

Get Real!

Greeting cards take a new, honest tack

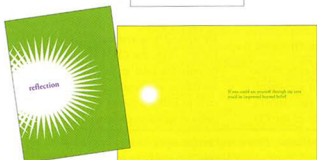
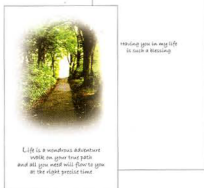
By Sarah Schwartz
Editor at Large

Bold and contemporary **U-ey** cards have a tear-away front cover so that the recipient can write back.
(617) 256-3940



Inspired by fruit crates and everyone's occasional need for an apology, this offering from **Rosebud Design Studio** tackles the task with humor and color.
(310) 435-1270

Cards from **Heavenly Notes 2000** feature soothing photography and uplifting messages.
(954) 917-8311



Regarding Life's Regarding You line is designed with bold, powerful colors and features succinct, intimate messages crafted to inspire thought and initiate positive changes.
(917) 362-8706

You know that when Hallmark unveils a collection of 176 greeting cards focusing on tough situations — such as leaving rehab or battling an eating disorder — social discourse in our country has loosened up a bit. Simply called Journeys, Hallmark's line (currently only available in Gold Crown stores) ranges from serious to light in tone, commemorating everything from coming out of the closet to traumatic loss, miscarriage to quitting smoking.

Theresa Steffens, an assistant product manager at Hallmark, said a majority of online and focus group respondents reported that they couldn't find what they were looking for when needing an encouragement card. "Either the consumer said they were walking away from the display or they were just unhappy with the card that they purchased, so we saw this as a huge opportunity," Steffens said.

Hallmark, however, is not the only vendor honing in on this cultural need. Dozens and dozens of smaller companies are focusing on this branch of communication and bringing their own take to the table. These cards dramatically run the gamut in terms of their approach to this new honesty, but however they do it, expect designs to be unexpected and fresh.

"We're a quickly growing inspirational card company, and the trends we follow are probably more subtle than those driven by design," explained Little Fish Studios' Mary Ann Rinkleff. "Buyers are looking for cards that are more 'real.' In other words, the traditional flowery verse and overwrought sentiments aren't cutting it any more. Our line — and in particular our sympathy and encouragement cards — is relatively straightforward and heartfelt without being edgy, and it maintains a softness in the design that our buyers describe as 'soothing.'"

She also pointed out that the baby boomers are dealing with elderly parents and their



These cards from the **Little Fish Studio's** Find::Peace line feature meditative art and design, thought-provoking quotations and straightforward sentiments. Inside top left: May your memories of joy and love bring you peace during this difficult time. Inside bottom right: It's hard to move forward when you lose someone you love. But I promise ... you will smile again. In the meantime, I'm here for you.

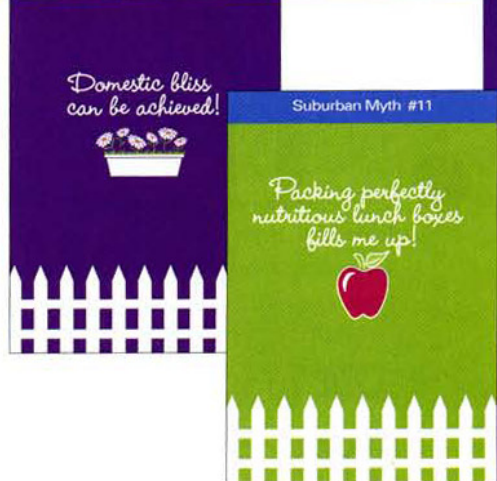
(888) 854-5115

Marriage did not agree with you, but thank god the judge did



These cards from **Cerebral Itch's** Break-up line make any lovelorn individual crack a smile from their biting yet hysterical sentiments. Inside messages: (Top) "Ha! You win!" (Bottom) "You feel better now don't you? Glad I could help out."

(619) 342-7432



Connexions' Suburban Myths

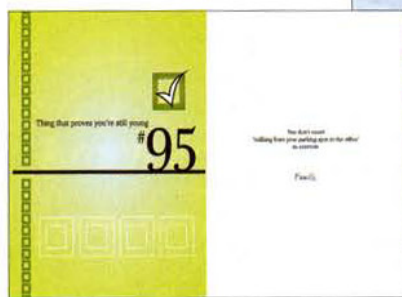
line welcomes humor to the table. Inside Myth #1: "With the right pharmaceuticals;" and Myth 11: "with resentment."

(866) 527-4258



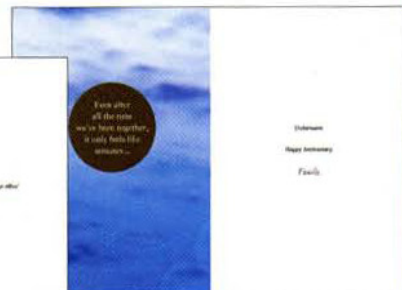
This offering from **Paper Words** offers heartfelt anniversary greetings to a same-sex female couple. Inside: Congratulations to two wonderful women on their special day.

(212) 581-8158



Each card in **Fondoodles'** two lines — Modern Moments and Most Moments — is presigned "Fondly."

(207) 712-6752



own aging, which creates a strong demand for sympathy and encouragement cards.

In a similar vein is Regarding Life's Regarding You line. "The line's specific purpose is to address and raise awareness on social and health-related issues that affect the quality of life of mass populations," said the company's Stacey Weihe. "It is an extension of the company's mission to encourage dialogue and strengthen relationships through honest, open and supportive communication."

Another great expression of this trend is Heavenly Notes 2000, which considers itself a nontraditional spiritual card line. The owner's goal is to bring people of all cultures and backgrounds together. There is a definite audience for this as well!

Finally, there are certain truths that can only be uttered through humor. This especially applies to girl-to-girl communication, and touches on the Alpha Mom market I devoted this column to last month. Look for lines like Connexions to do this with distinctive flair!

However, anyone going through a divorce or difficult split can appreciate offerings from Cerebral Itch's Breakup Line. And Fondoodles tackles events both exceptional and mundane with a light touch, but all apply to "moments that matter," in the words of the company's Alisa Conroy.

Then there are some fresh takes on existing categories. So while there are plenty of gay greeting card lines, Paper Words goes "beyond the rainbow" to

express the sentiments of the community without the stereotypes.

Finally, a line that simply fosters communication can only be good. A slang term for U-turn, U-ey cards do just that: You send one, and thanks to the tear-away cover, the recipient is able to reply right back.

"I believe that communication has become so technical impersonal that the traditional greeting card and snail mail has a new meaning," said the company's Shane Estock. "With a nod to the time challenged and multi-taskers, two cards in one facilitate a dialogue and open or reopen channels of communication, friendship or romance."

Facilitating dialogue — isn't that what stationery is supposed to be all about? ■