Alanna Volp recently figured out a way to generate local buzz, attract new customers to her store, entice existing customers to linger longer and reduce her rent for several months, all through one, perfectly on-trend promotion.

From June through October, Volp, owner of Billies Flower House in Squamish, British Columbia, hosted a pop-up shop for Cedar & Needle Fabric, cedarandneedlefabric.com, an online-only purveyor of “modern, youthful” fabric, whose crafty, creative clientele complement Billies’ own customer base.

“We have had a lot of new customers coming in who haven’t been in to our store before,” Volp said in early October. “Many shoppers think we just sell flowers but once they come in they are blown away by the selection of home decor, gifts, body products, etc. They often end up bringing a piece of their experience home with them and purchasing something from both the fabric pop up and the flower shop.”

Volp, who was motivated in part by the absence of a local brick-and-mortar fabric store, said she quickly noticed new shopping patterns among both the fabric company clients and Billies regulars who were curious about the 700-square-foot mini-store.

“[It] definitely seemed that customers wanted to linger longer,” Volp said, adding that, while she didn’t see her own sales increase, the average customer visit in that time increased by about 10 minutes. “Shopping for fabric is something that can take a long time, so those shoppers generally have a longer amount of time on their hands or make a point of creating space to come back and shop [another day].”

Cedar & Needle handled most of the pop-up promotions, set up the space and paid rent to the shop for the five-month period, cutting Volp’s rent by about 20 percent over that period. The fabric company relied on Volp and her staff to assist customers, but fabric and floral transactions were completed separately.

The partnership was a big hit — and Volp intends to host a pop-up store again in the future — but it did require some shifting, training and communicating, she said. For instance, to accommodate the fabric reams, Volp moved some of the flowers she usually displays on the floor into her cooler. In addition, while Volp’s staff could answer basic fabric questions (and measure and cut), they had to cheerfully remind customers that, while Billies remained a full-service florist, the pop-up shop was a separate entity, and a temporary one at that.

“The hardest part has been informing the customers that we are not experts in the fabric field, and that we will simply cut and sell,” Volp admitted.

Get additional pop-up tips on p. 13.
SALESBUILDERS
SMART STRATEGIES FOR SMALL BIZ SATURDAY

> Americans spent $5.7 billion on Small Business Saturday in 2013, according to American Express and the National Federation of Independent Business, and awareness of the event is growing, said Nicole Leinbach Reyhle, the Small Business Saturday spokesman for American Express. She shared tips for promoting the event:

■ Start the Clock. A countdown clock, in-store, on signage or in your window displays, reminds customers of the 2014 date, Nov. 29, and generates excitement. Start promos early (ideally by Nov. 1) and don’t be afraid to think big: Last year, 1,500 communities put together Small Business Saturday events to draw shoppers into smaller stores.

■ Tell Your Story. American Express promotes the event to the national media, but small business owners should share their own story with local reporters. “Talk about your store, yes, but also talk about the value of small businesses to local communities,” Reyhle said. (Try this: 28 million small businesses in America generate about half of the jobs in the private sector.)

Find out more at americanexpress.com/us/small-business/shop-small. For help crafting press releases and tips on talking to the media, visit safnow.org.

BEST PRACTICES
POP THAT SHOP

> Inspired by Alanna Volp’s effort to host a fabric pop-up shop in Billies Flower House? Before you hop on the hot trend, retail experts at sites such as TrendReports.com suggest evaluating:

■ Space. If you’re squeezing past your own staff and displays, adding a new business (even a mini one) may not be possible. Creativity can help — Volp shifted flowers into the cooler to accommodate the reams — but you’ll need to realistically evaluate your limitations and be clear with your partner about your own standards for displays. (Remember, even if the two businesses are completely separate, customers will likely see them as representative of each other.)

■ Brands. The clientele of Billies Flower House complemented those of Cedar & Needle (young, crafty types with a penchant for whimsy), as did the merchandise: modern fabrics alongside Billies’ mosses and ribbons.

■ Expectations. Before you agree to work with another business, decide how transactions will be conducted, which staff will assist customers and how to handle promotions. To be successful, “there had to be clear lines of communication [between the two businesses about] how much time the store staff could spend on selling the fabric,” Volp said.

■ Timing. The slow summer and early fall months were the right time for Volp to try the pop-up experiment, but she made it clear that the pop-up had to be gone by Nov. 1. “[We need] every nook and cranny of the store back for Christmas merchandising,” she said.

START SMALL. In 2013, consumers spent $5.7 billion on Small Business Saturday.

PRIMO PROMOS Cedar & Needle coordinated promos with Billies Flower House, including social media posts.

That’s all I have to say.