

July/Aug. 2009

# RetailMerchandiser

[retail-merchandise.com](http://retail-merchandise.com)

## STRATEGIES FOR GROWTH


Building a Better Bulls Eye

Learn a thing or two from the president of Target as he outlines how the corporation is mixing it up to stay relevant to consumers.



Success stories from the retail industry

# RETAIL REPORT

A man with dark hair, smiling, wearing a white blazer over a brown t-shirt with a graphic. He is standing outdoors in front of a chain-link fence and trees with autumn foliage. He is leaning on a wooden railing.

*"At Bretton's, people said the shoes were gorgeous and asked which ones were the most comfortable. At the orthopedic store, people said the shoes were comfortable but wanted better styles. The idea of fusing the two together was an obvious one."*

**-Ron White, CEO and creative director  
of his namesake retail chain**

## MORE SUCCESS STORIES

Ron White.....	26
Henry's Foods.....	29
Fast-Fix Jewelry.....	34
Highmark.....	37
Gas Mart USA.....	40
Nice N Easy Grocery.....	42
99 Ranch Market.....	44
Spinx Company.....	47
Garden of Eden.....	50
Pierce's Supermarket.....	52
Pat's Foods.....	56
Spoon Me.....	58
Mountain Equipment.....	60



# Fashionable Comfort



This Canadian-based creative director blends the best of healthy and happy feet with high-fashion shoe designs.

In 1993, Ron White was a young man in his 20s living in a basement apartment and using Visa cash advances and small family loans to get his business off the ground. Today, the name Ron White resonates with Canadians and Americans alike as the place to go and the person to see if you want your feet to feel fashionably wonderful.

## PROFILE



**Ron White**  
Ron White,  
CEO and  
creative  
director

[www.ronwhite.ca](http://www.ronwhite.ca)

HQ Toronto, Ontario

Number of locations 6

Number of e-boutiques 1

Number of employees 50

Six freestanding boutiques and an online e-boutique, as well as \$10 million a year in revenue, support that reputation and illustrate the company's standing as the go-to shoe store in Canada with shoes for both men and women that please the eye and the lower back. The perfected blending of these characteristics came from White's extensive experience within the shoe industry.

Fresh out of college, White started working in the shoe department of Bretton's, which was trying to be the Canadian version of Nordstrom, especially in the shoe department. After getting to know the fashion side of the shoe industry, White then moved to work at an orthopedic shoe store with a podiatrist and a chiropractor.

After learning about orthotics, biomechanics, and foot and gait analysis for two years, White decided to put his overall expertise together, making a name for himself and answering to the call of the many consumers he'd come into contact with over the years.

"At Bretton's, people said the shoes were gorgeous and asked which ones were the most comfortable," said White, CEO and creative director of his namesake retail chain. "At the orthopedic store, people said the shoes were comfortable but wanted better styles. The idea of fusing the two together was an obvious one."



White started out with an enterprise called The Foot Shoppe, which catered toward walking, casual, and athletic styles. Over the years, he realized his clientele were looking for more, and he began to change the product mix to match Ron White's current tagline: fashion that feels wonderful.

"In Canada, I've made myself the authority on shoes over a long period of time," said White. "I'm the go-to guy because I've got the biomechanics and orthotic background mixed with proving to people I've got a fashion product that is cutting edge."

#### More than fashion

Ron White's product mix ranges in price from \$99 to \$530 and includes Ron White's new collection called All Day Heels, which is rolling out this August. Handpicked by White each season, the new line of shoes has enabled the entrepreneur to expand upon the lessons he's learned from famous designers such as Stuart Weitzman and Donald Pliner into a product that White believes will change the lives of women everywhere.

"All Day Heels is my specialty," said White. "The line basically asks if there is such a thing as a career pump, and is there a heel that women can wear from day into evening and not have to kill their feet? We think the answer is yes."

But just as with his shoes, White understands fashion isn't everything; comfort counts just as much. So when customers walk into a Ron White store, they're not only taken in by the styles available but also the atmosphere White has perfected over the years.

The champagne and vanilla-striped walls are accented with chocolate brown paneling and a chocolate brown exterior. Stores are carpeted in berber and include custom leather couches.

In addition, there are four pillars of the business that make it successful: people, product, PR, and social responsibility.

From the people standpoint, all employees must go through RWU, Ron White University, which begins with a 65-page training guide potential employees must study after going through a minimum of four interviews and being chosen to continue. During the six-month RWU training period, employees go through three levels of training, from basic to advanced to footwear specialist training.

"Once you pass the training and the test at the end of each of these training milestones, you become a footwear specialist," said White. "We don't have sales associates working in our store; we have people who can recommend the latest, greatest, hot and fashionable shoes based on your specific requirements."

Employees aren't the only ones going through interviews, however. Customers start out by sitting in the get-to-know-each-other chair where they are served with Ron White luxury water and treated to a shiatsu foot massage—completing the spa experience that starts with each store's décor. Employees are responsible for finding out where customers' aches and pains are, any foot or lower ailments they have, and then finding the right shoe for their fashion and physical needs.

"Our products focus on fashion that feels wonderful," said White. "Our people focus on directing our customers to the right pair of shoes to ensure each person walks out of our stores understanding that tagline."

#### Giving back

The third and fourth pillars of the Ron White business are PR and social responsibility and are both heavily influenced by White's upbringing. On the PR side, White's active response to press inquiries led him to Canada's number one morning





talk show where he educated the masses on how to fuse biomechanics with fashion.

He's often on "Entertainment Tonight Canada" to comment on celebrity fashion, and he's recently been contacted to do his own shoe-based TV show. "I couldn't always afford to run full-page ads in magazines when I first got going, so I learned how to draw attention to my stores by word of mouth," said White. "These appearances have driven more traffic to our stores."

The fourth pillar began when White was still living in that basement apartment, borrowing money from Visa and family

members. "Even when I couldn't afford it, I was thinking about how I could give back," he said.

It started with a shoe drive that has over the past 15 years turned into the largest shoe drive in Canada. Every winter, Ron White gathers gently worn winter shoes and boots, cleans them, and distributes them to women's and homeless shelters. To date, the company has given away 18,000 pairs of shoes.

In recent years, White has added the White Knight Gala to his list of social contributions and has been selling a breast cancer-inspired handbag for 12 years to honor his aunt, who was one of the first family members to fund his enterprise, but also to honor his female customers and the struggles they have with the disease.

Unlike most other retailers who only offer a percentage of the proceeds from their breast cancer awareness giveaways, 100% of the proceeds from each Ron White breast cancer handbag go to the cause. So whether it's through a superior product, a spa-like in-store experience, or a fashionable pink bag, the success of the Ron White business has been possible due to a focus on giving back, one foot at a time. ☺

*"DistribuTech's Direct Marketing leadership has helped us retain our clients and grow our business" - Ron White*



**DistribuTech**

CREATING YOUR DREAM BUSINESS

1.800.361.9494

e-mail: [info@distributech.ca](mailto:info@distributech.ca)

[www.distributech.ca](http://www.distributech.ca)

