

SMART IDEAS

The Kindest Cut

SURE, OPRAH CUT THE FEET OFF HER PANTYHOSE, BUT SHE'S NOT THE ONE MAKING MONEY OFF 'EM.

BY P. KELLY SMITH

WHAT: Footless pantyhose
WHO: Sara Blakely of Spanx Inc.
WHERE: Atlanta
WHEN: Started in 2000

IT ALL STARTED WITH A GORGEOUS PAIR of form-fitting pants. Sara Blakely, a sales trainer by day and stand-up comedian by night, loved those pants, but never felt comfortable wearing them because she felt that every little bodily imperfection showed. Instead of shelving the slacks in frustration, though, she found an

innovative solution.

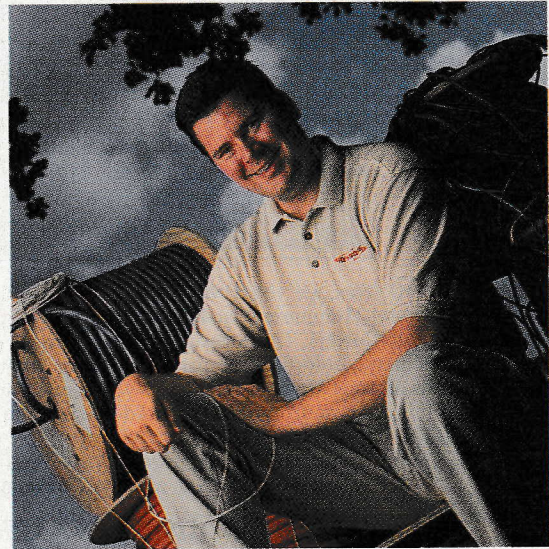
"I went through my pantyhose drawer and cut the feet off a nice pair of control-top," says Blakely, 30. A crude design, sure, but the altered hosiery worked—so well, in fact, that Blakely knew other women like herself would pay to enjoy the support of control-top yet still be able to wear open-toed shoes. On a quest to create the perfect pantyhose, Blakely dipped into her savings and launched Spanx Inc.

Obsessed with quality and comfort, Blakely had a hard time convincing hosiery manufacturers, who were mostly men, that the footless design would interest the hosiery-buying public. But when Oprah Winfrey lifted her pant leg to reveal that she, too, had been cutting off the feet of her pantyhose for years, the manufacturers finally sat up and listened. Before long, a footless-pantyhose craze ensued.

Retailing for \$20 in hundreds of specialty and department stores nationwide, including Neiman Marcus, Nordstrom and Saks Fifth Avenue, Spanx hose come in three shades (black, nude and spice) and five sizes. Sales have been brisk—Blakely happily admits she's already exceeded her goal of selling 200,000 pairs in the first year of business. Recently awarded a patent on her design, she plans to expand internationally and add new products—like Short Spanx for shorter skirts—to her hosiery line.

"I think women find it fun to buy," Blakely says. Of course, it helps when "Don't worry, we've got your butt covered" is her product's tag line.

SHE WEARS SHORT HOSE: Sara Blakely's footless pantyhose are short on length but long on control-top concealing.



ALL WRAPPED UP: Jeff Uphues got his home wired just the way he likes it—and now he does the same for others.

Wizard of Wires

WHAT: A home technology solutions provider
WHO: Jeff Uphues of My Wired Home Inc.
WHERE: Houston
WHEN: Started in 1999

JEFF UPHUES, WHOSE BUSINESS MADE \$2 million in sales last year, owes his current success to a bad case of frustration.

Back in 1998, while building his new home, his custom homebuilder informed him the house couldn't be wired to Uphues' specifications. Uphues, who has an extensive background in telecommunications, took matters into his own capable hands. Confident that others faced similar home-technology roadblocks, he then started My Wired Home Inc., a business that wires homes for communication services, networking, entertainment, automation and security.

"Ninety percent of America's homeowners can't get the blinking 12:00 off their VCRs," Uphues says. No wonder he sees his market as almost unlimited. Targeting homebuilders and consumers alike, he plans to concentrate on the local market first and then eventually expand nationwide.



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