

New Haven Register

Good Fit

T-shirt a good fit for young entrepreneurs

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Cara Baruzzi

NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT — Dubbing it a T-shirt company "with a heart, conscience and sense of humor," three young entrepreneurs have started a business that aims to promote marriage equality — one shirt at a time.

The Internet-based company, called ISSO, recently launched its first T-shirt, which bears the message "marriage is so gay." A portion of the shirt's proceeds are donated to organizations that advocate equal rights for gay and straight couples.

"We're not trying to be political in any sense," said Reggie Solomon, 31, of New Haven, one of ISSO's owners. "Unfortunately, marriage has become political, but we don't think it is."

ISSO merely wanted to create a stylish shirt that people would enjoy wearing, he said. Solomon, who is gay, founded the company in May with Ben Berkowitz, 28, of New Haven and Andy Horowitz, 26, who recently moved from New Haven to Louisiana, both of whom are straight. They had the idea for ISSO while on a road trip with friends when "somehow the subject of marriage equality came up."

Berkowitz had previous experience making shirts, having designed and independently sold T-shirts that said, "[New Haven: It's Better Than Your Town](#)" in the past.

All three owners have full-time jobs in addition to ISSO. Solomon works for Yale University, Berkowitz owns a Web design company called

[CT Web Net LLC](#), and Horowitz, the former director of the New Haven Oral History Project, is a freelance writer in Louisiana.



The company's name, ISSO, is taken from the "is so" on the first shirt. Solomon said the company plans to launch more T-shirt designs in the future, and not all products will necessarily be geared toward marriage equality. "We'll go wherever it takes us," he said.

Since launching its Web site, www.issogay.com, on July 27, the company has sold 34 T-shirts. The first one was bought by a customer in Arizona.

The owners hope to sell 100,000 shirts and hold a celebration when they hit that milestone.

"We created a product that we're excited about," he said, adding that the shirt has been well received. "We've struck a chord with some people. We've just had a really great response."

The shirt gives people a lighthearted way to show their support for a serious issue, said Carol Buckheit, associate director of Hartford-based [Love Makes a Family](#). The statewide nonprofit, which advocates equal rights for gay and straight marriages, is one of the groups receiving a portion of ISSO's proceeds.

"We are just thrilled that (the company) has created such a visible and such a fun way to support marriage equality," she said. While they

plan to expand in the future, for now, ISSO's owners are focusing their attention on the "marriage is so gay" shirt and are optimistic it will become popular.

"People are excited to wear the shirt," Solomon said. "We have as many straight friends wearing the shirt as we do gay friends. We've created a shirt that, whether you're straight or gay, you can feel comfortable wearing."