



Courtesy of The Los Angeles Sock Market

The Ways of the Web

Online retailers have their own specific needs for marketing and merchandising hosiery as well. While the online world is an ideal vehicle for the hosiery and sock industry (as sizing, cost, and warehousing do not pose the same challenges as regular apparel), what they lack in storefronts and sophisticated lighting they must make up for in other ways. **Sock Dreams**, a sock and hosiery website, has been keeping its customers in quirky, comfy, and sexy styles

since 2000. Its merchandising niche is providing an array of socks, hosiery, and accessories from around the world. Many styles are even made exclusively to Sock Dreams' specifications, based on feedback and requests from customers.

The site also has its own sock blog that acts as a newsletter and invites guest bloggers as well. This creates an interactive relationship with customers, who will then toggle back to the online store to find more information about products mentioned in the blog. Perhaps they'll even buy merchandise they otherwise would have ignored. "We'll continue to add new socks nearly every day," says Sock Dreams co-owner **Niqkita** via her blog. "Shipping will still be free for orders placed online, and we'll keep adding to the site features and customer service options."

Websites can also offer brick-and-mortar companies an extra hand in merchandising hosiery. Sparx

offers a website that features personalized accounts for customers who want to be notified of exclusive offers and new product releases, whereas **Hue's** online presence features interactive components, including a color profile and "hueoscope." The color profile attaches moods to customers' color selections, while the hueoscope offers lighthearted insight for customers' hosiery preferences based on their astrological signs. These devices draw customers into an interactive relationship. They may read their personal hueoscopes, return to the online store to view its predictions of their style preferences, and perhaps even purchase those items.

Step Away From the Box

The aforementioned marketing tactics definitely represent creative thinking that targets the end user, which seems to be exactly what the sock and hosiery industry needs. "The specialty retailer has to market more directly to the consumer," notes Cohen, who advocates featuring products "aggressively because competition is minimal. There is an absence of retailers in the hosiery niche ... Consumers were clamoring for footless tights this season, but were hard-pressed to find them due to a lack of retailers that even carried them."

The moral of the story is that there is plenty of business out there. Once the inventory is selected, the way that the products are marketed and presented may be the next big factor in determining whether a store's socks and legwear department performs in the red or the black. By using eye-catching displays, the power of the Internet, and a little creativity, retailers can entice customers to choose from some of the most stylish looks in the world...even if all they're looking for are white tube socks. ■



Courtesy of Hue



Courtesy of Hue

"Hosiery is definitely a fashion accessory."

—Marshal Cohen