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Retail Experience Holds Key to Stanley's Success

JCK-Jewelers Circular Keystone

By Glen A. Beres, Contributing Editor -- 6/1/2005

Since May 2002, Caroline Stanley has run her own company, Red Jewel Inc., a firm in Redondo Beach, Calif., that provides marketing, communications, and consulting to the industry.

Her client list includes the Centurion Show and the Jewelers Vigilance Committee, as well as trade organizations, international consulting companies and designers, retailers, and manufacturers. In 2004, Stanley—a past co-president of the Los Angeles Chapter of the Women's Jewelry Association—created and chaired the Women in the Know committee, which held a full-day seminar of education and networking. Now in its second year, Women in the Know is growing exponentially and also is writing a book for consumers on wearing and caring for jewelry.

Stanley traces much of her success to the solid retail education she acquired growing up in a jewelry family and 15 years in her family's jewelry store, Stanley Jewelers Gemologist Inc. in North Little Rock, Ark. During her time in Arkansas, she also served as president of the Arkansas Jewelers Association.

In 1996, Stanley broke away from the family business and moved to California to accept a position with Platinum International as communications coordinator. At PGI, Stanley's retail skills translated well to the trade arena. She became the spokesperson for platinum jewelry and helped develop educational programs, communications materials, and marketing plans. Stanley's efforts were rewarded in 1998 when she received WJA's first Special Services Award for Excellence.

Also in 1998, Stanley hooked up with then-Jewelers of America director of education, Bev Hori, to launch Jewelry University, an event-based jewelry course designed to bring basic product knowledge to a wide audience. Over the years, the course has expanded dramatically and is now sold on video through JA.

By 1999, Stanley was ready for a new challenge, and she moved to New York City to become JA's director of marketing and communications. Once again, she found that her retail background gave her an advantage in addressing the needs of jewelers. She helped develop a "new look" for JA, which included creating the Retailer Identity Kit, developing new marketing materials and videos, and redesigning the Web site.

Building on her longstanding passion for technology, Stanley also assumed the position of vice president of commerce for JNet, a joint effort between JA and the Manufacturing Jewelers and Suppliers of America to offer a full-service e-commerce-enabled portal serving retailers and suppliers. Stanley helped run the operation out of its Dallas headquarters. When financial constraints prompted JA to close the Dallas office in 2001 and move JNet operations to New York City, Stanley managed in-house. Stanley became director of marketing and development for JVC, where she helped launch J-1 (Jewelers Board of Appraisal Review), wrote the Retailer's Legal Handbook, and redesigned the Web site, among other initiatives. She stayed at JVC for a year before returning to California to launch her own business.

In an exclusive interview with *JCK*, Stanley discusses how her combination of firsthand retail experience, extensive marketing and communications skills, and passion for technology have guided her career.

JCK: What are the most important things you learned from your retail experience, and how has it helped you?

CS: I feel that everything I've done relates back to the job skills I learned while working behind the counter of my jewelry store. People skills would be at the top of the list. How to talk to people and develop relationships is a critical skill in any position. Also, developing selling skills, developing an ad, and creating a marketing plan are all things I learned as a retailer. Of course, the product and industry knowledge you learn at retail is tremendous. And when you are part of your own business, you wear many hats and nothing is off limits—it's a great learning opportunity.

JCK: How did your retail experience help you at PGI?

CS: I went from being responsible for a lot of areas in a good-size business to focusing on one area in a much bigger business, so it was an adjustment. But PGI was still fairly new at this point, and we were trying to build a stronger

presence for platinum. I traveled the country, talking to retailers about selling platinum, went on HSN as a platinum spokesperson, helped put together the Platinum Starter Kit for jewelers that never sold platinum before, helped build a Web site, wrote lots of PGI communications materials, and helped customers develop their own Web sites and materials. In trying to get all these retailers to "buy into" platinum, I think it made a huge difference to them that I had an Internet background. I had credibility and talked their language.

JCK: *What prompted you to launch Jewelry 101, and how did it connect to your PGI experience?*

CS: In traveling around the country to speak to retailers about platinum, I saw a huge gap in product knowledge at these stores—particularly with major chains and mass retailers that have to train sales associates with no prior jewelry background and have a high staff turnover. We were looking for a cost-effective way to train a lot of people. And in order to broaden the program's appeal, we needed to offer it in all jewelry categories, not just platinum. So I partnered with Horie from JA, and we were able to get all the major associations on board (JA, PGI, Diamond Promotion Service, Council, American Gem Trade Association, Cultured Pearl Association). We launched the program in 1998 in two cities and everyone did an hour talk. Usually, when you do these kinds of speaking events, you get 25 to 30 people. We got 100 people. We got hugely successful. We expanded it to four cities in 1999 and put it on video in 2000—mainly because it was so hard to coordinate everyone's schedule to participate.

JCK: *What was the biggest challenge in moving over to JA and working on JNet, and how did your past experience help you there?*

CS: Working for PGI was a great learning experience, but by 1999 I was ready for something new. I was offered an opportunity at JA and accepted it. My retail experience, and my experience with JA from the other side as an affiliate was president of the Arkansas Jewelers Association, really made a difference. I already knew all about how JA worked and it was an easy transition for me. In fact, the hardest part was probably moving to New York and getting used to the culture there. As for JNet, I was fascinated by the concept that we could pull the industry together in one spot. At that time the Internet was still fairly new, and one of the things that so many retailers lacked was a good Web site. It was frustrating because a lot of people back then were scared to get involved and put time and money into it. Some retailers still don't have an Internet presence. The Internet isn't going away; if you're not on it, you are missing out on a major business channel.

JCK: *How did working for JVC compare to your previous positions?*

CS: When JA closed the JNet Dallas office, I was looking for a new challenge, and I found it at JVC. I learned so much from JVC is a tiny group that does so much, but doesn't get nearly enough credit. The most valuable thing I learned there was a better understanding of the legalities of being in business. I spent a lot of time learning about appraisals, FTC guidelines, copyright issues, etc. My Internet background was helpful, as I worked on revamping the Web site.

JCK: *What made you decide to move back to California in 2002 and launch your own business? How did this compare with what you had done previously?*

CS: September 11, 2001, caused a shift in my thinking. I had spent the past decade following my career around the country. After September 11, I decided it was time to refocus on the personal life I had left behind in California. So I moved back and was very lucky that JVC stayed on as a client. I had a meeting in Las Vegas that year with Howard Hauben from the Centurion Show, and he hired me to do marketing and public relations for the event. I also started working with clients on marketing plans and press kits to help them get launched, consulting on trade shows, Internet development, trade education, and working with law firms as an expert witness. I find that people want to hire me to do whatever I can do. I might be revising HTML code for a Web site in the morning, writing a press release in the afternoon, and working on graphics together for another client in the evening. I enjoy having the run of the show, like when I was working in retail. But working for clients is also similar to the corporate environments I had at PGI, JA, and JVC. And working on initiatives like WJA's Women in the Know conference is very gratifying because there's such a need for it, and it gives me a chance to give something back. There may be no monetary rewards, but the great friends and business connections I have made as a result make it well worth it.

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