

# Shoe Retailing

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Camtrade Footwear:

# Secret Celebrity and Soft Comfort Create a "Comfort Zone"

SANDRA NEGOVAN

Launched in 2013, Camtrade Footwear brings a fresh concept to the floor, or foot – women's fashion-conscious comfort footwear at comfortable prices.

Although the Boxborough, MA company is a relative newcomer to the industry, its principals have been in the footwear business for many years, with strong backgrounds in wholesaling, retailing and footwear design. President Frank Cammarata has more than 30 years of industry experience, including positions as president of KLAS Shoes subsidiaries Rotasole, Roc-A-Bouts and Zooligans, as well as buyer and divisional merchandise manager at The TJX Companies, Inc. Dick Hartman, senior vice president of sales, has held senior sales positions with leading brands such as Famolare, Penobscot, Eastland and Dexter Shoes. Derek Benson, creative manager and vice president of product

development, has 25 years under his belt with Kenneth Cole, Camuto and Nine West.

## CamTrade

Frank Cammarata recognizes that the company has an interesting dynamic, of retail background merging with wholesale background. The team takes pride in their blend of skills, experiences, and the nuances of the creativity. "That's the essence, the anatomy, of our company. That's why we are where we are today. We are sticking to a strategy, and building it very methodically," Cammarata explains.

### Same Customer, Different Activities

Camtrade's two brands, Secret

Celebrity and Soft Comfort, celebrate their fourth seasons in Fall 2016. They are geared toward the same customer, but approach different segments of her lifestyle – going to work, going clubbing, or going out on a weekend in casual shorts or jeans. With emphasis on color, materials and silhouettes, the little details make the difference. Tasteful ornamentation, embellishments, modern textures, comfort features and timeless styling blend seamlessly to create visually appealing shoes at an affordable and accessible price.

Secret Celebrity is the company's more fashion-oriented brand. Leaning toward the glamorous, the collection is designed for the contemporary woman who desires high-style footwear at affordable prices – and she can find everything she needs within the brand, which features an assortment of updated dress, sporty lifestyle looks, boots,

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These shoes are in Camtrade's Secret Celebrity collection.

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booties and sandals, from opened-up footwear all the way to high heels. Innovations in the insoles, soles and uppers provide comfort. As Hartman notes, "The Secret Celebrity woman is fashionable and young-thinking. She can dress up in the high heels for clubbing or dress down into our sport-type shoes."

Leaning toward more country-road and casual-weekend wear is the company's other brand, Soft Comfort. It includes many sandals and flats that are made for comfort, and have insoles molded with super-soft relaxation technology. "The technology ensures the true flexibility, cushioning and comfort women expect and that they get in much-higher-priced brands," maintains Cammarata. The brand's goal is to have women feel like they are "walking on a cloud." Soft Comfort appeals to a wider demographic as the designs are more contemporary, but still fashionable and on-trend, Hartman adds.

Both Fall 2016 collections feature the continuing trend of ankle-height and tall-shaft boots, plus interesting oxfords, slip-ons, and Mary Jane styles in both brands. The Secret Celebrity line adds chunkier, block-type heels that, according to Hartman, have been well received at FN PLATFORM and regional shows. "It's not even a question of whether the customer wants comfort, she demands it," he notes.

**Common Structure: Price & Consumer**

Although distinctively different in style, the two brands have a commonality of price structure and consumer. Cammarata emphasizes that both brands are at "comfort zone" prices. The suggested retail prices are in "the sweet

spot," with Secret Celebrity at \$49 to \$79 and Soft Comfort at \$39 to \$69, depending on the season and item.

To keep the price point attractive, Camtrade uses faux leather materials for both lines. As he points out, "Even though they are faux leather, we emphasize the material interest, the styling details, the embellishments, and some of the finishes. We create unique styles and patterns through bells and

whistles, and color. We see what we can create with stitching—we can do so much with it. Our factory partners are very adept at working with us on new designs we feel are exclusive, updated and fresh in the market."

Secret Celebrity and Soft Comfort are geared towards women, ranging in age from 30 to 50, with Secret Celebrity a little younger and more trendy, dipping into the 20s; and Soft Comfort going up

to age 60 with day-in and day-out styling. "We want to go after the same customer, and we want her to buy multiple pairs," explains Cammarata, adding, "We were very cognizant of having something that was unique, fresh and somewhat innovative. Some of the design features in both collections include a mid-height wedge, which is really the best height that you can possibly achieve for back issues and foot comfort." The mid-height wedge provides a

# SECRET CELEBRITY®

## *Living it up*



stress-free lift and is contoured to cradle the foot's natural form. Additional cushioning, elasticized uppers and breathable fabric linings with extra backing are used to create an even more appealing

footwear experience.

### Design Is Cornerstone

Derek Benson and his design team shop the marketplace from North



**L to R: Dick Hartman, Derek Benson, Frank Cammarata and Dick Prout**

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America to Europe and interpret what's going on. "Then they make it work within the brand schemes and value pricing wheelhouse that the company subscribes to," says Cammarata. The team looks at toe characteristics, embellishments, outsole components, heels, color, fabrics, finishes, and more. As Cammarata puts it, "Our design team is the cornerstone of our strength and success."

He adds, "It's a team effort as well. We do a lot of product reviews, line closings and style outs on a regular basis. I do rely on people's expertise and background – everyone contributes. It's an art and a science. I create a wide scope and let them have the latitude and flexibility to bring product to the table that's creative and on-trend."

From the beginning, Camtrade was set up to sell and service independent footwear retailers. Hartman recalls that that was one of Cammarata's prime goals when he started the company and it is the mantra they continue to follow. Secret Celebrity and Soft Comfort are currently sold in a number of independent stores, as well as dot-com sites. Working with NSRA, Camtrade has reached out to many retailers and expects to have a lot of them on board heading into fall.

"One of Frank's primary goals [was] to have a continual inventory that [we] could turn for retailers, having our warehouse be an extension of their stockrooms," says Hartman. The investment in inventory benefits independents. An in-stock, open-stock program with significant pairage serves retailers well. Currently, Secret Celebrity has 12 SKUs, with 100 UPCs; Soft Comfort has 15 to 18 SKUs with about 150 UPCs. With import structure and fulfillment centers in Tewksbury and Randolph, MA, fill-ins, test orders, initial orders and reorders are easily filled.

### Quality Control a Matter of Pride

The production of both brands is contracted out, with manufacturing in Southern China. Camtrade has dedicated quality-control people onsite, examining the product well before it is ready to ship. "We are very judicious about quality control. That's something we take a lot of pride in," asserts Cammarata.

Styles in both brands are available in sizes 6 to 11, in medium widths. The company has plans to add wide widths to the mix in order to serve that consumer segment.

Camtrade has advertised both lines in *Footwear News* and *Footwear Plus*, and has strong relationships with women's magazines – including *Marie Claire*, *Teen Vogue* and *Cosmopolitan* – for product placement. Camtrade also works with bloggers who review the shoes. "It's a fun way to get people involved with the product," says Debbie Weisberg, director of marketing and public relations. Facebook and Instagram have proven beneficial, too. "All that, combined with a very integrated marketing approach," Weisberg says, "is definitely beneficial for the retailers as well."



### Camtrade's Soft Comfort brand

Display components for stores are being created, and Weisberg points out that the company will bend over backwards to help retailers with anything they may need in terms of advertising. "We want to be as supportive as possible," she affirms.

The company's sales team presents the brands at regional shows and visits retailers on a regular basis. They are available to provide in-store training on the footwear, plus do trunk shows, if requested. Orders can be placed by phone, fax, or email, making it easy on the retailer.

### Customer Service Hotline

Camtrade's customer service hotline staff is well versed in the comfort and construction features of the brands, and can thoroughly assist retailers. They can be reached at 978-263-1105 or by email at [customerservice@camtradeinc.com](mailto:customerservice@camtradeinc.com).

Although returns are uncommon, Camtrade is supportive and understanding. If a retailer is dissatisfied with a product because of a slight irregularity or situation that was unanticipated, the company welcomes the return with a full credit.

Hartman emphasizes that Cammarata looks at the business from a retail perspective. "We felt from Day One there was no better organization in the country as far as paying attention to retailers as NSRA," he says earnestly. "We are proud to be part of that, and I think retailers would benefit from the knowledge that we have from different avenues in the footwear industry."

Camtrade's goal is to build two iconic footwear brands in the women's footwear business with Secret Celebrity and Soft Comfort. "It's the long-term vision," Cammarata concedes, "But it starts now with the right independents, the right e-commerce accounts, having great product, great design, the right pricing, and making sure the consumer responds in a positive way. Short term, it's very methodical, blocking and tackling, and sticking to the basics and fundamentals. We are dedicated to this concept of brand building and we believe that the market needs fresh labels and fresh product. People are looking for newness. We are in this for the long haul."

For more information, visit [www.camtradeinc.com](http://www.camtradeinc.com), or contact Samantha Schulz at telephone 978-263-1105 or email [info@camtradeinc.com](mailto:info@camtradeinc.com). ■