

retail profile: zoe & co

Q&A with Bruce Prescott, Owner



Ted Vayos, BODY: Please tell us about your two specialty stores.

Bruce Prescott, Zoe & Co.: Zoë & Co.'s Rhode Island location opened in 2001 in the heart of historic downtown Westerly, a New England resort destination of quaint shops, lovely parks, and seven miles of beaches. In 2008, Zoë & Co. opened a second store in downtown Concord, New Hampshire, a hub of community activities, commerce, politics, and entertainment, overseen by the gleaming gold dome of the Capitol Building. We love vibrant, active downtowns! We invest in brick and mortar stores, rather than online business, because we believe in supporting the communities in which we are located. Our employees are community members, many with families and children in the local school systems, who contribute to the local economy and are invested in helping their towns thrive. We

sponsor local sports teams, volunteer at local events, and provide assistance to community organizations which promote the welfare of women and families in our locales. Finding the perfect fit is our passion, and it requires a personal touch. When our clients come into our boutique-style shops for a fitting, we are able to help them find basics, luxury bras, special occasion bras, and much more! Our stock room is packed with over 230 sizes of bras from over 40 companies. We carry strapless and longline bras, cup and band sized swimwear, sport bras, bralettes, shapewear, lingerie (racy, demure, and everything in between!), as well as breast forms, post-surgical bras, trans/cross gender products, maternity and nursing bras, corsets, panties and thongs, sleepwear, accessories, and hosiery.

Ted: What makes your store special?

Bruce: Outstanding, knowledgeable customer service is what makes our store exceptional. Finding a customer's size is only the starting point. Knowing the numerous factors that affect fit and knowing our stock is part of our rigorous training process. Our fitters know which styles work best with different types of breast tissue and body types/frames, so we can meet each customer's unique needs. Since we carry bras in over 230 sizes from more than 40 companies, we can help our clients find just what they are looking for!

Ted: What do you look for in a brand?

Bruce: We look for quality brands that provide a wide range of cup and band sizes. Brands most important to our store are Eveden, Panache, Anita, Royce, Parfait, Fitfully Yours, Wacoal, Chantelle, Empreinte, and Huit—each brand is special in its own way and fills a niche that others can't. Just as each woman is a different fit, each bra company is unique, and we appreciate the differences that make them special. We sell mastectomy bras and breast forms, as well as post-surgical products and transitional/cross gender products. We have a wide variety of nursing bras, and have recently

Key Brands

Anita
Chantelle
Empreinte
Eveden
Fit Fully Yours
Huit
Panache
Parfait
Royce

begun carrying the Cake brand, which is quite popular! We carry strapless and longline bras, cup and band sized swimwear, sport bras, bralettes, shapewear, lingerie (racy, demure, and everything in between!), as well as breast forms, post-surgical bras, transitional/cross gender products, maternity and nursing bras, corsets, panties/thongs, sleepwear, accessories, and hosiery.

Ted: What have brands done to disappoint you?

Bruce: One thing we find disappointing/frustrating is when companies we work with choose, shortsightedly, to sell their products online at lower prices than we can offer. Brick and mortar stores are the key to introducing customers to brands and styles they love—love, because fitters have worked with them to find just the right size and fit. Most customers going online would not know what size or style

to order without the help of a fitter, and might never consider searching for certain brands/styles on their own. Fitters encourage customers to try styles they might otherwise overlook—hand selling bras is what helps customers find and fall in love with just the right style/size for them. If those customers happen to search a company's website for bras they've purchased in our store, they aren't going to consider the expenses we must pay (fitter's salary, fixtures, heat and electricity, insurance, etc.) which are factored into the cost of a bra at our shop. They simply see that, by going directly to the company, they can now get the bra we helped them find for less money. We make one sale, and the company then gets all the future sales from that customer online. Some companies see this as an easy way to make a few extra dollars, but undercutting the brick and mortar stores that help build a following for their brand makes it not only unprofitable, but unpalatable,

for us to continue working with them. In the long run, such companies must recognize and respect the fact that working in partnership with brick and mortar stores is what ensures the continued promotion and success of their products.

Ted: Describe the popular styles or trends in your store.

Bruce: When we talk about trends, one thing to remember is that what is universally popular for all women is finding a bra that fits! That being said, bralettes are the rage right now, as are cup and band sized bras with bralette styling. Bras with conversion to racerback options are also highly sought after. Wedding boudoir photography is a trend that brings in women looking for beautiful lingerie styles that reflect their personality—corsets, chemises, lace, leather—it's a great opportunity to explore!

Ted: Describe your price points and size ranges.



Bruce: Our bras run from under \$30 to over \$300, with the average price of a bra being somewhere from \$65 to \$85. We carry bands from 28 inches to 56 inches, and cup sizes from AAA to KK. The average customer spends about \$200 per visit.

Ted: What is your typical or average customer size?

Bruce: We carry over 230 bra sizes, and we see the full range of sizes that women come in, from petite to voluptuous. Our average-sized customer is anyone who recognizes that they deserve to be in a bra that fits!

Ted: What does your average customer spend per visit?

Bruce: The average customer spends about \$200 per visit.

Ted: Describe your customer base.

Bruce: We have a very wide customer base, ranging from girls in their preteens to

women in their nineties. We work with people of all genders, including those who are transitioning (male to female and female to male), and we work with clients who have specific needs, i.e., breast cancer, mastectomy, augmentation, reconstruction, reduction, nursing, arthritis/physical or mobility issues, etc. Our customer base is diverse, and we love working with them!

Ted: What have you done to improve your business?

Bruce: As always, we strive to maintain the rigorous training and continuing education of our bra fitters, who attend workshops on fitting women with breast cancer, share knowledge about best styles for specific customer needs, talk with La Leche consultants and work with organizations which support LGBTQ+ and transgender people in order to provide informed, welcoming, and compassionate service for all our clients.

