

## GIVING IN STYLE

{fashion in the philanthropy lane}

# HOW CHARMING

Cause jewelry matriarch celebrates 15 years of innovation

Tyler Butler | Fashion Writer



Charity Charms founder Kay McDonald's love for charms began as a child.

Charity Charms has been a trendsetter since its inception 15 years ago. Kay McDonald, the founder of the company, created cause-infused jewelry before others were moving into this space.

McDonald's journey began at a young age, when she discovered her passion for making and selling things. She then began working in merchandising, branding and marketing. Combining these skills with her entrepreneurial spirit, McDonald opened her first business at 30. As her store, Regalia, matured, McDonald found herself involved with many charities, going so far as to give a percentage of her sales back to causes that were near and dear to her.

It was then that she noticed the need for charities to have more meaningful, wearable items that could be used to thank donors while being more sustainable than a pen or a T-shirt.

Sitting at her kitchen table with piles of charity brochures, McDonald's brain churned, searching for the key to fit the niche she had recognized. She recalled a charm bracelet that her grandmother had worn. McDonald remembered the bracelet and the beauty of how it represented so many important facets of life in one classic design.

Her experience in retail told her that, with the right marketing, charm bracelets could enjoy a resurgence. It was then that she had her aha moment, when she recognized that the logos and icons of varied charities would make ideal designs for charms. She knew she

could bring a new life to the iconic jewelry item and create a whole new concept to support worthy causes.

McDonald's entrepreneurial eye also recognized an opportunity to allow charities to earn revenue through a social enterprise they could call their own. She realized she could set her company apart by creating a program where causes could keep 100 percent of the profit.

McDonald set out to find the right charity partner to launch this new concept. After a meeting with former Arizona Humane Society CEO Cheryl Naumann, she identified Compassion with Fashion as the best vehicle to introduce this concept to Phoenix's philanthropic community.

And that's how Charity Charms began. McDonald self-funded the business, believing that her concept was new and fresh and had the right positive intent to catch fire.

The initial Charity Charms products were sterling silver charms with a signature clip-on clasp. This allowed the charms to be interchangeable so they could be added to an existing piece of jewelry. The designs had a rich, Tiffany-like feel that remains a mainstay of the business to this day. The concept was also used in Charity Charms accessories that included keychains and fobs that complemented the sterling silver clip-on charms.

The concept took off. With a website that allowed for full integration for charities to sell their custom charms



## Charity Jewelry Trends

FROM KAY MCDONALD

- **Unisex Bracelets:** More men are wearing bracelets.
- **Focus on Words:** Keywords are being used to brand causes.
- **Layered Necklaces:** With large pendant charms.
- **Purse Charms:** Clip-on lobster clasps that can be added to purses, backpacks, even dog collars.
- **Designer Brands Jumping into the Game:** Cartier, Tiffany and Louis Vuitton now have their own charity bracelets.
- **Sustainable Materials:** Recycled metals and eco-packaging are hot.
- **Artisan Jewelry:** Handcrafted pieces made by women in underprivileged countries to help support their families.

and provide an automatic way to give a percentage of sales back to each cause, the growth was so rapid that the company opened an office in Scottsdale to serve as its headquarters and retail outlet. But when the complex was later torn down, the company decided to restructure.

The reasons for this included the economic downturn in 2008 and the need to modernize their business model. With the price of silver doubling and spending habits changing, Charity Charms saw a need to diversify. So Giving Bands were born. These affordable alternative bracelets feature pewter charms on colorful silicone bands, a new way for causes to provide giveaways.

Throughout the years, the brand has introduced many new logo charm products and expanded their pewter line. They also offer a variety of other items including ornaments, keychains, lapel pins, purse charms, wine charms, earrings and nearly anything their clients want made.

They've also transformed with the times, updating their offerings to include jewelry featuring words, hashtags and mission statements. The company now offers unisex products, adjustable bracelets and incorporates custom cards to personalize their inventory.

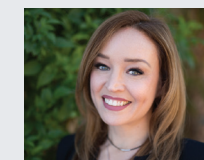
Despite the changes, the brand has come full circle, launching their EMBRACELET line, returning the business to its sterling silver roots with a new logo

bangle design. Through it all, the company has remained true to its initial concept, "having an aesthetic that guides the company look with an icon on the front and charity information featured on the back," McDonald said. "Each charm is a miniature work of art, a meaningful, wearable token that brands the charity in a subtle way."

The direct sale model Charity Charms has adopted enables charities to purchase items 50 to 75 percent below retail so that each cause can keep 100 percent of its profits. And make no mistake about the legacy of this brand; it's one of the first purpose-driven custom jewelry companies in the country.

Today, 15 years after starting a revolution in cause marketing, McDonald has provided a stylish way for organizations to make a positive difference through sustainable, wearable pieces.

To learn more, visit [charitycharms.com](http://charitycharms.com).



Tyler Butler  
FASHION WRITER

 [givinginstyle.net](http://givinginstyle.net)