

Building a Career on Relationships

LESLIE RAABE



Lloyd's Shoes of Carmel, California, is just the kind of boutique you would expect to find in this quaint, upscale village on Carmel Bay, south of San Francisco. Located in the heart of the shopping district, Lloyd's offers a unique and extensive collection of quality women's footwear with attentive, professional service.

"People who find Carmel feel good because this is a special place," says Lloyd's owner and president Jeffrey Greenberg. "It is beautiful, five blocks from the ocean...[and] very inviting."

Eclectic Mix, Targeted Marketing

With names like Chie Mihara, Donald J. Pliner, Hispanitas, Prevata, Peter Kaiser, Frye and Merrill, Lloyd's carries designer shoes and handbags from around the world. "We are a women's fashion store, although we keep an eye out in the comfort business with brands like Beautifeel and Arche," Greenberg says. "We have also found a niche with some of the luxury designers, like Thierry Rabotin. Our customers enjoy seeing styles and brands not found in their local store or department store. Our overall assortment is what sets us apart."

Lloyd's customers are typically women between the ages of 25 and 55, educated and urbane. While the store benefits from summer tourist traffic, a good share of business comes from Carmel residents. "We also like to consider anyone who lives within three hours of Carmel a local customer," Greenberg adds. In fact,

people come from Santa Cruz, Fresno and San Jose to shop in Carmel.

To attract customers, Greenberg advertises in *Carmel* magazine, published four times each year, because it covers local people and businesses. He also places ads in newspapers and upscale periodicals.

"We really reach customers by being attentive on the sales floor and, through the years, understanding who is coming in and where we belong in terms of our niche in the business, which is definitely a lady's store," Greenberg explains. "This is who we target with merchandise, and, if we advertise, who we are showing our product."

Relationships that Matter

Lloyd Firstman gave the store its name. His business began as a concession in a larger department store in 1975 across the street from the current location. Greenberg started working with Firstman just before the business moved to its current 2,000-square-foot location 28 years ago.

"Shortly after we moved to the new location, I became more responsible and took a share of the business," Greenberg remembers. He became an equal partner in 1985. "Lloyd taught me the business. We are great friends and I still consider him my confidant," he adds.

When Firstman retired in 1998,



Jeff Greenberg

Greenberg bought the remaining shares of the corporation. Although Greenberg considers himself fortunate to have an experienced, professional confidant, he also relies a great deal on the National Shoe Retailers Association (NSRA) to keep him connected to other shoe professionals and informed about the latest trends. He attends all the big shoe shows, from Las Vegas to Milan to Madrid. "It keeps me sharp and informed," he says. "Carmel is a small town, and if I don't go outside there is a danger of becoming very provincial. You don't want to be surprised by a new trend. Even if it is not right for your store, it is important to keep up with what's happening with the business as a whole."

Greenberg joined NSRA several years ago, after participating in a buying trip to Brazil with the organization. But it was after a buying trip to Italy where he met several NSRA members that he became more involved in the association. Today, he is on its Board of Directors.

Supported by eight full-time employees and additional part-time staffers during peak season, Greenberg describes the store atmosphere these employees help to create as "friendly and relaxed."

"One of the advantages we have is that when people are in Carmel, they are [usually] in a good mood and it is easier to break the ice," he says. "We have sales-



A look inside Lloyd's Shoes

people who the customers really like to see. We are a small store, so we are less effective if we are always changing our staff. We build customer confidence through their relationships with our employees." One gentleman has worked for Lloyd's for 24 years and another

young woman for more than a decade.

Challenges and Rewards

While Greenberg's staff gives him a competitive edge, his product is proving a challenge. The cost of his inventory has increased 25 percent in the past 18 months as key vendors' prices have gone up. Greenberg says he is still carrying the same number of shoes as he did two years ago, but with the rising cost of inventory, any drop in sales will have a bigger financial impact.

"Right now, I feel that I have to be careful about the levels of inventory and reordering," he adds. "This is not an exact science, and I think that is what makes this business kind of exciting. One of the nice things about being independent is having those kinds of choices. I can be more adventurous, and that works in Carmel because we have visitors from all over the world."

Looking back on his years in the business, Greenberg believes his success is a reflection of the many relationships he has built along the way. For him, part of the definition of success means being able to get away a few times each year with

wife Deborah, taking the occasional weekend off to visit his children, or attending a professional sporting event with a friend. "I've really enjoyed having a career in the shoe business," he says. "I have met a lot of wonderful people." ■