

From blogshop to flea power

Blogshops are expanding their online business the brick-and-mortar way by selling at flea markets. By Eisen Teo

So the Internet is THE place to buy cheap and good clothes and accessories.

But while being online gives businesses access to the whole world, many blogshops are finding that it is sometimes the brick-and-mortar, good ol' fashioned flea market which gives them an edge.

Flea markets are bazaars hawking inexpensive or second-hand goods. Once they were tucked away in various corners of the island, known only to intrepid shoppers and usually via word of mouth.

Now, however, newer and trendier flea markets targeting the bottomless pockets of youths, are themselves the targets of ambitious blogshops looking to expand their online businesses, according to a survey of 20 blogshops and four flea markets here.

Blogshops are online shopping sites that run on free blog sites like LiveJournal. They are usually run by girls for girls, hawking clothes, bags, shoes and other accessories, and are popular among youths because of their online accessibility.

Flea Fly Flo Fun, a flea market that operates once a month at Home Club, an indie club at The Riverwalk, is one that draws blogshops like, well, flies.

When Mr Terence Lau, 31, started Flea Fly Flo Fun in October

2006, there was nary a blogshop among the stalls.

Now, at least 40 per cent of the 200 applications he receives every month are from blogshops. Sixty to 70 lucky ones get in on a first-come-first-served basis.

"You get a blogshop every page you turn now," he told IN.

Spotting the same trend is Ms Jasmine Tuan, 31, senior multimedia designer of Zouk and the brains behind Flea And Easy, a flea market launched in 2001 which runs every quarter at Jiak Kim Street.

Out of the 70 stalls in the market, a quarter are blogshops. Successful applicants are selected through ballot, and she gets about "200 to 300" applicants each time.

The 20 blogshops IN spoke to were mostly formed only in the last three years and, on average, took a couple of months to a year before venturing into flea markets.

Why were they willing to pay \$40 to \$50 for five to six hours in a venture that runs only once a month at most?

Three reasons: Drum up publicity for their websites, get rid of old stock and, for the new kids on the block, find out what sells and what does not.

When Ms Esther Hou, 20, launched her blogshop, Glamorous Vogue, with a partner at the start of the year, the Republic Polytechnic student found the going tough as "not many people" knew about them.

A stint at a flea market at the Bishan Community Centre last month changed all that. "We printed namecards and gave out fliers," she said.

Sales have grown by about 40 per cent since the flea market.

"On the Internet, you have to wait for customers to come in. But offline, you can approach them and tell them what you do," she said.

More than half the blogshops interviewed said that showing up at a flea market boosted their sales by 10-

40 per cent.

"I wish flea markets were held more frequently, instead of once every few months," summed up Ms Emily Kwa, 24, owner of Wonderwee.

Not all blogshops need the flea market to bump up sales, though.

Ms Jeannie Pang, 29, owner of Traceynny, who rakes in \$30,000 a month through online sales alone, uses them only to clear old stock.

But flea markets are so abuzz with blogshops these days that an events company, Urban Eventz, started one just for them, called Fashionista, last month.

Events executive Angie Lim, 21, said: "Many blogshops are not given ample opportunities to advertise and reach out to customers. We would like to bring these people together."

Within one-and-a-half weeks of registration, all 100 booths, which were going for as low as \$30 each, were snapped up.

The next instalment is at the Singapore Management University on Aug 22. The organisers hope to run it once a month.

Welcoming the move was Ms Adeline Ng, 22, who will be advertising her three-month-old blogshop, Chamberlove, at Fashionista that day.

She said: "Competition might be tough, since it's an all-blogshop flea market, but if the organisers get a good crowd, I should do fine."

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Market strategies

Blogshop owners share tips with IN on how to work the flea markets

1. Do your homework – check out the location beforehand and find out where the best spots are. Go early on the big day to grab them.
2. Plan the most convenient method to truck in your goods and other equipment – and truck them out at the end of the day.
3. Adjust your pricing. No one is going to buy your clothes at online prices. After all, flea markets are where people go to look for cheap deals.
4. Make your stall attractive with brightly coloured and welcoming banners.
5. Go out and make friends with customers. Answer their questions and make them feel at home, even if they are just browsing.
6. Prepare fliers or namecards for your blogshop and give them out liberally.
7. Tell your online mailing list way ahead of time about your flea market cameo.