

Julie Brighton

It was a summer evening in 2001 and Julie Brighton was cleaning up after having had a few friends over to her San Francisco apartment for barbecue. As she stacked the last plate into the dishwasher, she remembered Jim Henly's fascination with the clunky but practical charcoal starter that she had made. "That's one of the *crudest* gadgets I've ever seen," Jim had said, "but it sure does fire up the charcoal!" Julie had built her starter two weeks earlier, having seen some campers light charcoal using a crude device made out of an old coffee can with holes punched around the bottom.

Julie's prototype charcoal starter was only slightly more sophisticated than the campers' version, but she was nonetheless convinced she was on to something. In fact, she was so intrigued by the concept that the week before she had spent several hours in the library reading about the barbecue industry and spoken with a business school friend who worked in the charcoal industry. Her curiosity also led her to check mail order catalogues and local stores to see if there were any like products already on the market.

After seeing Jim's reaction to her product, Julie decided that she would spend some time with the information she had collected, trying to determine if there was market for this unique charcoal starter. The following day she got up early and started reviewing her research results.

The product idea

As Julie envisioned it, the charcoal starter would be a metal cylinder a foot tall that was tapered towards the top. On the bottom several large holes would be punched through the metal and a wooden handle (protected by a heat shield) would be attached to the side (See **Exhibit 3**). Two inches from the bottom, on the inside of the cylinder, would be a metal grate.

The product itself was not glamorous but Julie believed its beauty was in the simplicity of use. To light charcoal using this cylinder starter, the user would place the starter into the barbecue, stuff two sheets of newspaper underneath the grate, pour up to four pounds of charcoal on top of the grate, then light the newspaper from the holes on the bottom of the cylinder. Once the charcoal was hot (which was typically in 10 to 12 minutes, as opposed