



MIXING IT UP • 20
Real founder Jim Farrell dreams of the perfect milkshake blender.



SPENCER BROWN

"Everyone's offering bras; they're starting to get it that women need bras to run," says See Jane Run founder Lori Shannon of her late-on-the-race competitors.

Retailer finds fans in women athletes

See Jane Run opens fourth store, in Danville

BY VASANTH SRIDHARAN
San Francisco Business Times

Lori Shannon always wanted to be a business owner, but she didn't see her opportunity until she started running.

Back in 2000, she was working for Electronic Data Systems and on the side she was running distance events like marathons, as well as cross-country biking. It was doing those events that made her realize that the options for women's exercise wear left a lot to be desired. So she sold her car, maxed out her credit cards and started See Jane Run, a fitness company that sells gear, runs training and holds events all exclusively for women.

"I didn't think that there was an overall philosophy that really embraced what I wanted to do, to create a space for women of all shapes and sizes to choose sports and fitness as a lifestyle," she said.

Now, See Jane Run has four stores, in San Francisco, Oakland, Danville — which opened in March — and Boise, Idaho, as well as an online store. It runs training for triathlons and half-marathons and hosts two events. It's also a thriving business. From 2006 to 2008, revenue grew 34 percent to \$2.5 million, and the company employs 40 people.

Shannon started out concentrating on two products that she felt were absolutely necessary for women's exercise — shoes and bras. Unfortunately, she said, it was a challenge to find vendors for the store that shared her passion for making equipment for women of all shapes and sizes. For example, when she started, it was difficult to find shoes bigger than size 10, and it was also difficult to find shoes that were designed with women in mind rather than just scaled down men's shoes.

But even though finding good equipment remains a challenge, it has gotten easier, especially as more companies enter the women's exercise gear market.

"It's changed drastically," she said. "Everyone's offering bras; they're starting to get it that women need bras to run."

See Jane Run now carries much more than just bras and shoes. The store has a full-line of exercise wear as well as accessories such as bags, swim goggles and sunglasses.

See Jane Run also offers two training classes for, as Shannon puts it, beginners to intermediates. The company has two classes — one for a half marathon, which costs \$200, and one for a triathlon, which costs \$300. And the company sponsors events, too — a half marathon and a triathlon.

Mallory Gaston, owner of Body Mechanix, a fitness training center that partners with See Jane Run, credits the company's success to more than just finding a niche of underserved consumers. He says that Shannon has continually impressed him with her business acumen,

especially the way she's been able to keep consumers committed to her brand and to the events and training. Since partnering with the company and setting up a booth at See Jane Run's half marathon in Alameda, he's been able to open up two more locations in the East Bay.

"The first people that we got to come to the door was because we did booths at the See Jane Run half marathon," he said. "We're geared up and ready to do more."

Gaston said he's also impressed with how much Shannon's staff has bought in to her overall philosophy for the company.

"I only have one store that we recommend to anybody — and that's them," he said. "They have knowledgeable people that care about what they're doing."

But even as See Jane Run grows, the recession is taking its toll. The company had layoffs earlier this year, but Shannon thinks the worst is over. She said that same-store sales will be flat, but e-commerce and the new store will allow her to continue to grow — probably another \$700,000 to \$800,000 this year.

Shannon said she's also keeping an eye on some of her bigger competitors, like Lucy and Title 9. One of the company's other competitors, Athleta, was bought by Gap Inc., for \$150 million last year, and that's a future that Shannon sees for See Jane Run as well. But for now, the company is trying to raise another round of funding — about \$2 million — from friends, family or angel investors.

SNAPSHOT: See Jane Run

Location: San Francisco.

What it does: Sells women's athletic apparel, runs training and puts on events.

Founder: Lori Shannon.

2008 revenue: \$2.5 million.

2007 revenue: \$1.98 million.

2006 revenue: \$1.87 million.

Growth: 33.6 percent.

Year founded: 2000.

Number of employees: 40.

Web site: www.seejanerun.com