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## Retail nomad

A boutique owner will set up her "store" wherever she can for a different experience

By [Nadine Kam](#)

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Jessica O'Neill can't stay put, even if it means lugging garments from site to site — not just her own, but a whole shop's worth.

In fact, Jessica's Traveling Boutique is presenting a sale event Saturday at the Waxing Co., newly open in McCully Shopping Center, but O'Neill won't be there. She's in Philadelphia, laying the groundwork for a Jessica's Traveling Boutique event there, where she expects 8,000 to attend.

O'Neill gets around, having presented events on the Big Island, in San Diego, and coming up, Michigan and Wisconsin, as well as making shopping excursions to Los Angeles and New York to bring the latest in accessories and clothing back to the islands.

After working in the retail clothing business several years in Los Angeles, O'Neill moved back to Hawaii in February 2007 to work toward a degree in communications. At the same time, she said in a phone interview from Philadelphia, where she's spending the summer, "I wanted to open a store, but I wondered how I could do it while going to school full-time and without being in the store 60 hours waiting for people to come to me.

"So I decided to take the boutique to the people and do private shopping parties where I would go to girls' homes and they'd invite friends for food, drinks and to hang out, where they could shop in a casual, party-like setting."

Hosts are rewarded with up to 10 percent of total party sales in free merchandise.

It's a concept that has worked for food caterers, Tupperware and lingerie sales, so it made sense. Other businesses and event promoters, such as the Wedding Cafe, Hapa Grill and Night Market at Aloha Tower, caught onto the concept as a way of partnering to drive traffic to their venues and events, giving Jessica's Traveling Boutique exposure to a wider audience. She makes it a point to shop so there's something to suit every taste.

"I don't just focus on one style," O'Neill said. "My customers range from 20-somethings to women my mom's age."

Without the overhead of a storefront, she's also able to keep prices low, with many costume jewelry pieces priced under \$20 and many pieces of clothing available for less than \$50. She also made forays into designer merchandise, although the state of the economy influences her direction. With a traveling boutique, she can be more nimble than traditional retailers, staying in step not only with fashion, but with consumers' moods.

While she's on the road, friends and family members keep her boutique events running locally.

"At first I wasn't doing that, but at times I had to leave for a month, the business would be put on hold until I came back," said O'Neill, who's happy about the flexibility of the traveling boutique.

"I really like this format," O'Neill said. "I do about two or three events a week, but it's literally setting up a boutique and taking it down each time. It's not the easiest thing, but then I think I could be sitting in a building waiting for customers to come to me seven days a week. The setting up and breaking down gets a little monotonous, but it's worth it.

"This way, I have the lifestyle I want, while still being able to enjoy Hawaii."

### JESSICA'S TRAVELING BOUTIQUE

» **Place:** Waxing Co., McCully Shopping Center

» **When:** 1 to 5:30 p.m. Saturday

» **Admission:** Free

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