

## **Weemote®X This time it is Ready!**

Our 4 year old son with mild autism was having trouble watching tv with the universal remote control. Too many buttons, too many pit falls, too much difficulty navigating content, finding the wrong content. John, then an IT guy with a successful career in computer networking sales set out to create a tv remote to keep kids safe while watching tv. He had a small nest egg of 50K, fear, expectation and raw nerve. The spec was to limit the number of buttons, make them kid friendly, programmable, make it indestructible and of course make a million dollars. With the help of John's good friend and computer guru, Bruce Lundeen, all functions of industrial design, software, and production were out-sourced. Bruce and John called in favors, connections and any business associate who could add to the puzzle; many for the price of a phone call and a question. John and Terri Stephen and Bruce Lundeen handled everything that they could physically do themselves. This included packing, shipping from their garage, writing manuals, creating the website, purchasing tradeshow equipment, creating packaging, etc. Production was sourced to a major U.S. based

remote control manufacturer. This proved to be good and bad.

The company, Fobis Technologies, Inc., launched its first weemote® at the Toy Fair in New York City in February 2000. Patents, trademarks, liability insurance and great hopes and dreams. CNN Financial picked it up, Newsweek, Lillian Vernon catalog. Followed soon after were Hammacher Schlemmer, Just Right, Delta Sky Mall and about a dozen other catalogs. The product was also for sale on our website [www.weemote.com](http://www.weemote.com). We were profitable in less than a year.

The only advertising was through PR. We found radio spots, gift guides in magazines and on local tv stations and any mention in a newspaper anywhere in the country.

Nine months in Oprah Winfrey picked it up for a "favorite things" segment. While this was a magical moment, the trio was not ready for prime time. The product was not in big box retail yet and purchasing on-line was not yet main stream. Weemote® enjoyed a spike in on-line activity but it was a short spike.

Within a short time, John scored a deal with Target Stores for 40,000 units. As a newby the product was stuck in a back corner of the stores with replacement remotes and portable

phones. It slumbered there with little traffic. It ended up in their clearance bin and the low price undermined all other sales avenues nearly sinking the company. Two guest spots on QVC failed to delight their audience. It soon became apparent that the product was in demand for the senior and disabilities market. John and Bruce re-invented it, changed the colors from the toy-box spectrum to a more conservative pallet and launched weemote® Sr. They also created the weemote®dVr for dvd navigation, the Nascar In-Car remote for an InDemand promotion, and several branded versions of the original weemote® for private corporate promotions including Comcast, Nickelodeon and others. The US based manufacturer was keeping too much profit for themselves making profitability for Fobis Technologies, Inc., impossible. John found a Korean manufacturer who was a much better and more ethical fit. Unfortunately, the mold had to be moved from China to Korea and was vandalized in the process. A new mold at the cost of 50K dollars had to be made before production could resume. That was a year's salary for the Stephens, a serious financial blow. John had to take on a part time job as an Apple Computer Genius and private consultant to make ends meet.

Then came another major bump in the road. In 2009, Nintendo introduced their Wii gaming platform. With the new controller being all the rage world wide, their online community named their remote the "wiimote". This was a viral phenomenon. Phonetically identical to "weemote", in a similar market, sold in similar places and causing confusion with both the gaming customer and the tv remote customer, the Stephens spent two years convincing Nintendo to cease and desist from using the name. It took Terri 6 to 8 hours per day for two years working with lawyers, researching retailers who were infringing, and documenting evidence of confusion. Do an internet search on "weemote wiimote" to learn more about the saga. Trademark infringement must be defended else the trademark can be lost. This took Terri away from all PR efforts. Web traffic stalled. Weemote® did accomplish the cease and desist effort but at a great cost.

Now it's ten years and Fobis Technologies, Inc. is launching the new weemote® X. With new energy, a new look and a greatly updated software package, John, Terri and Bruce are ready to shoot much higher than ever before. We expect to reach 3-4 million in sales in the next year and position the company for sale. The trademark is our biggest asset. Getting

that right was lucky. Knowing what we do now about trademark law has taught us a great deal about doing our legal homework. There are some really big sharks out there who will not think twice about burying you.

Moving forward we will not change much about the way we do business except that it will be bigger and with much more confidence. We are seeking an angel investor so that we can pay for advertising and maybe draw a salary while we ramp up to the big numbers we are aiming at. The product is the best it has ever been and the market is very hungry for what we have to offer. Terri envisions a weemote® as a balloon in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade one day. Bruce see's it along side his other inventions already in the Smithsonian Museum and John wants to see it turn a profit so he can retire one day. The 4 year old boy who inspired it all graduated from high school in June of 2011. The weemote® never made his life easier but it most certainly will improve the lives of millions of others.