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Hip-T

A hip new product that covers your assets.

Lifelong friends, Christine Meeks and Kelley DeSerpa, are on a quest to close the gap between fashion forward clothing and the fashion faux pas that come with them. In 2006, Meeks was embarrassed when her 8-year-old daughter requested that “Mom” refrain from wearing a certain pair of low rise (below the hips) jeans due to what was left exposed for others to see.

In search of the perfect solution to her cheeky problem, Meeks teamed up with DeSerpa to create a problem solving accessory that is quickly becoming a hot item in the clothing market. After months of trial and error on their kitchen-placed sewing machine, the two entrepreneurs produced a comfy, classy and flattering clothing piece – called the hip-T – to help women of all shapes and sizes camouflage unwanted bulges, skin and much more.

Millionaire Blueprints had the pleasure of speaking with Christine Meeks about the creation of her new product, her business with Kelley DeSerpa and the fashion flubs that started it all.

Where did you and Kelley DeSerpa meet?

Our husbands had been friends in high school, but we did not meet until we both filled in as substitutes at a friend's bunko group. Our kids are roughly the same age, we live in the same area and the kids go to the same school. We have a tight-knit group of friends and tend to spend a lot of social time together.

Tell us a little bit about your business background.

I worked as a corporate meeting and event planner for roughly 12 years prior to having my third daughter. Managing multiple vendors and coming up with new and creative events was my main goal as an account/operations manager. I loved the job, but knew I couldn't continue with the travel and keep up with three children, my husband and a home.

Kelley was a kindergarten teacher for many years prior to starting her family, but she also was looking for a new challenge. After our infamous morning chat about my rear hanging out, our minds started spinning.

What exactly happened that "infamous morning?"

Our business relationship started one morning when we were talking on the phone after the kids went to school. Both of our husbands had been complaining that we spent way too much time in Target! So we were joking when we started talking about inventing something. Then, when talking about all the simple things that make our lives better, my most current problem came to mind.

And what problem was that?

My third grade daughter asked me not to wear a particular pair of jeans to her school, due to the fact my "stuff" had fallen out of the trunk the last time I worked in her class. I had to take a look at my own rear view. Did I know my jeans were low? Yes. Did I know I was showing? No. I tried to pull down my T-shirts and wear longer tops, but apparently that was not working.

What solution did you come up with?

With that "problem" in mind, Kelley and I chatted for quite some time about how to fix it. I had an idea so I went into my drawers and began cutting off my old T-shirts. I pulled the bottom half of one of the cut shirts on over my hips and put on my normal T-shirt. I then took a deep bend in front of the mirror and I saw nothing! No butt-crack, no extra skin, nothing! The idea had hatched in my closet.

Would you normally consider yourselves "fashion-conscious" people?

I'd say we both like to read the fashion magazines and we both like to look good, but neither of us is a slave to fashion. Although, after starting our business, we both have become quite enamored with the "problem solver" type accessories that are on the market. Surfing the Web and visiting all the fashion avenue sites really can be addictive!

Besides realizing your own embarrassing "problem," when did you recognize that this was widespread among women?

I only wish we'd started five years ago when we began noticing the "bum cleavage," the "muffin top" and the "whale tail" shots at the grocery store, the mall, the park and school. We were really taken back when the younger girls (tweens) started wearing and pulling their thongs out of the top of their pants. Not only were we forced to see a lot of butt crack, but when the thong/panty brigade started storming the streets, you had to sit up and take note of what was becoming of our budding fashionistas.

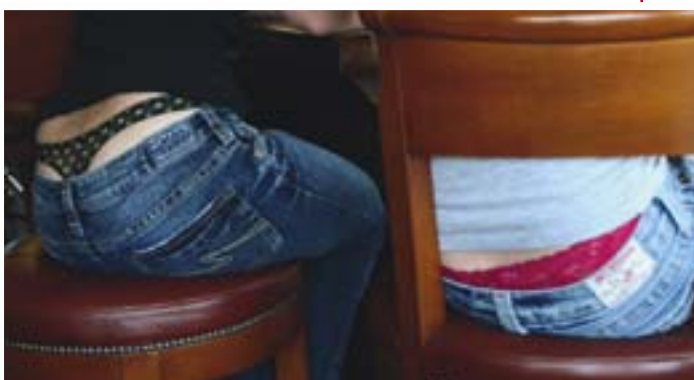
Why do you think no one has thought to create something like this before?

We knew there was something similar for the maternity clothing market. But for the rest of the world, or at least those wearing the fashionable low rise pants and jeans, there was nothing.

We must have lost sight of what is okay to expose to anyone looking. For fear of sounding like a prude, there is a time and place for everything, including an exposed midriff or panties. I think once women know there is a comfortable, yet fashionable product out there to help with the low rise pants and shrunken



Lifelong friends Kelley DeSerpa, left, and Christine Meeks, right, created the hip-T.



Exposure problem.



Hip-T solution.

tops, women will catch on and know they can still wear their denim investment without killing us all with the crack!

Women like options and we are here to offer another option.

So how did you go about making and testing your first hip-T?

As I mentioned earlier, the first hip-T was simply a cut off T-shirt. Next, we tried to make a one size fits all tube top for your hips. That didn't work. As stretchy as some fabric is, something that fits a size 2 is not going to fit a 10 or 12. We even tried a reversible model, which even had a little glue to close the turning hole. Of course, all of these were made with my serger on the kitchen table. Kelley cut them out and I sewed them up.

What did your friends think?

Some of our friends thought we were crazy, others thought we were genius. So, when one friend was hosting a purse party for some neighborhood gals, we asked if we could come and put our collection out to show those coming to the party. We were so nervous because we were really putting ourselves out there in more ways than one. We knew some of the ladies, but not all of them.

Did it pay off?

The ladies loved them and shared with us their clear need for such a product. We sold nearly all of them that night, and it

became very clear we all shared and struggled with the same issue – an overexposed rear end.

How did you branch out from there?

We went to our local mall and asked a few shop managers, as well as random shoppers, what they thought. Again, we had a positive response. I soon started having strangers call me at home asking if we were the hip-T girls, and if I would make them a hip-T. At that point, I knew I didn't want to be in the kitchen table sewing business, but we knew we possibly had a great idea on our hands.

When did the name 'hip-T' come into the picture?

We tossed around all kinds of names. We wanted our product name to tell what the product was. The hip-T is essentially, a T-shirt for your hips.

Did you make more from scratch after that?

After that first purse party, we did make more from scratch and kept working on a better design. We had other ladies wearing them and giving us their feedback. For a few months, we kept plugging away with different fabrics, lengths, contours and embellishments, such as lace. It became clear we needed a professional with the right type of sewing machines to get the right combination of design and finish. Kelley and I then started looking for a manufacturer.

What kind of research did you do regarding materials for the hip-T?

We started at the local fabric store and Target once again. For instance, we'd buy a large size skirt made out of fabric we liked and cut it up to make it into a hip-T. We knew the content of the fabric from the interior label. Later, we expanded to the Web for wholesale fabric companies.

How did you improve your product from the first homemade cut T-shirt?

We really kept trying different approaches. The cut T-shirt really wouldn't stay put as it had no waist band or any waist definition to keep it from falling down. The next tube top design worked better, but a woman's body is not straight up and down along the hip area. It also became apparent this could not be a one size fits all product.

Once we came up with the right shape, it then became a matter of fabric and the right sewing machine to put all the pieces together. We could only take it so far, so that's when we needed a commercial machine to put it together.

How did you find your manufacturer?

We did this all online. We sent out a request to three California manufacturers and S.J. Manufacturing (www.sjprivatelabel.com) in San Francisco responded immediately. We paid Seymour Jaron, the owner, \$500 to spend the morning with him and he would tell us all we ever wanted to know about the garment

manufacturing business. We also brought our prototypes, patterns and anything else we had.

We were nervous for many reasons. We had no idea what we were doing! Little did we know, at the time, this was the best move we could have made. We met the lead seamstress and she made a real hip-T from our pattern! We still needed to perfect it though, and she sent us home to work it out. But once we figured it out, she tweaked it a bit, sent us to a proper marker maker and we were then ready to make our first order of about 100 or so in black, white and pink!

Why did you not look overseas for a manufacturer?

It was important to us to go “USA Made” for a lot of reasons; one of which was, we needed to be able to put the kids on the school bus, drive up for a meeting and get back to see them off the bus at the end of the day. San Francisco was the perfect spot.

Was it at this point that g3 Originals was created?

Our company – g3 Originals, LLC – was created when we decided to put in about \$5,000 each and see if we could really develop a product, a brand and an image to take to the mass market. Once real money came into the game, creating a framework for our venture was a must. Both of our husbands run a family business and know the importance of a well-structured plan. When we decided to trademark our name, we also knew a formal company was needed.

What does g3 Originals stand for?

It stands for “girls cubed,” like in math; a number to the third power. Kelley and I have three girls each.

When did you realize that you had a groundbreaking product?

That first purse party in November 2006 was when it became evident that I was not the only one with “butt crack” issues. If these ladies didn’t have the problem themselves, their daughters did!

Have you done further testing of the hip-T aside from your own personal use?

Yes. We’ve tested on friends and once our Web site was developed and launched we asked for testers from all over the country. We’ve used testers for our plus-size line and currently have pregnant gals giving it a whirl.

Tell me about designing your logo and look for the company?

Our first tag for the original purse party was done by a friend. It was a simple sketch of a girl wearing a hip-T. Pink and black were our colors. Once we decided to take this project further with a Web site, we knew we needed to keep everything consistent and needed further professional help. I talked with a friend in public relations who gave me a few referrals.

We met our Web site and logo designer, Nicole Dore, over coffee and just about hired her on the spot. She was young, hip and got it! She really took our ideas and quickly brought them to life.

Her costs were also reasonable and she knew we were a startup with limited budgets. Today, we receive a lot of compliments on our Web site design and the flow. Our packaging, branding, logo concept, business system and Web site all work together.

What have you done to promote hip-Ts?

On our limited budget, we’ve blogged on some of the main fashion-directed Web sites, received a lot of great reviews and posts, ran contests and giveaways and pitched our product to *QVC* and *Oprah’s Big Idea* last February. We just keep sending out our story and product information! We’ve done press releases via PRWeb (www.PRWeb.com) and have been featured in our local paper and news stations as well as the Bay Area afternoon talk shows.

Where can someone purchase a hip-T?

The hip-T is available on our Web site, www.myhip-T.com, and in about 25 stores across the country. We are looking for more wholesale accounts and are distributing in Japan.

Overall, what has the public’s response been to the hip-T?

It’s been amazing! Kelley and I are always amazed with the time people take to e-mail us their praises regarding our product and offer assistance in getting the hip-T into their area stores! It’s also great to read what others’ comments are on various blogs and Web sites that are running contests with our product. We’ve also been asked to contribute to charity goodie bags, which we’d love to do!

So, what’s in store for the future of the hip-T?

We are still working to get our product into the hands of millions of woman! Also, we’re adding more colors and prints for the various seasons and a few new products are already in development.

We’ve also been contacted by women who use the hip-T for medical reasons. Those with devises or ostomy pouches due to cancer treatments love the hip-T to cover any possible embarrassing peaks under their tops. My oldest daughter was recently diagnosed with Type I Diabetes and wears an insulin pump. She loves to wear the hip-T not only as a layering accessory but to also cover her pump!

What’s in store for g3 Originals as a whole?

We are working on a few more products to add to our line in addition to the hip-T. The sky is the limit!

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