

Review: Blacksocks.com is as simple as it sounds

May 20 2009, By RYAN NAKASHIMA , AP Business Writer



In this undated photo provided by blacksocks.com, company founder Samy Liechti poses for a promotional photo. (AP Photo/Blacksocks.com)

(AP) -- Every week or so I undertake a rigorous mental challenge: matching my socks.

The toughest ones are the black ones, because they're not all alike. Some fade bluish, others don't. Some have dimples, others ribbing. Elastics stretch and break differently, and I am regularly bamboozled by multiple fabrics and lengths. Sometimes I find loners and socks with holes - and I

don't even bother to throw them out.

So when sock subscription service Blacksocks.com came calling, I answered, intrigued. After 10 years in Europe, where it sold its millionth calf sock in September, the company began marketing in the U.S. a couple of months ago. Founder Samy Liechti's promise: "Men never have to worry about misplacing or matching socks again."

Really?

Blacksocks.com says it will deliver three pairs of identical socks every four months for an annual "sockscription" of \$89. Longer socks and cashmere silk socks cost more, and there are trial pairs and starter kits for the uninitiated. They come in three sizes: calf socks (medium), knee socks (long) and ankle-high ones (shortys).

There's only one color: black. And one delivery frequency: three times a year.

Could this simplicity relieve me of a tedious chore?

The concept makes sense. If all your socks are exactly the same, matching them won't be a problem.

But with Blacksocks.com charging about \$10 a pair, I could save money with a do-it-myself solution: Buying dozens of identical socks at once at the local mall, even accounting for the cost of gas.

Liechti's rebuttal is that many people can also buy cheap watches but they spend thousands of dollars for quality. He's Swiss, so I concede the point.

He boasts about Blacksocks' yarn-testing methods in northern Italy, says

Blacksocks are cheaper than other brand-name socks, and notes that delivery is included in the price.

Without years of wear, it's hard to fully test this system.

Blacksocks has 50,000 active customers, and 100,000 former customers. "Often they have too many socks and they decide to quit the brand," Liechti acknowledged.

Two sample pairs I received made me laugh.

One pair, the knee-highs, were the longest socks I've seen since Michael Cooper played for the Los Angeles Lakers. They almost should be called hose. They were sleek and cool, but supportive.

The short ones - the ankle-highs - remain in the box. Who would wear these? People who wear socks with sandals? Even Liechti believes that fashion statement "is awful."

"I strongly believe there are moments in life where it's better where you don't wear socks," he said.

Yet there are ample situations when new socks can save you a lot of grief. Just look at what happened to former World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz. He was photographed taking off his shoes at a Turkish mosque in 2007. Both his gray socks had holes that revealed his big toes. Pictures are all over the Web.

Wolfowitz is a Blacksocks customer, thanks to an observant friend, Liechti said. Wolfowitz sent the company a personal letter of thanks.

It's just such a thing that tickles the founder.

"We market one of the most boring products available," Liechti said.
"We cannot really talk about socks and take it serious for 10 years."

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