

SMART IDEAS

Nice Threads

SHE DESIGNS 'EM. AMISH WOMEN HAND-STITCH 'EM. AND EACH OF THESE QUILTS GOES FOR MORE THAN \$2,000.

BY P. KELLY SMITH

WHAT: Maker of handmade quilts
WHO: Denyse Schmidt of Denyse Schmidt Quilts
WHERE: Fairfield, Connecticut
WHEN: Started in 1996

IN TODAY'S FAST-PACED WORLD, AT least one entrepreneur is enjoying business as it comes—stitch by stitch. With a taste for bold fabrics and unorthodox patterns, Denyse Schmidt says customers just can't get enough of her hip homemade creations.

Specializing in hand-stitched quilts that retail for between \$2,400 and \$5,400 each, Schmidt offers 12 designs that can be made to order. One hundred percent cotton and machine-washable, the quilts are pieced together by Schmidt and her full-time assistant; the quilts are then hand-stitched by a group of Amish women in Rochester, Minnesota.

Although her business projects \$250,000 in sales this year, Schmidt didn't start out with the intent of becoming an entre-

YOU'RE DOING IT WRONG! Laird Garner's vCoach records digital video to show athletes the right moves.

preneur. Back in 1994, Schmidt, now 40, was working as a graphic designer for a children's book publisher. Feeling that her artistic capabilities were being wasted, she began working on a quilt for a friend. "It was a very tangible work experience," she remembers. "I would sit down for three hours, and I had a tangible [result] to show for what I had done during that time."

A few years later, she decided to exhibit some of her quilts at the International Contemporary Furniture Fair in New York City. After receiving positive feedback, she decided to take a two-week quilting workshop in Maine—"to get the momentum going because I was still working full time at my other job," Schmidt says. She eventually quit that job and has since expanded her business to include Denyse Schmidt Prints, a line of screen-printed bedding. She now sells her products through retail stores, designers and catalogs.



HATS OFF TO HER: Maybe headwear isn't Denyse Schmidt's specialty, but \$250,000 in sales proves her quilting expertise.

Although the standard delivery time is six months for each quilt, Schmidt says her buyers are more than willing to wait. "People really appreciate a handmade product," she says. "There is a very personal connection that people have with [a quilt]. It connotes home, security and coziness."

Digital Drilling

WHAT: Handheld PC for use in sports training
WHO: Laird Garner of Virtual Veterans Inc.
WHERE: Lenexa, Kansas
WHEN: Started in 1999

LAIRD GARNER IS OUT TO REVOLUTIONIZE the way coaches train athletes. The 32-year-old hopes his high-tech approach to training will someday score big in the sports industry.

His product, the vCoach, is a portable PC about the size of a clipboard that uses digital video technology to record a golf swing, football tackle or other sports maneuver. Once recorded, coaches can then correct the play by watching side-by-side video clips and drawing directly on the screen.

Now that some major-league teams are using vCoach demo units, perhaps this is the start of something big. Says Garner, "We know the market is ripe." ■

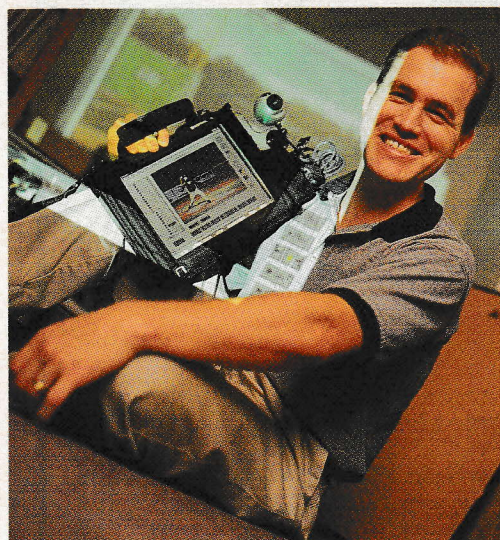


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