



EDITORS' NOTE Prior to founding her company, Dylan Lauren ran her own events company. She has traveled the world discovering a variety of confections and creative ideas for candy products, candy crafts, events decor, and recipes. Lauren graduated from Duke University with a major in art history.

COMPANY BRIEF Dylan's Candy Bar (www.dylanscandybar.com) boasts a private label of unique confections as well as a vast assortment of American favorites, rare novelty items, and imported specialty sweets from around the world. Stores are located in New York City, East Hampton, Garden City, Orlando, and Houston. In addition to the more than 5,000 edible treats, there are candy-inspired fashions from hats to galoshes, and the New York City flagship features the famed glass lollipop tree.

What did you see in the market that made you feel this brand would work?

I've always believed in this concept because I am my target customer, because I love candy. I've also met a ton of women like myself who could not find the candies they loved when they had their 4 PM cravings for sugar.

So I felt there had to be a store that had all the best things that people either grew up with or loved, and I also felt the customer was any age group. It was targeted at a woman in her 20s, but the older generation and Baby Boomers love their nostalgic candy and the young kids like the licensed candy; candy is going to be popular forever.

Living a Sweeter Life

An Interview with Dylan Lauren,
Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Dylan's Candy Bar

I also felt there was a need for a supermarket Disneyland of candy stores and I could not find that experiential candy store.

You also talk about how candy can be healthy. Is that message well understood?

I believe in living a balanced life. I work out, but I also enjoy eating candy. But I eat it in moderation. Most people, if they're on special diets, know they can either find sugar-free candy or candy that is made of other things if they want – there are so many types.

However, while we have a sugar free, gluten-free, allergen free section, it doesn't do that well, because whenever people want to treat themselves and feel like a kid again, and in moderation, it's important to have your treats. So people come here for the real deal.

I also contribute to *Self* magazine and feature a treat of the month that is about 100 calories, and discuss the benefits. For example, dark chocolate contains antioxidants.

How do you work to make this an experiential destination?

This was the first of the experiential candy stores I had ever seen. There are people who are now copying the concept.

What makes us different is we're genuinely passionate about developing products, private labeling, and partnering with other companies to make products.

We don't just do candy – we believe in a whole lifestyle. We make clothing with candy graphics, from t-shirts to boxer shorts to pajamas to handbags to accessories and towels. It's a lifestyle that people who want to live a sweeter life will want to live.

How broad can the extensions go?

Since we have to fill three floors with candy, we knew that the business couldn't just be bulk candy, so we have a café; we have a liquor license, so we have a cocktail bar; and we have a party room.

I also put out a book. In addition, we do wholesale projects in Neiman Marcus, Macy's, Lord & Taylor, and Stop n' Shops.

There are so many legs, so for me, it's not a job – it's constantly creating things with candy.

Candy transcends borders. Will there be more Dylan's Candy Bar stores?

Yes. We currently have five locations and have plans to open more doors. I'd love to one day expand overseas.

It's challenging to find real estate in America where there is a lot of walking traffic.



Dylan Lauren (left) and Dylan's Candy Bar flagship New York store's famed glass lollipop tree (above)

So wholesale shops in big department stores and hotels have been helpful.

It is important to get the brand out there and we'd love to open more, but to open smart.

We get a ton of tourists. It is an honor to have become a tourist destination. Featuring international candies was a big hit for us because people love to share a piece of their culture and get gifts for friends.

There are also so many different holidays that we carry candies for all those different occasions.

How have you maintained a stable workforce, and how do you retain the family environment as the brand grows?

The biggest challenge in being a CEO of a company is my passion is designing products, but it's hard to manage. We have 600 part-time and full-time employees, as well as the core corporate office group.

The good thing is that candy and the energy of the staff makes people happy. Our staff is not in a quiet retail environment; they are in a store where there is music they can sing to. We tend to hire entertainment industry people. We have people on megaphones on Saturdays, making jokes. So they get to be expressive.

I have learned to hire good leaders within the group who make everyone feel they can grow in the company.

Did you imagine in the early days that this concept would have become so successful?

I am surprised by the number of businesses that have come to us wanting to partner with us, like Target, or the Yankees, or eMattel wanting to create a Dylan's Candy Bar Barbie Doll to a custom Dylan's Candy Bar CandyLand game. Not only do we partner with corporations, but we recently created a candy bar for the singer Prince for his commemorative concert, and Madonna launched her heart candy tour in our store.

There is so much room for growth. We want to conquer the world with candy.

How important is philanthropy to the brand?

My passion is animals and what they give to people, so I want to develop something related to the brand to help that cause, which also helps bring our staff together.

We also have parties where we help with different charities and provide some charity candy bars. ●