

Entrepreneurs Face the Dragons

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By Judy Sellin, Over Easy Please

Who would have thought that all a person needed to do to get on television show Dragons' Den, was to attach a piece of carpet to an elastic, put it on your head, give it a name like "The RUGged Man" and you and your invention would be aired on CBC, March 9th at 8:00pm (this Wednesday evening)?

Although I am being somewhat facetious about the simplicity of getting on Dragons' Den, Edmonton entrepreneurs Richard Korbyl and Terry Syvenky will be featured, pitching their invention on that show, on March 9th. They auditioned in March 2010, received a call from the producers in April 2010, and finally flew to Toronto to film in front of the Dragons on May 13, 2010. From the entrepreneurs' press release, they stated they were "warmly embraced" by the wealthy Dragons/business moguls, who seemingly liked the the RUGged Man product, which is a novelty age-related gag gift for balding men. There will be a free viewing of the show at Ceili's Irish Pub and Restaurant, on 109th St. in Edmonton, at which time it will be revealed as to what really happened in the "Dragons' Den" to Korbyl, Syvenky and their product.

Personally, after viewing the RUGged Man's website, I found the product even more humorous. Without any solid reasons for my opinion, other than I am not bald, I do recall my days of living in homes with shag carpet and doing my share of raking carpets just before company arrived.

The RUGged Man Advanced Hair System started quite a few years ago, so it has been a product in the making for some time, with relatively good business sense behind the venture. But the birth of the product came to be when Richard Korbyl's father, Ed, needed a humorous hat: a theme for the family's business BBQ, that staff, customers and friends would be attending on that particular July 1st back in 1993.

A prize was offered to the winner with the "funniest, craziest and most outlandish hat." Unbeknown to most who attended the BBQ, the winner would not receive a dinner at Edmonton's finest hotels or anything of the sort. The winner would receive a picnic basket filled with hotdogs, buns, condiments and bus fare coupons.

Ed Korbyl himself had to think of a hat design for his own BBQ, and at the last minute he painted a cowboy hat green; funny, but not a winner. Then, Ed noticed some old shag carpet they had removed from the basement, waiting for a trip to the dump. It was at that moment that Ed's creativity kicked in. Ed decided to cut himself a piece of the carpet and wear it to the BBQ as a bad toupee. Ed's wife sewed on a elastic and Ed had himself a unique hat for the event.

The story of how The RUGged man developed is a very entertaining one, and can be read in detail at www.ruggedman.ca. It was however, when Ed Korbyl placed the shag toupee on his head in front of his party guests at the BBQ that his son Richard knew they had a future product. Guests wanted photos taken with his father them wearing it. People laughed at it and loved it.

The bad toupee became The RUGged Man, through Richard Korbyl, Terry Syvenky and Dean Danilak brainstorming and attending a trade show. Unfortunately, for a number of reasons, the product was not the incredible success they had hoped, even with the product in the hands of some retailers. Then, The RUGged Man sat for a few years due to the booming economy in Alberta and the need for the Korbyls to attend to their family business.

OEP's questions for Richard Korbyl, were based on what I would ask most inventors/entrepreneurs. Just like the general public, I too will have to wait until Wednesday night to find out if the Dragons made a business deal or not with the Edmonton entrepreneurs.

Most inventors/entrepreneurs have a long-term plan for their product. OEP asked Richard Korbyl where he sees his product being sold in a five year span: "Clearly our product is a gag gift, and will be carried in the US and Canada by chain and Independent novelty retailers. That being said, we have had success in non traditional locations such as weddings shops, carpet stores, and our parent company, Columbia Awards, [a trophy shop]." explained Korbyl. According to Korbyl, there is a market when it comes to balding: "Let's face it, everyone knows somebody bald and our packaging really captures people so it works everywhere." Korbyl sees potential for marketing The RUGged Man, in gas stations, hunting shops, and convenience stores.

It is not uncommon for novelty items to have a limited lifespan. Asking Korbyl about the lifespan of his product, he said: "As long as people throw around such terms as 'oh look at that bad rug on that guy,' I think the product will have legs." But there is always competition, those out there that will try to do duplicate an existing product. "I think what may take place are knockoffs or replicas," he said. But the team behind RUGged Man Advanced Hair System is prepared for this, with a few ideas in progress along the same line..."

RUGged Man is trademarked and copyrighted in both the US and Canada. When asked if they had patented the product, Korbyl responded, "Lets face it, it's a piece of carpet, with an attached elastic. If someone was to change the dimension of anything, they would be able to get around the patent. In addition the costs involved with a patent certainly did not warrant going this step." Manufacturing is presently being done at Columbia Awards in Edmonton, but once they secure American distribution, they plan on having the manufacturing done overseas due to the larger manufacturing requirements of the product.

As funny as the product is, OEP wondered if there may be those that have taken offense to it. Korbyl said, "we are proud to say that our product is one of the few age related gag gifts which is non offensive. It can be given to your uncle or father without any uncomfortable feelings. There was a time, when a television ad was run about the product, and Korbyl received an email from a "concerned client" that was upset that 6 inch x 8 inch piece of carpet cost so much. The same client was also disturbed that the RUGged Man just gave the Americans another reason to laugh at Canadians. Actually, the size of carpet used is 5 inches X 7 inches.

"The RUGged Man Advanced Hair Hair system is mostly aimed at the 35-65 age demographic, but university students seem to love the product too," Korbyl continued. So for the next while, Korbyl and his partners will concentrate on the RUGged Man, but will be putting out different modifications of the product. "It has been a learning curve, but it sure has been fun. There is no better feeling that watching total strangers look at the box and break into laughter. I guess the world needs levity these days," said Korbyl, the President and proud user of what he calls the worlds most revolutionary hair replacement system, The RUGged Man.



Terry Syvenky (L) and Richard Korbyl (R) proudly display their gag gift, The RUGged Man Advanced Hair System