



Calvin Klein - Calvin Klein's Success Story

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Growing Up

Klein, born November 19, 1942, was taught by his mother to love fashion. He would often accompany her when she went shopping in New York City for affordable clothes. From an early age he knew he wanted to be a fashion designer, and taught himself how to sketch and sew.

Before he turned twenty, he graduated from the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York. He married Jayne Centre and began working as an apprentice sketching European coat designs for his employer Dan Millstein to copy. Klein, however, disdained the idea that the normative American practice was to imitate European fashion and longed to start his own company. He believed that original fashion ideas could come out of the States and he was just the innovator to make it happen. But the realization of his dream seemed a long way away since he was struggling financially and was working part-time at his father's grocery store in order to make some extra money

Starting The Business

Calvin Klein Ltd. was formed in 1968. Klein took a \$10,000 loan from a friend and used \$2,000 of his own money to get it started. Rather than hunting out success, it stumbled upon him. His first order came from a coat-buyer for the large department store Bonwit Teller who got off the elevator on the wrong floor and saw Klein's work. The buyer was impressed and ordered \$50,000 worth of coats. In addition, an editorial praising Klein's designs was written up in Vogue. Klein's reputation was quickly established.

Five years after starting Calvin Klein Ltd., Klein moved away from solely designing coats and offered women a less-expensive alternative to the ostentatious European fashions with sportswear that could be identified as having "The Calvin Klein Look". Men also were drawn to Klein's comfortable outfits and masculine designs.

He was recognized for his accomplishments by being awarded the Coty award by the fashion press in 1973, 1974, and 1975, and his wealth grew as the public continued to buy his subdued clothing. But success troubled his home life and Klein and Centre divorced in 1974. Klein embarked on a period of partying and irresponsibility. By now a prominent public figure, Klein could be found nightly at Studio 54, but his days of unconcerned ease ground to a halt in 1978 when his daughter Marci was kidnapped. Marci returned home safely, but the incident frightened Klein enough to turn away from the publicity he once so doggedly sought.

Building An Empire

It was through a titillating ad campaign in 1980, featuring a 15-year old Brook Shields in a pair of tight-fitting jeans and the line "Nothing comes between me and my Calvins," that pushed Calvin Klein Ltd. forward once more. This now much-emulated, sexually driven method of advertising was at once condemned by feminists, calling it pornographic. However, through this experience Klein learned that there is no such thing as bad press; in their first week, an astonishing 200,000 pairs of the tight-fitting Calvins were sold. In 1982, Klein was taken to court over an ad campaign featuring men wearing nothing but briefs embossed in the Calvin Klein name. Though some magazines

refused to print the ads, the underwear sold incredibly well.

Due to the appearance of AIDS and the affect this had on the promiscuousness of the 1970s, the demand for the sexy, body-hugging jeans declined. The debt Klein had amassed by 1984 nearly toppled his fashion empire. Using \$80 million in junk bonds, Klein refinanced the debt, leaving his company at great risk.

Klein married again in 1986. However, addicted to vodka and Valium around this time, Klein was admitted to a rehab centre in the Caribbean. By the time he got out, bankruptcy was imminent, but David Geffen, a friend from Klein's days partying at Studio 54, helped him out financially and gave him the chance to begin again.

Saved from ruin, Klein went immediately to work churning out a variety of products. The CK brand of more affordable designer clothing, and, like Richard Branson, licencing the Calvin Klein name to sunglasses and other fashion accessories pulled the fledgling Klein back out on top.

Again controversy around one of Klein's ad campaigns in 1995 prompted the FBI and Justice Department to investigate Klein for violating child pornography laws. Klein stopped the campaign, and eventually the Justice Department's ruling came down in his favour.

With CK perfume and his CK jeans a success and money pouring in once again, Klein is undoubtedly the picture of a survivor who could have self-destructed, but because of a wealth of good ideas coupled with good fortune and diligence, he has become one of the world's foremost fashion designers.

Evan is an entrepreneur and international speaker. At the age of 19, he became an owner and Chief Operating Officer in Redasoft, a biotechnology software company. The company quickly grew to over 300 organizations as clients, including NASA and Johnson & Johnson, in 30 countries. He started Evan Carmichael & Associates with the goal to give entrepreneurs the Inspiration to follow their passion and the strategies they need to succeed. Evan has delivered over 100 keynote presentations to entrepreneurs in North America, Europe, and Asia. He has been interviewed by newspapers, radio stations, and television stations including The Globe and Mail, CHUM FM, CityTV, Global TV, OMNI TV, Enterprise, and the Toronto Sun. <http://www.evancarmichael.com> is the world's #1 website for small business inspiration and strategies.

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