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Cricket Lee (left) has launched the Little Black Pant, a stylish, slightly stretchy pant that comes in sizes zero to 18, each with three body-shape options. It's modeled by her daughter Natasha, who designed it.

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No one knows more about the triumphs and tribulations of Cricket Lee than her 20-year-old daughter, Natasha.

She was 9 when her mother decided to take on the apparel industry with a sizing method that realizes that all booties are not created equal.

Cricket's patented invention, Fitlogic, is a computerized system designed to make it universally easy for women to buy clothes that fit by adding a decimal point to designate how curvaceous their bodies are. In her perfect-fit world, a size 10 in one brand shouldn't be a 12 or 14 in another.

But getting the clothing industry to adopt her system has been like Sisyphus pushing a boulder up a mountain.

So no one's happier than Natasha now that her mother finally has her own product to sell and the real prospect of millions in marketing dollars from a large direct-response company.

"I have contrasts all my life," Natasha says. "Money, no money, rich, broke, no in between. It's been a struggle for both of us. But the outcome is going to be well worth it. I'm ready for a little stability."

Three weeks ago, Cricket launched the Little Black Pant with Fitlogic, a stylish, skinny-legged, slightly stretchy pant that comes in sizes 0 to 18, each with three body-shape options. It's being sold for \$60, which includes shipping, at littleblackpant.com or through a toll-free phone number.

Who knew that Natasha would be the one to solve her mom's fashion dilemma? She models the Little Black Pant and designed it.

A year ago, the graduate of R.L. Turner High School in Carrollton balked when her mother asked her to model the pant line.

"Her brand was frumpy and old — no offense, Mom," she says. "I'm fashionable. I have friends."

So Cricket told Natasha, who's always had a bent for fashion design, to create a trendy pant that she wouldn't be embarrassed to peddle.

"Natasha was treating me exactly like the fashion industry was treating me," says Cricket, referring to both her plus-size body and her mature-woman focus. "Now the company has youth, beauty and fashion with my daughter. And I'm the age, wisdom and scientist."

Mixed success

Cricket has tested the Fitlogic system with major brands at Macy's, Nordstrom, QVC and designer boutiques with mixed success.

"When I was on QVC, we sold \$680,000 in pants in 14 minutes," she says. But consumers were confused in stores when there wasn't someone there to explain it.

In another test in 2011, she offered pants in five colors, three styles, three lengths and 11 sizes in three shapes for a total of 900 SKUs to members of eWomen Network, a large women's business networking organization based in Dallas.

She couldn't handle the mountain of individual orders.

"They ordered pants and waited for them," she says. "Some waited months and months. I had to find a simple way to get to market."

Now she has pants on hand in a warehouse and a distribution system in place.

Her new pants will be sold through direct response — TV commercials asking you to call a 1-800 number or buy online.

In mid-January, Cricket conducted a five-day test with Mercury Media of Santa Monica, Calif., which aired her two-minute commercial on national cable networks to see what worked and what didn't.

Mercury set a goal for a successful test, and sales were double that number.

Dan Danielson, co-chairman of Mercury, has been tutoring Cricket since she first called him eight years ago about financing her TV commercials. "A lot of clients don't have the fortitude to stick with it as long as she has and just muscle through."

Only one in 60 commercials tested on television makes it, Danielson says. Cricket's results were promising enough for a second test that will begin in early March. "We've got to dig deeper and make sure that those prospects are as strong as we think."

The website has a fit guide to help women pick their size and shape. Returns are running about 15 percent for first-timers and 7 percent for repeat customers, Cricket says, well below industry levels for online sales of fitted apparel.

Long road

Over the years, Cricket has raised and spent about \$8 million in savings and angel money.

Henry Cantrell, who met Cricket through his daughter, is her largest investor, having kicked in about a half-million dollars over the past decade.

"She's come to me on many occasions and said, 'I've got to have more money or this is it.' And I gave it to her," says the retired utility executive who lives outside Shreveport.

"She's got a big-demand invention, if she can just market the dadgum thing," he says. "I've never seen a woman with as much intestinal fortitude. I believe she's going to make it. I really do."

The industry is finally recognizing the need for more standardized sizing. The cost of returns is an e-commerce killer. In April, Cricket is giving a keynote speech to the American Apparel & Footwear Association.

She swears she isn't straying from her quest to change an industry.

But for now, it's one pant in one color, 10 sizes and three shapes.

