

# In Focus: Business Insights

## RETAIL

### M. Gemi Leverages PredictSpring To Bolster In-store Experience

- The retailer spends time talking to customers and identifying their needs while leveraging data to inform product development.

BY ARTHUR ZACZKIEWICZ

As fashion brands and retailers respond to a changing consumer shopping environment, the role of physical stores is rapidly evolving. Brands are rethinking formats, inventory and in-store technologies to adapt to these changes.

For fashion footwear retailer M. Gemi, the secret sauce is a combination of offering high-quality products at a value-driven price point served by attentive sales associates in a well-designed store – and a traveling pop-up store and truck that serves Italian-style gelato.

M. Gemi was founded in 2015. Last year it opened a store in SoHo and later opened one in Boston selling men's and women's shoes that are handmade in Italy. The retailer sources products directly from small, family-owned factories. There's no middle man, which allows for more accessible price points. Prices range from about \$200 to \$400, and each week new offerings are showcased online and in stores.

Last week, mobile commerce platform provider PredictSpring presented a fireside chat with Lesley Mottla, senior vice president of product and customer experience at M. Gemi, and moderated by Andrea Wasserman, a retail and technology marketer, at the brand's SoHo store to discuss the "store of the future." M. Gemi partnered with PredictSpring on an in-store POS system that helps sales associates improve interactions with shoppers.

After an introduction by Nitin Mangtani,



Men's shoes from M. Gemi.

founder and chief executive officer of PredictSpring, Wasserman and Mottla engaged in a half-hour discussion on how the brand differentiates itself in the market and how it is using technology to create a better shopping experience.

"M. Gemi was launched in 2015 and we were inspired by Italian craftsmanship and the beauty of artisan craftsmanship of handmade Italian shoes," Mottla explained. "That was kind of our passion and inspiration with the business. Basically, what we wanted to do was bring those shoes to life in kind of the old way, which is showing the artisanship and craftsmanship, but selling it in a very new kind of way."

That "new way" means doing shoe releases each Monday in new styles in an "affordable way."

"So, versus traditional retail, you might get an M. Gemi shoe for \$200 dollars where another luxury brand would be two or three times that amount," Mottla said. In regard to the price points, buying direct facilitates better costs. "We're working with artisans throughout Italy, and have relationships directly with them. And because we have a direct relationship with those craftsmen there's no middle man or any other intermediaries in the process, so we're really able to control all the pricing and offer something that's typically, like I said, a third less than other retailers. But the quality is the same. It's all the same materials."

Mottla said the brand is "very passionate about the customer experience and figuring out what drives our customers and what they're interested in." She said the

company spends a "lot of time talking to customers, understanding styles, things that they choose." When asked about the physical store environment and the M. Gemi vintage truck that toured the country this past summer selling shoes and serving gelato, Mottla noted that the brand launched online first, but the stores "are a place to bring the brand to life."

"People still love and learn a lot by seeing and touching and feeling, and obviously trying on our shoes," she explained. "So, we can really use it to bring the brand to life and introduce people to the brand."

A "high-touch" level of service is also key, she said adding that the brand uses technology "to collect information about that interaction," Mottla said. "So, if you're coming here and you try on 10 different styles, what we want to do is make sure we're recording that in a very casual kind of way, but then that information carries with you for the next time you go online and you purchase."

Gather data and insights is used to "really understand what fit is best for you, what size is best for you," Mottla said. "We're starting to understand the styles that are great for you as well." She also noted that experiences in stores drives sales online. And vice versa.

"We built the company on data and having a really good data foundation," Mottla added. "The tools that we use, all the technology that we use, also accommodates that. We're collecting that information back to our workshops in Italy, and using it also to help us predict. The shoes are made in small quantities because we have releases every Monday. Obviously, we're only making 200 or 300 pairs. It's small batches all the time. So we're using data to really kind of understand what we should make to meet the demand."

With customer engagement, Mottla said the starting point is online first. And with the use of PredictSpring in the store, the goal is to further engage shoppers by making it easy for the sales associate to interact with them. Since the store has a relatively low inventory level, the use of the PredictSpring platform creates an "endless aisle," Mangtani said.

## TEXTILES

### Compression Technology Hosiery Offers Circulation Solution

- Item M6's unique technology promotes circulation and reduces cellulite for Consumers.

BY TRACEY GREENSTEIN

As consumers continually seek ways to combat the travails of aging, the elements and other inescapable conditions, companies such as Item M6 are creating textile solutions to help. In this case, Item M6 is targeting gravity.

The Bavarian-based leg and shapewear company integrated its compression

technology into high-performance yarns that promote circulation and reduce cellulite. Its parent company, Medi, is a global medical compression firm and has been a leader in the category since the 1920's. When Medi saw an opportunity to take its core technology and enter a new market, Item M6 was born. Item M6 was launched in Europe over six years ago and entered the U.S. market in 2014.

Sanaz McCartney, the brand director at Item M6, told WWD, "[Compression] has kind of become a buzzword in the ath-leisure category," she said. "For us, the true benefit of compression is that [it is] promoting and increasing your blood circulation. So, [it's] promoting everything back up to the heart. Gravity takes its impact on us every single day."

Described as a "beauty balm for your legs," Item M6 products feature a unique performance yarn technology that promotes greater circulation to the surface of the skin and combats cellulite, smoothes skin texture and battles bruising, blemishes and spider veins, the company said. Particles of ceramic crystals are melted into the compression high-tech yarn, which enables body heat to be reflected and converted



Compression hosiery by Item M6.

into infrared radiation and ultimately penetrate the surface of the skin to stimulate the breakdown of fat cells. The firm said it recommends wearing the tights eight hours a day, five days a week to reap the maximum benefits.

The ongoing use of compression technology results in micro circulation, lighter feeling legs, higher energy and a regeneration and rejuvenation of the system, the company said. Wearing compression material aids in performance and also recovery, as it helps avoid shin splints or lactic acid buildup.

McCartney told WWD, "[Consumers] don't realize they can actually wear a product that isn't [just] about colors and styles, but actually something that [is] such a foundation piece that can do something for you, outside of aesthetics. And so we've really kind of disrupted that category a little bit even within our major retailers like Nordstrom and Bloomingdale's. The buyers always say that we're fulfilling a white space." McCartney continued, "Now we have something that makes you not only look good but feel good as well, which I think is really rare in the world of hosiery and shapewear."