

Payne and Lisa Raye and sitcom star Flex Alexander and his wife, singer Shanice Wilson. Celebrities Tichina Arnold and Brian Hooks have publicly endorsed My Lil Star. Marciano says he is ready for "different" baby products. My Lil Star infantwear and educational DVD/videos are already on the drawing boards, and even items for parents of babies are envisioned.

MahoganyBaby.com

In July 2004, in Jersey City, N.J., Wilma Ann Anderson launched *MahoganyBaby.com*, an online publication geared to Black mothers. "A colleague from graduate school brought the initial idea to me based on her difficulty finding parenting magazines that focused on the issues faced by parents of African-American children," says Anderson, the magazine's publisher. "I then crafted the idea to fit an online magazine model, keeping many of the features one might find in a print publication but without the print costs."

MahoganyBaby.com has become a popular e-zine. "The most difficult part of the venture was deciding what the face of *MahoganyBaby.com* would look like, its design. After that was cemented, it was a matter of executing that vision online," says Anderson. "Months of nonstop research on the baby industry, our target audience, as well as the growth of the Internet, preceded our launch," she says.

Start-up costs were low—under \$1,000. "Quite frankly, it was the cost to set up a domain name and obtain an electronic-mailing-list-facilitating company, less than \$500.

"All other services and goods were donated," explains Anderson. Freelance writers provide copy in exchange for bylines. "Thankfully, the Internet is still a medium that allows one to operate with little capital. *MahoganyBaby* is profitable and makes money through advertisers, affiliates and donations from supporters," Anderson says.

Mommy Too!

In October 2003, in Chapel Hill, N.C., Jennifer James launched *Mommy*

Too! Magazine (www.mommytoo.com) "because I could find relatively little about mothering and motherhood for mothers of color in article format." She wanted to provide an online portal with uplifting, positive content about such subjects as babies, pregnancy, parenting, home and living, "where mothers of color could come and really enjoy themselves as moms," James says.

Like Anderson's, James's start-up costs were relatively low. "I started literally with \$20 and the determination to make it the best online site for mothers of color," says James. "Since then, the costs of the site have truly grown because of the increased costs of bandwidth, e-newsletter costs, Web hosting and the costs of professional photos." James still funds the site with money "right out of

my pocket," although advertising income offsets some of the cost.

Mommy Too! has yet to show a profit. "It is difficult to corner the market of online mothers of color. *Mommytoo.com* has mainly grown via word of mouth. Our main obstacle is gaining more subscribers and online readers," James says. The magazine currently has 12,000 readers. James plans to spin off a print version "eventually."

Global Profiles Inc.

Necessity truly was the mother of invention in the case of Global Profiles Inc., a Decatur, Ga., company founded in 1998 by husband-and-wife team Antonio Anderson and Raquel Lett-Anderson (no relation to Willa Ann Anderson). "I was feeding my youngest son and trying to use the remote control for the television to watch the Falcons football game," recalls Antonio. "I wanted to be able to feed my son and caress him while I watched the game. Then I began thinking about all the things my wife has to do [while she feeds] the baby. She was seriously lacking a free hand. So the idea

was born out of a need."

That idea was Gabriel Feeding Pad, a cloth garment you drape over one shoulder that holds the baby's bottle while the baby feeds. Start-up costs of \$75,000, followed by a \$100,000 line of credit, put Global Profiles's first product on the market.

"It took nine months before it was commercially manufactured, packaged and brought to the consumer in November 2001. We did an advertisement and sold the product online," says Antonio. With stores skeptical about carrying innovative products, the Andersons literally took to the road. "It was a major challenge, traveling to and testing our products through consumer trade shows," Antonio says.

Steady sales at these shows helped

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build their confidence, as well as the product brand. The product eventually was accepted by one store. "Once it was accepted, stores wanted more." In May 2004 Global Profiles landed its first contract to supply the Gabriel Feeding Pad Break-Away to more than 200 Babies"R"Us stores and *Babiesrus.com*, *Target.com*, 100 Burlington Coat Factory (stores), Baby Depot stores and *Babydepot.com*. The company's projected revenues for 2005 are \$1,073,474. New products include the Gabriel Discovery Pad, an interactive learning pad, and the Gabriel Feeding Pad Break-Away, a three-in-one product for nursing, bottle-feeding and burping. A line of educational toys for infants and toddlers is being developed.

The couple, who have appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, have also created a seminar series entitled *Take It to the Market!* where "we help make the invention process easy from our own experiences," Antonio says. Already available in book form, the seminar is expected to be on DVD by the end of the year. 