

MADE TO MEASURE

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Manufacturing Better Services

School Uniform Retailers Find Manufacturers Are Helping Them Improve Sales More Than Ever

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Years ago, school uniforms meant private schools, limited locations and lots of pre-measuring. Today, with more schools wearing uniforms and more retailers carrying them, the partnership between manufacturer and retailer is more important than ever. When speaking with retailers about their success with uniforms, two things keep coming up – choosing the right school uniform partner and assuring good customer experience.

“It’s a partnership. If I succeed, they succeed. They want to make me a success and I appreciate that,” says Dorothy Moore, owner of Moore Seigler Sports World in Shreveport, La., speaking about her two most helpful uniform partners, Classroom School Uniforms and Elder Manufacturing. “They are my experts. They educate me on what they are seeing in the market nationwide and how I can improve my business. It’s a wonderful partnership.”

Keith Beile of Elder Manufacturing says his philosophy is to focus on the retailers and to help them make money.

Andy Beattie of Strategic Partners, makers of Classroom School Uniforms, says, “we understand what our retail partners need to improve their business, and we deliver. To be more efficient, Strategic Partners is opening a new 300,000-square-foot distribution facility in Texas that will shorten delivery time and lower freight costs for retailers in the central and southern part of the country.”

Manufacturers are adding online capabilities to help their retail partners. Classroom School Uniforms is launching Classroom Uniforms.biz to provide retailers access to their inventory in real time, 24 hours a day/seven days a week. Royal Park has also initiated an online ordering system to accommodate its customers’ need for access to their inventory and to check on orders.

“If a retailer needs a certain size or item, the order is placed immediately and shipped immediately,” says Steve Royal of Royal Park.

Heidi Granatelli of Collette’s Uniforms in Glendale, Ariz. agrees that choosing the right supplier is important. When referring to her top uniform manufacturers, Classroom for her girls program and Dickies for her boys, she says, “They have year-round stock, awesome quality at decent prices. The styles are up to date. Even if it’s \$16.99 for an item, my customers know it’s going to last.”

Since children grow throughout the school year, it’s important for uniform retailers to have year-round access to quality inventory. Jane Thomas of School Uniform Warehouse (school-uniforms.com) agrees. “This year, Classroom is helping me drop ship my Internet orders. This will save me time and money and allow my customers to get their products a lot faster.” Thomas’ focus is now on how to maximize her relationship with her customers, not handling order fulfillment. While Royal Park has experimented with drop shipments for customers, they agree that time is of the

essence. Most orders are shipped to their retailers within 24-48 hours.

When asked how they improve their school uniform business, all these retailers agree, the customer experience is most important.

Have the right selection

“When parents first hear ‘school uniforms,’ they often think military. I like to work with a manufacturer that has a lot of options for colors and sizes. Parents and students can then pick what they like, show their individuality and still be in the program”, says Thomas. Moore agrees, “I can only carry so many brands. When



TOOLBOX: SCHOOL UNIFORMS

the product is good and the manufacturers are willing to help me so I buy the right things, its easier for everyone.” Hair accessories, belts, socks and backpacks are also part of a successful school uniform program.

Be approachable

All these retailers agree that being helpful and approaching the local schools is vital to their individual success. By offering to help schools with information, fashion shows or showcasing samples in the schools, retailers become more involved in their communities and gain a positive reputation of wanting to help. The more help a retailer can give to parents, the more new and repeat business they will have.

“Having a real knowledge of product and direct communication with the manufacturer is also key,” says Thomas. “If a school needs information, my manufacturers are available to help.” While all the manufacturers featured here work with retailers on improving their business, only Classroom offers information about the benefits of uniforms, sample surveys and other benefits so that schools can have an informed dialogue about school uniforms.

Advertise

Place an ad in the local yellow pages or on the Internet telling parents and educators that you carry school uniforms. “We now work with a school more than 40 minutes away they use our Web site euniformstore.com to place orders. They found us from an ad in the yellow pages,” says Granatelli. Thomas agrees; she has

customers from all over the world for whom shipping charges are often larger than the overall order.

Customization & Personalization

Embroidery and silk-screening services are a great opportunity for a smaller retailer to show why they are often the best retail partners. These natural services allow

a school to show more school spirit, and many retailers will work with schools so that product is available in the retail store and the school store. In addition, some retailers also have tailors on staff so hems and waistbands can be fixed immediately, often saving parents time and money.

Helping those who can't afford

Before moving into uniforms, many school districts look for purchasing options for those who cannot afford them. While many retailers work to help schools directly with discount cards and special sales, Royal Park explained that since it does not deal with the schools directly, these solutions are often handled through its retailers. Classroom's approach is a little different. It

works in partnership with schools and retailers to create ways economically disadvantaged kids can get the same uniforms.

During back-to-school season, retailers try to do it all, but when partnered with an experienced school uniform manufacturer, it's much easier. I hope you have a successful back to school!



School Uniforms Made Easy



Classroom Uniforms provide the easy-care qualities that parents love. This also makes them very easy to sell.

Featuring extra stitching, reinforced knees, deep hems and elastic for growth spurts, we also use fabric treated with Visa® by Milliken. It prevents pilling and fiber loss for longer wear, holds color for over 50 washings, won't let stains set and requires little or no ironing.

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