



TAKE THE GUESSWORK OUT OF LAUNCHING A LINE

SOMETHING shiny and new caught your eye at a show, you say, and you'd love to see that hot collection in *your* store. Other stores are selling it — why shouldn't *you* jump on this particular bling bandwagon?

Enthusiasm is a useful selling tool, but before you proceed, make sure your decision isn't based entirely on a whim, says David Brown of The Edge Retail Academy. Sure, shopping can be fun, but since you are growing a business, it also needs to be purposeful.

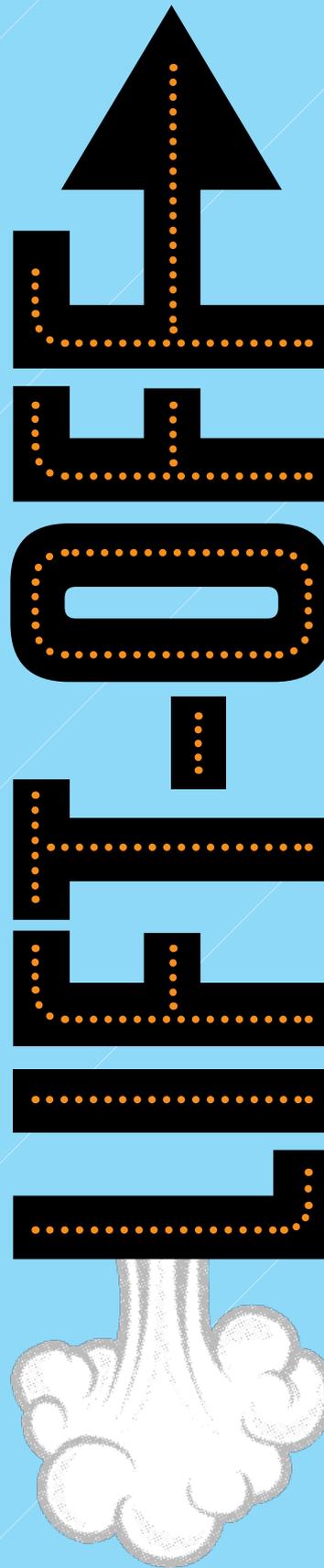
"The problem retailers have is that most of the time when they look at a new line, it's done on impulse and emotion," Brown says.

"But ideally you need to have a budget and a plan. Yes, you are looking for new product categories but they do have to be paid for, and you do have to have a plan for how you are going to sell them."

Jennifer Gandia, co-owner of Greenwich Jewelers in New York City and an avowed look-before-you-leaper, has taken as long as three years to commit to a line.

"We always consider our customer, the history of lines and price points, the designer's point of view and salability," she says. "We think of specific people in many cases; would our best customers — the top 20 percent — buy it? And we have to like it."

Once you have it, putting it on a shelf and hoping it sells itself is not a sound strategy, Brown says. And it's unreasonable to expect your sup-



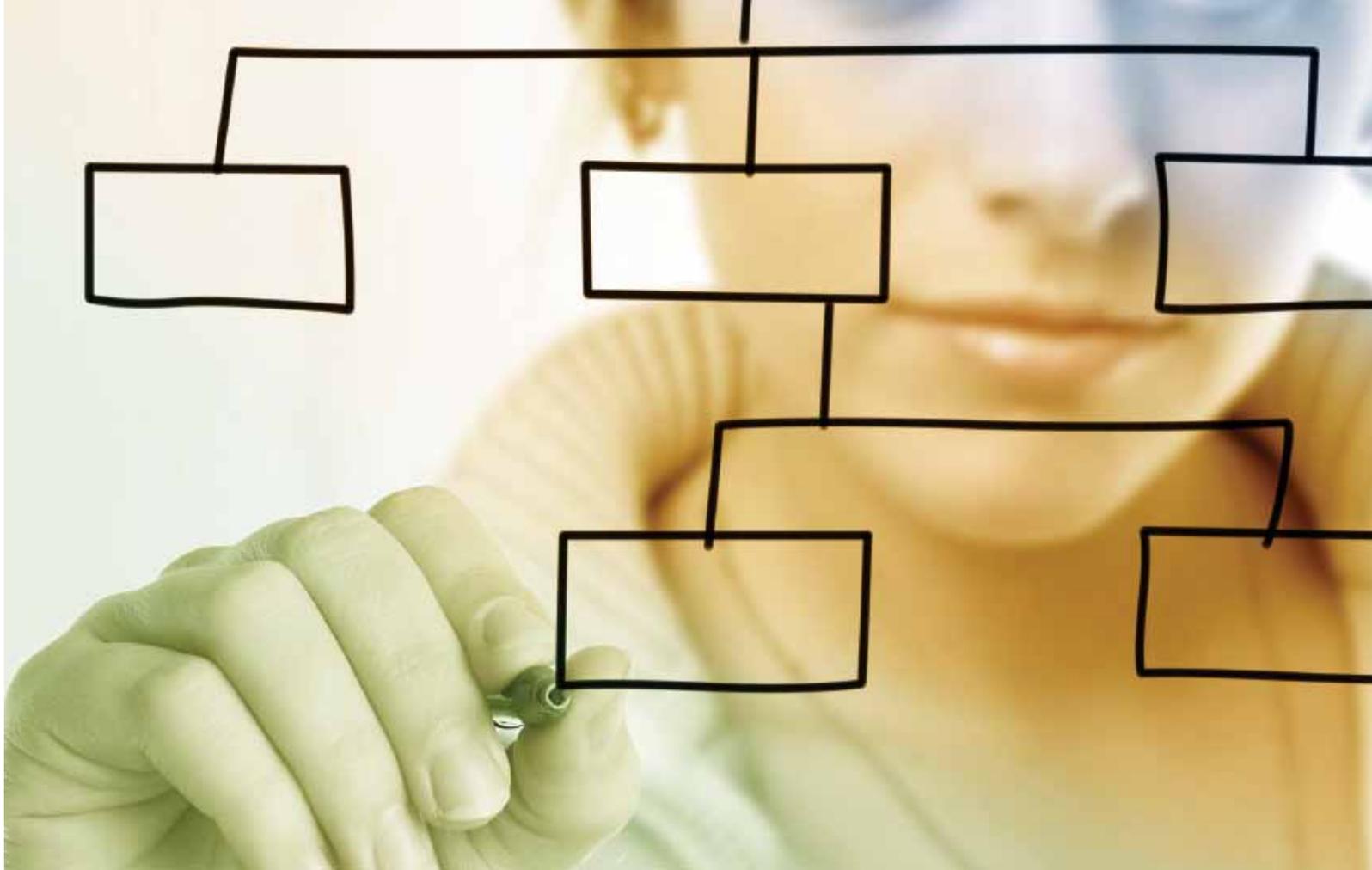
plier to take it back unless you can demonstrate you've made a serious effort to sell it. But if you do all that you can to train your employees, promote the product, display it well and reorder fast sellers, the majority of vendors *will* agree to stock balancing.

Julie Lorimer, buyer and sales associate for Siebke Hoyt Jewelers in Cedar Rapids, IA, says she and her co-workers treat vendors as she wants to be treated by her own customers: with honesty and loyalty. "I try to reorder our fast sellers quickly and show them that we are really interested in making the line work."

Growing a vendor relationship is a two-way street based on communication. "We do find that the reps who come to see us, who understand our market, those lines do the best in our store," Lorimer says.

Success is never guaranteed with a new line, but with our eight-step guide that follows, you will at least give yourself a good chance.

By Eileen
McClelland



PLAN FOR IT

FIRST, LOOK AT THE BIG PICTURE — your vision for your store — and figure out how to bring that picture into focus.

Brown suggests asking yourself: How do I want to be perceived? What would make me most proud as a retailer? Do I want to be a custom store? Or a bridal store with the best vendors? Do I want to be doing 50 percent of my business in diamonds?

Consultant Sally Furrer says that if you've been tracking close percentages and traffic (and you should be!), you'll have a good idea of which sales are eluding you and why — whether it has to do with styling, or price points, or whether you are weak in a category like fashion, silver, bridal or loose diamonds.

When you are shopping for new lines, continually refer to your merchandising strategy to make sure

“Sometimes the selling plan determines the buying plan, and sometimes the buying plan determines the selling plan.”

DAVID BROWN

the line is compatible with other big-picture objectives, too, such as increasing profitability or raising the value of the average sale.

Once you have found a few vendors that carry the type of product you want, fill out a Merchandise Brief (*See Furrer's column on page 92 to learn more about and download your own Merchandise Briefs.*) and figure out which company will best help you meet your objectives, Furrer says.

Sometimes, though, despite the best of intentions, you *will* get caught up in the moment and buy something without a buying plan.

What then? Reverse the process, Brown says, and come up with a selling plan.

“Sometimes the selling plan determines the buying plan, and sometimes the buying plan determines the selling plan. Say you



Sally Furrer

spent \$20,000 on a new line from a supplier you've never heard of before and you expect to get a keystone markup on it, and let's say you want a one-turn stock turn. You need to go back to your store and adjust your sales budget by \$40,000.”

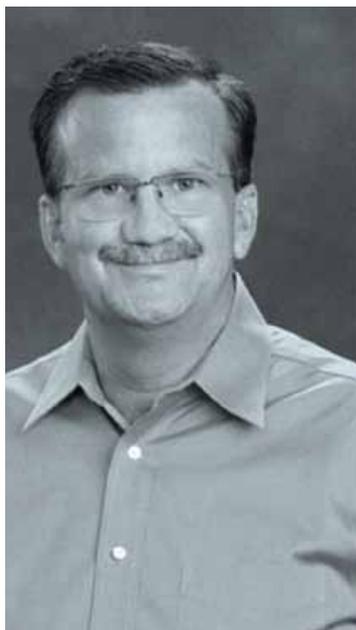
2 SET THE STANDARDS

DAN SCHUYLER, co-owner of Lily & Co. Fine Jewelers in Sanibel, FL, says he has learned from past mistakes not to jump the gun.

“It’s easy to see it and like it and open up a new account off your emotions,” Schuyler says. “I need to sit back and think it through and do my homework.”

Schuyler picked up three new lines this year at Centurion — Breuning, Charles Garnier and Raymond Hak — all of which earned high marks after he put them through his evaluation process.

He makes certain the styles don’t overlap with anything he already carries, and he asks other retailers whether the suppliers have lived up to their word about co-op advertising. He tries to get a feel for whether he can work comfortably with the vendors and whether they share his



Dan Schuyler

code of ethics. He asks about terms, warranties, availability and buy-back programs.

Relationships are important to Schuyler and he has ended a few when the sales rep with whom he felt comfortable left the supplier’s business. As a result, “I like to deal with the owner of the company, and I tend to choose smaller brands,” Schuyler says. “I feel more comfortable going straight to the source and finding out what’s going on.”

Babs Noelle, owner of Alara Jewelry in Bozeman, MT, says it’s important to spell out your own personal deal breakers while negotiating. For her, exclusivity is a top priority, so much so that she looks for undiscovered talent at arts and craft shows in an effort to be the designer’s first wholesale account.

“As the merchant, it’s important



Babs Noelle

to have a set of rules that comes from your business model and your personal principles and not to make too much of an exception to how you do business,” she says. “You go in with a plan that works for you and your customers and stick to your guns.”



“It’s easy to see it and like it and open up a new account off your emotions.”

DAN SCHUYLER



3 SHOP FOR IT



Ronda Daily

“WHEN WE GO TO THE SHOWS — Centurion, Continental Buying Group, Luxury, JCK, Couture, The SMART Show — we go to *look*,” says Ronda Daily, owner of Bremer Jewelry in Peoria and Bloomington, IL. “We get all the photography of it, we bring it back, and our staff takes a look at everything because if they don’t love it they won’t sell it.”

Daily advises store owners to bring along advisers with diverse points of view. “I have three buyers so I take them with me,” Daily says. “I’m in my 50s and one is in her 20s and one is in her 40s and one is a guy. So we have a pretty good cross-reference.”

“ I have three buyers I take with me. I’m in my 50s, one is in her 20s, one is in her 40s and one is a guy.”

RONDA DAILY

Lorimer of Siebke Hoyt, says her buying decisions are influenced by what clients are asking for. “If we don’t have it and it’s a repeated request, the sales people come to me or the owners and we look for a line that might have it,” Lorimer says. “We just put Sydney Evan in and that was a result of customers see-

ing it in *Sports Illustrated*.”

Always be true to your market when choosing individual pieces from any line, rather than accepting a generic assortment. “I’m different here in Florida,” Schuyler says. “I have a very Midwest customer, not too much flash for the cash. They want subtle.”

4 TRAIN FOR IT

SUCCESSFULLY SELLING a new line often comes down to training, Brown says.

“Your staff needs to know about the product, be enthusiastic about the product, have product-knowledge training, and the confidence to say, ‘Hey, have you seen what the boss just brought back from the SMART Show?’” Brown says. “If the staff says, ‘Well, I think it’s a bit expensive for our store,’ I *guarantee* it’s not going to sell.”

Have a store meeting before or after hours, and invite the vendor to talk about the line’s design and features and benefits, Furrer says. “Get the store staff excited about it and equipped to be able to talk about the designer, the philosophy or the origin. They need to feel totally confident and excited and ready to communicate with the consumer.”



David Brown

Before Gandia launches a line, education involves immersion in the brand, not just for the sales staff, but everyone — marketing and website and production people, too.

“We bring in some sample product for the staff to see, and we’ll do a meeting where we look at it, discuss price points, talk about the designer, the look of the items, materials, and what other lines would work well with a piece of this jewelry,” she says. “If there is no training from the vendor, we make our own. We make sales sheets where we list materials, features and ben-



Jennifer Gandia

efits, and we develop that in store. That way we are armed with what’s unique and different and special about the line.”

Ray Lantz, store manager for Lantz Diamond Center in Claremont, CA, says he learned from Hearts On Fire to make sure every employee knows the basics about each new line and is prepared to launch into a short presentation at a moment’s notice — “A simple two-minute drill that everyone knows and can communicate quickly, so that’s kind of in your back pocket when you need it.”



Ray Lantz

5 PROMOTE IT

MAKE SURE THAT you have high-quality photos so that you can easily advertise it. If they aren't available from the vendor, it's your responsibility to show your inventory in its best light.

"There are wonderful jewelry photographers, and to me, that's part of what you have to do," says Ellen Fruchtmann of Fruchtmann Marketing. "You have to show people the product online and in your advertising and it has to be beautiful, beautiful photography."

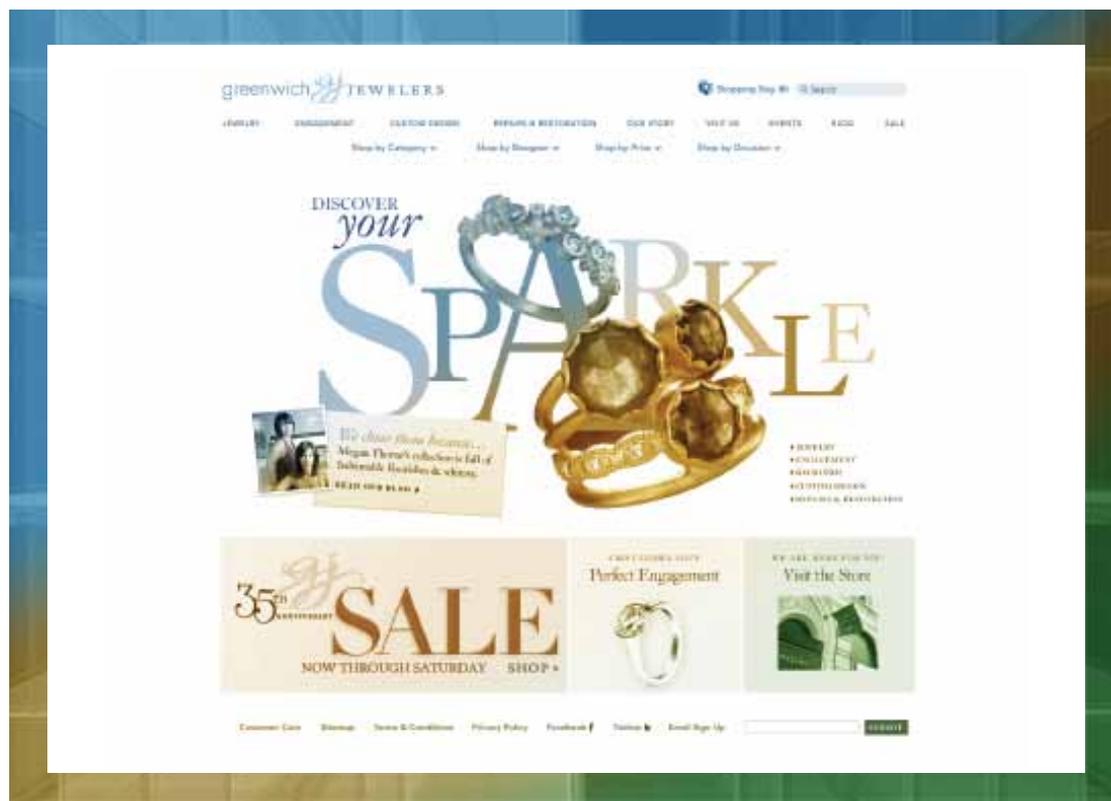
Once you receive the inventory, Fruchtmann says, immediately integrate the new line into your advertising mix. Cover all the bases:

- Shoot video of the product if a TV commercial isn't available.
- Run a contest on Facebook for fans to vote on their favorite pieces.
- Make sure your staff is wearing it and talking about it.
- Have counter signs.
- Begin an e-mail and direct mail campaign.

Greenwich Jewelers' marketing relies heavily on social media and the store's website, which features promotional boxes on the homepage that can easily be updated to feature new products. Gandia also keeps a close eye on what celebri-



Ellen Fruchtmann



Promotional boxes on Greenwich Jewelers' homepage make it easy to highlight the newest products.

ties are wearing, in case it turns out to be a piece available in her store, which is another angle to promote.

"We'll talk about trunk shows and co-op if it's available," she says. "And we'll ask about things that have worked in other stores."

For Gandia, though, the best promotion occurs one-on-one between informed sales staff and loyal clients. "We have such a personal relationship with our clients that it's really about talking about it and trying it on," she says. "That's what helps us to sell it in the beginning."

Alara's reputation automatically promotes newlines. "Once you start being known as the place that always has new and interesting stuff, you get lots of people coming in just to see what you have that's new," Noelle says. "But it doesn't happen overnight. It's a building process."

“Once you start being known as the place that has new and interesting stuff, you get people coming in just to see what you have that's new.”

BABS NOELLE

Beyond that, Noelle's marketing strategy depends on the price point. If it's a high-end line, she plans a trunk show within a couple of months of a soft opening. On the lower end, she'll do a photo-driven, fact-filled e-mail blast introducing the designer and revealing the price points of items she has in stock.

If promoting a new line sounds overwhelmingly time-consuming, it can be. Consider marketing to be an employee expense, whether you have a full-time employee handle it, or you outsource it.

"Jewelers have been so used to doing it themselves for so many years," Fruchtmann says. "And in years gone by, it was a doable project. But it's so complicated now. And you want to present yourself professionally. There's no way the jeweler can wear all those hats."



CASE STUDY: A TRUNK SHOW'S PROMOTIONAL TIMELINE

BY LORRAINE DePASQUE

IN THE TRUE SPIRIT of retail partnership, a Rhinebeck, NY, jeweler and an L.A. jewelry designer planned a trunk show with a week-by-week timeline.

Hummingbird Jewelers had been carrying about two dozen pieces of Pamela Froman Fine Jewelry for almost a year, and owners Peggy and Bruce Lubman felt it was time to step up promotion of the emerging designer.

Here's how the pre-show publicity unfolded:

10 WEEKS BEFORE

→ Froman designed postcards ❶ and posters ❷ that incorporated photos of her jewelry and Hummingbird had them printed.

8 WEEKS BEFORE

→ The store announced the trunk

show on its website, with a bio of Froman and images of her work.

4 WEEKS BEFORE

→ Hummingbird e-mailed and phoned clients who had shown an interest in Froman's work.

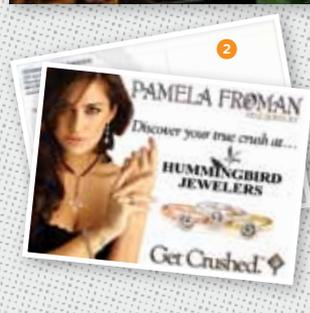
→ It asked the local tourism office to post the dates on its website.

→ Hummingbird and Froman posted the news on their Facebook fan pages.

3 WEEKS BEFORE (AND ONGOING)

→ Hummingbird ran 60-second radio spots, three times a day, on two local radio stations.

→ In the November issue of *Hudson Valley Magazine*, an article on bridal featured some of Froman's wedding bands, with copy saying she'd be at Hummingbird Jewelers. (Hummingbird had sent rings to the publication so they could photograph them.)



10 DAYS BEFORE

→ Hummingbird mailed postcards and displayed Froman's pieces and the posters in its windows. It e-mailed customers: "Check out Hummingbird's windows this week for a preview."

1 WEEK BEFORE

→ The store phoned clients to suggest pieces they might like.

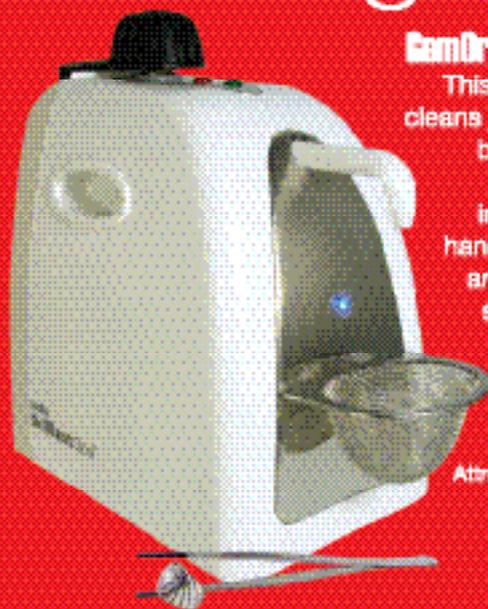
THE BIG EVENT

→ Froman brought 200 pieces, including one-of-a-kind items.
→ The jewelry was put in the largest showcase, near the entrance.

RETAILER'S REVIEW

"It was one of our best trunk shows ever," Peggy says. "We'd been pretty conservative with Pamela's line. But when I saw how customers responded to her color, I decided I'd be adding that."

Bling Blah?



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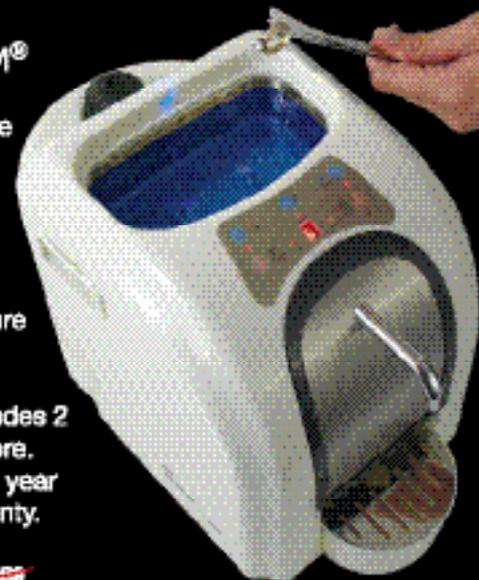
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6 DISPLAY IT

AT ALARA, Noelle says, something new always goes into the case viewed first by the greatest number of people. To determine which case that is, simply observe the traffic pattern of customers for a day or two and jot down some notes.

Beyond finding the perfect spot for it, it's got to sparkle and *say* it's brand new, Brown says. "Have a sign that says you are proud to present it for the first time, to let people know that it hasn't been sitting there for 18 months."

Jeff Jaffe of Harold Jaffe Jewelers in Toledo, OH, announces new collections on a digital signboard in front of the store. Bremer Jewelry's Daily introduces them with promotional video loops on a flat-screen TV near the new-collection case.

Larry Johnson, author of *The Complete Guide To Effective Jewelry Display*, says it's important to let your displays tell the story behind the goods. So use the props to



“Handmade is the new black.”

LARRY JOHNSON

initiate conversation. One popular story to tell is about how the jewelry is made. If it's genuinely handmade, for example, incorporate signs that say so, and encourage your sales team to use that word in the presentation. Why? "Handmade" is the new black, says Johnson.

To set it apart, Johnson says, use special color displays or change out the color of the floorboard in that part of the case to set the new collection apart from the regular selection. Use components of displays the vendor provides that help set it apart and tell its story.

Or invent your own.

Allison Love, owner of Allison Love's Fine Jewelry in Rock Hill, SC, found that her purple showcase interiors clashed with Sara Blaine's collection, so she bought pink scrapbook paper to set the collection apart while enhancing it with a complementary color. She also bought an embroidered runner

with a vintage look that captured the feel of the line.

Keep the display neat and organized because this case will be the focus of attention for the next few months, Johnson says.

Once the goods are in the case, Johnson says, go through your sales presentation with your team to ensure the displays match the selling sequence you are using. Rearrange the display as needed to have everything you need readily at hand when you are busy selling. You don't want to be fumbling around for selling aids when you are "on a roll."

Employees of Siebke Hoyt are encouraged to display a new line by wearing it. "If they like it they are going to wear it, own it, *and* sell it," Lorimer says.

At Greenwich Jewelers, if a piece is being worn by an associate, a little sign on the empty form instructs customers to "See me on Robin" or "See me on Jennifer."



At Harold Jaffe, new collections are announced on a digital sign (above). Allison Love's Fine Jewelry set apart the newly introduced Sara Blain collection with complementary scrapbook paper in the case (right).





Simon G came for a two-day launch of his fashion line at Bremer Jewelry (left and below). The store launched Rebecca Jewelry at a local country club (above).



7

LAUNCH IT

DAILY, who began selling Belle Étoile, in February, decided to launch the line, which she describes as a fun, flirty, self-purchase kind of thing, outside her store walls.

Daily displayed the jewelry at a YWCA event called “Wine, Women and Shoes,” where a portion of the proceeds benefited the Y. The promotion introduced the line to hundreds of women, who otherwise might not have seen the jewelry.

During another launch, Daily rented a banquet room at the local country club, hired security, invited 250 women and put all the jewelry out on tables so they could try it on. Then the guests bought raffle tickets for a chance to win a piece.

The raffle proceeds benefited Easter Seals.

Chuck Smith of Morrison Smith Fine Jewelers in Charlotte, NC, recalls the pre-recession Hearts

“Having aspirational pieces there was one key to the launch’s success.”

CHUCK SMITH

On Fire black-tie launch party he threw. Hearts On Fire provided some showstoppers — five- and six-figure pieces Smith wouldn’t have had on hand otherwise.

“People enjoyed being able to try on a Hearts On Fire cuff bracelet worth a couple hundred thousand dollars. Having the aspirational pieces there was one key to the launch’s success. The other was reaching out to the existing customer base.”

Hearts On Fire also provided marketing material and artwork that Morrison Smith incorporated into its direct-mail piece.

“It was a big deal, with the red carpet out front, ice sculptures, black-tie-optional,” Smith says. “The event wasn’t themed toward purchasing, but people started collecting it from the first day and we have customers who have been col-

lecting the product ever since.”

Noelle has begun hosting “dinners with the designer” as a variation on trunk shows. She hands out personal invitations to loyal customers until 20 guests have RSVP’ed, and throws a catered dinner in the store, after hours with the door locked and the jewelry out on the counter.

And when she launched Meché, a line of gold and silver charms depicting AKC dog breeds, she devised a promotion in cooperation with a local no-kill animal shelter. When someone adopts a mixed-breed dog from the shelter, they are encouraged to design a personalized “mutt bracelet” at Alara, filled with charms of dogs representing the genetic makeup of their mutt.

Fifty percent of the profits go to the shelter.



CASE STUDY: NURTURING A 'DISCOVERY'

BY LORRAINE DePASQUE

JIM ROSENHEIM has been in the jewelry business for 54 years and, during that time, his store, Tiny Jewel Box in Washington, DC, has built a reputation for bringing in 'special' well-known brands as well as new unknown talent. "But clearly, the best find I've ever made in my business was Alex Sepkus" — nearly 20 years ago, when Sepkus was an emerging talent on the scene.

In Rosenheim's own words, he "stumbled across the line." He was at the JA New York show in 1993, where he met Sepkus and his marketing partner, Jeff Feero. "As soon as I looked through my loupe at the workmanship, I bought 80 percent of their production," Rosenheim recalls.

In the months that followed, he bought whatever he could find

of Sepkus' production — even from other stores that were not doing well with the line. "It didn't matter if a store wasn't doing well with it," Rosenheim says, "because I knew the jewelry was incredible and I would."

Next, Rosenheim got his staff as excited about the collection as he was, "And to this day, my staff loves selling it." When Rosenheim himself talks with customers, he tells them, "This is what is different, and 100 years from now, people will write about this like they write about Faberge."

These days, Alex Sepkus does one or two trunk shows a year at Tiny Jewel Box, but back then, Rosenheim did not launch the line with a trunk show.

He nurtured it in more of a grassroots way and focused on the exclusivity of it. "The first three months, it didn't sell. But I kept



Jeff Feero, who co-owns the Alex Sepkus line and organizes all its trunk shows, works with a customer at Tiny Jewel Box.

with it and, in a 12-month period, I sold seven \$15,000 bracelets."

Integral to how Rosenheim nurtures the Alex Sepkus brand is by trying to expose people to something "new." Sometimes he asks the designer to bring back some older pieces that are no longer in the catalog. "Or I might

show my customer a Sepkus catalog of pieces and encourage her to choose some new stones."

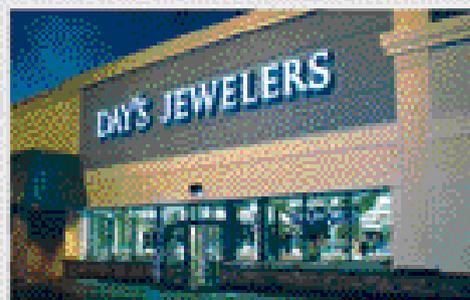
Today, Tiny Jewel Box also advertises the collection — which is one of the store's top-three lines — and promotes the trunk shows through direct mail, newspaper advertising and local radio spots.

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SELL IT

MOST RETAILERS are better at buying than selling, Brown says.

“You need to put as much time and effort and money into selling it as you do buying it,” Brown says. “It doesn’t sell itself. Just bringing it back from the SMART Show, ticketing it and putting it on the shelf, is *not* all that is required. You have to take ownership for selling it. If your strategy is to sit back and wait, it’s a flawed strategy.”

Love couldn’t agree more.

After initially being turned down by Sara Blaine due to competition in her market, Love worked hard to win the company’s confidence. She wanted the line in her store be-

cause she and her sales staff loved the high-style look available at great price points, and predicted their customers would, too. Once Love got it though, nothing happened for months — and months. Failure loomed.

“At Christmas time, I told my salespeople ‘I want you to show Sara Blaine to every customer in the store, even if they want to see a diamond engagement ring, show them Sara Blaine first,’” Love says. “At the end of the month, it was amazing how the line had taken off. Most of the time it’s an add-on. Customers fall in love with it and come back asking for it.”

““ You have to show it and tell a little story about it. You can’t just put it in the case and let people walk by.”

ALLISON LOVE

It’s all about marketing, Love concludes. “You have to show it and tell a little story about it. You can’t just put it in the case and let people walk by.”

Monteca Confers-Beisel, sales manager for Confers Jewelers in Bellefonte, PA, has mastered the art of building suspense. When a new line comes in, she keeps it under wraps in the vault for a few days and offers customers a sneak peek. “People thought it was really special being able to see it first,” Confers-Beisel says.

“We got a whole entire new line and I sold the whole thing out of the safe.”



