

# FOOTWEAR INSIGHT<sup>®</sup>

Steven and  
Mark Jubelirer,  
co-owners of  
Reyers Shoe Store.

## **GOLD MEDAL SERVICE AWARD WINNERS 2021**



**RETAILERS SHARE THEIR TOP TIPS  
CHIC COMFORT GOES THE DISTANCE  
RUNNING FOOTWEAR + ESSENTIALS**



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# FOOTWEAR INSIGHT®

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New shoe and campaign from Diadora celebrate the brand's authenticity and Italian heritage.

# Great customer service... it's one thing within our control.



I've said it before, and it's worth repeating. We believe in the foundation and success of independent specialty brick-and-mortar stores. There is something called the in-store experience. The curated assortment and the touching and feeling of products. The sit-and-fit-process. The consultative and attentive retail sales associate. At the end of the day,

it's all about the customer service experience. It's what truly elevates independent retailers above the rest.

We established the **Gold Medal Service Awards** in 2015 to recognize and celebrate the best sit-and-fit stores in the country each year. That said, there was no playbook to follow to help navigate the challenges that we've faced over the past 20 months. As retailers were dealing with the pandemic's constantly changing dynamics, followed by new rules and regulations, mask mandates, limited store capacity, newly conceived curbside pickup, reduced store hours and reduced staff (just to name a few), we chose not to mystery shop stores in 2020 for the Gold Medal Service Awards. Instead, we took that opportunity to talk to independent retailers across the country about the challenges they faced, and the customer service strategies they implemented. We published their stories in our "Retail Resilience" feature last December.

The inspirational stories about the many obstacles — and the hoops that some of our past Gold Medal Service Award winners had to jump through — to maintain a level of service that their customers expected, were simply amazing.

Their top priority in 2020 was making their customers feel safe. From mandatory shutdowns to appointment-only shopping, to masking up, temperature checks, cubicles, sanitizers, the whole bit. Soon to be followed by walk-ins (only six at a time please), tents to shield customers from the weather, and the added storefront doorbell. Footwear retailers knew they had to find a way to provide customer assistance that often brought them closer than six feet. It's what they do. Alternatively, there was also curbside pick-up or ship to customer's homes. Why? It was the "new" customer service expectation that at times seemed to require customized service showered on anyone that walked into the door that day. Add to all of that, the one item that truly tested almost everyone's patience... the occasional difficult customer interaction about requiring a facemask. Again, something that was not in anyone's playbook.

Although these safety concerns gradually started to subside in 2021, retailers faced new obstacles including supply chain disruptions, wildfires on the west coast and hurricanes in the south. PPP forgiveness? *Check*. As a result, while more consumers have been venturing back into the stores, they are met with a shortage of products and often a shortage of retail sales associates.

This perfect storm was brewing just in time for our 2021 Gold Medal Service Awards secret shop, which took place in October. Here's what we found. This year, there were more retailers that scored at the higher end of the spectrum (90+ points). We have



**This year, there were more retailers that scored at the higher end of the spectrum (90+ points)**

16 new Gold Medal retailers in 2021 that had never been on our winner's list before. We also added a bonus criteria item — one focused on the consumer's safety experience and how a sales associate deftly handled an out-of stock item. Our Gold Medal Service Award winners continue to be the masters of delivering outstanding customer service.

Check out the 2021 Gold Medal Service Award coverage in this issue starting on page 22. You'll see the full list of award winners, along with a profile of the year's top-scoring store. Plus, we have an array of outstanding customer service insights and tips shared by some of this year's winning retailers.

And a shout out if I may, and a tremendous thank you to Alegria, Feetures, Geox, OS1st and Propet, our 2021 Gold Medal Service Award brand sponsors, who believe as we do, in the continued success of brick-and-mortar independent retailers.

Finally, we applaud all of the independent footwear retailers both on our list as well as all those who continue to strive to offer the best customer service experience during these most challenging times...one customer at a time. We wish you the best of health and continued success for the upcoming holiday season. If you would like to nominate a store for next year's secret shop, please email me at [jnott@formula4media.com](mailto:jnott@formula4media.com).

Jeff Nott, Publisher

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## BRAND LAUNCH

## Erem's First Collection Drops



BY CARA GRIFFIN

**T**he new footwear brand Erem, from the family that founded Timberland, officially launched in November with its initial line of “Biocircular” Desert Hiking Boots that are described as “high on performance and low on environmental impact.” Erem’s designs prioritize breathability, durability, and protection. The trademarked term “biocircular” means the company is only using materials that have paths back to nature and that can be re-streamed at the end of their useful life into new products.

Erem’s co-founder Noah Swartz is a fourth-generation shoemaker. His father and co-founder, Jeff Swartz, was the president and CEO of Timberland, which was originally founded by Jeff’s grandfather Nathan.

The Erem collection is launching with the men’s and women’s Xerocole (pronounced Zee-ra-kohl) and Xerocole Expedition boots, named after animals that are adapted to thrive in desert environments. Uppers of the boots feature reverse, full-grain leather and brass hardware for durability, moisture-wicking, TENCEL lyocell canvas paneling and lining for breathability, and a contoured, shock-absorbing, cork insole for comfort. The biodegradable, fully reusable, one-piece outsoles are made of 70% recycled rubber, and are stitched to the uppers using welt-grade linen thread to avoid delamination and enable repairs. The Xerocole Boot retails for \$169.99 and Xerocole Expedition Boot retails for \$199.99. Learn more on the brand’s site at [eremlife.com](http://eremlife.com). ■

## SALES TRENDS

## Athletic Footwear Sales Are ‘Booming’

BY BOB MCGEE

**T**hey may not be the subjects of glitzy ad campaigns from the sneaker giants, but the aging Baby Boomer set is buying up athletic footwear at a record pace. Consumers, aged 71+ and most flush with plenty of disposable income, have spent more than 50 percent more in dollars on athletic shoes during the first nine months of 2021 compared to the same 2019 period,

according to new data from the NPD Group, Inc. Conversely, younger consumers in the 16-19-year-old range, spent 7 percent less year-to-date on athletic shoes through Sep. 30. Those in the 36-51-year-old and 52-70-year-old age ranges produced 20 percent dollar sales increases over the comparable period. Meanwhile, 20-35-year-olds spent 11 percent more on their kicks over the nine months.

Through the first nine months of 2021 as compared to 2019, total U.S. athletic footwear sales rose 18.8 percent in dollars to nearly \$21.3 billion, the research group found, with units rising 3.8 percent and Average Selling Prices (ASPs) increasing 14.4 percent. Year-to-date quarterly athletic footwear volume has been up double digits in each period, although it slowed to 12 percent growth in Q3 after 17% (Q1) and 29% (Q2) increases during the first half of 2021, NPD said.

Meanwhile, online athletic footwear sales rose 63 percent during the first nine months of 2021 versus the comparable 2019 period as total category sales in stores dipped 3 percent. NPD found that ecommerce accounted for 37 percent of all athletic footwear dollars for the nine months versus 40 percent in same 2020 period and 26 percent during the first nine months of 2019.

Women’s athletic footwear sales were up 24 percent through nine months. But in the athletic specialty and sporting goods channels, women’s athletic footwear sales increased 38 percent (vs. comparable 2019 period), outpacing both men’s (+14%) and children’s (+23%). Among all categories, Sport Lifestyle (+21%) paced dollar volume growth for the nine months, NPD reported, followed by Running (+19%) and Work/Safety (+23%). Among lower sales volume categories, Sports Slides (+39%), Hiking (+25%) and Walking (+46%) had significant dollar volume increases over the nine months. Training (-9%), Basketball (-2%) and Outdoor Water Sandals (-4%) were the decliners.

A closer examination of NPD’s y-t-d Running data shows a 25 percent y-t-d increase for women’s and 14 percent increase for men’s, which accounts for 45 percent of the category’s dollar volume. Nike’s market share in running has dipped 8 points since 2019 and now stands at 27.9 percent, NPD said. While Brooks (+6%) led the category’s gainers, followed by Hoka (+3%) and On (+3%), Adidas dropped 3 points and New Balance, Saucony and Fila were each off 1 point through nine months. ■



Photo: Tempus/stock

**Monroe Hydrophobic  
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## ACQUISITION

# Fleet Feet's Next Steps

BY BOB MCGEE

In a move heard round the run industry, Fleet Feet announced last month that it is acquiring JackRabbit. The transaction, expected to close in early December, will end CriticalPoint Capital's nearly four-year investment in athletic/run specialty retail with JackRabbit and create a national, omnichannel running specialty business of more than 250 doors under a Fleet Feet single banner. Financial terms of the deal were not disclosed.

The JackRabbit acquisition is clearly a turning point in Fleet Feet's 45-year history. From the onset, the deal should give the retailer more buying power and greater leverage with key running vendors. Immediate plans post-closing include installing 3D foot scanning areas in all stores by the end of Q1/22 and redirecting all jackrabbit.com online traffic to fleetfeet.com. Longer-term, all JackRabbit branding will move to Fleet Feet by the end of 2022.



Having JackRabbit.com redirect to FleetFeet.com will help in a few ways, Fleet Feet CEO and president Joey Pointer explains. He says. "By being redirected to our site, these new customers will not only see the inventory available through our e-commerce site, but will be able to check their local inventory; learn about our training programs; read our blog that includes information on exercises, health and nutrition; and, be introduced to our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives and charitable partnerships. In the long-term, we believe this increased traffic and awareness of our brand will lead to greater conversion both in-store and online."

Fleet Feet's acquisition of JackRabbit is the latest strategic investment the company has made in its brick-and-mortar footprint this year.

Over the past 10 months, Fleet Feet has acquired four franchise locations as a part of its succession plan for retiring owners; acquired FITNiche, a Central Florida independent running retailer with three locations; and, opened five new stores with an additional two stores planned to open by the end of the year. Prior to the JackRabbit deal, Fleet Feet's store count stood at 191.

In November, Fleet Feet also acquired its fourth franchisee this year, a Pittsburgh, PA store from its retiring owner Bob Shooer, to increase its company-owned store count to 38. Fleet Feet experienced its all-time highest sales month in August with a 34 percent year-over-year increase. Subsequently, the retailer's Q3 results to-date have remained strong, up 34 percent in physical doors and 32 percent digitally, it said.

At the end of 2021, Fleet Feet will have 156 franchisee-owned locations and 94 company-owned locations. And the retailer will continue to seek development opportunities with existing and

new franchisees, Pointer says. "We currently have five new franchisees in the pipeline who will be opening Fleet Feet locations in markets new to the brand; additionally, more than a dozen existing franchisees are looking to add new stores

**"With 250 stores at the end of this year, we still believe there is a tremendous runway to develop stores across the United States."**

**JOEY POINTER, CEO & PRESIDENT, FLEET FEET**

within their current markets. As some markets experience growth, we are actively pursuing acquisition opportunities and expansion to support that growth within our legacy markets. With 250 stores at the end of this year, we still believe there is a tremendous runway to develop stores across the United States."

How Fleet Feet balances its new, larger presence with the need to maintain community-focus at the local level will bear watching.

Bill Kirkendall, CEO of JackRabbit, in A Sept. 2020 interview, highlighted scale when we asked him what the Denver-based JackRabbit business brings to market. "The advantages are scale. It allows us to provide more resources, tools for our staff, more advancement for staff, larger benefit packages," he said. "It allows us to create a more competitive cost structure in our business and it allows to continue to build an omnichannel model. You need that to compete in today's retail market. When you're larger, you're able to execute on that strategy."

When the transaction closes in early December, it will be Fleet Feet with the largest scale of any retail run specialty operation in the U.S. ■

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RELAUNCH

## Heritage Brand Hood Bounces Back



Hood 1967 Rocket High Cut Sneakers

**M**itchell & Ness has relaunched the Hood Rubber Company footwear brand with seven heritage canvas and rubber sneaker styles, priced at \$70-85.

Hood was founded in 1896 in Watertown, MA and merged with B.F. Goodrich in 1929 before closing shop in 1969 after years of developing and selling rubber-soled footwear. At its peak, Hood Rubber Co. produced 90,000 pairs of footwear a day, and its Watertown, MA, plant employed over 9,000 workers. Hood was one of the first brands to design and market footwear specifically for basketball with the debut of its first canvas upper high top as early as 1914.

The newly launched line reflects the style and feel of the brand's original canvas low and high tops. ■

MARKETING

## Celeb Tool Guy Works It In Iron Age Clips



Richard Karn's Iron Age videos can be viewed on the brand's YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfbho96HUSb-t8xzeu5h97A>

**W**ork boot brand Iron Age Footwear is featuring Richard Karn in a series of new videos. Karn has been working with the tools of the trade on TV for decades, first as Al Borland on ABC's *Home Improvement* and most recently on the History Channel's *Assembly Required*. In the clips, he heaps praise on Iron Age Work Boots with humor and straight talk.

In one video, Karn educates on how to save a foot with metatarsal protective footwear from Iron Age. In another, he invites viewers to “just say no to (boot) crack” with Iron Age's industry-only crack-resistant leather. And Karn gives tough workers the okay to wear soft toes for some jobs, profiling Iron Age's first-ever soft toe offering, a boot not a slipper. — *Cara Griffin*



AHEAD OF THE CURVE

# COSM

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ISA TanTec™ recently launched a new division called COSM, innovating and developing bio based materials. The first product launched is called: Hyphalite HP.

### HYPHALITE HP

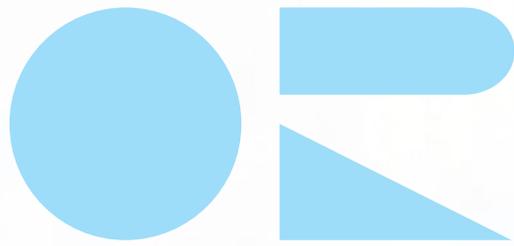
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\*Results from test method ASTM D6866-21



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# PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES

Lightweight design and innovation in uppers, midsoles and foam materials have running footwear brands racing ahead into 2022. With **supply chain and inventory issues** expected to continue well into the new year, look for some shifts on the shoe walls as **availability and innovation** combine to impact the running footwear brand pecking order. **By Cara Griffin**



## ASICS GEL-NIMBUS 24

With advanced impact protection for distance training, the GEL-NIMBUS 24 offers a softer landing in every step. It is approximately 10 grams lighter than the previous version. The upper features soft engineered mesh and the midfoot panel is flexible, moving seamlessly with the foot for a smoother stride in every step. FF BLAST+ cushioning keeps the shoe lightweight while increasing shock absorption in each step. **MSRP \$160.**



## Skechers GO RUN Razor Excess 2

New for Spring 2022, this ultra-cushioned, lightweight, neutral road running shoe is built for speed, with a 4mm drop. A versatile trainer or race day shoe, the GO RUN Razor Excess 2 has a mono mesh and polyester knit upper and it features a carbon infused forefoot plate, which promotes stability and energy return. It also has a dynamic Arch Fit insole for podiatrist certified arch support. The shoe also features highly resilient Hyper Burst cushioning and a Goodyear Performance Outsole. **MSRP \$145.**



## Diadora Equipe Atomo

The first performance running shoe made in Italy in over 30 years, the Equipe Atomo features a brand new midsole technology called DD ANIMA (Italian for SOUL) that is light, cushy and reactive. DD ANIMA is an expanded EVA blended with a proprietary material that is highly responsive. It is also extremely durable, according to the brand. The shoe has a 5 mm drop; men's stack height is 29/24; women's stack is 27.5/22.5. The shoe's upper is made of Engineered Air Mesh Nylon. **MSRP \$195.**



## Propét Visper

New for Spring 2022, the Visper is a follow up to the men's Visp trail shoe launched in 2021. It has a precision knit and leather upper with a padded collar and tongue. It features OrthoLite X40 for high rebound performance and has the brand's EVA spacer to customize fit. The Visper boasts an EVA midsole with toe guard plus a Vibram Arctic Grip three-season traction outsole with Wet-Ice Technology. **MSRP \$114.95.**



## Under Armour HOVR Machina 3

In its third iteration, the HOVR Machina 3 continues to blur the lines between race day performance and everyday high-mileage trainer. It delivers softer landings with a more decoupled heel midsole design, along with softer HOVR in the heel and more responsive HOVR in the forefoot for improved shock attenuation at heel strike and more efficient toe-offs. It also has an enhanced rocker effect with more beveled heel and sprung forefoot. **MSRP \$150.**



## Brooks Glycerin 20

Featuring the brand's super-soft DNA Loft v3 (nitrogen-infused foam) midsole tech, this Summer 2022 offering is designed to deliver comfort on the run. The Glycerin 20 has a redesigned midsole and outsole, offering a widened platform for smoother, easier transitions. And its plush and breathable, engineered air-mesh upper offers a secure fit, comfortably holding the foot in place. It has a 10mm drop. **MSRP \$160.**



### Xelero Steadfast

New for Spring 2022 in Carbon Grey, the Steadfast is designed to deliver “ultimate stability.” Xelero’s patented technology helps keep the foot in alignment and off-loads forefoot bottom pressure. Combining stability and cushioning with a dynamic forward motion, the Steadfast works to help wearers run easier for a greater distance with less pain. Available in multiple widths.



### ENDA Koobi Fora

This nimble, lightweight trail shoe, with a 4mm heel to toe drop, has a ripstop fabric upper for extra protection and water resistance, and an ariaprene fabric booty that hugs the foot around the heel. The Koobi Fora also has a flexible ballistic fabric rock plate and 18mm high-rebound EVA under the forefoot. Enda footwear is designed for a natural midfoot landing. The brand makes its shoes in Kenya.



### HOKA Tecton X

Carbon-fiber propulsion meets HOKA trail innovation in the Tecton X, available in May 2022. Coined after the earth’s tectonic plates, which inspired its parallel carbon fiber plate design, the shoe is built for speed, from its Vibram Megagrip with Litebase construction outsole to its ProFlyX midsole that merges a light, responsive foam base and ultra-soft foam underfoot. **MSRP \$200.**

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# IN THE SPOTLIGHT: RUNNING ESSENTIALS

## Heat Holders Ultra Lite Socks

Designed with heavy bulk yarn to provide thermal protection and comfort in a lightweight profile, these socks are ideal for wearing in tighter fitting shoes and cold temperatures. With a Thermal Overall Grade rating of 1.04, they are scientifically tested to be 3x warmer than regular cotton. Heat Holders are non-binding, making them diabetic friendly. **MSRP \$9.99.**

## OS1st AC4 Active Comfort Socks

Part of the Socks with Purpose line, the AC4 Active Comfort sock has a Y-Gore Heel (no slip design), arch compression, moisture wicking, and has silver antimicrobial with bamboo charcoal in the heel and forefoot. OS1st's Skin Thin design (on the top of the sock) was created to work along with the breathability of a running shoe for a cool, dry experience. **MSRP \$13.99.**

## Falke RU3 Invisible

This Spring '22 sock is invisible in the shoe, but still has a high level of cushioning and padding. Special heel construction provides optimal support and prevents slipping.



Darn Tough



Zensah



Balega

The moisture-wicking socks offer high shock absorption and maximum comfort, along with protection against blisters by reducing pressure points. **MSRP \$23.95.**

## Drymax Run Lite-Mesh

Made in the USA, and providing a balance between thin and thick running socks, the Run-Lite Mesh is engineered with plush terry loops underfoot and a seamless toe for comfort. Mesh Stripe Vents over the foot provide breathability, helping keep feet cooler and drier. **MSRP \$13 to \$15.**

## Darn Tough No Show Tab Lightweight with Cushion

A new run offering for Spring '22, this no show is crafted in a space dyed merino wool yarn with a digital print. There are endless possibilities for unique

patterns in each pair. A performance fit offers no slipping, no bunching, and no blisters. Fine gauge knitting makes for high durability. **MSRP \$17.**

## Zensah Calming Sleep Sock

The thermoregulating nature of merino wool in the Calming Sleep Sock keeps body temperatures cooler in the heat and warmer in colder environments. This leads to deeper, more uninterrupted sleep, according to Zensah. A breathable yarn blend with a soft feel, and terry texture on the stretch band makes for a not-too-tight fit at the cuff. The Sleep Sock is ideal for athletes looking to recover faster. **MSRP \$20.**

## Balega Hidden Contour Recycled

Drynamix, a proprietary moisture management yarn,

is incorporated into recycled yarn in this Spring '22 sock to keep feet cool and dry. Hidden Contour has a snugger fit, so the sock stays put in the shoe while running. Three elasticated zones provide structure, while 200 needle cushioning offers comfort on the footbed. A seamless toe reduces bulkiness. **MSRP \$16.**

## Feetures Elite No Show Tab

Feetures introduced its first ever 360 print designs this season with the City Collection. 360 print provides the ability to direct garment print on socks in a truly seamless design. For Fall '22, a new Geo Print design is in the works for the Elite Light Cushion No Show Tab style. The sock is engineered with an anatomical design and targeted compression, providing a custom-like fit

and reduced risk of blisters. A light cushion offers impact protection. **MSRP \$17.**

## LP Trail Running Compression Socks

The Target Compression System is designed with biomechanics in mind, placing emphasis on specific muscles and joints. The System rotates from the sole of the foot to the lateral side of the ankle and extends to the calf muscles. Graduated compression provides support to the arch to strengthen coordination and movement control of the ankle, while also promoting calf muscle contractile efficiency.

## CEP Run Compression Sock 4.0

With new directional air channels in the foot, mesh structure in the calf and ventilation zones in the toe, CEP's Run Compression Sock 4.0 is designed to offer maximum moisture management and ultimate comfort. The sock also has CEP's true graduated compression. Run Compression 4.0 is available for Spring 22 in five heights and six colors. **MSRP \$59.95.**



Heat Holders



OS1st



Falke



Drymax



Feetures



LP Support



CEP



#### OrthoLite HybridPlus-Recycled

Created in response to increasing demand for more sustainable product solutions and the brand's expanding commitment to closing the loop on production waste material, HybridPlus insoles elevate total eco-content to 50% via a unique blend of 7% recycled rubber and 43% recycled production waste foam. The insoles will be utilized in Fall 2022 footwear styles from various brands.



#### Sorbothane Ultra PLUS

The Ultra PLUS insole integrates a custom composite stability system with the impact protection and cushioning of Sorbothane. Expanded Sorbothane forefoot protection, stability, and a deep heel cup for rear-foot stability combine to create the brand's next-generation insole. MSRP \$59.95.



#### Currex SupportSTP

Designed to support the foot and its natural movement, Currex's SupportSTP insoles may help reduce pain from plantar fasciitis through their shock absorption and cushioning. The SupportSTP is available in three different arch profiles. All Currex insoles have a 60-day guarantee. The company will accept returns even if the product has been cut to the customer's shoe size. MSRP \$69.95.



#### Cadence Low Volume

Catering to the run specialty community and offering exclusive in-store only models, Cadence insole designs combine contoured support with enhanced comfort under the heel and forefoot. The brand's most popular styles in the run specialty channel are the Original Orange, Low Arch and Low Volume (shown here). MSRP \$49.95.



#### PowerStep Pulse Thin

The brand's new insoles for 2022 are focused on relieving and preventing pain through support, alignment, and impact control. Offering semi-rigid arch support and PORON cushioning, insoles in the Thin line will retain a 95 percent compression set, absorbing the pressure and impact. A narrower and thinner design delivers support and cushioning while also fitting in more minimal running shoe options. MSRP: \$49.95. ●



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# ALL DAY EVERY DAY:

## CHIC COMFORT GOES THE DISTANCE

Style is as important as ever for shoppers heading into 2022 – whether trend-right clogs, rugged boots or sleek slip-ons, the consumer demand for chic hasn't changed. What *is* different? Consumers aren't interested in compromise. If the shoes don't feel right, they're not an option. Luckily, comfort brands are more than ready to deliver, with fashion-forward silhouettes packed with enough smart construction, technical materials and clever design to make these the styles women will reach for, no matter what the day brings. **BY JENNIFER ERNST BEAUDRY**



**CHOOKA**

Stay dry and comfortable without sacrificing any style with Chooka's Moto boot (\$80). The fully-waterproof mid-cut boot has a rugged outsole for durable grip and silver buckles for serious style, with a memory-foam footbed for cushioning.



**GEOX**

Lace up and face the day with the \$190 Phalae from Geox. The lightweight and cushioned combat boot has a breathable, nonslip outsole and a side zipper for easy-on, easy-off wear.

# CASUAL STYLE



The slip-on silhouette is hotter than ever. Whether throwback styles like clogs or modern takes with athletic bottoms, there's a look for everyone.



## KLOGS

Bring on the chill: The Munich clog (\$144.95) from KLOGS adds a plush trim to a classic closed-toe style with a contoured heel and stitch detailing for shoe that's winter-weather ready.

## DANSKO

Dansko's open-back Bel clog style has 70s style to spare. Made with a lightweight EVA outsole with a Scotchguard-treated nubuck upper, the \$140 style is made with a patent-pending stapled construction.



## FINN

As part of the FinnStretch collection, the \$275 Asinara Mary Jane style from Finn Comfort marries a soft footbed with an elasticized upper designed to accommodate the unique shape of each wearer's foot for a supportive fit.

## ENJOIYA

A memory foam footbed and a cozy sherpa lining make Enjoiya's Chelsey (\$79.99) slip-on style as cozy as the leopard-print upper is chic.



# ELEVATED COMFORT



From mid-height looks like athleisure-inspired ankle boots and rugged outdoorsy styles to lower-cut styles with warmth to spare, these style standouts looks are ready for anything.



## SANUK

Made for inside/outside wear, Sanuk's Cozy Vibe Low (\$85) style has a collapsible heel for ease of wear and uses natural materials like a wool-blend lining, and recycled hemp and Tencel to create a breathable, temperature-regulating style that wearers can feel good about, too.

## MOSH BY KLOGS

An athletic knit upper gives the \$170 Rise slip-on from Moshn by KLOGS a sleek athleisure look perfect for a day around town, while the exaggerated toe spring and generous midsole keep things comfortable.



## LAMO

With a sheepskin lined footbed and lightweight EVA outsole, LAMO's Cassidy bootie (\$78.95) is built for long-wearing comfort—the plaid textile-and-suede upper means its trend-right, too.

## OBOZ

Oboz pays homage to Butte, Montana-based union organizer Lena Mattausch with the \$125 Lena mid boot, which features a stretch knit upper accented with bold lacing.



## NAOT

The \$200 Polaris sneaker from Naot is an athleisure standout, pairing a lightweight and flexible athletic outsole and cork-and-latex footbed with a stylish leather upper.

# BOOT UP

Nothing says versatile like a boot, and these fall styles are the perfect blend of rugged performance features and high-style aesthetics.



## ALEGRIA

Take a walk on the wild side with Alegria's Shalet boot, \$179.95. It marries an eye-catching leopard print with a bold black outsole for a true statement piece.



## RIEKER

Rieker's \$145 Tara is a leather Chelsea boot that combines an updated mid-calf height and a super-luggy design for an ultra-modern take on a day-to-night boot.



## VIONIC

In a perfectly on-trend olive colorway, Vionic's waterproof mid-calf Karsen boot, \$179.95, is a styling superstar, but don't be fooled – the chunky heel and seam-sealed construction make this boot an all-day workhorse.



## WESTERN CHIEF

Western Chief's \$40 Dainty Chelsea boot have stretch going for easy wear and fully waterproof uppers, as well as a chic and cheerful print that elevates any outfit.



## ARCOPEDICO

The sleek L19 boot (\$135) from Arcopedico features the brand's trademark non-binding upper and supportive build designed to distribute weight evenly across the entire foot – and it's vegan and machine-washable, too.



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**GOLD MEDAL SERVICE  
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**FOR OUTSTANDING  
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# THE GOLD MEDAL SERVICE AWARDS 2021

# SHINING STARS



A look inside some of this year's award winning independent footwear retailers. Left to right: Reyers Shoe Store, Miroballi Shoes and The Heel Shoe Fitters.



**At *Footwear Insight*, we've been honoring the best of the best independent retailers with the Gold Medal Service Award for Outstanding Customer Service annually since 2015. In 2020, we took a pause because conducting our in-store mystery shop was not viable (or fair) during the height of COVID's impact on everyone's business.**

This year, it's back to business, as we once again are honoring retailers across the nation. And in our eyes, the recipients of the 2021 Gold Medal Service Awards all deserve an extra gold star. Not only do they deliver outstanding service to the shoppers who visit their stores, they are also managing to do it in the midst of some current challenges that we couldn't have predicted when we last handed out the awards in 2019.

The 2021 Gold Medal Service Award winning retailers each have unique stories and strategies, but they all share at least a few things in common — an understanding of and appreciation of customer service, and the ingenuity and dedication required to thrive in turbulent times.

Kudos to all of the honorees.

The award selection process began earlier this year — after screening the nominations and “mystery shopping” the stores, 70 stores earned a score worthy of the Gold Medal honor in 2021. Turn to page 32 to see the criteria for our mystery shoppers.

We have 16 first-time award winners this year — congratulations and welcome to the newcomers! Turn to page 33 to see the list of new faces.

Since 2015, there are nine standout stores who have been on the list every single year. These retailers can be called the “Consistently Consistent” crew. See that list on page 29.

This year, the top scoring store on the list is Reyers Shoe Store. This family-owned store had quite a moving year (literally). The store moved from a town it had been in for more than 130 years, and is now thriving in a new location. Check out their story on page 24.

For a look at the full list of the 2021 Gold Medal Service Award winning retailers, turn to page 34. ■

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GOLD MEDAL SERVICE AWARDS FOR OUTSTANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE 2021

# MOVIN' ON UP

Reyers Shoe Store Is Our Top-Scoring Store of the Year.

By Cara Griffin

**D**escribing the past year as “challenging” for independent retailers would be an understatement. Retail competition, inventory shortages and a boatload of pandemic-related obstacles have kept everyone’s problem-solving mode in overdrive. But each of the store’s that earned a spot on our Gold Medal Service Award list this

year managed to navigate the year and successfully deliver for their customers.

For Reyers Shoe Store, this year’s top-scoring Gold Medal store, 2021 had another major challenge — a moving one. Reyers, which had been located in Sharon, PA for 134 years, relocated its flagship store over the summer, and is now located a short drive across state lines in a mall in Ohio.

But while Reyers, run by co-owners and brothers Mark and Steven Jubelirer, may

have gone through a major change this year, more than a few things have remained the same. “We have defined our brand around three simple words — style, service and selection,” says Mark Jubelirer. “Those words adorn our store front, as a message to our customers that this is a promise that we make to them.”

We caught up with Mark Jubelirer, who serves as president at Reyers, to learn more about the move, the past, present and future of the store, and to get some insight into the secrets of their success.

Originally established by a German immigrant cobbler in 1886 in Sharon, a small town on the Pennsylvania/Ohio border, Reyers was purchased by Mark and Steven’s father Harry in 1952. Over the years, Reyers became a draw for miles, marketing itself as the world’s largest shoe store, growing from a 1200 square foot space into a 36,000 square foot downtown anchor.

Along the way, Mark says he and Steven learned from Harry that, “It’s in the doing that superior service is learned and taught. Our father preached to us that if you take care of the customer, then everything else takes care of itself. We watched him as he serviced customers over the decades when he was out there selling. So did our management team, which is largely still with us. His ethos became ingrained in us.”

While the store thrived in Sharon for decades, the surrounding downtown business district eventually lost its luster, slowed down, and brought less traffic. As the store’s enormous footprint became increasingly untenable in recent years, Jubelirer says, “My brother and I agreed



Mark (left) and Steven Jubelirer of Reyers Shoe Store.

Photos: Michael Stephen, www.michaelstephenstudios.com

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## GOLD MEDAL SERVICE AWARDS FOR OUTSTANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE 2021



When Reyers moved its store a short distance across state lines earlier this year, all of its staff stayed on board.

with our accountant that the time was coming when we'd have to run a GOB and retire, or do something dramatic. We chose the latter."

The Reyers team began searching for a new location three years ago, looking in neighboring towns, attempting to stay in Pennsylvania, but nothing panned out. Eventually, the team found the answer 25 minutes to its west, in Ohio, at the Eastwood Mall.

**"We see plenty of our old, loyal customers still, and many more fresh new ones. And we shall learn what this new marketplace demands of us and we shall give it to them."**

"This mall was hailed as the single best mall in Ohio," says Jubelirer. "We took a look, and found a fabulous 14,000 square foot room, brightly lit, bright white, just recently abandoned. We'd feel a little cramped to be sure, but it seemed perfect

otherwise. Tons of traffic and destination stores surrounding the mall and within the mall. And traffic was what we craved."

The Reyers team was in the middle of negotiations for the mall location when the pandemic hit, delaying the deal for a year, before they revisited the idea in February, 2021. From there things moved quickly — Reyers had relocated and opened for business by August, 2021, bringing every one of their 30 employees along with them.

"Leaving Sharon after 134 years was heart-wrenching, but setting up shop in a viable new venue was life-affirming," says Jubelirer. "We see plenty of our old, loyal customers still, and many more fresh new ones. And we shall learn what this new marketplace demands of us and we shall give it to them."

### Sustained Success

So how does a family-owned, independent store manage to survive and thrive for 100+ years?

Connecting with the community, for a start. "We have advertised like crazy over many decades, so the local marketplace knows our name," says Jubelirer.

The community also knows the store for its local philanthropy and its staff, who the store owners describe as "great and caring."

Reyers does not sell online, though customers can call in toll free and have items shipped. Jubelirer bluntly says he detests e-commerce. "And I really hate it when my vendors sell directly to my customers," he adds.

As for current challenges, while inventory and supply chain issues are top-of-mind, the Reyers team feels ready for what's next. "Our buying team geared up to do more business in Q3 and Q4 anyway, since we were moving to the mall," says Jubelirer. "So we bought plenty of product and placed more backups... Reyers has plenty of product. And we're raring' to go."

When it comes to Q4, Jubelirer says he is "excited as all get out." Why? "We're in a mall," he exclaims. "And malls major in fourth quarters."

As for the biggest lesson of 2021, Jubelirer says it's simple. "This past year has taught us to just keep going. Stay ambitious. Stay in the game. Take care of your staff. And take care of the customer." ■

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## GOLD MEDAL SERVICE AWARDS FOR OUTSTANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE 2021

# HOW THEY DO IT

Gold Medal Winning Retailers Share Tips on How to Deliver Outstanding Customer Service in Today's Ever-Evolving Marketplace. By Cara Griffin & Bob McGee

### 1. BE A GOOD LISTENER

“We train our employees to never ask, ‘Can I help you?’ but instead engage the customer in a conversation that will lead to gaining more knowledge about what the customer really needs. We find that our customers often know what their issue or need is, but they don’t have much of an idea of how to resolve it because they don’t know our inventory or product the way we do.” — *Adam Griggs, Soft Shoe*

“I like our team to ask the right questions that will get the customers to really communicate what they need. Also, it’s really important to set the right tone as the customers enter the store. We have to manage a lot of foot traffic, so we use a floor coordinator who drives the sales floor and connects the customer with the right salesperson. They use an iPad and the app Waitlist to create a queue for customers to be helped when busy.” — *Troy Dempsey, The Heel Shoe Fitters*

“We talk to our staff about leading with curiosity, asking thoughtful questions and listening closely to the customer’s responses to help get the product/fit right. We define our customer service by paying close attention to the details. It’s trying to do all of the little things right that help create a great overall experience. The concept of customer service is ever-changing, its a fluid concept that you should always be striving to improve upon.” — *Dillon Dardano, Dardano’s*

“We greet our customers with a smile and ask, ‘What can we help

you find? And what are your footcare needs?’ We always listen to the customer and hear what their needs are first. We found that our Pedorthic education has helped during the pandemic. We educate people on proper footwear and support devices to aid in their ability to walk more, work longer, and improve their overall health and wellbeing.” — *Giuseppe Lombardo, Lombardo Comfort Shoes*

### 2. BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

“Our goal is to make a friend with every customer that comes into the store. We push relationships, not sales. Naturally through getting to know someone you better understand what they need and look forward to them coming back and asking about their trip, grandkids, surgery, et cetera.” — *Julie Pierce, Valley Sole*

“For us, it is about developing relationships and helping our customers and patients find what they need. Our staff all know the importance of what customer service means to our business and we regularly discuss ways to improve. If anything, the last two years have shown us that when hardships come, good customer service is more important than ever.” — *Brett Boger, Boger’s Shoes*

“Customers come into our stores because they not only want to find great products but they want to be helped by friendly and competent staff. Our staff acknowledges that people want to do business with people that they enjoy spending time with. Instead of pushing sales we



At your service: Alan’s Shoes, Tucson, AZ.



Greeting customers with a smile: Lombardo Comfort Shoes, Ocala, FL.



## GOLD MEDAL SERVICE AWARDS FOR OUTSTANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE 2021

want to build relationships. Especially over the past year where most people have been stuck inside, a welcoming concern on how their overall wellbeing is goes a long way.” — *Steven Rueda, Sole Provisions*

“We look at the shoes we sell as simply the byproduct of the experience and knowledge we provide. We make it a priority to get to know our customers, their families, and truly try our best to make their experience one they’ll never forget. Over the past year or two, it has [been challenging] to deliver world class service. State and local mandates have made us an easy target for people to get frustrated with... While the disruption has created challenges, simply smiling and remaining kind and friendly to everyone who enters our store, still remains our top priority.” — *Ted McGreer, Ted’s Shoe & Sport*

“The shoe fitting experience extends beyond what happens in the store — measuring both feet, actively listening to the needs of the customer, analyzing the customer’s gait, thoughtfully suggesting appropriate footwear, insoles and shoe care products best suited to that person’s individual needs. It extends to how the customer will use and enjoy these products in real life. For us, customer service is about treating every customer like family.

Since the pandemic, personalized customer service has become more valuable than ever. To combat the ease and convenience of internet shopping, we make sure that individualized relationships with our customer base are just as notable as the services and products we provide. Amazon and Zappos will never ask how the shoes you purchased worked for that vacation or special event the next time you’re there to make a purchase.” — *Perry Calhoun, The Shoe Market*

“We always strive to ‘Make A Friend,’ like our founder, Stan Sajdak always said. Our customer service experience in-store and online remain the same. It continues to be our mission to solve their footwear needs with great product, delivery, education, style tips, in a welcoming



Ready to help: Soft Shoe, Richmond, KY.

### CONSISTENTLY CONSISTENT

These nine stores have been a model of consistency — earning *Footwear Insight’s* Gold Medal Service Award for Customer Service every single year that we have held the awards since the program launched in 2015.

**Comfort One Shoes**  
Fredericksburg, MD

**Tops For Shoes**  
Asheville, NC

**Miroballi Shoes**  
Orland Park, IL

**Turnpike Comfort Footwear**  
Fresh Meadows, NY

**Schuler Shoes**  
West Roseville, MN

**Valley Sole**  
Huntsville, AL

**Stan’s Fit For Your Feet**  
Brookfield, WI

**Woldruff’s Footwear**  
Goshen, IN

**The Foot Spot**  
Leawood, KS

environment... Over the last two years, we have had to pivot and find new ways to continue our excellence in customer service. We recently added curbside pick-up, strengthened our online chat, and continued our exceptional online customer service experience to support our brick-and-mortar operation.” — *Jim Sajdak, Stan’s Fit For Your Feet*

### 3. DON’T FORGET THE BASICS

“We sit and measure the feet, we carry a good array of sizes and our staff gives their full attention to the customers, or guests, in our store. COVID has impacted the amount of hours we are open, and now we offer a little bit of curbside fitting. We are located in the small downtown of Quakertown (PA) and business is good. Many of the customers grew up getting their shoes from Moyer’s Shoes and [we]



Solving your footwear needs: Stan’s Fit For Your Feet, Brookfield, WI.



## GOLD MEDAL SERVICE AWARDS FOR OUTSTANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE 2021

### HOW THEY DO IT

know customers by name and shoe size. I want everyone who walks in here to feel good.” — *Ralph Moyer, Moyer’s Shoes*

“Keep it simple. Do the things you expect others to do for you when you patronize their establishments. Have professionally trained staff. Consumers want to deal with staff that knows their products and how it benefits the specific customer. Myself as a consumer, I don’t want to research everything I need to buy. I want to go where they can tell me what I need and why. That’s the reason for brick-and-mortar. Also, consumers want to be addressed immediately after entering your store. A simple ‘Hello. How are you?’ There is nothing is worse than entering an establishment and no one welcomes you or addresses you.

Consumers also don’t want to be sold. I instruct my staff to ‘assess the needs, fill the needs.’ Add-ons are as simple as suggesting to fill a need the consumer was not aware of. Never push products on the consumer.” — *Steven Rueda, Turnpike Comfort Footwear*

“The basics of carrying sizes and widths are still essential to provide superior customer service. Our staff is continually retrained on the importance of measuring feet, asking open-ended questions and bringing out a four-pair minimum.” — *Tony Miroballi, Miroballi Shoes*

“Our definition of customer service is being able to solve footwear problems for our patients and customers. We realize that our clients have particular footwear challenges that the typical shoe store can’t address. No one comes here because their feet feel great. As our company name says, we specialize in providing solutions to our customer’s problems. We feel strongly that it’s better to not sell a shoe instead of selling the wrong shoe that won’t address the customer’s needs.” — *Bill Smith and Althea Schlumpf, Althea’s Footwear Solutions*

#### 4. MAKE IT AN EXPERIENCE

“Step one for us is offering a comfortable, easy shopping experience in which people are encouraged to stay, learn, and have some fun with our team. Upon entering one of our locations a person can expect to be greeted by one of our team members, given a tour of the store, and be offered a beverage the same as we would welcome someone into our home. Blending the new age technology with the tried and true traditional fitting methods allows our knowledgeable team to create a personalized experience that will exceed the customers expectations.” — *Adam Beck, Beck’s Shoes*

“We like to pamper our customers. My theory is the longer they stay, the more money they spend. I welcome my sales people to spend as much time as they can with each individual customer. In order to do this, I have to keep enough people on the sales floor.

After a customer is greeted and the schmoozing is done, we invite customers to get their feet analyzed and scanned on our 3D foot scanner. It gives us information on instep height, width, length, pressure points, pronation, and arch height. It also recommends orthotics. We then use this information to find the best fit for their feet. Customers can also relax and get their feet massaged and munch on fresh popcorn. We have treadmills to test the product right in the store.

When you leave our store you have had an experience that you will never get online or in most stores. Customer service has not changed. We still stick to the basic principles of what our store was founded on — sit-and-fit.” — *Bruce T. Wesley, Wesley Shoes*

“We simply treat our customers/friends just as we would want to be treated. That means we put down the red carpet every day. Customer service starts with communication. When a customer



Julie Pierce, Valley Sole, Huntsville, AL.



The team at Wesley Shoes, Chicago, IL.

arrives in our store, we greet them with a smile and a warm heart. We discuss their wants and needs, we measure their feet (if they let us - some people still don't want us to), put them on our foot analysis scanner (which also gives a foot size) and we bring them everything we have to meet their specific needs. It's that simple.

Another aspect of customer service is that we're always available to make special appointments with customers that can't get out to the store. We've gone to their homes or the nursing facilities as necessary. During the height of COVID, we added curbside pickup and made special appointments in the store for those that requested such. We even made contactless deliveries upon request." — *Brenda Felger, Felger's Footwear*

## 5. STUDY UP & SET GOALS

"It's not about the transaction, it's about developing trust and confidence between our staff and our customers. We coach our staff at monthly meetings, which focus on the best practices we have used year over year. This includes the initial greet, seat and measure the feet. Then, listening to the customer to learn of their wants and needs. We are also a Pedorthic facility so we see many customers with common foot problems and may be hard to fit. Our staff are trained to understand these problems so that they can make recommendations accordingly. Additionally, we develop our staff to be product knowledge experts to further enhance their ability to fully service the customer." — *Terry Trentini, Terry's Shoes*

"At Comfort One Shoes we take training very seriously. We use a proprietary training system built around our very own Ten Step Selling program. We have a training department with a full time Director of Corporate Training that does basically nothing else other than training. We have always required a high level of outstanding customer service. We follow up in a multitude of ways. We have a contract by an outside third party for hundreds of secret shops annually.

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Continued on page 33



Steven Rueda, Sole Provisions, Wading River, NY.



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## GOLD MEDAL SERVICE AWARDS FOR OUTSTANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE 2021

### MYSTERY SHOPPING CRITERIA

CRITERIA	RATING SYSTEM
1 How promptly were you greeted?	Thirty seconds or less = 4. One minute = 3. Ninety seconds = 2. Two minutes = 1. Longer than two minutes = 0.
2 Were you greeted with a smile when you entered the store?	Yes = 5 points No = zero No partial points on this for friendly nods or smirks.
3 Did the sales associate measure your foot?	Yes = 5 points No = 0 points
4 Did the sales associate ask you what type of shoe or the purpose of your footwear purchase was?	Yes = 5 points No = 0 points
5 Were you provided a comfortable place to sit while trying on shoes?	Yes = 3 points No = 0 points
6 Do you feel you were offered a fair selection of shoes?	Rated on a 1-to-5 point scale. (5 = Very Good)
7 Did the sales associate check for proper fit?	Yes = 5 points No = 0 points
8 Were clean try on socks available?	Yes = 2 points No = 0 points
9 Did the sales associate recommend a specific type of shoe?	Yes = 5 points No = 0 points
10 Rate the professionalism of the sales associate who helped you.	Enthusiastic = 5 points Rude = 0 points
11 Did the sales associate discuss either insoles, socks or other products related to your footwear request?	Yes = 5 points No = 0 points
12 How knowledgeable and helpful was the staff overall?	Very helpful & knowledgeable = 5 points Not Helpful = 0 points
13 How would you rate the sales associates on their attire? Was the staff easily identifiable?	Rated on a 1-to-3 point scale.

CRITERIA	RATING SYSTEM
14 Were you thanked and asked to return?	Not thanked at all = 0 Thank you = 1 Thank you and invitation to return = 5
15 Was the store well-lit and easy to maneuver?	Yes = 4 points No = 0 points
16 Was the merchandise presented in a way that was easy to understand and shop?	Rated on a 1-to-4 point scale.
17 Rate the assortment of insoles, socks or footwear accessory items.	Rated on a 1-to-5 point scale.
18 How inviting and comfortable was the store?	Rated on a 1-to-4 point scale.
19 At checkout, did the sales associate ask for your email address as an incentive for future sales, or "see it first" notifications?	Yes = 5 points No = 0 points.
20 Was the checkout process easy and intuitive?	Yes = 3 points No = 0 points
21 Were there any extra special additions to improve your checkout experience?	Yes = 2 points No = 0 points
22 How would you rate the overall experience?	Rated on a 1-to-5 point scale. (5 = Very Good)
23 Would you refer a friend to this store?	Rated on a 1-to-5 point scale.
<b>Bonus Questions:</b>	
Did the sales associate offer water or other beverage?	Two points.
In regards to the environment and Covid-19 Pandemic, as compared to any other similar businesses, did you feel comfortable in this store?	One point.
If an item was out-of-stock, did the sales associate offer a favorable response?	One point.

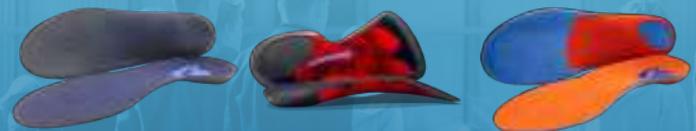
Mystery Shopping for the Gold Medal Service Awards was conducted by Franklin Retail Solutions.



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Continued from page 31

computer system — things like their sales per hour, inner-sole attachment rates, multi-pairs sold, and accessory/sundries percentages vs. the goals for each of these areas. The system automatically tabulates each day's progress to create weekly results. This allows the store managers to easily review weekly performance by individual sales associate.

We sell very expensive product at the higher end of the channel. Knowledgeable sales associates are paramount to our success. Over the years, I have made it a practice to walk briskly into our stores and examine the demonstration being conducted by each sales associate. I'm looking for a couple of things. First, a big demonstration (4-10 pairs), then I am looking for multiple classifications of footwear. For example, if the customer comes in for sandals, we address that need first, but also probe the needs of the customer and present other categories of footwear such as walking shoes and athletic shoes, in addition to the sandals the customer came in for." — *Maurice Breton, Comfort One Shoes*

"Our goal is for the customer to get home with all of the products — no more and no less — that they will be happy with. Our salesperson's goals are to suggest second (and third) pairs as well as accessory items such as insoles, socks, handbags, shoe care, hats, et cetera. We give our staff average benchmarks to meet so that we can monitor what is going on at the fitting stool. Our staff is commissioned to maximize the sale." — *Alan Miklofsky, Alan's Shoes*

#### FRESHMAN CLASS

This year, 16 stores have been named Gold Medal Service Award winners for the first time. Congratulations to the honorees!

**Althea's Footwear Solutions**  
Everett, WA

**A Proper Fit**  
Reno, NV

**Boger's Shoes**  
Jacksonville, FL

**Dale's Shoes**  
Daytona Beach, FL

**Fit My Feet**  
Sioux Falls, SD

**Lombardo Comfort Shoes**  
Ocala, FL

**Moyer's Shoes**  
Quakertown, PA

**Orleans Shoe Co.**  
New Orleans, LA

**Roberts Shoes**  
Fort Wayne, IN

**Saxon Shoes**  
Fredericksburg, VA

**Shoe Center**  
North Myrtle Beach, SC

**Solely Comfort**  
Winchester, VA

**Sound Feet Shoes**  
Powells Point, NC

**Terry's Shoes**  
Willoughby, OH

**The Shoe Market**  
Greensboro, NC

**The ShoeMart**  
Norwalk, CT

Congratulations!

# To the Winners of the 2021 Gold Medal Service Awards

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by PG Lite

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## GOLD MEDAL SERVICE AWARDS FOR OUTSTANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE 2021

### THE 2021 GOLD MEDAL SERVICE AWARD WINNERS

STORE	LOCATION	RATING
Reyers Shoe Store	Niles, OH	104
Fit My Feet	Sioux Falls, SD	102
A Proper Fit	Reno, NV	101
Esmond's Shoes	Richmond, IN	101
Soft Shoe	Richmond, KY	101
Tops For Shoes	Asheville, NC	101
Allen's Shoes	Northfield, NJ	101
Sole Provisions	Wading River, NY	100
Burton's Shoes	Lodi, CA	100
Orleans Shoe Co.	New Orleans, LA	97
Moyer's Shoes	Quakertown, PA	96
Sound Feet Shoes	Powells Point, NC	96
InStep	Austin, TX	95
Saxon Shoes	Fredericksburg, VA	95
The Foot Traveler Shoe Co.	Buford, GA	95
Alan's Shoes	Tucson, AZ	94
Solely Comfort	Winchester, VA	94
Terry's Shoes	Willoughby, OH	94
Althea's Footwear Solutions	Everett, WA	92
Comfort Plus Shoes & Footcare	Leawood, KS	93
Karavel Shoes	Austin, TX	93
Roberts Shoes	Fort Wayne, IN	93
Shoe Fly	Harrisburg, PA	93
Ted's Shoe & Sport	Keene, NH	93
Felger's Footwear	Houma, LA	92
Shoe Center	North Myrtle Beach, SC	92
Vanderloop Shoes	Little Chute, WI	91
Waxberg's Walk Shoppe	Niles, IL	91
Wesley's Shoes	Chicago, IL	91
Comfort One Shoes	Frederick, MD	90
The Heel Shoe Fitters	Green Bay, WI	89
Work Boot Warehouse	San Bernadino, CA	88
Dale's Shoes	Daytona Beach, FL	87
Dardano's	Denver, CO	87
Woldruff's Footwear	Goshen, IN	87

STORE	LOCATION	RATING
Joy-Per's Shoes	Salinas, CA	87
Alec's Shoe Store	Nashua, NH	86
Peterson Shoes	Anoka, MN	86
Beck's Shoes	San Jose, CA	86
Schuler Shoes	West Roseville, MN	86
Vernon Powell Shoes	Salisbury, MD	85
Becker's Best Shoes	Mount Dora, FL	83
Boger's Shoes	Jacksonville, FL	83
Coolest Shoes in California	Carlsbad, CA	83
Elliott's Boots	Knoxville, TN	83
Lombardo Comfort Shoes	Ocala, FL	83
Lucky Shoes	Fairlawn, OH	83
Smith & Davis	Fayetteville, GA	83
The Foot Spot	Leawood, KS	83
Westlake Shoes	Westlake Village, CA	83
Lebo's	Charlotte, NC	82
Miroballi Shoes	Orland Park, IL	82
Chiappetta Shoes	Kenosha, WI	80
K&D Shoe Warehouse	Conyers, GA	80
Stan's Fit For Your Feet	Brookfield, WI	80
Kassis Brothers	Charleston, SC	79
The Shoe Market	Greensboro, NC	79
Eneslow Shoes & Orthotics	New York, NY	78
Foot Savvy	Greenwood Village, CO	78
The Foot Performance Center	Rochester, NY	78
On The Run	San Francisco, CA	78
Modern Shoe	Provo, UT	77
The ShoeMart	Norwalk, CT	77
Turnpike Comfort Footwear	Fresh Meadows, NY	77
E.L.M. Shoes	Greencastle, PA	75
Burch's Shoes	Eugene, OR	74
Walking Comfort	Centerville, UT	74
Abbadabbas	Marietta, GA	73
Brown's Shoe Fit	Fort Collins, CO	73
Valley Sole	Huntsville, AL	73



For more information on the Gold Medal Service Awards visit [goldmedalserviceawards.com](https://goldmedalserviceawards.com)

A person wearing bright pink leggings and colorful socks. The socks are primarily red with blue and purple accents. The word "features" is printed on the side of the sock. The person's right leg is raised and bent at the knee, while the left leg is on the ground. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

**meant to  
move**

**features®**

We surveyed 401 consumers. Here is what they told us.

## THE IN-STORE EXPERIENCE



FOR INDEPENDENT BRICK-AND-MORTAR RETAILERS, getting consumers to shop in-store rather than online is an ever-present challenge. But once those customers do decide to shop in the store, delivering on what they want is also critical. In our latest survey, we asked consumers which types of stores they prefer to shop for footwear in, and what they expect and hope for when it comes to in-store service. A prominent theme? Selection. Once a consumer decides to shop in a store, having an assortment of brands and styles available to buy on the spot is critical.

Twenty-eight percent of survey respondents said their top choice of store to shop would be an independent shoe store or a footwear specialty chain. Sixty-four percent rated the level of knowledge of sales people in these stores as “very good” or “excellent.” Brand and product assortment was highlighted as the element in a store that makes the biggest impression on shoppers.

In the final question of the survey, which was open-ended, we asked, “If you could change one thing about your in-store shopping experience, what would it be?” Answers there ranged from things such as loyalty discounts and brand assortment improvements to the availability of treadmills and foot scanners in-store to a desire for “less pushy” salespeople. A sample of replies: “Less upselling.” “Free chair massage?” “A more involved fitting process.” Read on for a look inside the mind of the in-store shopper. ■

The survey, conducted by MESH01, included 401 respondents, male and female.

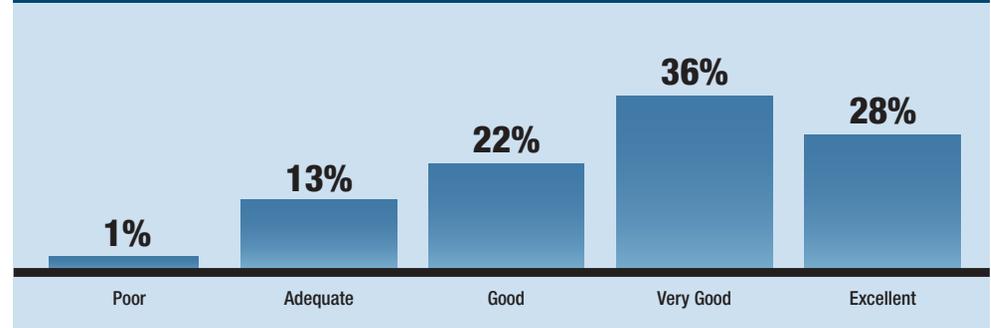


Trend Insight Consumer is a feature within Footwear Insight that delivers research conducted on the MESH01 Platform. MESH01 collects data from a select panel of sports enthusiasts. For information on the Mesh1 Platform, contact Brian Bednarek at 603-766-0957 or brian.bednarek@mesh01.com. For more information on Trend Insight Consumer and how your company can participate, contact Jeff Nott at 516-305-4711 or jnott@formula4media.com.

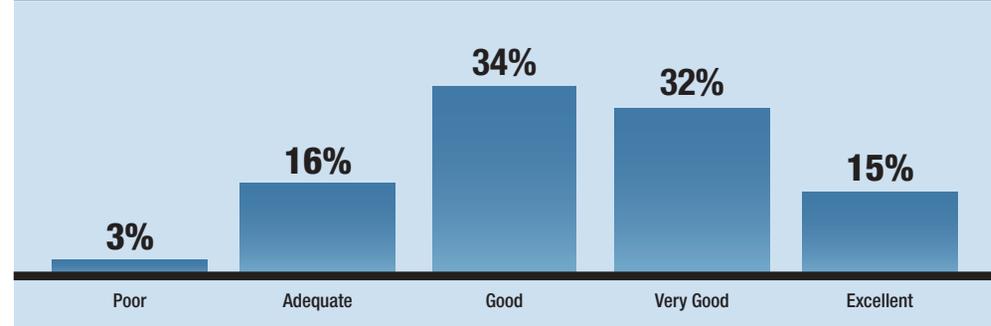
### Where do you most frequently buy your footwear?



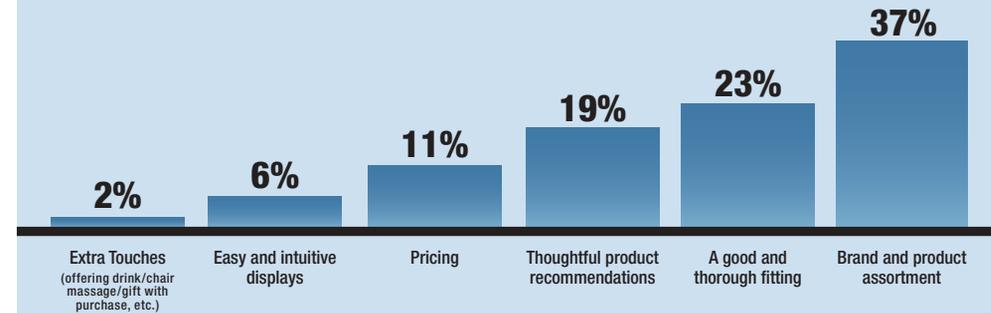
### If you shop in an independent shoe store, how would you rate the level of knowledge of the sales people vs. other types of stores?



### If you shop in an independent shoe store, how would you rate the quality of the assortment?

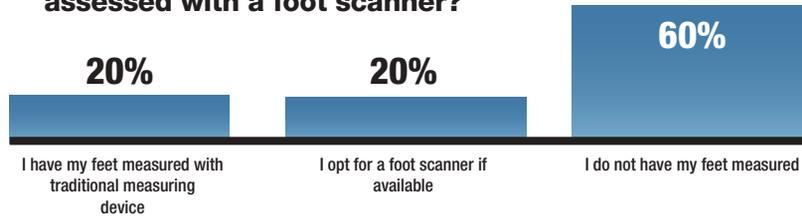


### What's the in-store element that makes the biggest impression on you?

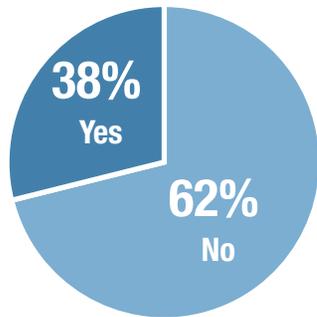


### When shopping for footwear in a store do you...

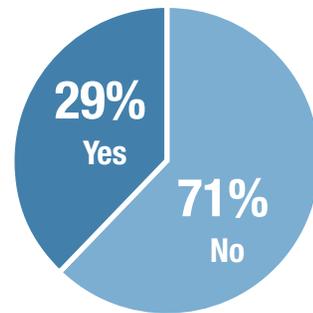
... have your feet measured or assessed with a foot scanner?



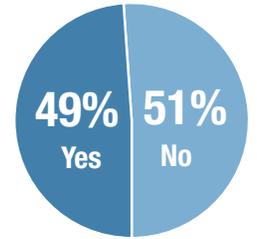
... like to have additional styles or colors presented to you by the sales associate?



... like to have accessory options suggested to you? (e.g., insoles, socks, or shoe care products)



Have you ever gone into a store to try on your footwear and then left to purchase the same item online at a site not affiliated with that store?



If YES, what motivated you to choose not to make the purchase at that store?

It's been a mix of sizing and price. I'd happily pay more if the service and selection is good. **Male 46**

I can usually find it cheaper online. **Female 37**

It wasn't the style I wanted. **Female 40**

Lack of size or color I wanted. **Male 39**

Price, size availability. **Female 44**

Older model, way more expensive, bad sales experience. **Male 31**

I ended up buying online from the brand directly because the store did not have my size in the color I wanted. Too bad the brands don't give the local store some kind of acknowledgement. **Female 59**

The price is usually the reason, but if it is a local mom and pop store I tend to try and support them as long as the price is comparable. **Male 28**

The price online was dramatically different. I saw a shoe online, but wasn't sure how it would fit, so I went into the store to try it on a few days later. As I was in the store I pulled the shoe up online and saw it was on sale for over half off through the brand's website (Nike). The store I was in was an independent retailer. They wouldn't price match, so I purchased the shoe online. **Female 44**

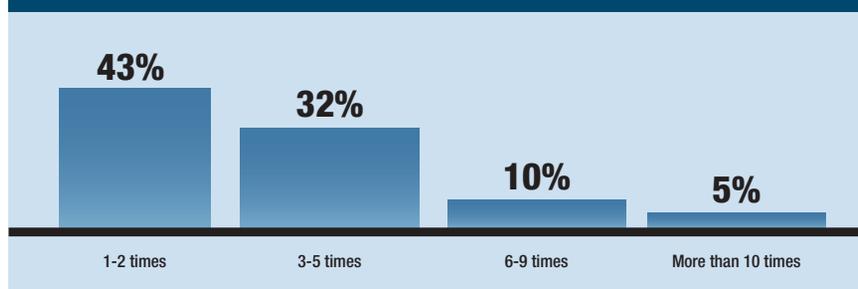
It always comes down to the price! If they offered me some type of discount then I wouldn't have to go online to purchase. **Male 49**

Return policy was better online. **Male 29**

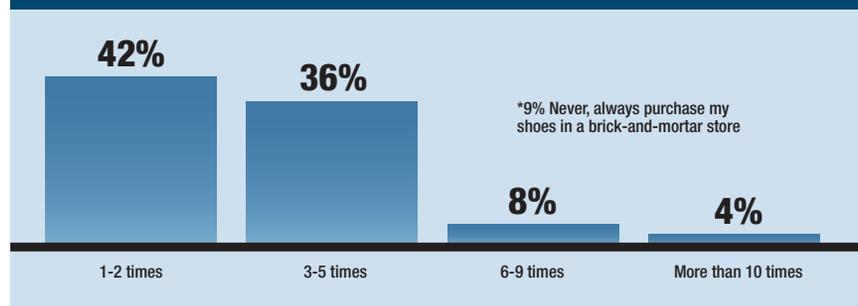
There are several factors that lead me to the decision of not making a purchase in-store. 1) Convenience and Safety. During this pandemic, I feel a bit uncomfortable going inside a brick-and-mortar store where there are a group of people indoors. 2) Price. I can often find comparable shoes on sale or cheaper online. 3) Pressure. I often feel pressured or obliged to purchase a shoe when I go into a store because I feel bad if I leave without one. This often makes me purchase a shoe that I have second thoughts about and I often have buyer's remorse afterwards. **Female 32**

#### SELECTED COMMENTS

### How many times have you shopped for footwear in a brick-and-mortar store in the past year?



### How many times have you purchased footwear online in the past year?

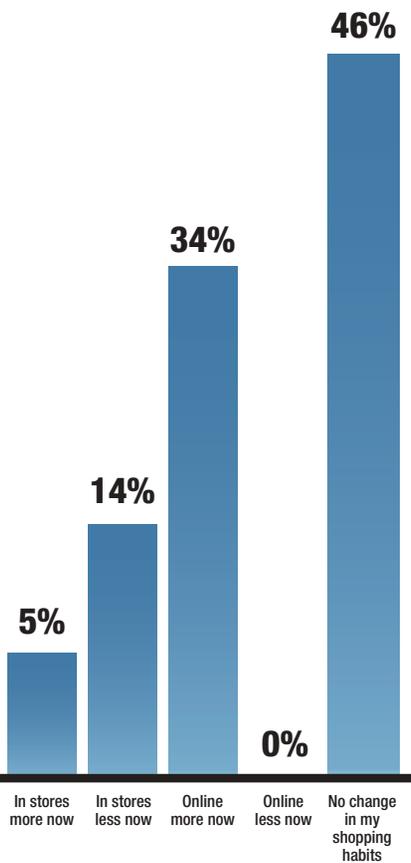


When shopping in brick-and-mortar stores, please rank in terms of importance when choosing where to shop for footwear.

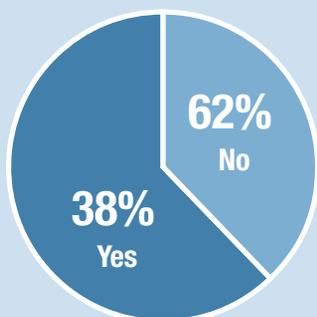
1. Selection
2. Prices
3. Location
4. Service
5. Atmosphere
6. Speed

We surveyed 401 consumers. Here is what they told us.

Are your shopping habits different now than they were before the pandemic when it comes to shopping and purchasing footwear in-store vs. choosing to shop and purchase online?



Does the concept of "shopping local" and supporting local businesses impact where you choose to shop for your footwear?



## If you could change one thing about your in-store shopping experience, what would it be?

### SELECTED COMMENTS

That more of the employees are knowledgeable with the shoes offered in the store. **Female 48**

Better organization/labeling of brands/models. **Female 30**

I would ensure that there are more associates available to assist. **Female 26**

I would like to feel less pressure, have more areas to sit and have more mirrors available. I would also like to see more sock options that would go well with the shoes I am purchasing if applicable. **Female 41**

Not to be hounded by a sales person. But also being able to easily find a sales person when needed. **Female 44**

Sales associates hovering the whole time. It's nice to have some alone time with the shoes. **Male 19**

Having a foot scanner in every store would be sweet. **Male 38**

To not have the items separated by brand, to have them separated by style. **Male 29**

The approach of sales staff. There's little middle ground between not caring if I'm in there versus driving hard for a commission. **Male 29**

Honest and considerate salespersons. Too many companies drive their employees to make additional sales instead of encouraging honest service. **Female 45**

Price. Usually a really great in store experience comes with a high price tag. **Female 36**

Better customer service. Employees who understand the meaning of customer experience, to 'surprise and delight' during this COVID time is lacking. In the past, I've supported local retailers who did things in the community such as group walk/runs that start from the brick-and-mortar location. **Female 59**

Less salesy feel from the staff and more educational. **Female 38**

I would love to be able to view the brick-and-mortar store's current shoe selection online first before making the trip to the store, just so I know there are interesting options available to me. **Male 49**

Price match with online prices. **Female 40**

Less upselling. When I go to buy shoes I don't need nutrition and socks and insoles and recovery etc., etc. **Male 35**

That all of the people are trained on shoe fit. Some stores don't always train the whole staff. So if you go on an off peak hour, there might not be a person there who is as knowledgeable to help you. **Female 43**

More things like offering drinks, places to sit, gifts with purchases, etc. **Female 54**

Probably selection. I typically purchase at a couple of fairly well-stocked but smaller stores, and there selection can be a challenge sometimes. Ultimately, I'm happy to have the local options, so I continue to support them. **Male 60**

Have product availability in store available to search online. **Male 27**

A more involved fitting process - knowledgeable staff with suggestions, scanners for sizing my feet, etc. **Female 40**

Lower prices, in line with what's available online. That said, I'm happy to pay a bit more for the knowledge/experience of the staff. **Male 47**

I appreciate when staff are more interested in what I'm training for than what I'm buying. **Male 32**

I would like to be closer in age to the sales associates. I mean these high school cross country guys are in super great shape and they're so young. I'm not saying that I want more middle aged folks working at the store, but I would appreciate a little more understanding from the 4 minute mile guys for the 10 minute mile guys. **Male 47**

Better prices and more availability of all the options. If I could try them on then have shoes of any color or style or size shipped next day to my house, for same price, with same return policy, I'd like that. **Male 53**

It would be neat if stores would have a good reward program that tracked what I got so when its time to get new shoes you could order the same from the stores website. **Male 39**

Steeper loyalty discounts... keep me coming back by giving me a great deal. **Male 52**

Agnostic recommendation of brands/styles vs. smaller selection and pushing limited brands that the store might carry. **Male 42**

I have a tough time finding product that fits my feet so having size and width options is important to me when shopping. If they don't have wide then it is usually tough for me to find something to get. **Male 31**

If the shoes are in the back then make sure someone is around to grab them. **Male 36**

The customer service should be better. People are not as helpful or as friendly as they use to be. **Female 40**

I would like to not feel pressured to buy extra items or have to wait more than 10 minutes for a shoe to be found in the back room. **Female 36**

I wish it offered a more holistic experience, such as having a running treadmill to properly try out the shoes in store. **Male 32**

Shoes are often grouped by brand rather than runner type. I would like to see all the low-stack height, neutral shoes grouped together instead. **Male 44**

If I take the time to go into a store looking for shoes they better have them! I don't want to have to come back, I don't want to have to check another store, I don't want to have to order them online to get the color or size I want. If I go into a store looking for shoes, I want them now! **Male 42**

I usually have a great experience in store! I really wish wider shoes were more common in store vs. online, but I think I'll be searching for more shoe stores near me because of this survey. **Female 28**

Free chair massage? (Haha.) I don't know really... I don't think I'd change anything. **Female 47**

Have people not want to sell me something, but help me with something. **Male 26**

I would appreciate it if the reps in the store could tone it down and maybe only provide service when asked for it rather than pushing for it. I wish there was a slightly less hands-on approach but at the same time, service should be provided if you ask for it. **Female 32**

# NSRA

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SHOE RETAILERS

## Thank You to Our 2021 Exhibitors



features.



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November 3 & 4, 2021 • Tucson, Arizona

This acknowledgement is in appreciation of the brands who exhibited at our premier education event of the year for NSRA members. The support of our exhibitors and Education Sponsors make this event possible, and reflects their commitment to doing business with independent footwear retailers.

For more information on our annual event and the many benefits of joining the NSRA community as a retailer or vendor, visit [nsra.org](http://nsra.org) or call us at 520-209-1710.



# Diadora Launches **Equipe Atomo** With Postcards from Italy Campaign

CARA GRIFFIN

**T**he new Equipe Atomo performance running shoe from Diadora is ready to make a splash at run retail. And with its accompanying “Postcards from Italy” campaign, the brand aims to elevate and celebrate its Made in Italy story.

The first performance running shoe made in Italy in over 30 years, the Equipe Atomo not only features a compelling performance and design story, it is also a passion project of sorts for Diadora. Available in two color ways — “azzurri” blue for men, white for women — the \$195 Equipe Atomo features a brand new midsole technology called DD ANIMA (Italian for SOUL) that is light, cushy and reactive.

And the shoe’s “Made in Italy” story? It is more than just messaging. Developed, engineered, and produced in Italy, the Equipe Atomo combines the brand’s signature craftsmanship and attention to detail with advanced scientific research conducted in its in-house lab.

The “Postcards from Italy” campaign that is accompanying the launch of the new shoe celebrates the brand’s authenticity, as well as its Italian heritage.

“Postcards from Italy” is comprised of a series of snapshots of modern Italy, highlighting the beauty of running through vignettes that speak of togetherness, self-reflection and adventure. Each location tells a story and explores a way of running, passion being the fil-rouge that connects them all. The campaign takes a trip through “the Boot” that mixes imposing backdrops, gentle hills and unexplored towns across the country

**The “Postcards from Italy” campaign that is accompanying the launch of the new shoe celebrates the brand’s authenticity, as well as its Italian heritage.**

with undiscovered musical gems and a storytelling-focused editing.

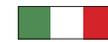
“For Diadora, the message is all about being authentic,” says Bryan Poerner, Country Manager USA at Diadora. “When you think about marketing, normally it’s ‘pick your demographic and try to figure out how to sell to them.’ We aren’t a big believer in that sort of approach.”

Poerner says the campaign is more aptly called a “manifesto.” With it, the brand wanted to show its roots, the story of a brand manufacturing in Italy, and to show what running in Italy really looks like.

“Postcards from Italy” is composed of four chapters which are dropping every two weeks on all Diadora social channels — the first dropped on November 30.

Diadora focused on four different

locations in Italy. The imagery shows what running looks like in these locations — a seaside, town, Tuscany, a mountain pass, a small city. A variety of characters are featured, ranging



**We wanted to show the beauty of country. It is super aspirational and inspiring.”**

**Bryan Poerner,  
Country Manager USA at Diadora.**

from locals to world class runners.

“The locations are all special to us,” says Poerner. “If you go to any small town in Italy, you’d see similar things. We picked different locations that showed different landscapes and made sure to tell the stories in those different cities. These are things that are authentically Italian. We wanted to show the beauty of country. It is super aspirational and inspiring.”

In addition to Diadora’s social channels, the “manifesto” can be viewed on a variety of digital platforms, which include all of Diadora’s retail partners’ social platforms and a few key partners platforms. Outside of the digital landscape, a few retail partners will have window installations with campaign graphics and Diadora is also doing activations with actual postcards, which tie into the message.

And what overall message do the “Postcards from Italy” convey? “I think you would want to go for a run in Italy [after seeing it],” says Poerner. “Running is a huge sport and a huge part of the culture in Italy.”

He adds, “It is a way to show the soul behind the product. When you see the campaign, you have a another level of understanding that you can’t get just from the shoe.” ■

## Tipping Point?

Diadora has seen its specialty run business blossom over the past few years, and is now in 275+ specialty doors in the U.S. The brand sees Equipe Atomo as a possible “tipping point,” but intends to stay focused on the specialty channel. “We believe the product evolution, as well as the new brand direction, will be the catalyst for the brand to get to the next level in terms of market share, door count, and awareness in the total running space in the North American market,” states Poerner.

# THE RIGHT COMBINATION

COMFORT, TECHNOLOGY, PERFORMANCE AND STYLE ALL COME TOGETHER IN THESE NEW STANDOUTS.



**BAFFIN TESSA**

This function-first winter boot boasts a stylish vibe suitable for everyday wear. Recommended for use during moderate to high activity levels, the \$177 Tessa is **specifically designed for a women's fit** and boasts a combination of Baffin proprietary technology comparable to some of the brand's utility styles.



**DECKERS X LAB X-SCAPE NBK MID**

This hybrid street sneaker/hiking boot delivers the comfort of a slipper. Plus it is designed to perform. The \$200 NBK Mid, made with ECOTAN leather, has a **Vibram N-Oil Litebase outsole and is a water repellent all-day boot**. Other features include a Meta-Rocker geometry and a flared swallow tail that enhances a natural stride.



**VEJA X VIBRAM DEKKAN**

Created in a collab with Vibram, the \$170 outdoor-inspired Dekkan is influenced by Veja's running technology, but is **made more for travel, everyday wear or light hiking**. The sole uses a new rubber formulation co-created by Vibram and Veja. Its midsole is made with 70% sugar cane; the outsole features 30% Amazonian rubber and 5% rice waste. The shoe's breathable Alveomesh upper is made of recycled polyester.



**OOFOS OOCANDOO**

Set to launch in April 2022, the OOFOS Oocandoo brings active recovery to the everyday adventurer. The lightweight shoe, \$99.95, delivers the brand's OOfoam technology and patented footbed in a versatile style that's ready for any excursion. **A one-piece molded OOfoam construction wraps proprietary OOFOS technology around the foot** for impact absorption below and delivers a soft pliable upper. An adjustable velcro strap provides an optimal fit.

diadora



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