, especially colors
- Le Pen colors
- Expanded assortment of school supplies available online (not just logo school supplies) – UCLA
- Duffel bags (Nike) – Arizona
- Coronavirus Plush from Giant Microbes – Grinnell
- Batteries for clickers
- Face shields; store repackaged for individual sale – Arizona
- Not so much...
 - Logo supply items
 - Calculator sales down by 2/3
 - Backpacks

Promos

- “Hobby Week” Promotion
- Flash Sales: 3 per week for the store – Arizona

In-Store Floor Changes

- Switch to more carded product for sanitization measures – Minnesota, BYU Idaho
- Changed floor to put art supplies near other supplies – BYU Idaho
- Moved Supplies & Tech department from lower level to first floor – Arizona
- Moved separate art store into main store to ease staffing issues and attract related sales – CSU Long Beach

Buyer2Buyer Recap – Tech

Buyers were inspiring with their Lightning Round recommendations on the best tech gadget they bought for themselves or the store. Notable (and repeat) comments, in addition to AirPods and iPads:

- A really nice mouse! Logitech Marathon
- Bluetooth headphones – never going back to wired!
- Aftershokz headphones (several)
- Happy Plugs air pods (several)
- Total techy – 60 watt GaN (gallium nitride) power block can even power a laptop!
- iPad Pro 11
- Sennheiser noise-cancelling headphones; good for office and at home
- JBL Party Box
- Apple TV
- Apple Watch (several)
- HP Stream book – laptop for students at a lower price point
- Low-tech silicone cases for AirPods; keeps from slipping out of pockets or backpacks
- Low-tech cell phone wallets; stick-on styles

Smartest Thing

- As with other product categories, challenges with website and online sales became apparent with the pandemic. *If it's not visible on the website - including accessories, they can't buy it!*
- Basic accessories for a store starting out in tech: USB-C multiports, earbuds, charging cables and adapters, webcams, mics, wireless mice, USB headsets
- Kept the repair team engaged to help handle service issues even with store closed
- Whereas Apple stores were closed in many places, some campus stores remained open
- Coordinated with campus help desk managed out of the library for better relationship going forward – Central Michigan University
- Payroll deduction plan
- Transparent communication with departments with weekly spreadsheet showing items available in stock. Tech sales up on the year – UC Santa Cruz
- Offer warranty service with CPS or Safeware – Minnesota
- Gaming bundles with Alienware – Minnesota State
- Mike Wang at University of Arizona shared a link on how he builds a quote for Apple customers: <https://ecommerce.apple.com/asb2b/public.do?language=en&country=US&segment=EDU-HIED>

Promos

- Free shipping on most items
- Considering doing their own version of the Apple holiday promotion
- Using ripl.com and Hootsuite to create engaging posts across platforms – UC Santa Cruz
- 9:00 – 10:30 PM is best post time for student engagement on social media – UC Santa Cruz

In-Store Floor Changes

- Demo stations either abandoned or with signage that has staff cleaning before and after customer handles product. One store provides gloves to handle demo stations.
- University of Arizona moved from lower level to have all departments on the main store level.

Buyer2Buyer Recap – Apparel & Gift

The Lightning Round kicked off the call with the very popular topic of face masks, running the gamut of **multiple** styles of logo masks, fashion & solid color masks, disposable masks, gaiter styles, and departmental orders. In some cases, stores partnered with the campus to create masks for free distribution as well as selling additional masks as the customers needed. Many buyers have had to restock throughout the last 9 months and are adding new styles to their offerings (some are up to 10+ styles). Buyers are considering and booking holiday styles.

Brands mentioned: Spirit Products, Colosseum, All-Star Dogs, LXG, Jardine, Third Street, Logo Brands, Badger, Zoozats, Hanes (5pk), Wincraft, Authentic Brand, Strideline, League, Blue 84, Ouray, Snoozies, Care Cover (with matching headbands), Pomchies, DM Merchandising (including fashion kid sizes), Fingerprint, McCoy, local vendors

Those stores getting ready for the start of the abbreviated football season are wondering what to expect in terms of traffic and sales. For the most part, buyers are not looking to bring in new products due to lack of sales and need to move existing inventory.

What's Selling Online and In-Store?

- Basics – hoods, crews, t-shirts
 - Some reports of having to reorder value line and basics
- Black tone-on-tone Nike apparel – Iowa State

- New color-wash colors from MV Sport – Flagler’s Legacy
- Over-size or unisex over-size for women in both tops and sweatpants
- Water bottles
- Cropped tops
- Reverse Weave better than usual
- Increase in full-zip fleece
- Pink items!
- Zoozats rock inspired graphics – UW Madison
- Yard signs; success at grad season, continuing with new styles / designs – Iowa State
- “Home-gating” & tailgating bundles
 - NDSU and Iowa State including snacks in bundles
 - Apparel / gift ware / masks
 - Logo napkins, paper plates, etc.

Promos & Marketing

- Targeting items with surplus inventory levels
 - Daily Deals
- BTS Welcome Gift Box @\$139. Will do Christmas gift boxes at \$120 price point – Santa Cruz
- Targeted email for holiday promotions
- Always includes a thank you postcard (last month – Mustache Gracias graphic) in each shipment, encouraging social media engagement.
- Reach out to people wearing university apparel for permission to re-post
- “As Seen Around Campus” photo series on social media
- Free shipping offers
- Outdoor “yard” sales while weather permitted
- Yearly \$19.99 “box sale” of crews and hoodies also offered online – CSU Long Beach
- Bought a canvas bag on closeout for \$3, sold the bag for \$5, customer gets 25% off anything that fits in the bag (some restrictions) – Iowa State sold 600 bags!
- Ads with promo codes do better than those without – Carroll College
- Products featuring “NFL Pokes in the Pros”. One player even has his own cereal – Wyoming
- “Freshmen only” after hours event with 20% off, giveaways, and snacks. Promoted with posters in residence halls and with RA’s ; lenient on letting anyone in – Dakota State
- Virtual fashion shows or FB / IG live posts

In-Store Floor Changes

- Revamped sales floor while closed with better organization of hats resulting in an increase in sales

Marketer2Marketer Recap

The consistent mantra throughout all the October networking calls was, “If it’s not online, it’s not selling!”

Kicking off the call with a Lightning Round of Biggest Challenges, callers repeatedly called out:

- Focusing on online business
 - Transitioning products traditionally sold in-store (art supplies & kits) to online options
 - Lots of requests from store staff for increased promotional efforts
- Driving more traffic to store
- Challenge of cancelled on-campus events
- Constant changes in operations
- Staying up on social media posts and trends
- Poor or lacking system integration from web, to POS, to marketing

- Launching equitable access
- Getting students to read emails!

For the most part, store marketing is not directly subject to campus oversight but most are limited in messaging around COVID or social injustice. In some cases, the institution has gate-keeping responsibility for all outbound messaging, hampering a store's identity as well as available outreach and band-width options.

POLL #1: Currently, we frequently communicate via:

- Email – 45%
- Website – 9%
- Facebook – 9%
- Instagram – 32%
- Twitter – 5%
- Other – 0

POLL #2: Customers are most engaged on:

- Email – 24%
- Website – 24%
- FB – 14% (older – non-traditional students / faculty / alumni / team fans)
- Instagram – 33% (students)
- Twitter – 5%
- Other – 0

POLL #3: Biggest challenge with our website has been:

- Adding products and descriptions – 20%
- User Friendly (Design & Functionality) – 60%
- Solid analytics/data – 20%
- My website rocks! – 0 (said no one, ever!)

Engagement notes:

- Parent forums are a new way to engage with families, particularly with freshman orientations moving to virtual.
- For the most part, stores have abandoned Snapchat.
- Closely watching Tiktok with only a few venturing there by employing student workers well-engaged on the platform.

Buyer2Buyer Recap – POS Systems

A diverse group of systems were represented on the call. Six stores must replace their Sequoia Transact system in the coming year as that system reaches end-of-service life. While it's not the best time to consider new POS systems financially, many were on the call to keep their options open and increase awareness of system challenges. 28% of the callers were Satisfied or Very Satisfied with their current system. 61% were Dissatisfied or Very Dissatisfied!

Systems Considerations

The explosion of e-commerce during this pandemic has pushed many stores to the realization that a robust e-commerce solution and integrated marketing tools are significant requirements of a modern POS system.

- Training is an essential element of any new system.
- When creating an RFP for a new system, be sure to engage as many campus areas as possible in the process to avoid problems down-the-road.

- Campus integration is challenging due to the variety of requirements specific to individual institutions.
- Even though some stores are considering an outsourced virtual model for course materials, many still need the POS system to manage that aspect of the business.
- Greatest dissatisfaction issues:
 - Seamless customer experience both in-store and online
 - Seamless integration with marketing
 - Need access from a phone or computer
 - Long delays in much needed updates
 - More payment options; Apple Pay, Google Pay, Buy now / Pay later, etc.
 - Flexibility with reports and layouts
- POLL – which feature of POS would help you the most if it were to be improved/enhanced?
 - Reporting tools – 17%
 - Financial reconciliation – 28%
 - Promo capabilities – 33%
 - Inventory management/purchasing tools – 17%
 - Better training from provider – 0
 - Other – 6%

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Thanks to all who participated in the ICBA's Store2Store or Buyer2Buyer calls. As always, ICBA Store Members can access recordings of past webinars and calls, as well as contact information for colleagues at ICBA Member Stores, via your Member Dashboard:

- Log in to ICBAinc.com, and the first page you land on will be the [Member Dashboard](#).
- For webinar and call recordings, check the "Important Info & Reminders" section.
- For upcoming webinars or calls, check the "Upcoming Events" section.
- For store contacts, scroll down to "ICBA Member Stores Information" and click on the store name to view that store's profile.

Reach out to us at Office@ICBAinc.com if you have any questions.