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# The Write Stuff

By Haley Shapley

Instant communication is no match for back-to-basics stationery with bright colors and a simple message.





With the rising popularity of text messaging, the ubiquity of e-mail and the proliferation of online invitation sites like Evite, stationery should be on its way out, right? Fortunately for retailers and fans of good old-fashioned snail mail, it's not quite that simple.

The good news is that a study by Unity Marketing found that the stationery goods market is actually growing, albeit at a modest pace of about 1.7 percent. Even better news for the approximately \$37 billion industry is that the biggest-buying age group is that of 25- to 34-year-olds.

"Stationery as a whole is a lot more hip than it used to be, and the younger generations have embraced it because it's fun and colorful," says Lori Eddleman, cofounder of **Three Designing Women**, a manufacturer of custom stamps and stationery.

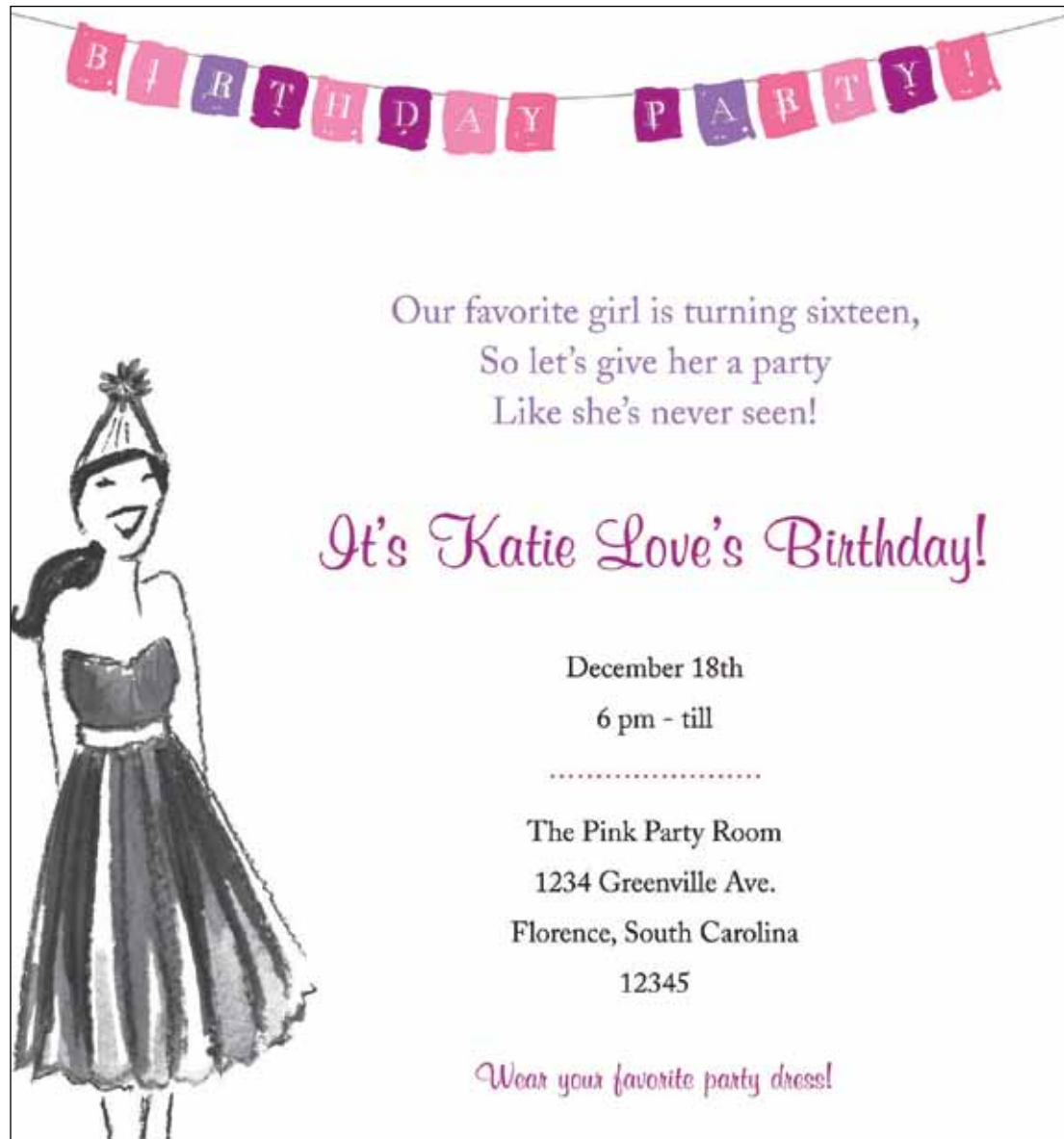
Despite fears that technology would displace the art of written correspondence, younger consumers are interested in paper products — but still, technological advances and simply the passage of time have had an effect on what these new customers want today.

#### The Latest Looks

"There will always be simpler lines or more color-infused lines, but the biggest trend is what colors are used," says **Tart Paperie** owner Amanda Chenevert, who adds that jewel tones like peacock green, deep purple, Tiffany blue and tangerine paired with grays and metallics are big right now.

Some color combos are always en vogue, like lavender and green, pink and green, and the uber-popular brown and blue. "Brown and blue is the color combination that doesn't ever seem to die," Eddleman says.

As far as patterns, look for stationery to take its cue now more than ever from other industries, like home décor and fashion.



Geometric designs are hot across product categories, and the same applies to stationery, Eddleman says.

New combinations, especially in texture, are also welcome. "A mixture of textures on invitations is something that we're seeing," says Judy Gardiner Loudon, principal of the **Howard Gardiner** showroom. She points to **Anna Griffin** invitations with a laser-cut latticework and an overlay as an example.

You also can't deny the power that the eco-friendly movement has had on stationery. In addition to using recycled paper, more products are featuring a green motif. "People are moving to more earthy, natural inspiration — birds, peacocks, owls, wood and floral," Chenevert says. "People are becoming green and finding joy in a more simple way of life."

#### Signs of the Times

Although customers are still buying stationery, that doesn't necessarily mean they're buying what they used to. "Before the economy, shops were filled with all these really cool cards with glitter and bows and die-cuts

Opening spread: stationery from **Three Designing Women**, **Howard Gardiner**.  
Opposite page: assorted invitations from **Anna Griffin**, **Howard Gardiner**.  
Above: invitation from **Tart Paperie**.

#### DICNOTE

For more paper resources, consult the **Stationery/Invitations/Writing Instruments** section of your on-site directory. Or, review the section on-line before market and set appointments with exhibitors.





Thank you cards from Compendium, Portico Collection; Snow & Graham, Holst-Bowen; Green, Holst-Bowen; Galison Books/Notes, Howard Gardiner.

and velvet-flocked things,” Chenevert says. “Now people want something simple that looks great but doesn’t have the cost.”

As people revert to simplicity in tougher times, messages on cards follow suit. Chenevert’s cards feature short sayings, like a wedding card that says “Oh happy day” or a birthday card with “You are exquisite” and the image of a peacock. “Designers are combining a frilly and decadent look with an honest, to-the-point saying,” she says. “The trend of simple truth is wildly popular because it’s getting back to basics. Everything is stripped down to its bare beauty, the bare message.”

On the topic of basics, certain things never

go out of style, and thank-you notes are one of them — it’s never a bad time to express gratitude. In fact, they may be even more popular now than ever before. “Due to the job market, thank-you notes have become increasingly in high demand, as has résumé paper and things like that,” says Sue Littleton, owner of Avalon, a stationery store in Houston.

Also doing well: cards that have an uplifting message or a bit of mild humor to impart. “In an economy like we’re in, people like to be cheered up,” Gardiner Loudon says. “Anything that has a lighter direction or theme or verse is going to be well received.” She cites **Shannon Martin** cards as a good example,

with sayings like “You will always be my best friend ... you know too much.”

Because people are entertaining more in their homes now, invitations can be a great category, and they’re a fun and easy way to add a bit of class and sophistication to an event. “The party starts once the guests receive the invitations, because they’re anticipating the party. They’re wondering who’s going to be there; they start thinking about what they’re going to wear,” Gardiner Louden says. “There’s anticipation that doesn’t happen if you just send out an Evite.”

### A Proper Introduction

Back from its Victorian era popularity, one piece of stationery making a big resurgence is the calling card. Like a business card, calling cards include contact information such as a name, phone number and e-mail address, but unlike most business cards, they allow the users to infuse a little of themselves into the cards. “People want to make more of a personal statement,” Eddleman says. “It’s a nice way to give something that reflects your personality.”

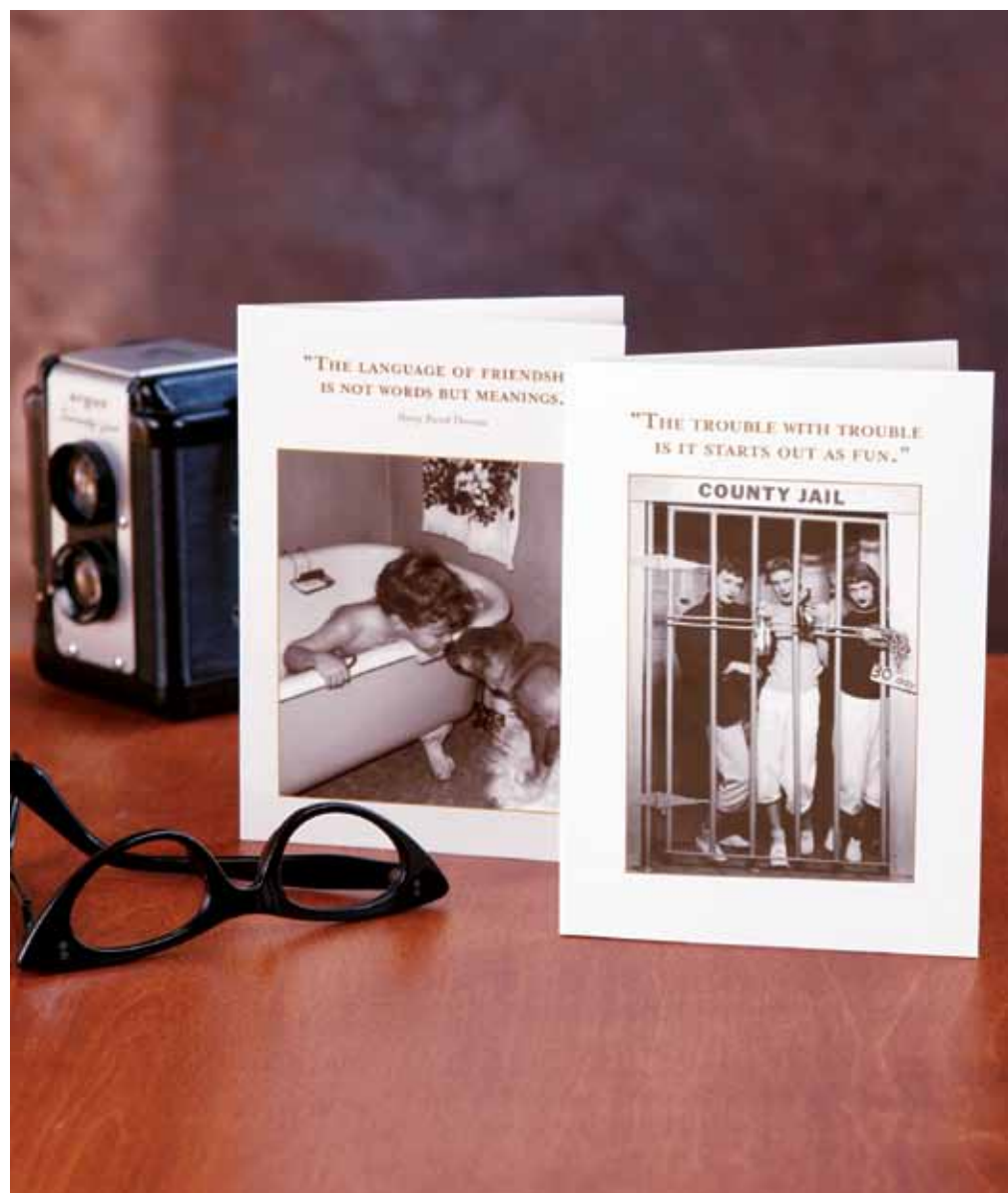
She’s found that they appeal to people of all ages, particularly moms who give them out at playdates and soccer games, retirees who miss having a business card and professionals who want a card to exchange in social situations. Littleton says they’re catching on with the younger crowd and have always been big with kids, who use them as tags on gifts.

The personalization aspect that’s led to the comeback of calling cards is the new face of this old genre. “Over the past several years, there’s been a bit of a backlash against the computer and e-mail,” Gardiner Louden says. “It’s special to know that somebody took the time to sit down and produce a handwritten note for you.”

Even so, remember that consumers are used to having items tailor-made via online invitation sites and easy-to-use design programs, so carrying products that feel unique and like they fit the personality of your customer base can help move inventory.

Fortunately, paper looks like it will always have a place in people’s lives, given the milestones it helps commemorate. “Stationery is important because it celebrates the most important life events: births, weddings, deaths,” Littleton says.

The sentimental value will always be there with cards and other stationery — and even the best technological advances can’t take that away. As Chenevert says, “You can’t pull out a text message from a box 20 years from now.” ♦



Above: Cards from Shannon Martin, Howard Gardiner; cards from Tokyo Milk, Portico Collection.