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## A biz built on short sales

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By her 50s, Pam Starobin had enjoyed what she calls “a very interesting and varied career.” She had launched and run a successful computer program for the food service industry, pursued a master’s in library sciences and was enjoying her career as a librarian.

But what she really wanted was a few extra inches.

“Every time we’d go to the theater or movies, I was just miserable,” says the 4-foot, 11-inch Yonkers resident. “Even if I was sitting behind an average-sized person, their head would be right in front of me. I was constantly making everyone shift around or switch with me.”

Determined “to deal with it in a positive way,” she dusted off her sewing skills and started experimenting with attaching a strap to a pillow to make a portable booster. After a few iterations of her rudimentary designs, “the light bulb went off,” she says.

“I wanted something that looked elegant, that would be discreet but really functional,” she says. Her solution: a firm cushion concealed in a chic leather tote bag that, when placed on a seat, offers a comfortable 4-inch boost.

Figuring there might be a market for her invention — which she dubbed the Sitting Taller adult booster seat — the high-spirited mother of two spent the next year bouncing ideas off her family, developing a prototype with a living-wage factory in China and testing various models. When she settled on a final design — one featuring furniture-grade foam covered in vibrant fabric Starobin still sews herself — she decided to launch a simple Web site “just to see what happens.”

The response, she says, was “unbelievable.”

“Anyone who Googled ‘adult booster seat’ would find me,” says Starobin. “I was getting the most amazing e-mails and phone calls from people who were like, ‘I’ve been waiting my whole life for this.’”

With steady sales from the get-go, Starobin found herself working late into the night and through the weekend to keep up with demand for the boosters, which sell for \$139 to \$169. After breaking even within the first year, Starobin decided to leave her librarian gig last year to give Sitting Taller her full attention.

The extra time has allowed for more conversations with customers, which have inspired additional product features. Starobin now offers a matching clutch that slides into the booster tote and eliminates the need for a pocketbook, and a slim, foldable footrest that solves the problem of dangling feet.

A few months ago, she also launched the Sitting Taller Backpack, a booster seat for children. Starobin partnered with the nonprofit Nomi Network to have the backpacks made out of recycled rice bags by Cambodian women.

For both of her products, she says, the sourcing and manufacturing has been “the easy part.” The challenge is getting the word out.

“I feel like there are still so many people who could benefit from it who don’t know about it,” says Starobin, who’s researching markets and additional retail avenues.

It’s when she gets her invention into such a person’s hands that the effort of running a business single-handed pays off, she says.

“You realize you’ve done something that has really made another person happy,” she says. “It’s so exciting, you just glow.”

### Pam Starobin’s tips for launching a business

**Test the waters.** “Don’t be afraid to start small,” says Starobin, who launched her product with only a small investment and a low-key Web site. “It was a nice way segue into a business without too much panic.”

**Know your strengths.** “Once you’re clear about this, take on those tasks with gusto that you’ll succeed in and enjoy, and outsource the rest.”

**Tap your network.** “You’d be amazed at the three degrees of separation that exist in the most unexpected places,” says Starobin, who found all of her suppliers through friends’ connections. “People can be so generous in helping you make a connection when they believe in you.”

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