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Inventors pitch products for chance to get on QVC

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Phoenix resident Marty Watts got the idea for his invention two years ago, when he found himself lined up outside a theater waiting for a movie premiere in 108-degree heat.

"There were no trees, no shade, and we had to wait almost two hours. Everybody was dying," he said. "I thought, 'This is ridiculous,' and that's when I got the idea for a shade on a stick."

On Tuesday, he brought his HaloShade solar umbrella to a QVC product search at the Tempe Ikea, in hopes of persuading the popular TV and online retailer to buy it.

Watts was one of 10 of the 50 applicants who got to spend about 15 minutes with QVC Director of Vendor Relations Marilyn Montross. He won't know for some time whether his product will make it because it still has to go through administrative layers.

Competition is stiff. Although the company buys about 13,000 products a year, including many established ones, only about 3 percent of those end up on the show.

Product searches are not often held in the Phoenix area, Montross said.

The event drew inventors from as far away as California and New York.

Some of the more innovative products offered Tuesday included a car-seat cooler; plastic liners for refrigerator crispers, suitcases and lunchboxes; sandals with interchangeable straps; a spackling product that can be applied in a variety of textures and colors; a lamp that turns on with a wave of the hand; an oral cookbook on a CD; and a device that diagnoses what is wrong when an engine warning light comes on. Deborah Lowe of Cave Creek also got to spend time with Montross. Lowe invented the

BabyBeeCool Car Seat, which uses reusable ice blocks, in 2000, but has since come out with an adult version.

"I kept getting phone calls asking, 'When can you come out with an adult seat cover?' " Lowe said.

Connie Guzzo of Chandler got 15 minutes to introduce her Kik-n-It callus remover and smoother. It is a disc that is adhered to the bottom of a tub or shower. A bather kicks his or her heels against it to help remove calluses and exfoliate the skin.

"It's good for people who can't bend over because they had back surgery," she said. "And some people just don't want to get a (pedicure) because they don't want their feet exposed."

The creators of the 40 products that Montross' advance team had determined would not sell on QVC each got five minutes of "speed coaching."

During the sessions, Montross advises inventors on the viability and prices of their products. If QVC won't take it, she may suggest alternatives.

"You can overdesign something and just price it out of the market," she said. "It can be a great idea, very salable, but if it's overpriced, the consumer is going to look at it and say, 'Oh, I can do with what I've got. That problem isn't so severe I need this expensive device to help solve it.' "

The product search was held in Ikea's cafeteria as part of an Ikea-Women's Leadership Exchange business and networking conference that drew about 200 people.

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