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"GLOVE GUY" ENJOYS HIS HANDS-ON BUSINESS

- Lacey Burnette Of The Post-Dispatch
- St. Louis Post-Dispatch (MO)
- February 17, 2004
- Section: ST. CHARLES COUNTY POST
- Edition: FIVE STAR LATE LIFT
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William Hiatt is never quite sure where his day is going to take him.

When he starts up his van, he has an idea of some of the stops he has to make, but there's no telling who might call along the way. He knows he'll probably drive a couple of hundred miles and will visit several of his nearly 100 accounts, but there's no telling when a new account might surface.

"There's been people who called me and said, 'I'm right behind you, pull over,'" Hiatt said. "Not a day goes by where someone doesn't flag me down or my pager goes off."

Hiatt is the "**Glove Guy**." While his business address is his home in St. Peters, his working hours are spent in his van, making deliveries. The company's official name is gloves4you.com, which is his Web site. But when he calls on accounts, people sometimes don't recall who he is until he tells them, "I'm the **Glove Guy**."

Hiatt has been the **Glove Guy** for only about a year and a half. Business has increased fivefold in that period; on average, he sells between 3,000 and 5,000 pairs of gloves a month, although there have been months where that number has doubled. He has accounts in 14 states, which he handles through drop-shipping. The St. Louis area accounts get personal deliveries. He has a warehouse in St. Louis County.

Hiatt started the company after noticing that basic jersey gloves were selling for about \$1.50 a pair. He knew from previous business experience that they could be sold for a lot less. In fact, he sells those same gloves for \$6 a dozen, one-third of the cost many people were paying before.

"There's really no good place to buy gloves, and when they do, the prices are just outrageous," he said. "People aren't getting that good of a deal because stores have got that overhead they've got to cover, so they charge more."

Most of Hiatt's clients are in industry, such as warehouses, construction, meat-packing companies and roofing companies. While he is generally a wholesale supplier, he also sells retail and over the Web. Anyone who stops his van on the street isn't going to get turned down.

Hiatt is a distributor for five glove companies and sells about 400 styles of gloves, ranging from the \$6 a dozen jerseys to specialty gloves that can run \$50 or more. A steel glove used in meat packing is designed to prevent workers from suffering serious cuts. Those gloves cost about \$50. Gloves impervious to various chemicals are also popular, if costly. A new glove that he has begun promoting is called the Silverback. It is designed for construction workers and carpenters and has a magnet on the back of it that can hold items like screws and nails. It runs about \$28.

Hiatt says that one of the reasons for his success is that he has developed good relationships with glove manufacturers.

"I pay my bills right away, within two or three weeks. So they give me pretty good deals," he said.

In addition to gloves, Hiatt sells safety equipment, such as goggles and dust masks, rain suits and disposable gloves. One thing he has learned is that gloves are not a seasonal item. Hiatt knows that some of his customers are reselling the

gloves, but that doesn't bother him. The buyers are probably still getting a better deal than if they bought them at the store, and he's been paid.

Word-of-mouth and referrals have been Hiatt's best advertising, although the signs on his van have paid off. He used a Web site address as his company's name because he thought people would be able to remember it easily, at least more easily than a 10-digit phone number.

"I've been trying to build my Web base. That's where the future is. I know a lot of buyers, big corporations, they do all of their purchasing online," he said.

So far, Hiatt is his sole employee. He has had no trouble meeting demand, despite the company's growth. He drives between 800 and 1,000 miles a week, fulfilling his accounts.

"What's the limit? I don't know. If that's my worst problem, I've got it made," he said. "I run around and sell gloves. That's what I do."

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gloves4you.com

* Owner: William Hiatt of St. Peters

* Telephone: 314-509-5241

Photo by LARRY WILLIAMS/POST-DISPATCH - William Hiatt, 51, the "**Glove Guy**," shows off some of his wares from the back of his delivery van. Although he lives in St. Peters, he works mostly from his van.

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