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Windsor Jewelers' secrets of success

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(AUGUSTA, Ga.) - Everyone in the jewelry business always wants to know, "how did he do it?" It is a question this writer has

heard many times over the years. I decided to try to find the answer.

The "he" I am speaking of is Donnie Thompson, of Windsor Jewelers in Augusta, GA and the "it" is growing the largest jewelry store in the southeast (in a city that

but it is not surrounded by other high end shopping or dining spots or near huge office buildings or surrounded by fine homes owned by wealthy folks. But step through the door and "oh, I see why" slips out while your eyes feast.



Donnie Thompson

is far from the largest in the southeast). To get to the bottom of this question I hopped in my gas guzzler and headed to Augusta to see for myself.

Windsor is located directly across the street from the infamous Augusta National Golf Club, and all the hype associated with the green jacket of golf doesn't hurt. But the Masters is only once a year so that wouldn't help sell jewelry year round. Windsor Jewelers' two story brick building is very fine

The showcases are delightfully stuffed with the most incredible assortment of jewelry you have ever seen. Shopping for a diamond bracelet? There are at least 600 to choose from. Want to buy your first piece of Yurman? This is better than seeing the salesman's line! Windsor has it all. If you are shopping for a semi mount, why shop anywhere else when Windsor has 3,000 on hand to choose from? So I can begin to see the "how" but
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know that to get to the complete answer, I will need to talk to the creator of all things Windsor.

In his upper level office, Thompson is on one of a series of phone calls and jumps from cell to land line and back answering questions and giving advice. (note: this busy man does not screen his phone calls) His office is filled with the trappings of a man going in many directions. Over lunch his phone is quiet enough to help answer the big question.

Thompson attributes much of the store's success to the incredible selection. "Inventory is the key; selection like this makes it easy for customers to find just what they are looking for." This philosophy began with wedding bands when he purchased Windsor 17 years ago. Thompson felt it was necessary to have what the

customer needed or wanted on hand. Today they carry hundreds and hundreds of styles and most every ring in every size in every style is on hand at all times. Thompson explains, "why take the chance on the most important day of your life? We have what the customer wants."

Besides these category killers, wide selection carries over in the designer and watch categories. Most every important designer can be found in the cases and 29 watch brands, including the most well known and sought after, are here for the Windsor client's selection. I found myself thinking "why go anywhere else?"

What about price? Thompson says that his prices are always competitive and that when he finds deals he tries to pass them on to his customers. Customer service is not overlooked at Windsor as you would expect. Some of the employees that started out with

Thompson years ago are still a part of the company today. Seasoned professionals are on hand every day to help both long time loyal customers and new customers moving into the area or a young man buying a first piece of jewelry.



Thompson grew up in the jewelry industry when his father was in charge of finances at Friedman's Jewelers and he began working part-time as a stock boy at the store. He moved into sales during high school and was a store manager when he graduated. He was very successful during his career with Friedman's and in 1989 purchased from Friedman's the store he had been running.

During the next 17 years Thompson built the store into a world class venue and a sell machine. He says that this happened not only because of selection and service, but because of the marketing plan he developed. While he used traditional print vehicles to advertise jewelry he also began to develop massive radio and TV campaigns that were very success-

ful. In these ads he relied heavily on co-op funds from major brands like David Yurman, Rolex and Tag Heuer.

During my visit, Windsor's in house marketing manager, Don MacNeill, a former local radio personality, told me about the in-

comercials they were getting ready to produce. These 30 minute programs air frequently on local cable and are freshened every six weeks with new products, editorial and client testimonials. MacNeill helps Thompson manage the constant flow of marketing effort the store puts out. Thompson's son Shane, who grew up like his dad in a family business, found his position at Windsor through his talent in graphic design and photography. He works out of a Windsor office where his abilities are utilized for many of the marketing materials the store grows its business with.

Another important part of the marketing strategy is Windsor's annual catalog. Handled by the Mitchell Publishing Group, the slick magazine style book not only features Windsor's top brands but also features many members of the staff to give his clients and potential customers a personal look inside the store. From the original Windsor Jeweler's catalog the publishing group, run by Bryan Mitchell, grew and now creates high quality catalogs and marketing material for many other stores across the country that, like Windsor, want to have high quality direct mail pieces to send to their customers.

Thompson's sister Lynn, who was his book keeper for many years, often asked him why he spent so much money on advertising. "Without advertising we might as well close the doors," Thompson would answer. His methods have most certainly worked.

In 2004 Thompson purchased his long time competitor down the street, Doris Diamonds. Some in his local market thought this would lead to a diminished marketing effort. Not true. He kept his marketing efforts the same.

Later that year, after 40 plus years in the jewelry business Thompson sold all but a small interest in Windsor Jewelers to an investor. A long term plan included expanding the Windsor brand name to other locations

in the southeast with Thompson participating in this effort. With many other activities like his beloved automobile and motorcycle collections and what he calls "the farm" beckoning him to "play" it seemed like the perfect solution to stay involved but have fun.

His "retirement" was short lived however when the investor came to Thompson 18 months later and asked him to come back. It seems that the captain of the ship was too vital to the continued growth of the business for Thompson to be out riding his tractor. The business stopped growing almost instantly when Thompson stepped out, and after so many years of growth that was not acceptable. During his absence some of his sales people left and marketing was reduced. Customers commented they "had not paid for a watch battery in 24 years" and were being charged.

Thompson has stepped back in and charted the course for success. The staff was glad to have him back and so were the customers. So were the vendors and their representatives. "While I was gone we lost some crucial advertising positions that we had maintained for years and that is going to take a while to get back" says Thompson. A local luxury car dealer jumped on the page two position Windsor's had controlled for years in the local newspaper and a local hospital grabbed the back cover position of *Augusta Magazine*, another Windsor stronghold. But with Thompson once again in charge the future looks bright.

The Windsor name and Donnie Thompson are, through long tradition, entrenched in the Augusta community via his participation in various charities, art and educational organizations. Donations of jewelry, sponsorships of community events like the Boshears Fly In and the River Race Augusta and the Windsor Treasure Chest have all been on the receiving end from Windsor Jewelers. From major events to high school year book ad requests, he keeps his store's name in front of his community.

In 2005 Thompson was honored by the Augusta Advertising Federation with the Silver Medal for his marketing efforts and changing the way consumers viewed his business through innovative advertising strategies. He is also a past recipient of the annual Jeweler of the Year award from the 24 Karat Club of the Southeast.

"The challenge as a retailer is to figure out the next thing your customers will want. If you can do that you can hit a home run," said Thompson. He wants his customers to love shopping at Windsor Jewelers. And like I said, why shop anywhere else?

Source: Augusta Advertising Federation "Donnie Thompson of Windsor Jewelers receives 2005 Silver Medal"