



John Blair and Robby Tyson



CM Jewelry Sparkles

Robby Tyson and John Blair have created a gem of a business with affordable, profitable and ready-to-run jewelry programs for rent-to-own.

By Kristen Card

Robby Tyson and John Blair make an unlikely pair of business partners. Tyson is a career jewelry guy with a slow Southern drawl and a talent for turning ideas into realities. Blair is a fast-talking former Marine with an executive background and a talent for teaching others how to sell.

They share one essential quality: decades of experience in rent-to-own. Together, they're leading the industry's largest jewelry supplier. Atlanta-based Classic Models Jewelry Manufacturing, or CM Jewelry (www.cmjmf.com), currently services more than 1,000 rent-to-own stores nationwide and Tyson and Blair are aggressively expanding the company.

"We're a single source to meet all your jewelry needs," company President Tyson says. "We go into your store and set up a complete, turnkey jewelry department. And we're a true manufacturer; we specialize in creating classic models, award jewelry and custom pieces."

Tyson has done everything in the jewelry business, from diamond sorting and grading to sales and marketing. He launched CM Jewelry last year with sisters Susan McKinnon and Sherron Shaw of ABS Artistic Jewelry, with whom he had a working history; the women now do CM's design and manufacturing. Blair, the firm's vice president, spent a total of 25-plus years as an executive with Broyhill Furniture Rentals and as executive director of TRIB Group, the country's largest rent-to-own buying cooperative. He and Tyson met while Blair was with TRIB Group and Tyson was vice president of sales and marketing with jewelry manufacturer and supplier Jerry Bogo Co. They find their jewelry expertise and rent-to-own experience make a valuable combination.

"We understand jewelry is an add-on product in the RTO industry," Blair says. "But it's also extremely profitable merchandise, because no matter how long it may be in your case or how long it's rented out, it doesn't depreciate. It also requires no additional personnel, not much showroom space and no delivery charge." Additionally, CM Jewelry has a return-for-credit policy—75 percent of original value for the first year and 65 percent the second year—for items that have been rented or sized. The dealer can return the piece and put the credit toward the purchase of another piece of jewelry—the only product in the industry dealers can return for credit.

As jewelry's popularity as a rent-to-own product develops, Blair and Tyson believe CM Jewelry programs are exceptionally effective due to their unique understanding of their customers, their customization of programs and products and the ease and support they provide to dealers.

"We offer live and non-live programs," Tyson explains. "A store can launch a non-live program for less than \$1,000. We conduct demographic studies around the store's location, so we can make sure we've got the right product mix for that store. And the dealer chooses what the showcase looks like."

"We provide all the sales training you need," Blair adds. "We help store personnel understand the importance of making sure the jewelry display is clean, neat and professional—but that they must take items out and put them on the customer, so that they can see it; that's 90 percent of your sale, done. Dealers who put themselves fully behind the product and are successful can add up to 12 percent to their revenue."

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“We do our best to make everything as easy as possible for the dealers,” Blair continues. “Initial sizing and refurbishing are free; we furnish FedEx labels and boxes, so they can send products for resizing or service; we provide point-of-purchase and other promotional materials; we custom-tag each piece with their information; and we give stores a comprehensive binder containing all the info they need to know about our company, the products and the pricing. Additionally, we offer a stock-balance program, so it’s simple for the dealers to swap out pieces not moving in their stores.”

The jewelry business is jumping and Blair and Tyson say the best part is being part of the rent-to-own realm.

“John and I are passionate about rent-to-own,” Tyson says. “I love the people—they’re genuine, they’re nice, they’re fun. We’ve got a lot of friends in this business and working with them is great.”

“We’re here to support the RTO industry,” Blair concurs. “It’s come a long way since I got involved in it in 1984, and whatever changes, we want to be included in it. It’s good for the consumer and it’s good for us.” ✱

Kristen Card is a freelance business writer based in Austin, Texas.

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Who's Who in Rent-to-Own Jewelry

The following rent-to-own jewelry vendors are APRO associate members (*), APRO advertisers (+) and/or APRO Buying Show exhibitors (^).

ABS Artistic Jewelry Inc. *

Contact: Susan McKinnon
2936 N. Druid Hills Rd. N.E., Ste. B
Atlanta, GA 30329-3920
404/636-6143; fax 404/320-1490
absartistic@bellsouth.net

Bryce Co. * ^ +

Contact: Bryan Collins
1612 2nd Ave. S.W., Ste. 232
Cullman, AL 35055-5313
800/880-9434; fax 800/881-0194
bryan@brycejewelry.com
www.brycejewelry.com

CM Jewelry Manufacturing Co. * ^

Contact: Robby Tyson
Sales and marketing:
5512 Ringgold Rd., Ste. 101
East Ridge, TN 37412
Factory and distribution:
2936 N. Druid Hills Rd. N.E., Ste. B
Atlanta, GA 30329-3920
888/995-5579; fax 423/648-1105
robbtyson@aol.com
www.cmjmf.com

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