

Rochelle's Boutiques
Rochelle LaRue, Rachel Beauchamp Intrieri, and Jill Fazioli
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Summary by Fallon Bright

Imagine being the owner of a little boutique by the sea! In 2003 Rochelle LaRue, a 19-year-old sophomore studying TMD at URI, opened a seasonal store in Watch Hill, Rhode Island. After working in her parents' retail stores, her father encouraged her to open her own store – and financed it. *Rochelle's Boutiques* now has four locations. Despite a U.S. decline in brick-and-mortar stores, Rochelle's is an example of a success story. Rochelle and her store managers/buyers, Jillian Fazioli and Rachel Beauchamp Intrieri, provided some key reasons for their success.

One of the most important factors is “location, location, location”. The boutiques are in historic locations in Rhode Island and Connecticut. Each store has different merchandise and unique “vibes”. All offer trendy, hip, and eclectic items. Watch Hill is by the ocean and customers want bathing suits and nautical sweatshirts. The Newport store is near Salve Regina University and the historic mansions. It focuses on price-conscious students with trendy crop tops and high-waist jeans, unlike the preppy styles common to Newport. Yearly events bring people to the area, like the St. Patrick's parade and Boat show. There are two boutiques in Mystic near Old Mystic Village and the drawbridge. The Main Street store gets a lot of foot traffic and customers want clothes for a night out. The Cottrell store is on a side street and is frequented by mothers and daughters looking for a unique special occasion piece.

Others factors are customer service, inventory management, and trend forecasting. Time must be spent on learning about the customers so personal styling can be provided and relationships built that bring in repeat customers. Good inventory levels can prevent overages that result in a lot of sale items. Trend forecasting is constantly done by following social media (Instagram). Capitalizing on new trends (choker trend) can make money! Also, having unique items is vital. Rochelle likes brands from California and Europe. She and her managers attend trade shows in New York and Las Vegas to buy items. Rochelle travels the world and has found unusual pieces, like leather belts from Italy, scarves from Peru, and jewelry from South Africa.

Despite the success of her brick and mortar stores, Rochelle started an online website since she understands its benefits. She has seen amazing sales in a short time and hopes to grow with new software. Other sales methods include store fashion shows, “sip and shop” events, charity auctions, and creating their own photo shoots. The creative marketing ideas help the stores grow – and the employees. There are opportunities for growth into management positions with bonuses, not to mention the discounts and fun work environment.

In conclusion, the dream of owning a clothing store may be a long shot, but can be realized. Some factors to consider are initial funding (Rochelle was fortunate), finding great locations, creating a brand and style, and understanding that it will involve long hours and hard work. Rochelle's Boutiques is definitely a “Cinderella” story but it provides hope for other aspiring entrepreneurs.