



ALLBRANDS

A One-Stop Shop for the Homeowner

by Simonette Berry
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Have you ever heard of a crisper that can keep your produce fresh for not two weeks, not two months, but two years? Welcome to AllBrands, the company that stays on the edge of technological and market trends to bring you only the best. Allbrands began in 1976 as a small fabric store run by a young couple and today it is celebrating 36 years in Louisiana stores and its 16th year online. In 1976, John and Anette Douthat decided to settle down in Baton Rouge near Anette's parents. After working for Purina and A.O. Smith across Asia and America, they wanted to start their own Stretch & Sew fabric business. Anette had a degree in home economics from LSU and a lifelong background in sewing and 4H, while John had an MBA in accounting from Washington University and several years of sales experience. The couple decided to cater to homemakers, something they both had experience in. Their store quickly gained a following, popular because of their wide selection of fabrics and great customer service. Then, the Douthats added Brother, Janome, and Singer sewing machines to their inventory. Once they saw how much attention this small addition brought, they began to follow market trends and add other products where they saw a need in the community. This mindfulness has turned into a trademark move for the folks at AllBrands.

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"It's all about change. It's been a constant change to keep up with developing markets, locally and online," says John. In 1996, John and Anette's son, John Frederick, asked why the business wasn't on the internet. "I said, 'What's the internet?'" John chuckles. "Our 12-year-old son built us our first webpage. He went on to study computer science at LSU, and now he's our IT director. We went from one webpage to 15,000 active pages on our site—now isn't that something," he exclaims. John Frederick's twin sister, Barbara (married last month to Seth Chatelain, AllBrands lead technician), is the head of product development at AllBrands, a job her father describes as "the lifeblood of our business."

The business has six locations. The showroom on Highland Road in Baton Rouge focuses on major appliances and small electrics, while the other five stores (New Orleans, Slidell, Baton Rouge, Lafayette, and Lake Charles) offer sewing and embroidery machines, vacuums, irons, and repair services. AllBrands got into major appliances five years ago when they had an extra space they didn't know what to do with. "When we moved out to our location on Highland Road in 2003, we also owned a building next door. It was a large space, and we thought we could make better use of it than the dance studio that was there, so we got into appliances," says John. "Now we sell complete kitchens and a huge variety of specialty kitchen appliances, laundry equipment, steamers, and home cleaning equipment. We still sell fabric, sewing and embroidery machines too. The demographics are the same, and they all plug in the wall, after all! We can offer up to 10-year extended repair warranties, which you can't get with other household items like pots and pans."

AllBrands covers all bases, but lately they're specializing in high-end complete kitchens. "We want to work with builders, designers, and architects. We have a gathering once a month at the showroom, where we let people from the industry come and meet with our product reps. We have cooking demonstrations in our showroom kitchens to feed our guests and demonstrate the various features in each kitchen," says AllBrands CEO Blaine Austin. "Instead of having a typical appliance store where you get everything piecemeal, we want to offer the whole package on display. Most people that are building a home want a brand-specific kitchen—all Miele, all Electrolux, all GE. We offer packages with all sorts of fun options, like wine cellars and high-end crispers," he says.

At the showroom on Highland Road, run by appliance guru Chad Jackson, there are 2500 square feet of complete kitchens by brand as well as individual appliances. "We want this to be a one stop shop for customers. You can walk in and see such a wide variety of refrigerators, cook tops,



disposals, even complete outdoor kitchens—the list is endless. The neat thing is that they're all set up and ready to go—you can demo every single one of them," Austin says.

One of AllBrands longest running vendors is Miele, a large, notoriously innovative family-owned German appliance company. "The neat thing about their appliances is the way they're designed—energy saving, efficient, and well-made for 20 year plus life," John says. "Steve Jobs was a big fan of Miele. The story goes that he researched washers and dryers for two whole years before deciding on a Miele set. He was a big fan of their product design."

I'm a big fan too, and here's why: in the showroom at AllBrands, there's a Miele refrigerator with a crisper in it, but it's not just any crisper. "Miele guarantees that if you put an apple in their crisper, you can take it out two years later and eat it. It's amazing. They've figured out a way to remove all humidity and keep produce completely fresh," says Austin. "We decided to test their promise. We put a Granny Smith apple in there and put a date on it. It's been there for...many months. I don't even remember how long. And it's still as fresh and green as the day we put it in there. This just shows you the huge difference in quality we offer with our high-end appliances." So long, wilted lettuce!

In addition to high-end kitchen appliances, AllBrands carries a wide variety of home cleaning, ironing, steamer, and laundry appliances, bathroom equipment, sewing and embroidery machines, sewing patterns, and fabric. Vacuum cleaners, washers, dryers, Rowenta irons, sewing machines, and Jiffy steamers litter the showroom floor. Some of the top appliance brands are Miele, Electrolux, GE, KitchenAid, Whirlpool, DCS, and Samsung. A big part of AllBrands' business is also industrial laundry equipment. "We saw a need for heated roller continuous feed ironing presses, so we got some and we sold about 500 Miele ironers. Now we supply many local businesses," says John.

Now, the rooms you spend the most time in can be tech-savvy, quiet, convenient, and beautiful. "People these days are trying to save money, enjoy long-term use, and conserve energy. Instead of taking clothes to the dry cleaners, they wash, steam, dry, and iron them at home. Instead of eating out all the time, they make their kitchen a place they enjoy spending time in and cook at home," John says. "We're serving our customers at home, in their kitchens, laundry, and sewing rooms. We always have." The homeowner comes first at AllBrands, and it shows. ♦

