



[Home](#) / [News](#)

http://www.bgdailynews.com/news/turning-pink-into-green-homegrown-e-tailer-continues-to-expand/article_77cc2432-9852-585d-a484-415c9bf6665b.html

Turning pink into green: Homegrown 'e-tailer' continues to expand

By DON SERGENT dsergent@bgdailynews.com 16 min ago



Pink may be Bowling Green native Tori Gerbig's favorite color, but green is closing fast.

In only four years, she and husband Chris Gerbig have parlayed their Pink Lily Boutique into an e-commerce giant that is raking in enough green to make St. Patrick envious.

And they're not slowing down.

Now in their fourth location in as many years, the Gerbiggs are preparing for a \$2 million expansion of their warehouse and fulfillment center in Warren County's South Industrial Park. Plans call for the "e-tailer" specializing in women's clothing to nearly double its square footage and add some 50 employees over the next five years.

Not bad for a company that was started in the Gerbiggs' living room by a young couple looking for extra income.

"We had bills, a mortgage and a 7-month-old baby at the time," said Chris Gerbig, who was working in finance for Dollar General Corp. when Pink Lily was launched in 2014. "A lot of people thought it was a bad idea, but we knew we were on to something."

That "something" was the rising tide of e-commerce, which has lifted Pink Lily to annual revenue of \$15 million and climbing, a lofty height Tori Gerbig never envisioned.

"I thought it would be another source of income to help pay off student loans and other bills," said the 2005 Warren Central High School graduate. "I never thought it would be our full-time jobs. When we saw how fast it took off, we decided this wasn't just a side hobby."

That decision was easy to make as Tori Gerbig found herself working a full day at an insurance office and then often staying up until 1 a.m. or later to fill the 100 or more orders for dresses, pants, sweaters, skirts and jewelry that were coming in each day.

“I remember all the clothes spread around the dining room,” said Merritt Evans, Pink Lily’s first employee and now its marketing coordinator. “It’s crazy how much it’s grown. It really helped that it started as a Facebook group and just kept growing from there.”

“We were at capacity at our house in four months,” recalled Tori Gerbig.

It didn’t happen by accident. Even in Pink Lily’s home-based beginnings, the Gerbigs recognized that computers and mobile devices could literally bring the world’s shoppers to their living room. With worldwide e-commerce sales exploding from \$1.3 trillion in 2014 to a projected \$2.7 trillion this year, the Gerbigs have been able to grab their piece of that expanding pie.

“E-commerce sales continue to grow and grow,” said Chris Gerbig, an Indiana native and 2007 Western Kentucky University graduate. “Why not get a piece of that market? There’s a lot of competition, but there’s also a lot of customers. If you can find a way to get them to your website and you have good products, you can do well.”

The Gerbigs, still the sole owners of Pink Lily, had the background to make it work. Chris studied business and finance at WKU and Tori studied sales and marketing, which included a course in e-commerce. It also helped that they were able to use income from their previous jobs to help get Pink Lily rolling.

“In the beginning, since we had corporate jobs, we were able to invest money back into our company,” said Chris Gerbig. “We bought Facebook ads and more inventory. In the first six months we reinvested everything, and that worked out well.”

Pink Lily, a name derived from Tori Gerbig’s favorite color and her grandmother’s favorite flower, quickly blossomed. Through that reinvestment, the company has built its online presence to include more than 1.5 million Facebook fans, some 300,000 Instagram followers and an email list of 500,000.

All that traffic results in about 25,000 website visits per day, with a little more than 3 percent of those resulting in sales.

That cyber success has also given Pink Lily a national and even international reach. The company does more business in Texas than in any other state, and 8 percent of its total sales come from Canada. Shoppers in Europe, Australia and New Zealand also regularly visit the Pink Lily website.

The Gerbigs have built brand loyalty with longtime customers such as Shannon Collins of Bowling Green.

“I’ve been shopping with her (Tori Gerbig) since she started out of her home,” Collins said. “I have teenagers, and they love those type of clothes. It is a little surprising how they’ve grown. I didn’t expect it would blossom the way it has.”



Catering to customers like Collins, the Gerbigs last year opened a Pink Lily Boutique retail store on Scottsville Road near Greenwood Mall.

“We did it backwards,” said Tori Gerbig. “We started with the online store and then opened a brick-and-mortar store. We opened it after there was such a huge demand in town to open a store.”

The store has six employees, although that number will probably grow during the busy spring and holiday seasons.

“People were wanting to come to our warehouse and try stuff on,” recalled Chris Gerbig in explaining the decision to open a store. “This (e-commerce) will always be our main focus, but that’s a good bonus.”

In addition to the headquarters expansion, which should push total employment to around 100, Pink Lily is planning to launch a new e-commerce business called Leisure Tees that will sell graphic T-shirts for men, women and children.

The Gerbigs plan to use this new venture in part as an outlet for philanthropy.

“One dollar from each sale will go to Vanderbilt Children’s Hospital,” said Tori Gerbig. “Our goal is to sell 50 shirts a day, so that will be quite a bit going to the children’s hospital.”

Meanwhile, Pink Lily is working on an enhanced website that will use e-commerce algorithms to recommend products and “make the experience better for shoppers,” according to Tori Gerbig.

And more changes could be in the works for Pink Lily as it tries to keep up with the fast-paced world of e-commerce.

“We’re always looking for the next opportunity,” said Chris Gerbig. “We don’t know what it is yet.”

– Follow business reporter Don Sergent on Twitter @BGDNbusiness or visit bgdailynews.com.

Don Sergent