

The Business of Beauty

Beauty may be in the eye of the beholder, but the talent that creates it can be found in the hands of people in fields as disparate as food merchandising and jewelry design.

GOOD LOOKS = MORE SALES

Serendipity and creativity can be an awesome combination for someone with an entrepreneurial bent, and Jonathan Raduns is one of the lucky ones who has benefitted from it. The serendipity part: He grew up on a 200-acre farm near Rochester, New York, and was responsible at a young age for selling the farm's bounty from a roadside stand. As it turned out, he had a keen affinity for it. The creativity part: Well, who knows where creativity comes from? But Raduns certainly has it, and the way he wields it is a key factor in the success of his business, MerchandiseFood.com.

"Eighty percent of the information everyone receives is through the eyes, and at MerchandiseFood.com, we are a fresh set of them," Raduns says. His company coaches, consults, and trains clients to improve the visual presentation of their food offerings to make customers want to buy more. His client roster includes restaurants, resorts, retail food stores, and farm markets nationwide, and the displays, signage, props, and merchandising techniques he provides help increase sales and profitability. "We had one farm-market client increase sales by 78% over the prior year after our engagement, and many of our clients achieve sales-per-customer-visit improvements of 10% or more," he says.

Creativity plays a role in the design and implementation of Raduns' food displays, which he describes as "an artistic feat that requires us to use all the principles of design,



color, shape, line, texture, value, balance, etc.," But to make MerchandiseFood.com a success, he also must find creative ways to help his clients meet their goals while staying within budget, such as by procuring and repurposing old fixtures and supplies. He recently had a client who needed a large number of stainless steel metal deli pans made to an exact specification. "I remembered seeing something similar in a used-restaurant-supply warehouse 400 miles from my home some time earlier," Raduns says. "I drove up, and there they still were, a year later, which saved my client more than \$3,000 in new purchases."

When MerchandiseFood.com takes on a new client, its team members conduct a top-to-bottom review and documentation of the entire operation. "We review all surfaces for

"Eighty percent of the information everyone receives is through the eyes, and at MerchandiseFood.com, we are a fresh set of them."

Secrets of SUCCESS

Merchandise Food.com

1 Develop a good rapport with national media in your field.

2 When prospecting, target the boss of the person with whom you will work.

3 Partner with key industry professionals.

opportunities—counters, shelves, refrigerated cases. We suggest resetting displays, product placement, complementary food items to place next to each other, signage, fixtures, and, most importantly, technical procedures for employees,” Raduns says. Employee training encompasses procedures for product placement on shelves and in display cases, leveraging proven techniques to make them more visible to shoppers and driving increased impulse sales.

MerchandiseFood.com delivers its services hands-on and via webinar, and the company also provides off-site planning and project management for new merchandising rollouts across multiple outlets for a single company.

From the time he started running his family’s farm stand, Raduns has had a hand in the visual merchandising world. He ran fresh produce marketing operations for farmers markets in western New York during his teen years and all through college. “This became an excellent learning ground for me.

Managing a team of employees every day, I got to see the direct results of our efforts on the cash box,” he recalls. “I realized I had a knack for presenting our offerings in a way that made people respond by buying more.” After college (he earned a degree in specialized food marketing and distribution at the Rochester Institute of Technology), he spent a number of years in fresh produce merchandising and management at Wegmans, an East Coast supermarket chain with an industry-wide reputation as an outstanding visual merchandiser.

Raduns started what would become MerchandiseFood.com as a side project while he was working at Wegmans. At a trade show on organic farming, he met a woman who ran 20 farmers markets in the Hudson River Valley and metro New York City area. She invited him to speak at her company’s annual vendors meeting, and he developed a presentation called Farm “Smart”keting, which was well-received and led to other speaking and, eventually, consulting engagements.

Early in his company’s existence, Raduns began partnering with key industry professionals. That has enabled his company to maintain a lean and flexible human resources

policy, staffing up with contract workers as needed for specific projects. Today, MerchandiseFood.com is allied with National Restaurant Consultants and FreshXperts.

“Through these relationships, we bring nearly 20 veteran professionals in all areas of fresh produce and restaurant business consulting to help our clients improve results beyond just visual merchandising,” Raduns says. “These relationships have been a strong source of both support and new business leads.”

A MARRIAGE OF BUSINESS AND BEAUTY

International information technology consulting may not be the likeliest path to success as a jewelry designer, manufacturer, and distributor, but it worked just fine for Roz H. Liang. From the mid-1990s through the early 2000s, Liang ran Data Professionals Inc., which provided senior IT consultants to clients that included leading international banking, finance, and insurance companies. The experience served her well when she launched her current venture, Dandelion Global, LLC—the parent company of Rosaline Jewelry—in 2003.

During her years with Data Professionals, Liang traveled the world on behalf of the company and its clients. In her off time during those assignments, she began collecting a diverse assortment of cultural ornamentation that today inspires the vivid colors, unique gemstones, and captivating designs of the Rosaline Jewelry collection.

“When I launched Dandelion Global in 2003, my thought was to utilize my resources in Asia, as well as my resources and marketing capability here in the U.S.,” Liang says. “I saw a unique opportunity in the development of a one-stop resource that would provide significant benefits to my clients because I would control every aspect of the jewelry creation process. All my collections start out as original designs; every one of them is unique, not just in terms of the design, but also in the top quality of the craftsmanship. I am able to maintain that level of quality throughout the pipeline because I also control the manufacturing and distribution aspects.”



Roz Liang wears jewelry of her own design.

While Liang has no formal training as a designer, she has always been a lover of beautiful things and at least an amateur practitioner of their creation. Rosaline Jewelry started out as more of an avocation than an incubating business. “But then the entrepreneurship bug hit me again in 2003. My IT firm had been very successful, and I found myself with a valuable collection of resources in China and America that would allow me to cut out the middleman, which represents the biggest obstacle in this kind of business,” she says.

No middleman means low overhead, and

buyers benefit from dealing directly with the designer and manufacturer on every order. It’s a concept that enables Dandelion Global to maintain a robust private-label jewelry business along with its own Rosaline Jewelry line.

A self-taught designer, Liang skillfully uses a colorful palette to evoke imagination and imbue her handcrafted designs with elegance. She uses only semi-precious and exotic stones of the highest grade, all hand-selected for their beauty, color, and quality, as well as the role each will play in her unique creations. Shortly after the launch of Rosaline Jewelry, the line was featured on the QVC and HSN shopping channels and sold out on both shows.

Some high-profile customers have acknowledged the value equation inherent in Liang’s business model, most notably Sands Corporation, a Fortune 500 company that operates more than a dozen luxury hotels, resorts, and casinos around the world. In 2012, Rosaline Jewelry became

the innovative hotelier’s very first licensee with the creation of an exclusive Sands Jewelry by Rosaline Jewelry line. In fact, Liang counts the media launch party for the line at the world-famous Marina Bay Sands in Singapore as one of the two most defining moments of her life. The other was her invitation to Beijing to speak at the opening ceremony of the 60th National Day of China in 2009. “I am so blessed that after my life adventure in the U.S. for the past 23 years, I have that recognition from my motherland,” she says.

Secrets of SUCCESS

Rosaline Jewelry

1 Believe in yourself first; the best guiding star shines from within.

2 Have passion in what you do.

3 Nurture a “whatever it takes” attitude for the entrepreneurial journey.

Mike McDermott is a business journalist based in Carmel, New York. The business people profiled in this column are clients of Northwestern Mutual. If you know someone you think would make a good subject for Creative Business, please contact *Creative Living* editor Catherine O’Neill Grace at cgrace@tmgcustommedia.com.