

# Funky Fashion

Nick Aston *has been examining the growing popularity of fashion jewellery in the recession to see how people can look like a millionaire without spending like one.*



They've been heralded as original, cool must-haves. Young and fashion-savvy customers can't get enough of them. Their fans include trend-setting American celebrity Paris Hilton and Chelsea WAG Cheryl Cole. Yet despite the costume jewellers' luxury clients, Alayna Salter's price tags are anything but exclusive to the rich and famous.

Punky Allsorts' designs do not feature diamonds or any precious metals. Instead, the company draws on the popularity of another girls' best friend – sweets.

Modern in its creativity but retro in its inspiration, the company's creations started life on the wrists and neck of singer/songwriter, Alayna.

Her liquorice and dolly mixture-themed pieces became an instant hit with fans; many enquired where the one-off collections could be purchased. Sensing a great opportunity, she established Punky Allsorts in January 2008.

Whilst keeping costs to a minimum, the finished articles do not compromise originality and beauty. Each piece is made from clay beads; these are baked, formed and later coloured before being strung by hand on elastic thread. The results are colourful, eye-catching and unique jewellery.

Wholesalers are buying the pieces as quickly as they leave the kiln. Adored by Los Angeles' A-listers, upmarket boutique Kitson regularly snaps up the latest selections. In turn, Punky Jewellery has become a worldwide success story.

The latest addition is Seven Cities. Each design represents a popular destination such as London or Paris.

With retail prices of £12.50 for bracelets to £50 for a necklace, these are eye-catching creations that are inexpensive.

In the current economic climate, it's this value for money that customers seek.

Lower disposable incomes mean that the jewellery industry must explore new opportunities, and as some purchasers explore alternatives to gold, fashion jewellery is proving that a great look doesn't have to come at a price.

You don't have to be a music artist with craze-spotting fans to be profitable. Explore any department store and you'll find an array of glass, wooden and acrylic jewellery at pocket money prices. These aren't once in a lifetime purchases. Regulars won't buy one pair of earrings. They'll buy

earrings and a bracelet. While they're at it, they'll probably buy that necklace they have their eye on.

Why? Because costume jewellery is adaptable. It's designed to be worn with a number of clothes and for everyday occasions. Think about it: we wear a wedding ring for life. We wear our watches for years. When it comes to fashion jewellery, the wearer takes

their pick from their personal collection to suit the mood and occasion.

Juli Miller of Jules Jules explains: "Costume jewellery suits today's market for change. We change our wardrobe

frequently and like to do the same with our jewellery." She adds that purchasers, "can be up to date" without having to look to more luxury pieces in a recession. "Big statement pieces that are currently popular can be found equally in costume jewellery," she says.

Juli began designing her contemporary fused glass jewellery in 2005. Her pendants, cufflinks and earrings are individually hand-cut from layers of art glass. The glass is layered and then fused together to create a truly one-off piece. Highly wearable,

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Juli's work appeals to a wide range of customers. Her best-selling glass pendants retail at around £25.

Equally desirable examples stem from the highly popular children's costume jewellery sector. Launched in 2006, Molly Brown London's collections retail in major department stores such as Harrods, Selfridges and Fortnum and Masons. Furthermore, the brand is stocked in more than 50 other outlets, including seven Premier Fraser Hart stores.

The company's best-selling product, the Jelly Bean collection, has become something of a cult. Beautifully finished in solid silver dipped in enamel, International Jewellery London 2007 awarded the range 'New Product of the Year.'

Eleven 'flavours' are available. Admirers of these well-loved classics whose sweet-tooth is on strike can indulge in colours including strawberry and grape, and silver 'signature' jellybeans are also available. Single beans start at a trade price of £14.60.

Founder Erica Illingworth pulls no punches as to the range's success.

"Within two weeks of the jellybeans being introduced at Harrods, we became the best-selling children's jewellery collection in the store," she proudly says. Three years later and there is no sign of a lack of demand. "Even in the recession," Erica reflects, "the products remain the best-selling children's accessory."

Another ideal compliment to your range of beads and children's jewellery is S.R. Kidz by SilverRado. A sterling silver bead collection for children from five to thirteen years, they feature bright colours and appealing designs.

Vivid and intense designs are not only noticeable, Erica says, but hugely popular. "You have to offer something special. Our products are colourful and above all, fun".

At the same time, purchases can be highly personal. "Our signature Jelly Bean range is often purchased as a sentimental keepsake," Erica says. "I had one customer who bought a signature bean for his wife, who had just lost a baby. They used to call the baby 'Bean' due to its shape. For the couple, this was a special way to

remember their child".

Fat Lip's Sarah Watmore agrees. After leaving her job in PR and marketing, she travelled extensively with her husband sourcing new ideas for designs. In 2004, Fat Lip was born. This was, "At a time when fashion jewellery really took off," Sarah adds.

Featuring spectacular contemporary jewellery in a range of colours, Fat Lip is continuing to experience strong growth. "Our sales for this year over the last three months are up around twelve per cent from 2008," Sarah says.

She continues: "We have customers in the twenties to fifties age range, but also some who are in their sixties and seventies." The reason, she adds, is simple. "Our products have a wide appeal due to our array of styles."

Those not purchasing in-store can purchase, "At any time of the day or night" through Fat Lip's easy to use transactional website. "A website is essential," Sarah says. "A large number of firms we see at trade fairs do not have a website. This can really hold you back," she warns.

Sarah says the benefits of investing

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### *Fashion jewellery is proving that a great look doesn't have to come at a price*

in promoting fashion jewellery now can be highly worthwhile. "We take that extra step to help our retail customers," she says. For example, a comprehensive range of jewellery display stands are available.

Fat Lip's dedication and customer service has certainly paid off. The company successfully launched around twenty-five new products across four trade shows this spring. Far from cutting back on their products, it was their biggest ever launch.

With next day working delivery, low minimum order and excellent attention to detail, Fat Lip's ranges are both classic and enduring. Those looking for something more modern are not disappointed, either. Vibrant new styles made with a colourful selection of unusual acrylic beads will be launched this month. And that's not all. "At the Autumn Fair we'll be launching a new beaten and coloured aluminium jewellery range called 'Amarella,'" Sarah says.

As the warmer months approach, Sarah anticipates multicoloured, bold and dynamic jewellery to sell well. "They go with anything and we find these sell all year round," she says.

Want to pick and choose your own design? Charlotte Borgen Design is one such company that has embraced

the idea. The concept is simple; using your favourite charms, you can create your own personal jewellery.

There are more than 1,000 different colours, patterns and designs in glass, enamel, silver and a dazzling array of CZ beads in numerous colours. Designing your own bracelet or necklace will carry you to the limits of your imagination.

Similarly, Talbot's wide selection of ranges makes it one of the country's largest fashion accessory suppliers to the trade. Its jewellery and accessory designs include "Vital must-have" Pandora-look charm bracelets featuring interchangeable lamp-work style glass beads.

Also included in their ranges are long seed bead necklaces, inter-spaced with decorated beads. Together with glass designs in an array of rich, lustrous colours, these create a good splash of colour to any display.

Italian costume jewellery is held in equally high regard. Zoppini conjures collections with a multitude of magical tones, materials, styles and designs. The fashion conscious brand is boldly recognisable for its unique concept of subtly setting a trend, and at the same time reflects our day-to-day living, desires and image.

Even the wildest desires need to be tempered by reality, but spirits

can't help but be lifted with Valentina Jewellery's new strikingly pretty Mille Fiore pendants. Meaning 'one thousand flowers,' each pendant has its own story to tell. Made entirely by hand from authentic Murano glass, tiny slices of patterned glass cane, or "Murrine," are fused onto the base heart or disc bead. The designs are completely random, making each pendant totally intriguing and unique. The more you look, the more you find!

Still not convinced? Consider these words from Sarah Watmore of Fat Lip: "The jewellery industry should take fashion jewellery very seriously," she urges. "It is highly adaptable. It's far easier to create great statement pieces using readily available and affordable materials than with more expensive metals."

In what are challenging times, it's refreshing to see bold, highly creative and aesthetic creations prove that we truly can look a million bucks without a millionaire's budget. Success is there to be had. For designers short of inspiration, just turn to Punky Allsort's Alayna Salter: "If you're brave and have a great idea, use your initiative and just go for it. I wanted to create a young, fun brand that didn't follow the rules of the more formal traditional trends and now the success of the jewellery is providing me with great opportunities to further my music career!"