

Applemint attracts teens and 20-something shoppers with a “candy shop” of jewelry treasures.

*Vanessa Geneva Ahern*



## “Candy Shop” Jewelry

When Kye Park and his mother Kwang Sook Choi took over D & D Florida Imports jewelry store in Miami in the summer of 2005, they knew they would have to make some changes.

For one thing, they needed to increase inventory without designing new jewelry from scratch. Park’s mother taught him how to mix and match existing jewelry designs and create new looks. For example, they would add charms from one necklace to a different style chain, or add different colored stones to existing styles of acrylic hair accessories. This creative process resulted in many new and interesting designs.

### Display makeover

Park and his mother also realized the store’s displays would need a makeover to attract new customers. As they set about revamping the visual displays, Park noticed isolated pieces of colorful jewelry here and there throughout the store. “My first goal

was to bring them together in one place, which I then called the ‘Cute Jewelry Aisle,’” he says.

Early on Park noticed that his “cute aisle” was getting the most attention. By bringing the bright and cheery jewelry pieces together, Park realized he had created a “candy shop” feeling—one that attracted a broad range of customers.

### Applemint’s core

The success with this segment of his jewelry shop made Park focus on the teenage buyer. It eventually spawned Park’s new specialty retail concept: Applemint.

Park says Applemint’s mission is to have teenage girls celebrate their youth with a “candy shop of treasures.” Treasures include fashion jewelry and accessories: bracelets, rings, necklaces, hair clips, headbands, and more.

Incidentally, the business’s name came to Park when he did a Google search to treat his allergy to apples. “Applemint” came



up in his search though the plant has nothing to do with apples or allergies. The name appealed to him as being “spritely, energetic and easy to remember,” Park says.

### Creating the look

Park worked with a series of designers to create the “candy shop” design he was looking for. The theme of celebrating youth followed. Applemint creates an ambiance of innocence, so girls enjoy being young while they can, says Park. This ambiance is one of the things Park believes, sets Applemint apart from other teen jewelry and accessory lines.

Park loves to work with pastel colors and says the cheery look attracts teenage consumers to try out the jewelry. Even 20-somethings wear the line.

### Product range

Most Applemint products are made of acrylic. They are often rhodium-plated or epoxy-coated and decorated with rhinestones and crystals.

“The customer reaction has been fantastic. Sales have been good even in the off season,” Park says, adding that young girls like to shop for new styles during the summer and back-to-school season. Strong sales in a recession have been helped by the price points, which range from \$2.99 to \$24.99.

### Mall launch

The first Applemint cart opened in November 2008 at the Pembroke Mall in Pembroke Pines, FL. Since then, Applemint has expanded to two inline stores and three mall carts in Florida—and operations in Illinois and Georgia as well.

A nationwide launch is being planned for this year, but there were some operators who wanted to get a running start and open for the last holiday season, Park says. “All the property personnel and owner/operators we have previewed to are eager to get an Applemint location in their malls,” says Park.

Every Applemint operation will have the same look, props, accessories, gift bags and wrapping. “My program consultant and I are developing a very easy-entry operation, where independent owner/operators can basically look at the model of our own cart, and what they see is what they get,” Park says. Cart operators could be up and running within a month, while inline stores could take longer.

### Turnkey costs

It can cost operators around \$3,500 to \$4,000 for fixtures and inventory to make the cart look picture-perfect. Turnkey operators are required to buy into the Applemint look—custom-designed display fixtures and props cost around \$1,500 plus shipping.

Applemint prides itself on customer support and Park says that even people who have never run a cart before can be trained and fully equipped for this type of business opportunity. Despite depressed consumer spending, Park says that based on Applemint’s track record, most operators could become profitable within a couple of months.

Applemint expects to show at SPREE and other tradeshows this year.

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