

DELIVERING STYLE TO SENIORS

A mobile retailer with a unique idea, TaylorMarie's, enjoys steady growth and offers franchise opportunities throughout the nation and in Chicago. IVY GRACIE INTERVIEW



Left to right Heidi Welbig, founder and president of Minneapolis-based TaylorMarie's; a selection of accessories.

IT'S ONE OF THOSE why-didn't-I-think-of-that ideas and it's filling the void in a market that was previously untapped. Now, after seven years of perfecting and growing the concept, Heidi Welbig, President of Minneapolis-based TaylorMarie's - a mobile clothing retailer for seniors - is expanding her brand of shopping with franchise offerings across the country and into Chicago.

TaylorMarie's was founded on the concept of bringing fashionable women's clothing and accessories from respected, high quality brands right to their customers. Their goal is to recreate the total shopping experience of a department store for the women they serve in their own community.

"After watching my own grandmother experience difficulty shopping after her stroke, I realized that this was a much needed and beneficial service. When I show up the women express gratitude and relief that they are able to experience independent shopping in the convenience of their own community. Its very rewarding on many levels."

STEADILY SUCCESSFUL

Heidi called on assisted living facilities, senior centers and senior housing developments, offering her unique brand of shopping to their residents - scheduled onsite retail events featuring up-to-the-minute brand name clothing and accessories. She encouraged shoppers to try on

items in their own rooms and staged fashion shows starring the seniors. And it worked: TaylorMarie's grew from six clothing racks serving 10 facilities to 19 racks serving 157 facilities.

But that should come as no surprise.

The senior market controls over 50 percent of the discretionary income in the U.S and is estimated to grow by 81 percent in the next 25 years. And by filling a void in that market, Heidi has consistently generated brisk sales, even in the midst of the current economic malaise. "Last year was the most challenging year I've had," she admits. "But I still eked out a profit and expanded the business."

Bolstered by a steadily burgeoning bottom line, Heidi decided to branch out. "I thought, 'We have to allow other women to have this opportunity,'" she says. "There aren't a lot of things that are really interesting for a woman to open and this is a great business." Franchising offered a feasible solution.

THE FRANCHISE ADVANTAGE

The practice of using another company's successful business model, franchising offers the person with an entrepreneurial spirit the chance to open a business without all the headaches of a typical start-up. In return for a franchising fee and an initial investment, the franchisee receives brand identification, training and a proven marketing system.

"We have everything you need to start this business," Heidi explains. "We have a Web site and literature. I know what to buy - I've been doing it for over seven years - plus I have the

contacts with all the vendors. If you were to go to market and try to figure out what to buy, I don't know how long it would take you. No one could do this and have the profit margins we have, because we're able to buy in large quantities."

Heidi recently inked her first franchise deal in Maryland, and within a month of signing the documents, the franchisee booked 45 appointments. "She's already profitable and it's only been three months," Heidi reports.

COMING TO CHICAGO

Even though she's registered in a number of states, Heidi's zeroing in on the potential she sees in the Chicagoland market. "There are so many facilities [in Minneapolis]; I can't even imagine what Chicago has. And no one else is doing it." She's already fielding requests for shows from senior facilities in the area.

"There's a social aspect to it," Heidi says of the business. "It's business-oriented, fashion-oriented and senior-oriented. And I have three kids so I always take six weeks off in the summer. That's a huge bonus for me."

And the bottom line? "It's a sellable business. If you build up a nice territory I think you'll get your investment back triple fold. So you [increase] your investment, you make a living while you run it, you have a lot of satisfaction and you have something that you've been able to grow. That's phenomenal."

For information about franchise opportunities with TaylorMarie's, visit www.taylormariesapparel.com/franchise.html.