

Extra Credits

Add-on sales truly add up, resulting in a better bottom line for children's shoe retailers.

BY JAMIE WETHERBE



BabyLegs

It wasn't easy for Marsha Hartshorn, Wee Ones' vice president of sales and marketing, to convince "old shoe dogs" they could boost revenues as much as 15 percent with hair ribbons. But once in their stores, she says new accounts are often amazed at the volume they sell in hair accessories for girls. "I'll have a retailer call and say, 'We didn't sell a lot of shoes today, but we sold \$300 in bows,'" Hartshorn notes.

From jewelry to puzzles and art, add-on items for kids can mean big business for children's footwear retailers. Even obvious extras can make for a better bottom line. "In a year, we sell \$300,000 just in socks," says Andy Harris, owner of three Harry Harris Shoes for Children locations in Los Angeles. Not every add-on will sell well, of course, but retailers are committed to finding out what works—often by trial and error. At Wee Soles, a children's footwear and apparel boutique in Los Angeles, "We simply need to keep buying accessories," says co-owner Darcy Rosenberg. "The markup is so good," she adds, noting it can run up to 65 percent.

Retail consultant Jim Dion estimates that add-ons can account for at least 20 percent of retailers' revenues—but, he notes, accessories don't sell themselves. "The best sales as-

sociates are nothing more and nothing less than teachers," Dion says. A short product demonstration—even simply handing a customer an item—can encourage sales. "People won't buy what they don't see," he explains. "Most customers are ready, willing and able to spend more money," especially if it saves them a trip to another store.

For example, Ugg boots are still the top sellers at many children's shoe stores, and waterproofing sprays and cleaners that will make them last longer are easy upsell items. "High-end customers who spend \$125 on Uggs [for their kids] want to protect their purchase," says Matthew Brooks, regional manager for Brooks Shoes for Kids, which has 11 locations throughout California.

The trick it seems is finding the right mix of add-on products that enhance, protect or simply make shoe shopping more fun. Here's a list of tips to help you get the most out of this product category:

1 COMPLETE THE OUTFIT

The add-on has a lot to do with fashion, according to Sonia Ron, accessories buyer for Brooks Shoes. "Purses and gloves have faded away," she explains. "Tights, socks, bows and headbands are in." To keep shoppers stylish, Ron stocks

WHAT'S HOT

stores with colorful add-ons to match to a pair of shoes, including 50 to 75 different bows as well as leggings, socks and capri tights in patterns and solids. "Girls like to match," she says. "We have to have the whole outfit." It's also easy to talk customers into buying a little extra something for a special occasion, like a velvet bow or a satin headband that reflects their new footwear.

While many retailers rotate accessories seasonally, Ron switches up her accessories two to three times a season and fills in items on a weekly basis, so it's no surprise that 70 percent of the store's shoe sales also include an add-on.

2 SELL OFF YOUR WALLS

Add-ons can take floor space away from shoes, but certain retailers have utilized their creativity by turning accessories into décor. Rosenberg of Wee Soles created a gallery of sorts with an awkward, hard-to-use space. "I had a hallway I didn't know what to do with," she says. Now Rosenberg displays local artists' works as well as children's portraits taken by a local photographer—both of which have proven extremely popular with her clientele. Prices range from \$15 for an unframed print to \$850 for an original framed piece.

Instead of art, Scott Cohen of Newington, CT-based FootPrints hangs kids' rubber boots and raincoats in matching sets from the ceiling. "And they're all for sale," he says.

Hartshorn claims that Wee Ones hair accessories add color and ambience. "That's one reason we do so well [in shoe stores]," she explains. "Footwear isn't very colorful." While accessories can spice up a store's decor, Hartshorn recommends retailers keep their focus on the footwear. "Too many add-ons cut down visibility of the shoes," she says. "Make it warm and colorful but not cluttered."

3 DON'T FORGET THE BOYS

With all the focus on girls' accessories, add-ons for boys are often overlooked. Wee Soles has found a niche by offering high-end extras for boys. "Quality boys' socks are hard to find," Rosenberg says. "All that's really out there for boys are chains like Old Navy and Target, and parents are getting sick of it." Cakewalk, Stride Rite, Country Kids and MP Socks have become strong sellers at her store. "Once we have them [in stock], they go fast," she notes. Name-brand look-alike sunglasses have become another top-selling boys' accessory year-round—especially aviator styles. "We cannot keep them, even in winter," Rosenberg says.

4 APPEASE THE KIDS

Brooks Shoes has found a new way to keep kids entertained during a shopping spree: the store displays Jibbitz, the popular shoe charms for Crocs, in a glass case near the counter. While their parents shop, kids often sort through the bin to find their favorites. "Kids get attached while mom or dad is shopping," Brooks explains. "People buy five, six, seven at a time, not just one." This hands-on approach also works well with other items. Melissa & Doug puzzles displayed around the store provide a great distraction for bored children, whose parents typically end up buying one.

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Bradshaw's Children Shoes, Arlington, VA

Girls' shoes: Crocs' fur-lined Mammoths; Stride Rite's Adria black patent Mary Janes.

Boys' shoes: Stride Rite oxford Tumble.

Add-ons: Jefferies seamless socks; Beary Basics tutus.

Shoofly, New York

Girls' shoes: Naturino boots and Mary Janes; Ágatha Ruiz de la Prada Mary Janes.

Boys' shoes: Geox and Naturino sneakers.

Add-ons: Elite skull caps and polar hats with ear flaps; Rachel Weissman hair clips.

Brown's Shoe Fit Company, Durango, CO

Girls' shoes: Keen Newport H2 sandals.

Boys' shoes: Keen Targhee lace-ups.

Add-ons: SmartWool socks; Wigwam socks, especially the Hiker outdoor style.

Harry Harris Shoes, Los Angeles

Girls' shoes: Tall and short Ugg boots in chestnut; Kid Express utility Mary Janes.

Boys' shoes: New Balance and Adidas sneakers; Jumping Jacks Nicholas oxfords.

Add-ons: Jefferies socks with triple cuffs for girls and quarter socks for boys; Kidorable umbrellas featuring fireman or fairy prints.

City Mouse, Chicago

Girls' shoes: Pediped Giselle;

Wee Squeak Mary Janes.

Boys' shoes: Pediped Liam; Keen Briggs.

Add-ons: Jibbitz; Pea Soup pinch clips with felt bows.

Sole Food, Seattle

Girls' shoes: See Kai Run Stella Mary Janes; Primigi Azalea Mary Janes.

Boys' shoes: See Kai Run trainers.

Add-ons: SmartWool socks for infants; Country Kids cotton tights.

New Shoes for Kids, San Francisco

Girls' shoes: Stride Rite Superball LP sneakers; Skechers slip-on Bikers.

Boys' shoes: Stride Rite Superball sneakers; Skechers Galactics sneakers

Add-ons: Tic Tac Toe white calf-length socks and leggings.

Tip Top Kids, New York

Girls' shoes: Primigi loafers; Kenneth Cole Reaction ballet flats.

Boys' shoes: Primigi waterproof boots; Naturino boat shoes.

Add-ons: Jibbitz; Boot Bop pins for boots.