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Another retailer pops up in the city

crain's video exclusive presentation

LittleMissMatched, a sock and apparel company, is testing the retail waters with two temporary stores for the holidays.

Adrienne Pasquarelli

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Instead of depending solely on mass-market retailers, one vendor is ramping up its own strategies to stay afloat this holiday sales season.

After four years of selling at stores such as Macy's and FAO Schwarz, New York-based LittleMissMatched, manufacturer of patterned socks and apparel, is standing on its own two feet. The company has opened two pop-up shops in the city for the holiday season, and plans to open a brick and mortar flagship here in spring of 2009.



Courtesy of LittleMissMatched

"It will help us take New York by storm," said Jonah Staw, LittleMissMatched's co-founder. Pop-up, or temporary, stores have been particularly popular this year as landlords struggle with rising vacancies and retailers fear long-term real estate commitments. The two LittleMissMatched stores join holiday pop-up shops such as Gap Red, Wired and French perfumer Diptyque, all of which are open for November and December only.

"It's a good way to test the environment and see how your product works in a certain neighborhood," said Steve Rappaport, a broker with Sinvin Realty, of the trend. "There seem to be more retail vacancies now, so it's a good way for landlords to get some cash flow."

To advertise its shops, the sock seller has hired staffers to patrol the streets dressed in LittleMissMatched products. The promoters also push ice cream carts full of socks and other gift items.

Part of such aggressive marketing is because the vendor has recently experienced a decline in orders from retailers.

"The specialty sector has been incredibly challenging," said Mr. Staw. "We probably have 100 customer orders waiting to ship whose line of credit was cut."

In addition to credit issues, he noted that stores are stocking less product. Orders were down in October and November by as much as 50% from last year. Though LittleMissMatched sent out a postcard to its 2,000 retailers, promoting a special deals program in which large orders would be rewarded, selling to stores is still problematic.

While inventory bookings are down, the company says sales at its e-commerce site have increased 80% this year as shoppers choose to eliminate the middleman and go straight to the vendor.

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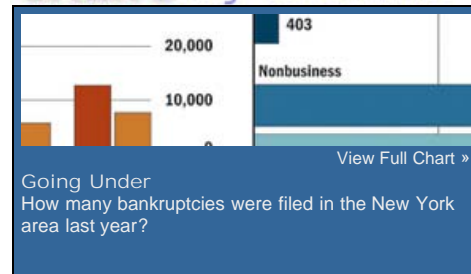


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