

Interview with Accidental Pren-her Wendy Krepak

S: Hi! My name is Susan Reid. I'm your host and it's great to be here today talking with Wendy Krepak about Card Cubby. In this podcast, we're going to find out what is a Card Cubby, what prompted Wendy to start up her business, and how she took her great idea to market. Welcome Wendy!

WK: Hi, thank you Susan.

S: It's great to have you, so let's just jump right in. What made you decide to launch your company while still being employed full time in your commercial real estate career? Wendy, this either sounds like a fabulous business strategy, or complete craziness! So which is it? Tell us about it.

WK: I would say that the words "Accidental Pren-her" really apply to me, Susan. I had no intention or goal of going into business on my own, even though I had been very entrepreneurial in my other dealings in business. I actually invented this product for myself, and found that it just took off. I am still employed full time in the commercial real estate business, which I have been in for the past 25 years. And yes, I am now doing two things at once, which of course leaves me with absolutely no free time!

S: You talk about it being an Accidental Pren-her, so how did you accidentally start this business up?

WK: I was actually looking for products for myself. I was always losing my frequent buyer cards, business cards, and coupon and discount cards. I went out to find something, searched on the internet, and looked in all the stores. But all I could find were things that I could jam more and more cards into. However I still couldn't find what I was looking for, and still found myself continually rooting through holders. I went out and made a really ugly prototype by putting a couple of existing items together and started using it. I made an alphabetized system, like a mini-card file. Basically I took that out and started using it. And even though it wasn't very attractive, people started asking me where I got it. After the first few dozen people asked me that, I figure maybe I should try to produce this product. So I took it to the best patent attorney here in the Orlando area, thinking he would tell me to go home. I figured then I would at least have given it the opportunity. When I went in and presented it to him, he thought it was a great idea. So we pursued the patenting and trademarking of it. And that was my first step into my

business that I'm in today.

S: That was more like a leap into this business!

WK: Yes!

S: Wendy, as you know I have a Card Cubby. You didn't send it to me, someone else did. I love it and have been using it. Could you describe for our listeners what exactly is a Card Cubby, and what can it be used for?

WK: The Card Cubby is a mini-alphabetized card file that fits into your purse, baby tote, car console, wherever you want to put it. It's only five inches wide and three inches high. It's alphabetized, basically like a mini-file cabinet. It holds up to approximately eighty cards, depending on what you are putting into it. It can be used to file gift cards that people are always losing. Did you know that there is over a billion dollars in unused gift cards because people never have them with them, or they lose them prior to their expiration? It can also hold things like your discount cards and frequent buyer cards, which of course in this economy are even more important than ever, and everyone is giving them out. And your insurance cards. A lot of people are actually replacing their wallets with the Card Cubby by adding some cash, credit cards and ID, since there is an ID pocket in the back of it. And some people just get a little change purse, as that's the only thing it doesn't hold. So when you go to the store, you just flip to "B" and you would have your Borders card. Flip to "S" for your Starbucks card. Everything is easy to find, very organized, and you don't lose anything. There is also, depending on how many cards you put in your Card Cubby, room for most cell phones, or an Ipod, in the back of it as well. So it gives you the opportunity to put everything in one place, and have it with you all the time. And that is part of the problem with all the cards we have in our lives. Most of the time you may have it at home in the drawer, and then when you get the store you don't have that coupon or buyer card that you need. So that's pretty much what the Card Cubby is!

S: You described that exceptionally well. And you're right, it fits right in your hand and is very easy to use.

WK: Thank you!

S: As an inventor of a new product, a first time inventor, I might add, what was the process? How do you go about developing a prototype?

WK: Well luckily I had read some of the books that are out there by our fellow

women entrepreneurs, which were very helpful. But I found that with such a unique product, I had my own journey. I found on the internet a group in Chicago that did similar type of purse products, and so I worked with them. This group helped me with a couple of the first prototypes, but as I got further down the road, it became apparent that I wouldn't be able to produce the Card Cubby here in the US. It was too cost prohibitive. So I worked with them, then I was lucky enough to find a couple different groups abroad who were able to refine the prototype. Even though the Card Cubby looks like a simple product, a little purse with an index file inside of it, there are specialized things about it, like the way it dips down in front so you can see the alphabetized cards easily and the way it snaps closed with the magnetic closure. I went through 9 or 10 iterations before I got the finalized product. It was a bit of a process.

S: It really does sound like it was. So how did you find a manufacturer? That was probably the next step?

WK: Yes. Luckily I had a good friend in real estate who had a good friend who was doing business in China. Their business is entirely different from mine, but they had an office there and were able to hook me up with some of the appropriate vendors for my product. I did go through two manufacturers before I found the one I have today, who I absolutely love. They are able to produce the product in a time efficient way, at a cost effective price, and he is just wonderful. He speaks English and we talk every night via email. At nine o'clock he gets in his office while I'm getting ready for bed. I spend every night on my Blackberry with him and we go back and forth on designs and orders and that kind of thing. So there are two parts to the Card Cubby, the purse and the alphabetized cards. Luckily I was able to find a printer here in Orlando who could do the cards in a cost effective manner. So I have been able to keep that part of manufacturing the Card Cubby here in the US.

S: What a journey the Card Cubby has been on.

WK: Yes!

S: How did figure out if there was even marketability for your product?

WK: You know that is a really good question. That journey is the most interesting part to me in this whole process so far. When I got the product where I wanted it to be, which was just the beginning of last year, I thought to myself- how am I going to figure out if there is a market? And how can I do this in a quick manner so I can determine if I want to proceed any further with this? And of course I am keeping in

mind that I am still working full-time, so I am very busy. So I took an ad out in Real Simple magazine, thinking that my product fit in with what the Real Simple reader might like. It is not an in-expensive thing to do, yet I felt it was worth it to get it out there and see if there was a market before I spent any further money. So I placed an ad in the magazine, and I was traveling at the time that it started to go to subscribers, but I got orders from the moment it did. These orders came in for over 60 days straight, and they ended up coming from 44 states in the US, as well as Canada, the UK, and Australia. So if anyone wonders what the reach of that magazine is, I can tell you! More over, from that advertisement I had a woman contact me about trying to get the product on QVC, and also from other retailers. So it's reach was much more than just to the individual consumer who were interested in placing orders. Once I got through that experience, it gave me a pretty good feel as to my viability in the market place. I also started receiving a lot of emails from people who purchased them telling me how much they loved them, how it made their lives so much easier, how they were saving money, and all the different uses they had found for it, which was really interesting.

S: So what are the markets for the Card Cubby? Who do you sell to?

WK: You know what is really interesting is that I attended the gift shows this year in Atlanta, Dallas and New York. And I was lucky enough to hook up with a sales rep group- that's a whole other story and could be a book in itself! However, this particular group believed in the product and was really excited about it. They put me in their Atlanta showroom, so I didn't have to go into the temporaries, and they hooked me up with groups in Dallas and New York who also did the same. I went in there and we sold to over 200 retailers, and the orders are still coming in! What we found is with this product it crosses over into so many areas. We sold a lot to Hallmark stores, hospital gift shops, women's boutiques, casinos, book stores, car wash groups... it's really interesting as the journey is really only in the beginning stages. We are finding that the Card Cubby, because it is such a useful item, and a great gift item, really has an opportunity to cross-over to so many markets. I also received business orders, people who are ordering the Card Cubby and having us put their business logos on them. They are giving them out as gifts and give-aways to their clients, or using them at trade shows where people get all those business cards. So it has a lot of different opportunities and many of them are still untapped at this point. We have our work cut out for us!

S: You are going to be on QVC this summer, aren't you?

WK: I am! That was really interesting as one of the QVC buyers came into the

Atlanta showroom and saw the product and fell in love with it. I had already been working with an former QVC employee who was a marketing rep, and she had already started the process of having QVC look at the Card Cubby. This buyer who came into the Atlanta showroom was from the QVC gift group, and she loved it so much she bought it for what they call "Christmas in July". So I will be on QVC on July 25th! I don't know what time, but I'm hoping it's not the middle of the night!

S: Well, I think that pretty soon you will be doing this full time.

WK: I don't know, I have to see! Either way, I'm going to be tired if I don't.

S: Wendy, we're at the end of our podcast, and here are the final five questions that we ask everyone. What is the one word describes your life today?

WK: Hectic!

S: What quality or characteristic is most important to you?

WK: Honesty.

S: What is the least appealing thing that you do as a small business owner?

WK: Anything having to do with accounting.

S: Who, or what, inspires your success?

WK: I think the women who love my product and write me to tell me how much it has helped them. I find that if I'm having a bad day, and I get a note from somebody, it just keeps pushing me forward.

S: It certainly does. And lastly, what's the most precious thing you've learned along the journey from Accidental-Pren-her to successful small business owner?

WK: I think that women are a wonderful group of people, and I am blessed to be one of them. They are so eager to share their experiences and help the people around them, and that goes a long way.

S: In deed it does. Wendy, thank you for being on the Accidental Preh-her show. I know that you have a special for us, so tell our readers and listeners how to get a hold of you, and what that special is.

WK: They can go to my website, www.cardcubby.com, and if they put in the code **CC208** at the checkout, they will receive a 10% discount on any of the Card Cubby's that they choose. And we now carry 11 colors!

S: That is wonderful! Ladies and gentleman, you heard it here. Wendy has a special for us over at www.cardcubby.com. And don't forget to put in the code **CC208** and you'll get a 10% discount on her fabulous Card Cubby! Thank you Wendy!

WK: Thank you!