



30 years of specs appeal

Nestled in one of the world's best and most sun-kissed fishing locations, Flying Fisherman is perfectly placed to be an authority on fishing sunglasses. **TW** uncovers how this company has achieved 30 years of growth and what the future holds.

Most businesspeople will tell you that there is no one specific secret to running a successful company. It's a combination of things that all have to be right for you to achieve sustained growth. This is certainly the view held by husband and wife team Patrick and Linda Sheldon and their firm Flying Fisherman.

"You need good customer service, a belief in your product and commitment," confirms Patrick, who together with Linda and the rest of team is celebrating 30 years in business in 2015.

Patrick came from the TV industry when he founded Flying Fisherman and

his company was a pioneer in the use of polarising lenses in fishing. It was a tough ask initially converting the set-in-their-ways captains and guides of Florida to the idea of polarising sunglasses but it's now the norm.

Patrick explains: "Those early days were challenging but very exciting. Only a couple of brands for polarising fishing eyewear were around at the time, with limited options, and the goal was to create a quality, affordable range of polarising sunglasses for average anglers. We started with direct-to-consumer sales on television, which drove the demand in retail stores and later led to wholesale distribution."

Flying Fisherman now ranks as one of Florida's, the USA's, and even the world's best-known suppliers of high-quality polarising sunglasses specifically designed for fishing. Its range has grown to include other items too – such as rods, reels and sun-protective clothing. As previously mentioned, there is no one secret to this, but there are some key factors that have helped. Linda explains how being a family business is a huge advantage.

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1987

THE YEAR IN WHICH FLYING FISHERMAN OPENED ITS FIRST CHAIN-STORE ACCOUNT.

A family affair: The Flying Fisherman team.



customer service,” she says.

“The addition of Bobby and Michelle Vaughn to the team will ensure that the brand is relevant and accessible for future generations of anglers.

“We’ve been very fortunate and the vision is heading in the right direction. The acceptance of the brand is our proudest accomplishment.”

That acceptance now sees Flying Fisherman exporting its products to more than 50 countries, as well as being partnered with some of the best rep groups in the USA.

The company has experienced some significant milestones over its 30-year history, as Linda adds.

“Some exciting milestones were our first chain-store account in 1987 – certainly a learning experience... expanding our distribution nationally and then internationally in the mid-1990s.

Also important is the development of our Accutint lens-colouring system, which eliminates glare and enhances colour contrast without distorting natural colours.”

So what of the future? It’s laced with opportunity according to Patrick, who is as hungry as he’s ever been throughout his 30 years of running the business.

“Our short-term goal is to keep the brand relevant by continuing to produce innovative products that offer value to anglers worldwide,” he says. “With no board of directors, we can focus on quality, value and customer service first. Long term, the Flying Fisherman product line will continue expanding to include more apparel and angler accessory items, like our Passport travel rods. We’re proud to announce that

we’ve recently teamed up with marine artist Jason Mathias to produce a range of decorative iPhone cases and a new series of SunBandit designs with his fantastic artwork. With family members, Bobby and Michelle Vaughn now on board, they bring fresh ideas and energy to ensure the brand is attractive and accessible to today’s up-and-coming anglers.

“In terms of the fishing industry generally, it is still experiencing steady but slow growth.

“Innovation is tougher now, with big companies owning most of the brands. The internet is also giving consumers more accessibility and choices. However, we see nothing but opportunity for the future – we’re excited.”

