

FRONT OUT CAREER mavericks



Renegade Cleans Up on QVC

by RUSSELL WILD

You may have seen him on QVC, following Marie Osmond or Anthony Robbins. Cactus Jack is his name, and fighting grime is his game. Actually, his real name is Jack Barringer. He describes himself as an entrepreneur—"that's an entrepreneur, Iowa-style," chuckles the 55-year-old Ames man who looks something like a cross between Willie Nelson and Roy Rogers. Since starting his cleaning products business in the garage of his house in 1990, Barringer has seen very happy trails—and sales. This year revenues from his Cactus Jack line should top \$3 million.

Those products include his Wash, Wax, and Shine for cars and boats, and his Ultra Concentrated Laundry Vitamins. But the company's largest seller, by far, is the One-Shot Cleaner. It comes in the form of a yellow bullet (hence "One-Shot"), is sold in (real) ammunition boxes, and mixes with water to form an all-purpose spray that Barringer says will clean everything from windows to carpets to bricks—and remove even the most ugly and stubborn stains. In addition, he says, its contents are kind to the environment.

About half of Barringer's sales come from his two to three monthly appearances on QVC, the world's largest television retailer. His spots are hard to miss. "Cactus Jack has never been known to lay low. His flashy cowboy outfits catch our viewers' attention," says Dennis D'Angelo, Philadelphia-based QVC's director of merchandising. But Barringer's success is due more to the man in the cowboy suit than to the suit itself, asserts D'Angelo. "One of the reasons he is so successful is because of his down-home, honest sales

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presentations. His demonstrations are focused on everyday problems, and he offers practical, informative solutions." Jack also has a large, loyal customer following—four years after first airing, his One-Shot Cleaner is selling as briskly as it did the first day.

That first day Barringer sold about \$100,000 worth of cleaning bullets in nine minutes. "My second time, I did \$200,000 in 12 minutes," he says. Most of the sales that don't come by QVC are made through Cactus Jack's equally flamboyant television infomercials. "Promotion is the name of the game," he says. "I believe that the success of any brand, including mine, is 10 percent product and 90 percent marketing."

Barringer allots 0 percent to financing. That's because he

didn't have any when he started his company. "Startup costs?" he chortles when asked how he got his business off the ground. "Um, I bought a 55-gallon drum for five bucks, and I had a broom handle, and I mixed up my cleaner in the garage," he says. "I got some spray bottles, filled 'em up with the stuff, and started selling." Total startup costs were under \$1,000, he says.

The idea for One-Shot Cleaner came while Barringer was watching a commercial for Alka-Seltzer. "I figured if they could produce a solid tablet for stomach aches that went plop, plop, fizz, fizz in water, then I could produce a similar product for household cleaning. So I called up a local chemical company and asked if it could be done." He got the answer he hoped for. The chemical company agreed to develop the product—at no cost to Barringer—in exchange for the promise of his ongoing business. The alliance has held for nearly a decade.

Barringer has dreamed up and marketed other products in the past—including the Monster Arm Wrestling Machine that made a fortune for him in the 1980s and then took it all away after a few broken arms resulted in costly lawsuits. Barringer isn't bitter. "I've made lots of money. I've lost lots of money. Now I'm making lots of money again," he says. But millions in sales aren't leading him to complacency. "I've never been interested in making a living," he says. "I've always wanted to be filthy rich!" ■

Russell Wild is the author of Career Smarts: 201 Guiding Principles from the World's Best and Brightest (Clear Light Publishers, 1999, \$14.95).