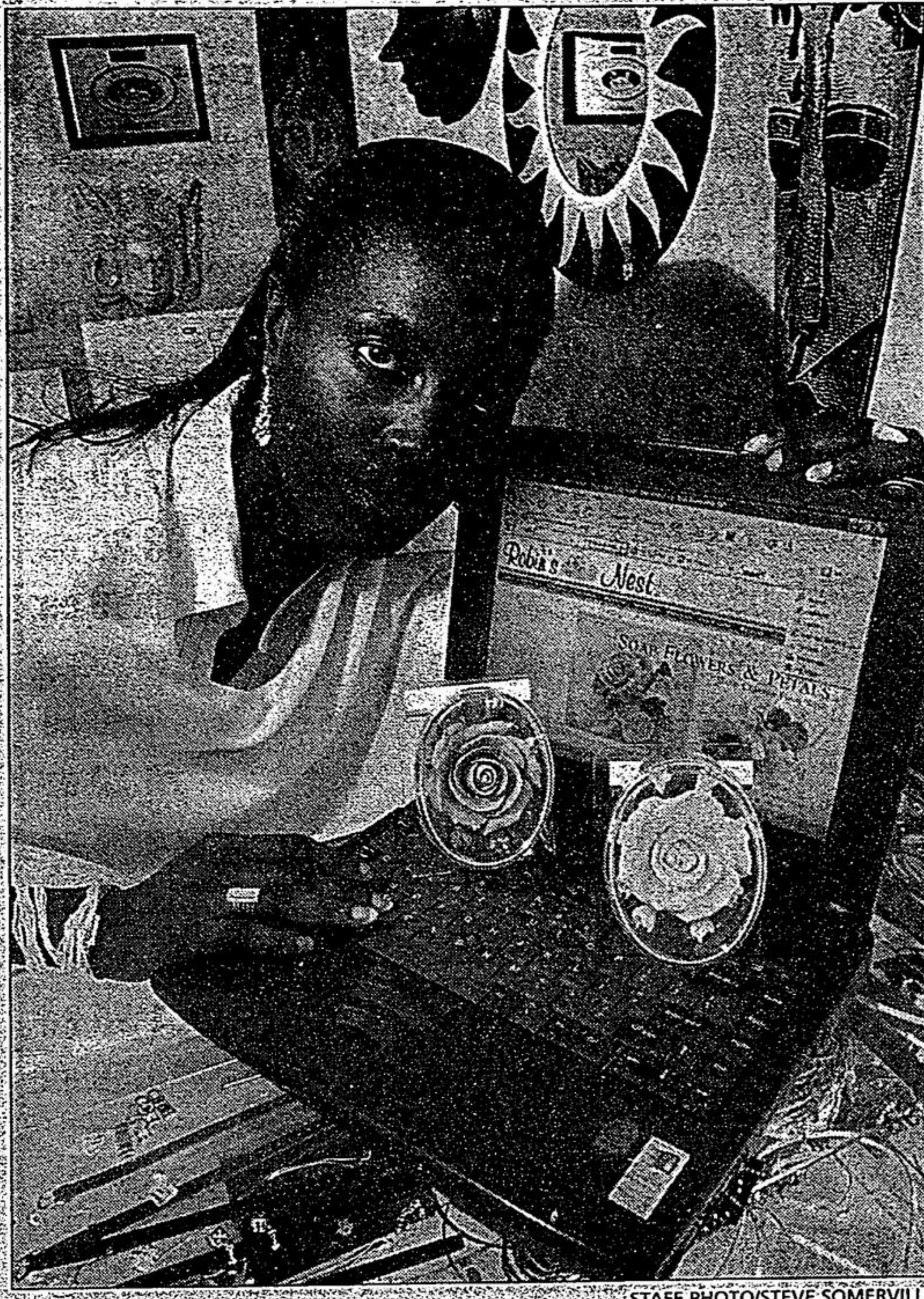


Tradition edges out convenience for holiday shopping

BY PATRICK MANGION
Staff Writer



Wendy Robin of Robin's Nest displays flower-shaped soap, just some of the items available at her website and in her Yonge Street store.

With an online survey of 1,200 Canadian shoppers finding more than 40 per cent of us would rather endure a date with the dentist than Christmas shop at a busy mall, it's no wonder Internet shopping continues its steady ascent on the retail landscape.

While the amount of business being conducted in cyberspace has grown steadily in each of the past four years, online shopping still accounts for less than 1 per cent of total revenue for Canadian businesses, according to Statistics Canada.

Meanwhile, despite the popularity of the Internet, e-commerce still seems to be receiving mixed reviews from consumers, who may be treading lightly given the number of identity theft-related crimes being reported.

But as the holiday shopping season shifts into high gear, many shoppers say relying on our senses, shopping the old-fashioned way, still beats convenience.

Brian Sieber figures he'll buy one gift online for every eight from a store.

"I like to see for myself what I'm getting. I'm always worried I'd order the wrong size (online)," said the Aurora resident.

While security isn't a significant concern for him, Mr. Sieber said Internet shopping provides an invaluable tool for time-crunched window shoppers who prefer to surf rather than shop online.

Dan Jankelow, co-owner of Richmond Hill-based Incredible Novelties, knows all too well how the

Internet isn't necessarily the panacea it has been called.

The three-year-old business specializing in promotional products and toys, has since scaled back its Internet presence, maintaining an online catalogue, but removing the shopping option.

"Competitors had access to our entire database," Mr. Jankelow said.

Now, the company is receiving more phone calls from customers inquiring about a product they saw on the website.

"It's the same as window shopping at a store. You still have to go in to see it," he said.

Wendy Robin is in the process of doing just the opposite, however.

She and her sister own Robin's Nest home decor on Yonge Street in Richmond Hill.

Ms. Robin hopes to have her company's website re-vamped by the end of the week to accommodate online shopping, rather than just browsing, so as not to miss the

Christmas rush.

"We've always wanted to do it. It will expose us to a wider market," Ms. Robin said.

But there will always be those undeterred by bursting parking lots and cash register line-ups.

"I like to see what I'm getting," said John Pape, as he perused the shops of Upper Canada Mall in Newmarket. "But if I did (shop online), I'd only order from a company I know," he said.

Aurora residents John and Allison, who did not want their last name used, said items such as books and CDs, bought from reputable online retailers, are a safe bet.

For those clicking and scrolling their way through the holiday shopping season, the message is simple: exercise caution, said Diane Brisebois, president of the Retail Council of Canada.

"It's the same as going into a bricks and mortar store. If you're providing (banking) information, ensure it's a store you know and trust," Ms. Brisebois said.

As more trusted brand names establish a web presence, more shoppers will turn to their computers instead of the mall, she added.

Canadians spent more than \$3 billion over the Internet last year, on everything from airline tickets to books, an increase from \$2.4 billion in 2002.

Roughly 14 per cent of Canadian shoppers — a number that has remained virtually unchanged since 2001 — comparison shop with the Internet without ever making a purchase, Ms. Brisebois said.

CONSIDER THIS ...

• Either an online invoice or order confirmation should accompany your online purchases.

• Know what currency is being used.

• Ensure the business you are buying from provides contact information.

• Find out if the total cost includes shipping and handling fees and taxes and duties, and;

• Make sure you know how to change or cancel an order.

Courtesy of the Ontario consumer ministry.

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