



Don Hoffman of Airport Plaza Jewelers in Cheektowaga, N.Y., with his "arm and leg." His famous local slogan is broadcast daily on 12 television stations, including CNN.

[SPRINGBOARD]

Silly Joke Turns Into Brilliant Idea

During a goof-off session one slow day at Airport Plaza Jewelers in Cheektowaga, N.Y., store owner and president Don Hoffman ripped the arms and legs from a child's doll, waved them about, and proclaimed: "Airport Plaza Jewelers—where a really great diamond doesn't cost an arm and a leg!" Six months later, the store's first "arm and leg" ad—in which Hoffman holds one of each from a dismembered mannequin—appeared on television.

"I knew the concept was a winner when a friend of my girlfriend overheard local women talking about it just weeks after it ran," Hoffman says. "They recited the entire commercial verbatim."

Since the ads began running three years ago, sales at Hoffman's business have tripled. In 2002, annual sales at his 200-square-foot store in the Buffalo, N.Y., metropolitan area were \$300,000; today, sales are \$1 million. The commercials run 365 days a year on 12 cable-television stations, including CNN.

Because his operation was small and independent, Hoffman realized his only chance to grow

was to brand himself. He's now a local celebrity who signs autographs, poses for photographs (with the notorious mannequin limbs), and has even sung his jingle (by request) in the frozen-foods aisle of the local supermarket.



Airport Plaza Jewelers, Cheektowaga, N.Y., is a 200-square-foot store that tripled its sales in three years by implementing a memorable ad campaign that started as a joke among friends.

Hoffman carries no branded merchandise (his store is stocked with staple items, including diamond engagement rings), maintains a healthy cash flow, and says he always pays vendors on time.

He also plans to share his success with jewelers in other markets. Hoffman has copyrighted and service-marked his arm-and-leg slogan and is working on three new concepts. As part of any licensing

deals, he'll help other jewelers produce commercials in their markets. Because this marketing system is personality driven, the best candidates are independent single-location ventures. "The whole idea is to brand yourself," Hoffman says.

To check out Hoffman's commercials, log onto his Web site at www.airportplazajewelers.com or see his business-to-business Web site, www.armandaleg.info. ■

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JEWELERS' CIRCULAR KEYSTONE

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