

How Thieving Inmates Helped to Fight Crime ...

Pink Underwear

... and the Birth of a Great Idea

What becomes all the rage or a fad these days is a great mystery in the world of retail. From pet rocks to cabbage patch dolls- it's anyone's guess what will capture the public's attention next.

In Maricopa County, Arizona, the Sheriff's Office has its very own "novelty item" for sale and it all happened quite by accident.

In 1995, it came to the attention of Sheriff Joe Arpaio that inmates were stealing the then white boxer shorts issued as part of the jailhouse inmate attire. The shorts had "MCSO" stenciled on the back and were being sold on the street for up to ten dollars. Word got back to Sheriff Arpaio that \$48,000 worth of boxers had literally disappeared from the laundry - presumably smuggled out of the jails and sold for pocket money.

Immediately, Arpaio ordered that all boxers be dyed pink. He reasoned that hiding pink boxers when inmates go out on work furlough or work release would be tough to do and easy for a detention officer to spot either under their uniforms or street clothes. Of course, truth be known, the Sheriff also knows inmates don't like pink.

At the Sheriff's request, the Laundry handled the dye job and within a few days, the inmate underwear was transformed into a rainbow pink color ... sure to offend the tender male ego.

While the reason for dyeing the boxers was certainly sound, it did cause quite a stir in the community and around the country. The idea was unusual enough that many people found it funny and called the office asking if they could buy a pair for their cousin in Vermont or their police officer brother in New Jersey. The demand was great - the requests were many.

It was hard to say no, so the Sheriff and posse together decided to market their own brand of

pink boxers and use the proceeds to fund the various posse operations conducted throughout the year.

The commercial boxers are different from the inmate version. The posse's boxers have a Sheriff's star, Arpaio's signature and a gold "Go Joe" emblazoned on the side.

When it was publicly announced that the boxers would be for sale for a ten dollar donation, requests skyrocketed and came in from all over the world.

"It's almost funny when you think about it. Inmates steal the jail underwear - and what we do to stop them ends up creating a novelty item. Pink boxers are now incredibly popular. The public demands to have them. So now we sell them to raise money for the posse - money that goes back to fighting crime."

Sheriff Joe Arpaio
Maricopa County, Arizona

Within a few short months, a whopping \$400,000 had been sold.

The proceeds help fuel the cars, vans, and planes used in posse operations like the Holiday Mall Patrol, the Prostitution Posse, Operation Butt Out (an anti-smoking program) and helps pay for overtime to the deputies used to supervise the operations.

Today, the pink boxers are still selling. And the 10,500 inmates wearing them still occasionally complain.

"I guess I should thank the inmates for stealing the shorts," Arpaio says. "Their crime was the birth of a great idea."