

Jennifer Jolicoeur: A Sex Toy Goddess on a Mission

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By Peter Berton

WOONSOCKET, R.I. – Jennifer Jolicoeur is the founder and president of Athena's Home Novelties, a highly successful sex toy retailer that markets through home parties.

Jolicoeur's attitude about sex toy sales is embodied in her company's mission statement: "To empower women and men down the path of sexual education in the safe, comfortable environment of their own homes by offering only the highest quality products presented by a trained Athena's Goddess or Adonis."

What really stands out about Jolicoeur is her irrepressible, irresistible and utterly authentic enthusiasm for her products, her business and her life. Jolicoeur and Athena's Home Novelties bring a very real zest to the novelty market.

YNOT: Tell us about the head Goddess.

Jennifer Jolicoeur: I'm 42 years old. I have been passionately and happily married for 18 years to the boy I fell in love with when I was four years old. We have two children, a 16-year-old-girl and a 12-year-old-boy.

I started conducting sex talks at the lunch table in high school. I was sexually active, and my friends felt comfortable sharing their experiences with me. In my yearbook it actually says "peniology" in my epitaph. How they didn't catch that is beyond me.

I originally worked for CVS headquarters as a teleprompter operator for the executives. When I started selling sex toys through home parties, I was just 21. Within a few years, I was making twice my salary and decided to take a huge risk and leave corporate America.

People told me I was crazy to leave such a reliable income with health insurance, vacation days and paid holidays to work for myself. I knew in my heart it was my destiny to talk to people about sex, thus making them feel more comfortable and more knowledgeable about pleasure.

Athena's Home Novelties has been in business for 15 years. We operate in 44 states.

How did you get into the business?

I have always been sexually aware, and when I went to buy my first sex toy at 18, I didn't enjoy the experience. The shop I went to in Providence [R.I.] was dark and was not a comfortable environment for a woman to buy a sex toy. You couldn't tell how fast or how loud anything was. The packaging was all pictures of women spread wide open.

There was a market; women like me wanted sex toys, but we didn't want to go into a store like that. You know, guy behind the counter reading a porn.

A friend of mine in the mail room at CVS told me about a sex toy party she went to, and she thought of me. I called the company and began working for one of the first sex toy home party companies on the East Coast. I was the very first person in Rhode Island selling sex toys through home parties.

Unfortunately, the company I was working for was not thriving. Before they went out of business, I jumped ship and started Athena's. My dream was to create a company that I would want to work for.

My grandfather, who was 69 at the time, let me borrow \$8,000 to kick-start the business, and I paid him back a week later. He was stunned. He thought I was selling drugs. I had to assure him that I was selling sex toys.



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He's 84 now, and he is my biggest fan. He loves to tell all the ladies at the senior center that I help people have better sex.

Since that fateful day — April 1, 1998 — Athena's has grown into a national entity.

To build it, I continued to do parties myself. I did approximately 300 a year while working in the Athena's office daily. It was an intense time in my life, but I was so passionate. It didn't feel like work.

My husband quit his job as a chef, and he has been home taking care of the children ever since. He's the envy of all his friends.



Why home parties?

Home parties provide a safe, comfortable environment. Women can sit in a friend's living room, have a glass of wine and maybe a chocolate dessert prepared by the hostess. Everyone can relax and escape the stress of family and work. It's girl time.

An Athena's Goddess or Adonis presents their favorite products for about 90 minutes. It's an educational, professional and entertaining presentation. Party guests are able to taste and touch the products. This allows them to pick the products that best suit their needs.

After the show is over, the guests come into a bedroom one by one to make their purchases in private. They

can also ask the Goddess or Adonis any sensitive questions they may have.

At the end of the evening, the hostess receives free products based on the party sales.

Everyone learns something new, has a fun time with their friends and goes home excited to have sex with their partner or themselves.

How difficult was it to get women to host these parties?

Party requests come in daily through our Facebook page and website from women all over the country [who want to set up] bachelorette parties, divorce parties, summer parties, *50 Shades of Grey*-themed parties. Goddesses and Adoni who do parties get bookings at their parties from party guests who want to earn free products too.

Attitudes have changed tremendously since I started Athena's 15 years ago. Women want to feel good. They want to release stress by having orgasms. They crave increased intimacy with their partners. Believe me, booking parties is no problem.

About a year after setting up shop, the city of Woonsocket came after me. They investigated me because they were sure I was doing something wrong. I was on the front page of the newspaper and the topic of local talk shows, all debating the issue of — gasp! — sex toys in the city.

Of course, I wasn't breaking any laws. This prompted the people who owned the office building [in which Athena's is headquartered] to consider evicting me. They didn't, after speaking with me. Thankfully.

People I loved, including my dad who was a veteran firefighter in the city, thought that starting a sex toy company was just a bad idea and discouraged me from doing so. I wouldn't hear of it. I knew that sex toys made sex more fun for both partners. I wasn't giving in or giving up.

Local attitudes changed, it seems.

Yes! I'm now invited to participate in the city harvest festival in the fall. I have been invited to speak at Chamber of Commerce events about my entrepreneurial spirit. I even was invited by the Speaker of the House in the State of R.I. to visit the statehouse during the general assembly, where I received two standing ovations for my tenacity and mission.

Sex has always been a taboo subject. It's organizations like religion and even the media that have made sex confusing, shameful, weird and uncomfortable. I'm doing my best to undo what has been done one party at a time.

What sells and what doesn't these days?

It's been fun to watch the bondage section of our product offering sell more than double. We always sold cuffs and blindfolds and ticklers. Last summer when *50 Shades of Grey* was at its peak, sales for those items spiked. Women who never in a million years wanted to be tied up and spanked were ready to go for it.

Our pampering products like Coochy Shave Crème, shea butters and bath salts are selling really well too. Women are so stressed out. They need ways to calm themselves throughout their day.

Silicone toys are selling better than ever. Women seek high-quality materials. The consumers of today want to put things in and on their bodies that are safe and sturdy.

Gyrators have also been a big hit the past few years. They allow women to have longer orgasms versus vibrators.

We've watched joke gifts like penis straws and penis ice cube trays sales drop. I think our industry was always connected to joke items because people have a tough time processing their emotions about sex — or maybe it's that men love making a penis out of *everything*.



What is the biggest misconception males have about this market?

Consumer Products & Services

- General Business Services
- Industry News & Resource Information
- Photography & Video Services
- Online Billing Services
- Software & Scripts
- Website Design & Templates

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Well, I'd like to say that men think women need big, huge, penis-shaped toys. I've heard from hundreds of women that their male partner went to a sex shop and came home with a large item, thinking that bigger was better.

The truth is that for most women, clitoral stimulation is where it's at. You can have intense, toe-curling orgasms with small toys.

Also, I think some men feel that sex toys replace them in bed. Although sex toys *can* serve as a replacement, women would much rather have an interactive experience with their partner *and* their favorite vibe. For the man who comes quickly, he can spend a grand half hour teasing and pleasing his female partner with a sex toy before penetrating her with his own penis. She's ready, juicy and hypersensitive.

Sex toys make it so *everyone* goes to bed happy and satisfied.

Tell us about Athena's Cup and why you are collecting used bras from your clients.

The Athena's Cup is my attempt to break the Guinness World Record for most bras hooked together. I started it because breast cancer affects primarily women, and Athena's deals with thousands and thousands of women. Many of our customers have had cancer touch their lives in some way.

Asking women for their old, unwanted bras is a simple request. We all have a bra in our drawer that no longer fits or may have a broken strap. We tend to hold onto bras long after they stop supporting us. We ask women to donate their unwanted bras to our bra chain.

People send in bras with memorials to women in their lives who died from breast cancer, or loving words to congratulate those who fought and survived. Since 2009, we have collected 108,733 bras from all over the world. When we hook them all together, this chain will be a representation of our unity — our stand against breast cancer. It really is a beautiful way to show "support" for the cause.

[Ed.: Even pro-wrestling star Hulk Hogan supports the cause. He posed with Jolicoeur at a recent event.]



How is business going these days?

Business is getting better. The recession definitely affected us. While I like to think sex toys are a necessity, they aren't when your pay has been cut or your partner has lost their job. We watched our average sales drop significantly when the housing crisis started. Thankfully, last summer we saw sales being to climb again. After surviving that difficult economic time, I have faith that we can survive through anything.

What are your future plans?

My future plans include revamping our training program to make it more interactive. I also want to tour the country and visit with Goddesses and Adoni all over

America. I'd also like to write a book about my journey in this industry.

If you could invent one sex toy for which you see a real need, what would it be?

Honestly, I would make a hybrid gyrator and vibrator — a twirling vibrator for the vagina with a gyrating clitoral tickler on the outside. *That* would be amazing!

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