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AUTHOR: JANET GRAY MUNIZ

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FEATURED QUOTE: "Our stores evolve. We're always changing it up because that's who we are."

Shopping is an experience and shoppers of all ages discover the ultimate spree at M.Fredric. A successful retailer in southern California for over 25 years, the company has evolved from one store that catered to women into a series of unique boutiques, connected by location and the M.Fredric moniker, creating a high-energy interaction among them that makes shopping ever fresh and fun.

"Everybody who lives in the area knows our stores," says co-owner Mardi Fox. "They're different doors but they're right next to each other and there's a walk-through between many of them." At many of their eight lifestyle center locations the boutiques are clustered in groups of four, each containing an upscale, fashion forward collection of product in women's, women's active wear, kid's and men's.

"To grow our business we developed into other concepts," says Mardi. "The second concept was kids because we follow our market. We went from women's to kid's because the women were having babies. We went to active with the workout craze and our newest concept is men's because men are becoming more fashion-oriented."

Mardi makes up the "M" of M.Fredric and her brother, Fred Levine, contributes the "Fredric." Together with Fred's wife, Lisa Levine, they work hard to create a unique experience for their customers. "I think that's the key to success. There's so much trust between us, I can have a clear head and really concentrate on buying."

Mardi is the principal buyer for M.Fredric Kids. She buys for six boutique stores which allows her to buy quantity. She has also developed relationships with manufacturers to create her own color stories, customize embellishments and design details for the garments she buys. "I can work with the manufacturers to create something that's exclusively for my stores. I like to have things that aren't in every other kid's store."

Because of the M.Fredric concepts, Mardi stays totally connected to the women's and men's market, where she watches trends she thinks will filter down to the kid's market. "For example, the women's market is all about denim. My women's customer is educated about a high-end jean, so they'll buy it for their kids. True Religion jeans, one of my top lines, retails anywhere from \$100-\$200 and I don't have a problem selling it. But I also carry a more moderate jean because I don't want to lose the back-to-school rush. Not every mom is going to spend over \$100 on jeans for school. I buy really to entice the mother," she says.

M.Fredric Kids is known for their boy's department because of its variety. "The father is getting trendier, and it's OK for the son to wear a designer jean. I'm going into Seven jeans for boys, Da Nang for boys," Mardi says. She took a chance on E-Land International's O.D.C.Y line (pronounced odyssey) and she says she blew it out. "That gave me confidence to say, OK, my customer is ready for it. I'm definitely taking a bigger chance now with my boys division."

The way M.Fredric stores look also sets them apart. Each undergoes décor adjustments regularly and the merchandising is distinctive at each location. “Everything is displayed beautifully, always telling a story so when customers walk in, it’s eye candy,” Mardi says. The displays and visuals keep in step with the product, which also changes regularly. “I think a buyer’s biggest mistake is that last re-order. I can sell something to the piece and I can re-order, but if I’m bored with it, my salespeople are getting bored with it.” Customer service has been a hallmark of M.Fredric where they strive to maintain friendly, informed salespeople. Mardi says, “My customers know the salespeople by first name. Our girls have a lot of responsibility. They have to be enthusiastic about what they are selling. It has to be new and fresh.”

With a reputation for the best service and attention to the changing needs of the customer, the product mix evolved from Moderate Junior Apparel in the eighties, to Better Junior Apparel in the 90’s, to Better Contemporary since 2003. Opportunities to expand the M.Fredric boutiques to other locales have tempted the owners, but they are building the company from within. “This is a very controllable operation and we like doing it this way,” Mardi says. “I know I can visit all my stores in a couple of days and introduce myself to my employees. They know who’s sitting in the office.” M.Fredric is nurturing its identity by directing profits and resources to internal controls of inventory management, selling technique development, publicity and merchandising. “It comes from the heart, it’s a passion. I wanted to go into kids because it’s a very fun product. I think our identity is very trendy and hip, with understandable merchandise. Practical and trendy combined. Kids have to be able to play in the clothes and look hip.”

The company also parlays its local public reach to better the community by raising funds for the treatment of breast cancer. “We chose that area because that’s what affects many of our customers,” says Mardi. Year to date the company gifted over \$195,000 with customer contributions at point of sale and matching their donations 25 cents on the dollar. Vendors can contribute \$10 each time an invoice is paid. Rewards are also given to top contributing stores. “Not only are we giving back to the community, we’re also teaching 170 employees how important it is to give back.”

M.Fredric is currently developing a full featured cinematic corporate website, where customers can purchase store gift cards. The company uses email to promote sales, special openings and events. Customers can sign up at the stores, and be eligible for a \$250 shopping spree drawn about every other month. Recently they’ve featured trunk shows for jewelry, denim and t-shirt lines in the women’s stores and are planning them for the kid’s stores as well.

“I think that the key to our success is that we change,” Mardi says. “Otherwise, we wouldn’t be able to keep the customer for as many years as we’ve kept them.” M.Fredric offers their customers, staff and community a dynamic environment that keeps everybody charged, motivated and advancing. “Our stores evolve. We’re always doing something, we’re always changing it up because that’s who we are.” Stores are located in Manhattan Beach, Brentwood, The Grove, Studio City, Encino, Calabasas, Westlake Village and Marina del Rey. More information can be found at www.mfredric.com.