



# Thinking by Megy Karydes GLOBALLY

With a new fair trade book for kids and three thriving fair trade stores in Indiana, Sam Carpenter is making a difference one customer at a time.

**S**am Carpenter is out to change the world. Each day he hopes to introduce or reinforce how much fair trade means to artisans in developing countries as well as our own lives. Carpenter is executive director of Global Gifts, a nonprofit retail operation with three stores in Indianapolis and Bloomington, Ind., which exclusively sells fair trade products from more than 35 developing countries and is poised to break \$1 million in sales in 2010. He is also editor of *Think Fair Trade First*, a colorful children's book introducing the concept of fair trade to kids that was written by Ingrid Hess, a longtime volunteer in one of his stores. I recently spoke with Carpenter about his fair trade shops and how he plans to introduce fair trade to his first child born earlier this year.





### A business with a purpose

Although Carpenter had not edited a book before, his background in fair trade and working directly with customers through his stores allowed him to make suggestions on *Think Fair Trade First's* content. Carpenter hopes the book will inspire and educate others about why shopping fair trade is so important to our world. He works toward that end every day with 22-year-old Global Gifts, helping it expand from one shop to three, which allowed the company to enjoy a 23% growth in sales last year alone.

Carpenter cites several factors that contribute to their success, including a strong volunteer base, dedicated staff, and more consumers becoming aware of what fair trade means. "This strong sales growth during such a difficult economic time is a testament to the support of Global Gifts and our fair trade mission by our staff and volunteers," Carpenter says. "Their passion for our mission keeps customers coming through our doors."

For those who stumble on the store—which often happens in their trendy downtown location—Carpenter and his team take the opportunity to share their mission if customers want to learn more about fair trade.

A wide assortment of products and price points, constantly updated inventory, and knowledgeable staff and volunteers have developed a loyal base of customers who help spread the word to their friends and family. And, like any strong and healthy business, Carpenter understands the importance of marketing. "We advertise on public radio and we're trying some television advertisements this year," Carpenter says. "We email our customers regularly and are revamping our website [[www.globalgiftsindy.com](http://www.globalgiftsindy.com)]. We participate in off-site events and we even host a festival where we invite other non-profits and fair trade organizations to join us. Social networking is still new for us but we do have a presence on Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter. We know our success relies on the fact that we treat this as a business."

Carpenter also is very active within the fair trade community nationally, serving as chairman of the board of the Fair Trade Resource Network ([www.ftrn.org](http://www.ftrn.org)) in 2009. "The Fair Trade Resource Network is the only organization dedicated to fair trade education and providing resources and educational products to those interested in learning more about fair trade," Carpenter says. Global Gifts also is a member of the Fair Trade Federation ([www.fairtradefederation.org](http://www.fairtradefederation.org)), an organization of businesses, both



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## Collection

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### More than a store

Global Gifts is a series of three fair trade stores. What does fair trade mean? Here's how they do business, as they explain on the stores' website ([www.globalgiftsindy.com](http://www.globalgiftsindy.com)):

- The stores specifically work with artisans who would not otherwise be able to reach a market for their products. They work with people in developing regions of the world who lack the opportunity to earn a decent living.
- Artisans receive a fair price for their work. It is often set by the artisans and is based on what is considered a fair wage in the artisans' country.
- Artisans are paid 50% in advance when an order is placed and the remaining 50% promptly after the products have reached the shipping port within the artisans' country or continent. This allows much-needed income for materials and supplies for those who otherwise might not be able to fulfill orders.
- The stores develop long-term relationships with their artisan partners, enabling the artisans to build their businesses over time.
- Environmental responsibility and sustainability are emphasized in the making of their products.
- Gender equity, no child labor, and safe and healthy working conditions are important to how they do business.

retailers and wholesalers, dedicated to advancing the fair trade movement in the U.S.

As thrilling as all of this has been for Carpenter, his life became much more exciting in early February when he and his wife welcomed their first child to the world. Asked whether *Think Fair Trade First* was the first book he read to his son, Carpenter laughs. "He heard it in-utero."

Undoubtedly this child will have no trouble understanding the concept of fair trade.

Megy Karydes is a professional writer and marketing/PR consultant in Chicago. She also runs World Shoppe ([www.World-Shoppe.com](http://www.World-Shoppe.com)), a fair trade wholesale company that works with artisans in South Africa.

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## Fair trade: The ultimate win-win

An international movement designed to alleviate global poverty and promote sustainability, fair trade has been growing by leaps and bounds, as evidenced by the success of Global Gifts.

The movement developed to address serious inequities in conventional trade models through trade of local commodities such as coffee and tea and indigenous crafts such as basketry and weaving. Fair trade helps communities directly by requiring fair labor conditions, safe environmental practices, and by setting a minimum floor price for commodities, all of which directly support local economic development.

While many of your customers might be drawn to the feel-good aspect of buying fair trade products, looks and price still matter, especially when consumers are watching every penny. Fair trade importers know this and are spending more time and energy on product development to ensure their products resonate with Western tastes.

Educating customers is still a must when showcasing fair trade products in your shop, however. Shelf talkers, posters, and information near the displays about the producer groups and products help your customers learn what fair trade means and also find out interesting facts about who made the items and how.

“Many retailers tell farmer and artisan stories throughout

their store and on their websites, host speakers, show films, offer product tastings, sponsor fashion shows or baking competitions, and participate in World Fair Trade Day in May and Fair Trade Month activities in October,” says Carmen Iezzi, executive director of the Fair Trade Federation ([www.fairtradefederation.org](http://www.fairtradefederation.org)). “We believe when people understand that trade can be a force for positive change, they will use their purchasing power to improve the lives of people and communities. Retailers are a key way that such education happens.

“It’s very easy to find high-quality, affordable products for your store that not only resonate with customers, but create tremendous positive change in the lives of the artisans and farmers from which they come,” Iezzi says. “We encourage retailers to ask questions—everything from where the products come from and who made them to how the artisans or farmers work together or are organized.”

It is important to note that fair trade is not about charity. “Fully committed fair trade organizations seek to create long-term, sustainable change among the poorest of the poor by creating viable partnerships with producers and offering great products to customers,” Iezzi says.

As more consumers become aware of fair trade principles and seek globally conscious products, your store can benefit by carrying a fair trade product assortment that appeals not only to your customers’ senses, but also their hearts.

—Megy Karydes

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