

'Jewelry as a Service' Start-Up Raises \$5M

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Source: National Jewelers



A ring by Crow's Nest, one of the designers available to rent or buy through start-up company Flont

New York--Flont, a fine jewelry e-commerce site that allows customers to rent and then buy, announced Thursday that it has completed a \$5 million capital raise.

Software inventor and founder of numerous start-ups Cormac Kinney started Flont last year and the site went live in May 2017.

Now it's being backed by a number of private investors, the most noteworthy of which is C Ventures, headed by Adrian Cheng, the executive director of massive Chinese manufacturer and retailer Chow Tai Fook Jewelry Group. C Ventures' portfolio is a who's who of sexy digital start-ups in the fashion and art world, with companies like Armarium, Bandier and Paddle8 on the roster.

The guiding principle behind Flont is "jewelry as a service."

"In the on-demand economy, people want short-term use of a product, and to pay for it as a service," Kinney explained to National Jeweler, "like ZipCar, AirBnB or Uber. Answering this demand, Flont created a new sales channel that delights consumers, and still supports brands and designers."

Kinney's knowledge of fine jewelry is personal; his wife is designer Mimi So.

"Over 17 years, I've seen how retail sales have been tremendously impacted by e-commerce, and this is magnified for fine jewelry, which is a high-touch sale," said Kinney. "More and more people prefer to shop online, or on their phone, so the industry needs to bring the jewelry to the clients. Our solution is to promote discovery through borrowing, and enable customers to 'try and buy.'"

There are three main ways for consumers to interact with Flont.

They can become members for \$299 a month (for a minimum of three months) and receive unlimited fine jewelry rentals from the site, up to \$5,000 at one time, with Flont covering the cost of FedEx and insurance for one item a month or 12 total items a year, and customers paying for the shipping and insurance fees for additional items.

Flont also allows four-day rentals for non-members, in the manner of Rent The Runway, targeted toward special occasions. Rental rates range from \$129 to \$379, depending on an item's retail value.

Finally, consumers can shop directly on the site, and if they're members they receive a discount on pieces.

More than 40 fine jewelry brands are working in partnership with Flont so far, ranging from big names like Chopard, Cartier, David Webb and Van Cleef & Arpels, to independents like Temple St. Clair, Pamela Love, Sabine Getty, Deborah Pagani and, of course, Mimi So.

As the husband of a designer, Kinney has the benefit of understanding what designers need from their relationship with Flont.

"The most important benefit we provide is brand discovery," he said. "We are uncovering and enabling new, lifelong fine jewelry consumers. Our designers benefit financially by sharing a portion of our revenue each time someone borrows their jewelry. It's 'fair trade' for designers. Of course, they benefit when a Flont member purchases their jewelry, too."

When it comes to consumers, Kinney noticed an incompatibility between fine jewelry and online shopping.

Similar to Memo, the company that is centered on allowing consumers to try on fine jewelry at home before they buy and return pieces for free, Flont's services are an attempt to overcome the disconnect that comes from not trying on jewelry in person before purchase.

Kinney said, "The ideal consumer experience consists of walking into a beautiful store, choosing from a variety of designs, and most importantly, holding the jewelry in your hand. This experience is essential to an expensive and personal purchase. By offering jewelry rental, and our unlimited jewelry membership, we enable a critical part of the purchasing process: wearing the jewelry.

"Our clients can borrow anything they like, and test drive it at work, at events, or with their loved ones. Some clients use Flont as an unlimited jewelry box, and some use it in order to decide what they want to keep forever."

Flont has brought on a team of digital and luxury experts, including jewelry editor Brooke Magnaghi, who also was part of fine jewelry e-commerce company Stone & Strand.

With the capital it's raised thus far, Flont will increase inventory and staff, and expand into the Chinese market.

Kinney also said his team is "developing services for both department stores and retail jewelry stores, where members borrow jewelry in person."

Customers can already do so at Flont's "Member Lounge" at Rockefeller Plaza in New York City, where they can try pieces on and change out their jewelry.



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