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Inspiring Innovators

South Asian Women In Business



Sarina Jan's bhangra fitness videos



At university, Sarina taught everything from step, kickboxing and salsa, while holding down jobs at the school newspaper and at a TV studio. This became a necessity when her father suddenly died of a second heart attack in 1994. The fate of her father, and the need to raise awareness of fitness issues in the South Asian community, hangs over Sarina even today.

Always involved in choreographing Indian dances while growing up, her initial concept of "masala bhangra" didn't strike her until spring 1999, after starting work at a small PR firm in Beverly Hills. The firm specialized in beauty, fitness and fashion, "a perfect fit for me, but I didn't know it then," Sarina

testers, and provided training and incentivizing for spa staff.

"People think Indian means not professional, no service and inconsistency," Sonia says. With her plans to expand cross-country and to distribute more products from Asia, she is on her way to realizing her business plan objective: "To sell a personal Asian luxury experience."

Another visionary combining Indian traditions with contemporary living is Sarina Jain. Founder of the "Masala Dance Workout", fitness instructor and host of *V-Desi* in New York, Sarina's energy and multitasking abilities stem from training in high school track and softball in Orange County, California. As if two sports weren't enough, Sarina began taking aerobic classes at her residential complex's clubhouse. By chance, the instructor was leaving the state, and she asked Sarina to take over. That was the beginning of a voyage that took Sarina from a suburban clubhouse to a major gym chain and, eventually, to inventing her own fitness program.

remembers.

Living at home with her mother and younger sister provided the perfect support network to incubate her ideas. By June 1999, Sarina had come up with the concept, trademarked "masala bhangra workout," got an 800 number, and launched a website. Keeping them under strict secrecy, Sarina hired five dancers, four of them South Asian, to make her initial video. With that kind of speed and passion, the video was shot in December and featured on KTLA soon after. Only a few months later, the premier New York Sports Club invited her to do a weeklong class. By June 2000, they called her back to packed classes in New York, New Jersey and Philadelphia.

From there, masala bhangra fitness has grown, attracting its share of imitators and detractors. With a typical day consisting of three classes, interviews, marketing her own products (available at www.masaladance.com; 1-877-4-MASALA; and online at Barnes & Noble), as well as prepping for her TV show,