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# Shot in the dark

Company that makes special pajamas rises with marketing campaign

Atlanta Business Chronicle - by [Kate Carter](#) Contributing writer

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Joann Vitelli

Seeing a need: Personal trainer-turned-entrepreneur Lesley Hatfield has seen her company double in size over four years.

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If Lesley Hatfield sweats the small stuff, it doesn't show.

Her company, **NiteSweatz Inc.**, pulled in \$1 million in sales last year, and is on target to bring in \$2 million in 2008.

NiteSweatz, a clothing company that sells sleepwear and apparel that wicks away moisture, began in Hatfield's garage just four years ago. From an initial investment of \$50,000, comprised mostly of her own money, Hatfield has been able to wring out a decent profit and land coveted real estate in national media. NiteSweatz has been featured twice in *O, The Oprah Magazine*, in the past year, and Hatfield is now a regular contributor to *CNBC's* "The Big Idea" with Donny Deutsch. **Entrepreneur Magazine** rolled out a two-page spread on NiteSweatz earlier this month.

How did she do it?

"The big idea" came to Hatfield in 2003. Hatfield, then a personal fitness trainer, went jogging with a client who was in her early 50s.

"She was really dogging it during that run, and I said, 'What's your problem?' " said Hatfield, 37.

The client responded that she was hitting menopause, and had sweat through three different outfits the night before. Hatfield suggested she wear moisture-wicking running clothes to bed, and then wondered whether sleepwear designed to keep skin dry was on the market.

A little research revealed that the only competition was a Canadian company that designed clothes for "much older women," said Hatfield. She decided there was ample opportunity in the booming market made up of women going through menopause, postpartum hormone swings and chemotherapy, as well as those with naturally high body temperatures.

"It was the total 'aha' moment," said Hatfield, mother of a 2-year-old son, Jack. "The light bulb that goes off and you can't ignore it."

Hatfield scoured the closets of her mother, friends and clients for fashion tips. Within one year, she brought her line to market, and made a splash with her "yoga cami set" inspired by one of her mother's outfits.

But her road was not always smooth. A North Carolina mill went under with half of Hatfield's money and all of her fabric. She arrived with a semi-truck and knocked on the doors until they returned her half-finished fabric. She then drove the semi-truck to a factory in Canada, and later moved her business to a factory in China, where she said the prices are better and the workmanship is unbeatable.

### **Meeting skyrocketing demands**

Hatfield launched her NiteSweatz line at the Atlanta Apparel Market in 2004, and now sells her products in more than 450 boutiques, including Intimacy, the Atlanta-based undergarment-fitting store that has been featured on "The Oprah Winfrey Show" and in Oprah's magazine. It was Susan Nethero, owner and president of Intimacy, who helped Hatfield land O, The Oprah Magazine, in May of last year.

The same month as her first Oprah magazine spread, Hatfield signed a contract with a search engine optimization company, and her monthly online sales soared from \$3,000 to \$30,000. NiteSweatz, however, still does two-thirds of its business in boutiques.

"We grew this thing organically," Hatfield said. "We do some pay per click, but we are very smart about how we do it."

Hatfield hired sales representatives, and now pays about \$10,000 each month for her share of a logistics and fulfillment center.

## **Marketing efforts pay dividends**

Hatfield hired a national public relations firm, Glow Communications Plc, and retains Terri Harof, president of **C3 Marketing Group**, to help with local marketing and public relations efforts. That, in conjunction with hiring Christian Griffith to manage NiteSweatz's Web site and search engine optimization efforts, is "probably the best money spent," in terms of return on investment, said Hatfield.

Harof, who is helping Hatfield lobby to get on Oprah's television show, said getting the product in front of people so they can "feel it, touch it" has boosted sales.

"Strategically speaking, we're real big believers in experimental marketing and getting our products in the hands of people who will use it," said Harof.

For example, NiteSweatz donated \$22,000 worth of clothes to an ALS, or "Lou Gehrig's Disease," organization. It donated another \$20,000 to an oncology center in rural North Carolina.

Author of "Attitude" and retail and marketing expert Barbara Babbit Kaufman said even little mentions of a smaller company can boost name recognition and sales.

"Marketing is everything," said Kaufman, adding that it's about getting to the right people in the right stores as much as it is about getting a plug.

And Kaufman has some advice for landing "The Oprah Winfrey Show": "You have to figure out the right angle. Maybe Oprah's going to do a show on hot flashes. Or maybe she's going to do a show on postpartum issues. You just have to keep sending stuff in a really clever manner every so often, and hopefully you get the right person at the right time."

## **Selling the "Big Idea"**

### **Five tips for marketing a new product or concept:**

- Have a mission. You need to be able to answer the who, what, when, where and how for your company.
- Be savvy. You have to run your business as if you're going out of business all the time.
- Network. So much in life is who we know, not what we know.
- Expose your product. Get your product or concept in front of the people who need it.
- Don't give up. Never take "no" for an answer.

*Tips courtesy of Barbara Babbit Kaufman and Terri Harof.*