

## **CHRISTCHURCH BRICKS AND MORTAR SUCCESS STORY HEADS ONLINE**

*Media release, 10 December 2008, Sucklings Shoe Store Ltd, Christchurch:* **Christchurch retailer Sucklings Shoes has been in business since 1934 with a single shop and an enviable base of loyal customers. The company has now become a truly multi-channel business, with the launch of [www.sucklings.co.nz](http://www.sucklings.co.nz) – a fully enabled, e-commerce website.**

Managing director John Suckling has been running the family owned business since the late 1970s when he took over from his father, and says the company has continued to trade strongly, even in a difficult time for many retailers.

He attributes much of the company's success to the continuing innovations introduced by his father and himself over the years.

"Dad saw the benefits of keeping track of each customer right from the beginning – within a year or two of opening the shop, he had developed his own card index system to keep a record of every customer who bought from us, what they bought and their special requirements.

"That was revolutionary for the time and some of our current customers still remember the card system. When I took over, I continued with the innovation by converting the card system to a computerised database, which was also quite revolutionary for the early 1980s," Suckling says.

In a time before suitable off-the-shelf software was available in New Zealand, Sucklings worked with Christchurch programmer Mike Wall to develop a fully custom built database system which has evolved over the years and continues to work well for the retailer today.

"The benefits of having such detailed records of thousands of customers are apparent every day – we can refer to the customer records for every customer who comes into the shop, and whenever we get a call or email from a customer who is looking at a shoe in our catalogue or on the website."

John Suckling's decision to add an internet shopping site was motivated by the desire to continue to innovate and provide 'world class service' to his existing customers by making it as easy and convenient as possible for them to shop with Sucklings. The site is a major plank in Sucklings' overall strategy of maintaining his customer focus and keeping a few steps ahead of his competitors.

"Some of our New Zealand competitors were online, but we recognised that most of them simply use internet storefronts to point customers towards their bricks and mortar shops, and they don't have their whole range of shoes online.

"We expect our site to drive foot traffic too, but anyone visiting the site can also choose their shoes and complete the whole buying process online.

"Because we have also traditionally sold a lot of shoes through the mail order catalogues we send out twice a year, we know that our customer base extends throughout the country, and having an online presence enables those customers to shop with us whenever they need to."

John went to Christchurch based post-click conversion experts, LeftClick Ltd, to build and optimise his website.

"The most important thing to me was that the site had to be very easy to use, easy to follow and that the process of shopping would be extremely simple for our customers – including those who are less technology literate," Suckling says.

Suckling was attracted to LeftClick because of their emphasis on a customer-focused approach and ensuring the effectiveness of websites.

He didn't want to work with a company that didn't have an empathy with his customers, so was looking for something much more than a straight website design.

LeftClick's CEO Alan Cox says the Sucklings project was a great opportunity for the company to build a site from the ground up.

"Normally we are making recommendations and changes to existing websites, but with this project, we were able to build in user optimised features right from the beginning, ensuring that the site was always going to be very easy to navigate and follows all the rules of effective e-commerce site design."

The site was launched in early October and is already having a positive impact on sales for the company, as well as changing the way Sucklings' in-store staff operate.

"LeftClick came up with an online Shoe Finder search function that gives the kind of experience that Sucklings wanted," says Suckling. "It's been so successful in fact that we are now using it as part of the in-store experience."

The Shoe Finder can access every shoe for sale in the shop. The stock is updated to the site at the end of every business day, which means customers can confidently search for sizes and styles and know that their shoes of choice will be in stock.

"We are finding that having the website up and running in the shop with the shoe finder on the home page, is making it easier for customers and our staff to quickly see if shoes are available in their size, which is great for customers with larger or smaller feet, and those requiring other features like orthotics or wider fitting styles," Suckling says.

As expected, customers are using the site at home or work to find out if sizes are available and then come into the shop to try them on and make their purchase.

"Every day now we have customers of all ages coming in quoting our website code numbers or with print outs of specific shoes they have researched on the site, which demonstrates that it is working exactly the way we expected."

Another benefit of the new site is that it is adding a new work dimension for the store staff who are now involved with the new site on a number of levels. Not only are they using the site to assist the in-store sales process, they are also using quieter periods to manage the website. "It's been very rewarding to see how my team have really got behind the new site," says Suckling.

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### **About Sucklings Shoes:**

The Sucklings name has been associated with footwear in Christchurch since the founding (by John Suckling's great-grandfather) of the Suckling Brothers factory in the city in 1871.

In 1934, John's father Len Suckling opened the current shoe shop in Colombo Street, initially selling men's shoes and only Suckling Brothers brands. John took over the business in 1977 and has traded continuously from the same site since then, specialising in quality shoes, designed for style, comfort and fit. The shop celebrates its 75<sup>th</sup> year of business in May 2009. In the last decade, Sucklings has added women's shoes to the range, and they now make up a significant percentage of sales.

John Suckling is highly regarded within the NZ shoe retail sector for his specialist footwear expertise, is a well known figure in Christchurch's central city retail world, and has also held national positions with the NZ Retailers Association, and is currently on the board of the Retail Institute.

[www.sucklings.co.nz](http://www.sucklings.co.nz)

### **About LeftClick:**

LeftClick was established in 1994 by CEO Alan Cox and has six staff based in its Christchurch office. The company provides evaluation and design services aimed at making e-business websites more successful through increasing persuasiveness and customer satisfaction.

LeftClick is a leading provider of solutions to test, measure and optimise e-business and e-commerce websites, using innovative research, analysis and design processes that improve online customer experiences and generate significantly improved revenues for the company's clients.

LeftClick's customer list includes Sucklings Shoes, Harcourts, National Bank, AMI Insurance, Christchurch International Airport, Ballantynes, PC Universe.

[www.leftclick.com](http://www.leftclick.com)

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