

Woo for Shoes: An Obsession with our Feet

Elyse Austin

Keywords: Shoes / Jones Apparel Group

Abstract

“She's beautiful, and therefore to be wooed.” That is the slogan that adorns the entrance to Jones Apparel Groups newest concept store, Shoe Woo. This mix of favorite brands allows every woman the chance to dive into a candy store-like atmosphere and give into their shoe obsession. Nine West, owned by Jones Apparel Group, has been a fashion conglomerate for the past 30 years. With this new direction, they are now a force to be reckoned with. Well known for their impeccable service and reasonable prices, this fresh idea has evolved the brand into something dynamic for shoe lovers everywhere. By taking an insider's look at this new brand and its consumer base this paper aims to pop the lid off of why women can never have too many shoes.

Introduction

Shoes, unlike clothes, can exalt a woman's self esteem and turn a drab outfit into something fabulous. Whether big or thin, shoes can transform you on a daily basis. To quote one of my favorite movies, *In Her Shoes*, “I get something out of them! When I feel bad I like to treat myself. Clothes never look any good... food just makes me fatter... shoes always fit” (Hanson). Shoes feel beautiful, taking you out of the office to out on the town in your 4-inch stilettos. From the days of learning how to walk to aspiring to be our mothers (glamorous in their high-heels), shoes are a staple in what it means to be a female. Shoes represent our wants as well as personalities.

More recently, an obsession with luxury shoes has become popularized with shows like *Sex and the City*. Label conscious fashion girls shop the Jimmy Choo isle, while the savvy consumers shop Nine West. No matter ones economic status or race, we love shoes and buy them constantly. Women yearn for shoes wanting to solicit the male eye and achieve a rush that only we understand. The intention of this paper is to expose this seemingly recession-proof obsession, its roots in our society, and explore where shoe brands are heading in the near future.

The History of Jones Apparel Group

Jones Apparel Group, Inc. has been a dominant company in the apparel and footwear industry for over 30 years. Founded by Sidney Kimmel in 1970, the company has consistently been known for its innovation and focus on the customer. Establishing the company's roots in Pennsylvania, they soon built their renowned Jones New York Brand. (Jones) After years of success in the women's apparel business through high quality merchandise and fresh designs they became a substantial force to be reckoned with.

Upon gaining success in the licensing business with other companies like Ralph Lauren Polo and the Sun Apparel, Inc., Jones decided to step into the realm of footwear. They acquired Nine West Group Inc. in June of 1999 (Jones). Nine West was originally known as the Fisher and Camuto Corporation. This was an extension of Jerome Fisher and Vincent Camuto's wholesale women's shoe business. Nine West Group became a public corporation in February of 1993 (Jones). They are a leading manufacturer, designer, and marketer of fashion forward footwear and accessories at reasonable prices. It is now an internationally recognized brand with a "moderate" to "bridge" price point. Under the company other brands such as Bandolino, Easy Spirit, and Enzo Angiolini are housed.

Jones Apparel's expansion over the years has allowed them to essentially have a brand represented at all price points. Each brand reaches out to a specific target customer and allows each individual woman to find themselves within their company. With footwear brands like AK Anne Klein, Bandolino, Boutique 9, Easy Spirit, Enzo Angiolini, Joan & David, Nine West, and RACHEL by Rachel Roy, their brands are everywhere and for everyone (Jones). Boutique 9, Enzo Angiolini, and Joan & David are among the higher-end brands that provide on trend fashionable shoes. Nine West and Bandolino cater to the lower end shoe-ista longing for comfort and style.

Let's Get Some Shoes: Shoe Woo

Jones Apparel Groups most recent endeavor as a company is to introduce an entirely new concept store into the footwear and accessories market. With recent openings of their boutique style store, Shoe Woo, in New York City, Boston, Menlo Park, New Jersey, and Washington D.C. the company plans to take a women's obsession with shoes to the next level! The fifth store opened in Philadelphia on July 10, 2010. With eight of the Jones Apparel Group Footwear brands available, they are able to reach a variety of clientele at one time. From the high-end trendsetter to the pocket conscious teenager they offer it all. The extravagant candy store interior allows one to get lost and become intoxicated by the array of assortment. This new and exciting concept will only expand the Jones Apparel Group brand allowing its consumers to shop in one space, with easy access to all the fashion footwear brands, furthering their obsession with shoes.

The hip mixes of music give this store that little extra edge while whitewashed wood flooring allow the customers to experience the sounds that their new purchases make clicking their heels. You can strike a pose in front of the long mirrors and strut across the store to see shoes spinning on turntables (figure 1). But don't forget to grab a lollipop or gumball on your way out! This high-energy store gives women another topic to talk about: shoes. In its opening week the Philadelphia store beat out the Manhattan store in total sales doubling their initial goal. This concept has been well received and as a sales associate I am constantly being asked, "When did you open? I've been dying for a good shoe store." The stores unique layout and plush vibrant colored chairs allow the consumers to sit down relax and take a load off while trying on the variety of merchandise (figure 2).



Figure 1: Shoe Display at Shoe Woo, Philadelphia. Photo courtesy of Elyse Austin. All rights reserved.



Figure 2: Shoe Display at Shoe Woo, Philadelphia. Photo courtesy of Elyse Austin. All rights reserved.

Review

With its grand opening on July 10, 2010, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Shoe Woo, an enticing boutique-style store, has made a name for themselves with their loyal Jones Apparel consumers. Upon interviewing a number of my friends and customers at the store located in The Shops at Liberty Place, the general consensus is that women love shoes. No matter the price, cut, or style there is something that draws us to them like bees to pollen. One customer wrote in the guestbook, “I have died and gone to shoe heaven!” Now if only a place like that actually existed. After questioning 10 of my girlfriends, the average number of shoes came to 15 (Austin). However, my obsession runs just a little deeper rounding out at approximately 60 pairs of shoes! (figure 3). I have a shoe problem, but it’s not just me. Linda O’Keefe sums up the idea of women and shoes, specifically heels. “Whether a woman thinks heels are the height of fashion or the height of absurdity, she usually has at least one pair in the back of her closet for the occasion when sensible shoes just won’t do” (O’Keefe 75).



Figure 3: Personal Shoe Collection, Philadelphia.
Photo courtesy of Elyse Austin. All rights reserved.

For centuries women have made it their mission to do whatever it takes to own the latest and greatest shoes. Antics range from the binding tradition of feet in Asia to modern day Carrie Bradshaw of *Sex and the City*, giving up her paycheck for the newest Manolo Blahniks. We just can’t seem to get enough. Living in the city of Philadelphia, good shoes are a must. From running to catch the train or simply stepping out on the town, having a shoe for every occasion is not uncommon for women. Society has allowed the

allure behind shoes to rise and fall with social standards and economic challenges (Berman). High heels specifically are known to make a woman feel sexier while adding that extra height. Linda O'Keefe notes, "psychologically, high heels permit them to lead rather than to follow" (O'Keefe, 72). You feel in control of your life and a sense of self-confidence seems to take over.

Working for Shoe Woo can be hectic, however there is a sense of pride that comes when you know that the shoes you just sold made someone's day. One of my loyal customers, Ms. Lynn, comes in religiously every week. Friday is payday, and she's in the store looking for new shoes to boogie down in at the nightclub. Her reasoning, "I like to be comfortable and these old dogs are not what they used to be!" However, the young women who come into the store are looking for a much different experience. Often drawn to the high stilettos by Rachel Roy or cut out black and gold booties they long to make a statement. Simply put, shoes can make or break an outfit! Whether the consumer wants to experience exceptional service, comfort, or being the envy of on lookers on the street, Shoe Woo delivers.

Conclusion

Over the years shoes have become a necessity for every woman. Whether shoes are just a means to an end or your go-to-fix for a bad day, shoes and their hold on women are here to stay. As each woman's needs and wants for shoes are different Jones Apparel group caters to them all. This forward trendy store is answering the consumer's call of remaining current and fresh. The success of the Shoe Woo brand so far attests to Jones Apparel Groups' continued connection with its loyal buyers.

Works Cited

Austin, Christina. Austin, Erin. Austin, Amber. Bigby, Nia. Gould, Andrea. Holloway, Jenae. Jenkins, Michelle. Pierre, Danielle. Raiford, Tomyra. Sandidge, Aisha. Personal interview. 31 July 2010.

Berman, Pat. "The Truth about Women and Shoes: Is This Really a Harmless Obsession?" *Fashion Life; F3* (2000). Web. 31 July 2010.

In Her Shoes. Dir. Curtis Hanson. Perf. Cameron Diaz, Toni Collette, and Shirley MacLaine. Fox 2000 Pictures, 2005. Film.

Jones Apparel Group Site. Our Company: History and Overview. 2010. Web. 30 July 2010.

O'Keeffe, Linda. *Shoes: A celebration of pumps, sandals, slippers and more*. New York: Workman Publishing Company, 1996. Print.