

WALKER & LING

Walker & Ling is Weston's family-run department store.

The store celebrates its 127th birthday this year and is still run by the same family that opened for business on Milsom Street in Bath in 1892. Don't be fooled by its long history though - there are plenty of surprises in store. Today, the High Street store has departments for Womenswear, including accessories and lingerie, Menswear and House and Home. In the last few years the store has introduced Superdry, Joules, White Stuff, Seasalt, Jack & Jones, Skechers and Mistral, though its handbags are still the biggest single driver of footfall.



Has the closure of Marks and Spencer effected your business?

"It is not easy at the moment. Marks & Spencer's was a great loss this year, and it may yet cause a drag on footfall in the Autumn when the holiday visitors stop coming to town. But honestly, I don't lament losing M&S. It was horrible for the staff there, some of whom had been working there many years, but that enormous old business is not competitive or exciting, and it simply is not offering a good experience."

"You have to move and adjust your offer all the time. Independent stores can do that, and it is a gift! Since M&S closed, and with a bit of hard work, our lingerie department is now the biggest in town, and it's been very exciting. Our bra section is 35% up year to date. Our women's trousers section has also seen some clear

benefit to Marks closing (+21% year to date). We provide quality goods and great customer service and have over 200 years of service in the store. My team are so passionate about what they do, and it shows! People come back to us again and again, because they can rely on what they buy and from whom they buy it."

What does the future hold?

"I'm not too interested in selling online at the moment. It's expensive and very competitive, and we really have no expertise in that field. Our biggest challenge, and opportunity, is not the internet, but footfall and marketing Weston town centre as a destination. Weston has an undeniably beautiful sea front and a town centre with many strengths, including a council who now have a huge retail investment in the Sovereign Centre, a growing local college and a supportive BID.

"I'm not even that interested in the parking charges anymore! I'd rather see the council, and all town centre stakeholders, invest their time and resources in flooding the town centre with new and exciting independent stores and restaurants, cafes and pubs, leisure facilities and family-fun-days-out. Visitors would pay for parking if they thought it was worth paying for. Everyone wants the same thing; we just need to pull together to improve public perceptions of the town. Once we start communicating, and working together, I think there will be good times ahead for Weston."

