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TO WATCH

Who's on the move in 2016



Entrepreneurship



Jocelyn Atkinson, chief marketing officer at Silicone Arts Laboratories, sits in front of the map showing all the places their product Dermaflage is shipped and sold across the world. Photo by: Troy Glasgow

"Dermaflage was used on Harrison Ford in Star Wars to cover his (ear) piercing"

MEMPHIS Miracle Makeup Goes to HOLLYWOOD

_By Toni Lepeska

At first, push pins put on a bulletin board identified all the places the Memphis startup, Silicone Arts Laboratories, sold its easy-to-use scar concealer, Dermaflage. In those days, only a few years ago, the entrepreneurial team worked long hours, hustled to connect to investors and waived their salaries to reinvest profits.

Dermaflage's reach is now so vast that a wall of an office in Cooper-Young is devoted to a global map. The entirety of the United States is covered in computer-generated circles that also dot the world. The product's grasp even extended recently to Hollywood, to a blockbuster movie. You may have heard of it.

"Dermaflage was used on Harrison Ford in Star Wars to cover his (ear) piercing," said Jocelyn Atkinson, chief marketing officer at Silicone Arts. "It's exciting to have really good makeup artists talking about us. I think we'll see a lot of traction in one year's time."

The product is a marriage of the science of facial prosthetics and art of Hollywood special effects, created right here in Memphis. It's designed to fill indented scars from acne, chicken pox, cancer or even surgeries like C-sections. Lasting up to 36 hours, it moves with the face, creating an invisible concealer.

Atkinson, a marketing executive who co-founded the consulting firm Southern Growth Studio here, was working to find products to commercialize when she met Matt Singer. The former Hollywood special effects artist developed a product to quickly and affordably cover scars. While Hollywood used a complex and time-consuming process of mixing pots of silicone and texturing it to make it look like skin, a simple, quick way was needed for the average Joe.

Silicone Arts began offering Dermaflage to consumers in 2011. After raising enough funds, Atkinson left her job to promote the product full-time.

Dermaflage is delivered to the skin via a plastic syringe-like applicator. After smoothing of the product, selected to match skin tone, a pad is placed upon the medical-grade silicone and left for two minutes, then lifted carefully to reveal seemingly flawless skin. Cost: \$60 for a kit that provides up to 200 applications.

Entrepreneurship runs in Atkinson's blood. She lived in Arizona, Texas and Virginia as a child, moving around as her father followed business ventures. "My Dad is an entrepreneur," said Atkinson, a graduate of the University of Virginia. "I don't know any other way of living, I suppose."

Her husband joined Atkinson at Silicone Arts a year after the startup commercialized Dermaflage.

A Memphis native, Oscar Atkinson's background is in sales and finance. In a previous role with FedEx, he saw fledgling businesses ship their products all over the world. "I always envied these entrepreneurs who were building businesses, scrapping it out," he said.

He also was taken with Dermaflage's life-changing impact. He remembers a demonstration of the product on a middle-aged woman with a scar on her chin since a mishap at age 13. "She'd given up trying to hide it, then that scar instantly disappeared," he said. "When she saw herself in the mirror, she cried."

Others bought into Dermaflage, too. Memphis angel investors provided initial capital with venture firm Innova rounding out a second tier of fundraising.

Jan Bouten, a partner with Innova who sits on the Silicone Arts board, said Silicone Arts "stands out for a startup at this stage," and that while a good product is essential, a good management team made the difference. Attracting customers is another hurdle. "They've cracked that nut," he said.

With the exception of lower-volume tones, the product is manufactured at a Massachusetts plant, then packaged and shipped from the Cooper-Young offices. "It has a sense of neighborhood," said Oscar Atkinson, who wanted to attract talent "with cool restaurants, bars and coffee."

To attract customers, the company employed a strategy of building product awareness and a customer base online. Now it ships to more than 20,000 customers in more than 30 countries. Dermaflage's name is promoted via social media and websites like dermaflage.com. "People looking for this solution find us," said Jocelyn Atkinson, who demonstrated the product last fall on TV's "The Doctors," part of a recent uptick in media exposure. Pursuing growth in the international market, Silicone Arts enlists distributors in other countries and lists the product in catalogs. The team now markets Dermaflage for wrinkles, too, under its "Worryless" brand, and hopes to get the product into beauty retail stores soon.

David Waddell, who chairs the entrepreneurship committee of the Greater Memphis Chamber's Chairman's Circle, said Memphis needs 1,000 more businesses like Silicone Arts. "We can't achieve prosperity without a thriving entrepreneurial community ... and we can't just talk about it," Waddell said. "We've got to go to work on it and celebrate entrepreneurs like Silicone Arts. They've got a great product."

