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TrimSpa's future in doubt after Smith's death

Marketing experts say TrimSpa's close association with its spokeswoman could spell disaster for the business.

By **Jessica Dickler, CNNMoney.com staff writer**

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NEW YORK (CNNMoney.com) -- The death of sassy spokeswoman Anna Nicole Smith coupled with growing doubts about TrimSpa's controversial weight-loss products may prove too much for the closely held company, marketing experts said Thursday.

"Given the double whammy of who their spokesperson was and the other tangential difficulties, I don't think they're going to come back," said Robert Passikoff, a New York brand consultant.

Passikoff said news that Smith died in Florida Thursday could spell disaster for the small business.

"When you mention TrimSpa, the image that came to mind was Anna Nicole Smith and that's the difficulty with being so closely tied to a celebrity," he said.

"You've just pulled the rug out from under what the brand was standing on," he added.

The former Playboy Playmate and reality TV star became a spokeswoman for TrimSpa in October 2003, after losing a reported 60 to 70 pounds.

But Smith and TrimSpa have faced repeated legal difficulties over allegations that advertisements for the weight-loss pills were misleading.

Last month, the Federal Trade Commission said it fined the marketer of TrimSpa and other over-the-counter diet drugmakers \$25 million for false advertising.

The government agency said that the company's weight-control claims were not supported by scientific evidence.

"TrimSpa has some major challenges given the loss of credibility about their product and [now] losing their spokesperson," said Britt Beemer, the chairman of strategic marketing firm America's Research Group.

"It's a one-two punch and it does damage their marketing position dramatically."

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TrimSpa, which is owned by privately held Goen Technologies, is based in Cedar Knolls, N.J.

TrimSpa founder Alex Goen expressed regret at her death.

"Today, Anna Nicole Smith's grief stricken and tumultuous personal life came to an end. Anna came to our company as a customer, but she departs it as a friend," Goen said in a brief statement.

"While life for Anna Nicole was not easy these past few months, she held dear her husband, Howard K. Stern, her daughter, Dannielynn Hope, her most cherished friends, beloved dogs, and finally, her work with TrimSpa," he said.

The two-paragraph statement didn't address the company's business prospects, and officials at Goen were not immediately available for further comment.

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