

Polo

By Kristi Weldon

Polo sprints into the 21st century

With a combined program of technology upgrades, strategic partnerships and store openings, Polo Ralph Lauren Corp. has been on the move.

Far-reaching strategies

Ralph Lauren's mega-branding vision has become even more pervasive over the last 18 months. Starting with the opening of "RL," Polo's signature restaurant adjacent to the Chicago flagship, new introductions included the Polo Sport RLX sports shoe; a collection targeting women ages 16 to 25, called RALPH by Ralph Lauren; and Ralph Lauren Romance, a new fragrance.

The corporation had two major store openings on New Bond Street in London: a new flagship store and its first freestanding children's store. Continuing its international pursuits, Polo acquired Canadian-based international retailer Club Monaco and Poloco SAS, its European licensee for men's wear, boys' wear and men's and women's Polo Jeans business.

Now poised for even more rapid growth, the company is integrating its existing legacy systems with new technologies to optimize planning, manufacturing and distribution resources.

More than e-commerce

Ralph is redefining the apparel industry again with the formation of Ralph Lauren Media, a new, separate company that will bring the Polo Ralph Lauren American lifestyle experience to consumers via multiple media platforms, including the Internet, broadcast, cable and print. Ralph Lauren Media will leverage the global brand equity established by Polo and NBC, targeting a broad demographic that both companies share.

The new company's premier initiative will be Polo.com, a destination site dedicated to the American lifestyle that will include original content, commerce and a strong community component. The site is expected to launch in late 2000.

"What began as a tie 33 years ago has grown into an entire world and lifestyle that has redefined how American style and quality are perceived," said Ralph Lauren, founder, chairman and CEO of Polo Ralph Lauren. "Polo has always been in the business of selling quality products by telling stories and inviting our consumers to be part of a dream. We were the first to create lifestyle advertisements that tell a story. We were the first to create stores that enabled our consumers to interact with that lifestyle. [Now] we are creating another first: a next-generation media company that delivers an even richer consumer experience without boundaries."