

Entrepreneur's Business Start-Ups

SMART IDEAS for NEW BUSINESSES

think big Smart Ideas

by
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STYLE FOR THE CAMERA

try to imagine a job where you in-line skate with famous hockey players, shoot hoops with Kobe Bryant, and then make sure they look just right for an advertising shoot. Thirty-one-year-old Cindy Whitehead does just that—and gets paid, too (seriously). Now attempt to contain your extreme jealousy.

A sports enthusiast since childhood (she was a champion vert skateboarder in her teens), Whitehead attained the confidence and ingenuity to meld her love of extreme sports with her career as the world's leading sports stylist. Snowboarding, skiing or surfing her way to shoots, Whitehead contributes her styling and research skills to help develop accurate and intriguing sports images for major clients such as Nike, Adidas and Gatorade.

While working as a fashion stylist and location scout for *Swimwear Illustrated* after dropping out of UCLA's film department, Whitehead met a well-known sports photographer and offered to help style the models and athletes for his shoots. "I started realizing 'This is what I want to do,'" she recalls. "The sports business was really booming, so I just started sending out promo cards and built up my clientele from there."

Styling means more than just applying fake sweat and dirt to models. Whitehead keeps in mind the details the core audience would notice—for example, sprinters wearing spikes (not regular running shoes), or the fact that there are no tape-style finish lines for hurdlers. "I want everything to be technically correct," she says.

Promoting herself as a self-made industry expert, Whitehead researches projects to the fullest extent, tracking down the most technically correct apparel and equipment; incorporating the latest accessories, fashions and colors; and arranging the most photogenic locations for each shoot. The attention to detail has paid off: 1999 sales hit \$200,000.

In addition to regularly tuning in to ESPN for the latest sports coverage, she researches meticulously by networking and attending sporting events. "I feel that by the time the shoot rolls around, I'd better be pretty darn knowledgeable about the subject," says Whitehead, who works from her Hermosa Beach, California, home. "So I might not start out being the most knowledgeable about street luge, but within a day and a half, I'm immersed in it."



CAMERA SLY: Image is everything to Cindy Whitehead (r.), who styles shoots starring models and athletes.

IN EXCESS

have you ever wondered where those cute, little *Sesame Street* print bandages you used to see in drugstores disappeared to? Well, one possibility is that the manufacturer's license expired and the merchandise had to be shipped back to a warehouse where it sits and rots. Or perhaps a close-out distributor bought the product from the manufacturer, re-packaged it and sold it themselves. Behold the magic of liquidating.

The liquidation industry has suffered from a less-than-spectacular reputation, thanks to some unsavory operators who take advantage of desperate manufacturers in order to achieve maximum profit.

Realizing the liquidation business could be more lucrative if conducted more professionally, former attorney Michael Brooks decided to start his own business dealing with manufacturers' excess inventories.

In 1994, Brooks used \$100,000 in savings to create International Purchase Systems (IPS) Inc. Working from a friend's office and storing initial inventory in a friend's mother's basement, Brooks cold-called manufacturers and visited trade shows, explaining his goal: to become a trustworthy close-out distributor.

By adhering to clients' resale restrictions, paying on time and handling all types of inventory—the good, the bad and the ugly—Brooks focused on gaining trust and building relationships for his Elmsford, New York, company.

Today, his honest ways have earned Brooks, 34, a long list of Fortune 500 clients, such as Duracell and Day Runner. And with \$6 million-plus in sales and seven warehouses nationwide, IPS can move anything, from toilet seats to breath mints—even a warehouse of '70s wooden light-switch plates. (Don't ask.) **B**



EXTRA, EXTRA: Michael Brooks makes millions moving all kinds of excess inventory for major manufacturers.