



Crocs Rock

COMFORT

Could Crocs become the next cult brand? BY BARBARA SCHNEIDER-LEVY

Fun, functional, fashionable. That's the way the management team at Crocs describes its new species of amphibious comfort clogs.

The line of colorful, multipurpose clogs is selling to water-sports enthusiasts, hikers, medical professionals, food service workers as well as fashion consumers, the executives behind the brand said.

At its initial launch in October 2002 during the Ft. Lauderdale International Boat Show, attendees bought 1,000 pairs. But it was positive reaction to the line by retailers and sales reps at The Shoe Market of the Americas last March that has encouraged the company to more aggressively pursue the shoe market. At its first footwear event, Crocs, a division of Western Brands LLC, Boulder, Colo., booked orders with 13 retailers, as well as reps interested in carrying the line. The company is exhibiting at this week's WSA.

The vendor now supplies 270 retail

and sides of the shoes, making Crocs ideal for the boating and water-sports market. They've also caught on with health-care and food-service workers who require footwear that's slip-resistant and can be easily sterilized with chlorine and water.

To date, the bulk of its accounts are boating stores, marinas and surf shops, but the line has been picked up by comfort retailers as well, such as Roth's Shoes and The Pedestrian Shops.

"Our comfort store business is great," said Mike Margolis, national sales manager for the brand. "It's an add-on business, especially due to the color choices. Customers won't buy a \$150 shoe in red, but will buy a [moderately priced] cool red shoe that's fun to wear."

Margolis said Crocs were also featured in the early winter Norm Thompson catalog as well as in fishing catalogs, and the brand has developed an international business with stores in Japan, the Middle East, South Africa and Australia.

Roth's Shoes, a 12-unit chain of comfort stores based in Salt Lake City, will be receiving its first shipment for spring '04, according to buyer Sue Selig. "They're good colors, something new and fun," she said. "They can be add-on items or multi-purchases."

At Boulder, Colo.-based Pedestrian Shops, 1,587 pairs sold from April to December 2003, with a few hundred moving during the Christmas season.

"Every single day, young girls were buying different colors, taking off the back straps and trading them," said owner Richard Polk. "Everyone wanted them. There's a whole culture [around] Crocs."

In the past, the Crocs line has focused on warm-weather styles, but an insulated waterproof ankle boot will be added for fall '04. The entire collection is available for men and women in a range of 12 colors that includes khaki, red and butter, and averages \$30 to \$50.

"These types of looks will make us less seasonal and that is a way to build the brand," said Boedecker.



Crocs' signature beach style is available in 12 colors. accounts, and expects to sell more than 500,000 pairs this year, according to George Boedecker, CEO of Crocs.

Crocs footwear, developed by company co-founder and inventor Scott Seamans, is made of a patented resin that softens with body heat, allowing shoes to mold to the foot for a customized fit.

To further enhance the comfort factor, the clogs incorporate such features as an anatomical last, built-in arch support, metatarsal bar and a back strap for added stability. And they're antimicrobial, making them resistant to bacteria and fungus.

Key to the collection is a ventilation system that allows water to pass through multiple ports in the uppers

