
Peaches at 10: How to mix business with friendship

As their boutique celebrates its 10th anniversary, school friends Andrea Lyons and Siobhan Forrest reflect on the importance of business and friendship.

Peaches Boutique is celebrating 10 years in business and despite Covid-19 best pals since secondary school Andrea Lyons and Siobhan Forrest are looking forward with even greater enthusiasm and confidence to another busy decade in the fashion trade on Kilkenny City's close-knit Kieran Street.

The stylish duo say their success is down to the phenomenal local support they receive from savvy Kilkenny shoppers and visitors to the medieval city, many of whom have been constant return customers since the ladies first opened their doors on November 5, 2010.

To celebrate their landmark anniversary, Andrea and Siobhan are launching their new website, www.peachesboutique.ie and will be selling online for the first time. They also plan online and in-store discounts as part of the 10th Anniversary celebrations with 20% off in-store on October 2 and 3.

They've extended their range to include more casual chic styles and top brands include Inwear, French Connection and Great Plains as well as Frnch, Traffic People, H2O, Rant and Rave, Mellaris, Genese, Rinocemento and more.

The value of shopping local

"We are incredibly thankful to the Kilkenny and visiting public for their continued support," said Andrea. "It's so rewarding to see returning customers as we prepare to celebrate our landmark anniversary.

"We set up at the start of the last recession and while the pandemic has been a set-back, we've changed our buying strategy and are stocking more casual chic styles rather than formal wear. Unfortunately, there just aren't as many formal events for people to attend in the current climate. We've also invested in a whole new series of brands," Andrea explained.

It's been an exceptionally busy year for the business partners. Andrea was still on maternity leave having had her second child when Siobhan had a premature baby in July with little Ruby born at 27 weeks and weighing in at just 2lbs. Thankfully, she's thriving now.

“I was in hospital for four weeks before Ruby was born so it was pretty hectic. But we managed it all and we are looking forward with renewed optimism to a great finish to 2020.

“Kilkenny people are amazing. They’re incredibly supportive. They really understand the value of shopping local and keeping business in the city and the county. I really don’t think our business would have survived if we were based anywhere else.

“Visitor numbers to Kilkenny are well down and we don’t have the usual lift from hens and weekend visitors anymore. Our loyal customer base have kept supporting us, have kept coming in, have kept buying.”

Keeping business and friendship alive

What are the tips to a successful partnership/What is the key to staying in business as friends?

Andrea: “You have to be very straight with one another. Running a business is time consuming enough without worrying about potential mistakes, potential fall-outs, the consequences of your own or anyone else’s actions.

“You also have to recognise your own strengths and weaknesses and share the workload accordingly in a successful partnership. If you don’t trust someone and you end up measuring your or their input at the end of every week, it just won’t work. You also need time away from the business each week to recharge, to step back and look at the bigger picture,” Andrea said

Siobhan: “The key to staying in business as friends is sorting any potential niggle points immediately and not dwelling on things too much. The past year has shown us that we can rely on one another; that we have one another’s backs. It could have been a stressful year. But it has made us appreciate one another as business partners and as friends even more.”

What are your thoughts on doing business from regional towns in the post-Covid world?

Siobhan: “It shows us that we have to be ahead of the curve all the time; that we have to invest time and effort into our social media activity and that we need to box very cleverly when we’re buying. We’re lucky in that Kilkenny has incredible charm and appeal.

“Boutiques and other small businesses in regional towns trading in the post-Covid world will really have to work on their USP, their web presence and telling their story through effective PR and digital campaigns. Customer service has been the cornerstone of our business and those doing business from regional towns post-Covid need to reward and recognise those who shop local, who come in, who want to buy.

“Pedestrianised Kieran Street means we’ve random shoppers dropping in, particularly at weekends. Being in sync with customers is everything. While we are going online and launching our www.peachesboutique.ie site soon, our focus will remain on our loyal clientele in Kilkenny, visitors to the city and county and repeat shoppers from Cork and Tipperary who’ve continued to support us through thick and thin.”

How did Kilkenny rally as a business community?

Andrea: “Kilkenny is a very close-knit business community made up of lots of independent retailers and many multiples. Kieran Street is a microcosm in itself and a community of very united, independent traders who go above and beyond every single day.

“We’re very fortunate to have an exceptionally proactive local council, headed up by CEO, Colette Byrne. She walks around the city, she talks to traders and she takes an interest in Kilkenny above and beyond her job. Steps to maintain social distancing through a new traffic system and widening walkways have taken time to bed in but it has helped people feel safer, particularly at weekends when footpaths can be busy.

“The Local Enterprise Office team, headed up by Fiona Deegan, has also been there for business and we are extremely thankful for their support. Our city has always been a mecca for discerning shoppers and while it will be a tough time ahead for the business community, we’re glad to have fantastic local authority and local business support.”

Do you anticipate a demand to live and work in regions?

Siobhan: “We definitely anticipate demand to live and work in the regions – particularly regions like the south east. We both commute to Kilkenny but would move there in a heartbeat. There’s a very special vibe about Kilkenny and about the region and there’s a great quality of life in the city and county.

“While we do experience colder winters, the summers are warmer, the quality of life is second to none, property prices are relatively affordable and we’re very fortunate to be within close reach of Dublin by car, train or bus. It’s great also being close to the sea and with plans for a Technological University at an advanced stage and work progressing on the city centre Abbey Quarter, the future is very bright.”

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