



How to run a fashion business (or two!)

Running one boutique is impressive, running two is pretty awe-inspiring! Kirstie Smillie met up with business owner, Liz Trendle to find out her successful formula.

Kirstie: What made you want to open up a fashion boutique?

Liz: I had zero experience in fashion retail, but adored clothes and was frustrated that I couldn't find what I wanted on the high street.

So I opened Catwalk in Godalming in October 2000 and then The Gate followed in 2009.

KS: How would you describe Catwalk and what brands are popular?

LT: Catwalk is very much a local boutique with many of our clients living close and popping in on a regular basis. The collections are affordable and more casual but we always have a good range of dresses for that special occasion. We are one of the largest stockists in Surrey of NYDJ jeans and also carry other denim brands.

We stock popular brands such as Great Plains, Vilagallo, Oui and Part Two, where dresses typically retail at around £60 to £100 and tops range from £30 to £80.

“Buying is one of the best things about my job but also one of the hardest, especially as I have two very different fashion boutiques”

KS: And with The Gate, how do you decide what looks to buy into?

LT: As Guildford is a larger shopping destination and we have a lots of competition, I decided to aim at the luxury market to be different from all the chain stores there, so I chose to stock brands including J Brand, Paige, Hale Bob, Patrizia Pepe plus much more.

It's very important I get the buying right, which involves a lot of trawling about and researching to cherry-pick the brands and styles that I think will work best for our clients.



Liz Trendle

KS: How far ahead do you have to buy collections for seasonal deliveries?

LT: I started buying for Spring Summer 2020 this July as we pre-order 70% of our stock for both stores. This involves a lot of travelling to trade shows, agencies and designers both here in London, Paris and other European cities such as Milan and Berlin.

KS: What would you say are the secrets to success with your business?

LT: We are constantly looking for better brands and new styles. Plus the fact that I have an amazing team of girls in both stores who are all very experienced in styling, are friendly and will go that extra mile for customers. In fact personal customer service is where the bricks and mortar stores can triumph over on-line stores. However you have to keep working hard and be dedicated, as someone once said to me 'Retail is detail!'

“I really think about our clients and I'm always on the look out for new brands wherever I go”

KS: How do you manage to balance work and home life as I hear your family has grown?

LT: Yes, I have four grown up children and now a little grandchild, Gracie, who is nearly one year old. She has already come into Catwalk with me as I love to look after her one day a week, so following in the footsteps of my daughters who both used to work on Saturdays for me! I manage the juggling act as I love what I do.

KS: What are your plans for the future?

LT: Well, next year Catwalk celebrates its 20th birthday and I have lots of plans for making it a birthday to remember....after all who'd have thought we'd still be on Godalming High Street 20 years later!

All clothes from Catwalk boutique, available in a selection of sizes.



Catwalk's Early Autumn Trends

- Colour... go for green or a pink punch
- Skirts... choose straight or fluid
- Animal print... wear as a neutral
- Ankle boots... easy go-to foot wear
- Jeans... find your perfect fit with us



Kirstie's favourite: "I love Catwalk's snake print pleated skirt with a sparkle stripe waistband, it's an all rounder, great for day with looser jumper or in the evening with slinky camisole tucked in under a neat fitting jacket - invest in statement items that can multi task where possible."



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Kirstie Smillie is a Personal Stylist, helping you love your clothes and yourself too.

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