

Covering the Business of Glamour Fashion

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Like No Other*

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So this guy walks in ...



THE SHOE COMPANY LIKE NO OTHER

by WENDY LEWIS

If you're a high-heel fiend, flipping through the pages of a Pleaser USA catalog is like taking a short trip to fantasy-land. With almost any shape, style, height and color high heel you can imagine available, you can sit back, get lost in the pages, and dream about the endless possibilities ... what dress would I wear these pumps with? Would those sandals look better with my (also imaginary) Gucci or Prada purse ... those sexy boots would really drive him crazy ... and so on.

Fun, isn't it? And here's the thing: your customers—from dancers to foxy grandmothers—feel the same, euphoric way about high heels. That's why Ben Hsu, President of Pleaser USA, thinks it doesn't make much sense when industry retailers look at shoes simply as "the accessory" to their staple merchandise.

"Industry retailers tend to think they should only stock a minimal selection of sexy shoes, but that's narrowing their own profits!" Hsu says. "Start by considering how much a pair of shoes adds on to an average purchase ... often, the shoes alone make up 30-50 percent of the sale! Then, think about how many more pairs you could sell each year if you allocated just a slightly larger portion of your floor space and your budget to shoes. It adds up exponentially.

"We wish to dispel the myth that it would suffice for a retail store to carry just four or five styles of sexy shoes," Hsu continues. "Sure, if you are a beginner or truly lack the space, stick to a few basic styles. But if your store caters to dancers, you should know that a dancer does not want to dress the same as another girl in the club, which drives exotic apparel manufacturers to come up with totally different offerings season after season, year after year. The same is true for sexy shoes.

"It's the demand that creates the market. It's just like going to a restaurant: everyone orders his or her own favorite food, because tastes differ. And even if you have a favorite dish, you don't want to order it every single time. The restaurants that offer more food selections make more money. Basically, we've done the same thing with sexy shoes: we've altered the landscape of the industry by offering a vast collection of styles in stock year round—hundreds of styles when we started, and more than 3,000 styles now, and counting."

Hsu says that besides offering the selection and stock retailers need, Pleaser is the exotic industry's leading footwear supplier because they are on the cutting edge in terms of design. "Our in-house team of dedicated designers constantly travel the globe to stay on the forefront of alternative footwear, whether the latest footwear trends are unfolding in London, Milan, New York or Tokyo," he notes. Pleaser is recognized for inventing trend-setting styles that quickly become every dancer's "must-have" shoe.

Like their latest innovations: the Treasure Chest and Tip Jar collections. "The Treasure Chest collection offers a convenient storage compartment, located in the base of the shoe, that is accessible from the insole," Hsu describes. "It is such a clever creation because the shoe can instantly be transformed into so many different looks. We've seen customers fill the compartment with everything from sparkling diamond necklaces to colorful glitter

that coordinates with their outfit. This shoe is a one-stop solution for every mood, outfit, and holiday."

The Tip Jar collection is just as much of an attention-grabber. "The idea in mind when the Tip Jar design was being developed was to give the dancers and opportunity to collect their tips in a more enticing fashion. The slot opening on the side wall of the shoe allows tips to not only be entered into the shoe, but to be displayed. The feedback we have received is astounding! Dancers are telling us that their tips have increased drastically since wearing this new style, and retailers are raving about how these are truly the most exciting and innovative sexy shoes they had seen in years."

If the dancer market is your specialty, you'll also want to check out Pleaser's Lucious line, a 100% US-made exotic footwear line that differs from the Pleaser line in that "It is predominantly flashier and trendier; handcrafted with gorgeous materials and superb workmanship," explains Hsu. "Styles with captivating UV reactive neon-colored heels, faux wood bottoms, exotic prints and flamboyant colors are a few examples of what makes this collection so distinctive and desirable among dancers around the world."

But what if your store doesn't cater primarily to dancers? According to Hsu, a good footwear selection can be ANY retailer's secret profit weapon. And that goes beyond carrying kitten-fooled maribous to wear with lingerie. "Industry retailers should be looking at every possible footwear avenue they can take advantage of to increase their profits: shoes for clubbing, weddings, proms ... shoes just to look stylish shopping! We provide collections for all those needs."

Pleaser developed such an expansive array of footwear because they are "meeting the demand of customers with different lifestyles and in different markets around the world. Our collections are introduced with our global customers in mind. In the U.S. and Canada, the Pleaser and Lucious platform shoes have been the biggest sellers, but in Europe, non-platform, single sole shoes as well as our Devious fetish shoes are what the customers are after. We have noticed that in North America, single soles have been catching on recently, especially after our single sole catalog consisting of over 300 styles was launched last year."

Pleaser's mission to make the world's feet sexier benefits even the most niche retailer, according to Hsu. For example, if you're in need of edgy, alternative footwear, the "Demonia" collection is "extremely popular among the alternative crowd." Demonia includes a wide selection of sandals, maryjanes, creepers, platform shoes and boots, and accessories, and because Demonia is a staple brand at the 700-plus store mall chain Hot Topic, as well as at Torrid, it's a powerful name for specialty retailers targeting the same consumer audience to carry.

Or, if you cater to a gothic or fetish crowd, there's "Devious:" a fetish footwear collection consisting of both 100% U.S.-handmade and



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imported styles—including everything from dominating metal spike heels to titillating ballerina shoes to sky-high 9-inch platforms. Devious is "the first and only large-scale fetish footwear collection in stock for immediate delivery. We are proud of this line because we immediately saw how many people there were who had been looking for shoes of this kind. It has been a huge success."

And though the Pleaser collection (*Pleaser USA's flagship brand*) "is geared towards satisfying the needs of dancers in both areas of practicality and aesthetics," the line has recently expanded to include evening-wear shoes in response to the demand from shoppers looking for more mainstream, yet incredibly sexy shoes. "In fact, we have noticed an upswing trend in the last two years of more and more lingerie shops starting to carry sexy shoes," Hsu reports. "Even adult video stores have joined the ranks. In addition, there are more and more shops being opened across the country, not just on Hollywood Boulevard or Sahara Avenue, that cater exclusively to sexy shoes. That speaks volumes!"

"Our extravagant inventory offers an assortment of styles that mix glamour and femininity to complement any look. For instance, we have several collections with heels from 2 inches to 4 inches that are perfect for evening wear. Although they are relatively low heeled, they reveal an unmistakable hint of sensuality and elegance, and match perfectly with an elegant cocktail dress, or add flair to a chic pair of jeans. Our Foxy 101 is a basic pump that's available in many colors ... many of our employees wear this style to work!"

Pleaser is "currently in the process of creating one, all inclusive 300-plus page catalog which will be comprised of our entire existing platform collection, plus over a 100 percent increase in the styles of platform shoes. This catalog will allow our customers to browse through hundreds of styles in one catalog."

Whoah ... while 300 pages of heel styles sounds like a wondrous thing to the average shoe shopper, we wondered whether it might sound a little daunting to an *apparel* retailer. "Knowing what and how much footwear to order is understandably a common concern for retailers," empathizes Hsu. "However, being customer-oriented—thinking like the customer—is a top priority to us, and we never stop trying to improve in this regard. We understand that some retailers may be unsure of which styles to carry, how many of each, and how to handle sizing."

So where do you begin? With a phone call, says Hsu. "We helping our customer decide on the best inventory for their market, depending on the type of retail business and the customers they serve. If you own an exotic apparel or lingerie shop, you'll probably want to focus on the Pleaser and Lucious lines,



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since the majority of your customers are interested in these types of products. On the other hand, if your clientele consists of a broader range, you might want to carry a few styles from each collection. Our customers who are located in bigger, metropolitan cities, such as New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, tend to carry more than one of our lines.

"Once a retailer has decided how many lines to carry, we'll provide them with a list which outlines which styles in each collection and lines tend to be the most popular. Again, if you are unsure, our customer service team is dedicated to helping customers with these types of questions."

If you're still concerned, "Pleaser offers three different Risk-Free Starter's Packages. You can either select one of the recommended packages, which consists of our best selling styles, or you can pick your own styles. If within two months you want to return any shoes in your first order that didn't sell in your store, Pleaser will happily take them back without charging a re-stocking fee and would even pay for the return freight."

Hsu assures readers that any retailer can develop a profitable shoe section within their store, adding that Pleaser recently brought former GE Executive Bill Bonorris on board as Chief Operating Officer to (among other things) ensure Pleaser's customer relations initiatives keep pace with the company's rapid growth.

"Retailers are the backbone of our business," Hsu comments. "We understand that an essential component in being a successful sexy footwear company is having excellent customer service. We want our customers to know, without a doubt, that we will surpass any expectations they ever had."

For example, "When almost all of the other shoe vendors are either selling retail through their websites or are linking to online retailers, a practice we consider tantamount to turning their back on their customers, Pleaser has decided against doing this. Rather, the Pleaser website provides a function whereby only *physical retail stores* who carry Pleaser shoes are searchable by zip code.

"We don't want to lose sight of who our core customers are," Hsu explains. "We want to be loyal to those who, for many years, have supported us by carrying Pleaser shoes in their stores. The last thing we want to see is a customer trying on a shoe in a retail store, and then going home and placing an order online. On the contrary, we hope to drive customers to retail stores to purchase shoes after they saw them on our website."

Retail customers can access the Pleaser online ordering system 24 hours a day. "We have taken our customers' Internet buying experience to the next level by not only offering inventory availability info, but info regarding when to expect the arrival of a new item, when a back order will be refilled, etc., all in a



"Pleaser offers risk-free starter's packages: If within two months you want to return any shoes that didn't sell in your store, Pleaser will happily take them back without charging a re-stocking fee and will even pay for the return freight."



constantly improving, user friendly system. Our system was designed with one thing in mind: to make our customers' buying experience as convenient, efficient, and enjoyable as possible."

Of course, there's nothing customers enjoy more than saving money, and Hsu says Pleaser is always looking for ways to help industry retailers get the most bang for their footwear buck. He says that while it is common practice among industry footwear vendors "to have a two-tier wholesale pricing structure (higher pricing for open stock orders, and lower pricing for orders of pre-packed case runs), we realized that when a retail store places a reorder, they usually don't need every size that was originally ordered ... only the sizes that were sold out.

"We're allowing customers to make up their own size run and still get the case price, as long as the quantity ordered per color of a style meets or exceeds the case packed quantity. This new policy not only helps customers save money, but more importantly, it helps them maintain a more balanced inventory and reduces the store-space taken. We also offer a price break when customers order quantity on the same item and color equal or greater than the case pack quantity. The customer is automatically given the less expensive case pricing."

Place an order with Pleaser, and you'll notice that each collection arrives in differently colored boxes, "making it as easy and convenient as possible for customers when it comes to receiving, inventory control, and order pulling. The different color-coded boxes allow customers to know, for instance, if a particular collection is running low and needs re-ordering.

"Additionally, for many of our collections, we've upgraded our packaging to a much higher-end looking woven fabric wrapping material. Packaging often denotes the quality and workmanship of a shoe, and we want customers to immediately feel they are buying a product of high-quality and value."

Beyond their customer service efforts and huge selection, Hsu says Pleaser is simply better equipped than other shoe vendor to meet any retailer's unique needs. A major point of pride for the company is their massive "in-stock" inventory of footwear, housed in a 130,000 square foot warehouse, (*the same size as a Costco or Sam's Club*), which enables Pleaser to claim one of the fastest turnaround times in the business. "We yearned for our customers to not only have significant selection of styles to choose from, but to guarantee that those styles are in stock to be shipped immediately." Pleaser guarantees that all orders received by 12 pm will be shipped within three business days within the continental US and Canada.

"We are able to accomplish this because of our warehouse logistics, our state-of-the-art computer controlled inventory, and order specialized order pulling system. On a typical day, we ship out 5,000 to 7,000 pairs of shoes to

our customers in different continents; all efficiently, correctly, and on time. It should be emphasized that although there are currently several suppliers of U.S.-made sexy shoes, no one keeps an inventory close to what we have. In fact, most still sell on a made-to-order basis, which usually takes a much longer time to deliver."



Hsu brings up an important point: some people believe that US-made shoes are of higher quality than imports. "This is totally a misconception," reports the company.

"Our 100 percent U.S.-made Lucious line of sexy shoes was launched for a few reasons: 1) to provide customers with a fresh selection of different heel constructions made in the U.S.; 2) to allow for a more vibrant selection of designs and fabrics that are hard to source in small quantity overseas; 3) to meet the demand of customers who prefer the prestige associated with the U.S.A.-made labels; and 4) so that customers in Canada and some European countries who import the shoes do not have to pay a high duty for the goods, compared to what they have to pay for China-made shoes.

Hsu acknowledges, "It is true that—generally speaking—imported shoes are not as well made as those made in the U.S., but we are proud to say that our imported shoes are as good, if not better, than the U.S.-made shoes because, rather than sourcing out the production, we manufacture 90 percent of our shoes at our own manufacturing facility under very our strict quality control measures.

"The best advertising is word-of-mouth advertising. We want end-users to fall in love with Pleaser brand of shoes and ask for it by name, and to make this happen, we have to ensure that Pleaser shoes are the best made sexy shoes; that they feature better quality, better fit, and last longer, so that they will build confidence and loyalty with its end-users over time. The Pleaser brand needs to live up to its reputation of being a premium brand.

We asked Hsu what specifically makes Pleaser a "premium" brand. "We pay meticulous attention to every detail when it comes to the manufacturing and quality control of our shoes,"

he explains. "One example is the fact that while almost every sexy shoe wholesale company uses a cheap, TPR outsole, our platform shoes are made with a premium rubber infused outsole, which provides more traction and ensures durability. One of the most common frustrations for exotic dancers is that the outsole of their shoe wears out too easily and too quickly, and new non-slip pads have to be put on constantly. With our outsoles, non-slip pads are rendered virtually unnecessary. While we absolve the extra expenses, customers (both end and retailer) benefit.

"Our products have had a proven track record and are recognized as one of the very best in the industry," Hsu, surmises. "Simply ask those customers who have bought from Pleaser for years."

Next on Pleaser's plate, look for Fantasma, a new brand that will be used on their entire Halloween line of footwear that will be unveiled later this year. "This is an expansion of our existing Halloween line of footwear, and offers a much wider choice of styles including many styles for men and children," reports Hsu.

Since the Pleaser company premiered in 1993, the brand has arguably advanced the sexy footwear industry by leaps and bounds. As Hsu puts it, "We have taken some unprecedented steps over the years in re-defining and re-shaping the sexy shoe industry, in filling niches that had never been satisfied, expanding the scope of the products to be in stock for immediate delivery, and creating quality and innovative designs for a wide spectrum of sexy shoe lovers.

"We afford our customers the ultimate shoe buying experience with our extensive selection, no-hassle open stock purchase, 24/7 online ordering system, and no-nonsense customer bill of rights. In short, we are committed to achieving the highest level of customer satisfaction by providing consistent, quality products, courteous and prompt service, and reliable on-time delivery. We are proud of what we've done in revolutionizing the sexy shoe industry, and couldn't be happier with what we have achieved as a result."



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More Reasons Pleaser USA President Ben Hsu Says Retailers will want to walk a mile in Pleaser Shoes:

**Many styles available in plus sizes, even up to size 17, without extra charges.*

**"Pleaser shoes are carried by the world's largest and most well-known on-line retailer, Zappos.com. Even the Playboy mail order catalog carries Pleaser brand of sexy shoes."*

**Consistent publicity via advertising in consumer and trade publications such as Teeze, Gothic Beauty, Exotic Dancer, Marquis, Skin Two, Body, Revolver, etc.*

**Drop-shipping: "not only a wonderful convenience for our customers, but also for their retail customers."*