Success Story

SleepPhones: Pajamas for Your Ears™

The Penn State SBDC has been assisting Dr. Wei-Shin Lai since March 2008 when she first contacted the SBDC regarding guidance on writing a business plan for a local contest. That initial connection has resulted in a multi-year engagement that has followed the remarkable AcousticSheep, LLC story.

According to a December 2010 article published in Medical Economics magazine, Dr. Wei Shin Lai touted that advice from her SBDC small business consultant had been invaluable to the success of AcousticSheep. She wrote how her consultant had connected her with news outlets, offered free professional advice for specific issues, and had been AcousticSheep’s ultimate networking tool. She further noted that her consultant always vouched for AcousticSheep, delivering gracious introductions. “Best of all, our coach, mentor, proofreader, and cheerleader services are all free, paid for by the U.S. Small Business Administration.”

From the first time that Dr. Lai met with her SBDC consultant, the consultant knew that this was a potentially extraordinary entrepreneur. Dr. Lai understood how to leverage available technology with refreshingly simple practicality to create a product that represented an innovative advance and creative solution to what could be perceived as a common consumer need. Although Dr. Lai had never previously owned a business, she was already adept at marketing, finance and understanding their target market through research. Knowing that going in, the SBDC consultant strived to add value to the AcousticSheep, LLC business model through her SBDC resources and stakeholders, through her own professional background and through networking with other SBDCs, by offering a list of resources within the community while also engaging Penn State students as partners who would help move her business to the next level.

As that relationship matured and the years went by, it has been rewarding for the SBDC to watch a business that started out in a kitchen expand to 10 employees, hire an outside manufacturer who credits the orders from AcousticSheep, LLC to helping him maintain steady employment during off season and grow sales from $28,000 in 2007 to more than $1,100,000 in 2012. The success of AcousticSheep, LLC was no accident. It was a well-planned strategic initiative from not only Dr. Lai, but also from her technology driven spouse.

In summary, Dr. Lai, CEO of AcousticSheep, LLC and its patented SleepPhones® present a near classic MBA case study. A family doctor self-described as a “light sleeper” created a refreshingly simple headband design that cleverly incorporated audio headphones. When she realized how life-changing getting a good night sleep was, she patented the design and started the SleepPhones® company. The impact and resulting ripple effect of this successful business run by a resourceful woman is incalculable. Shipped all over the world, with resellers in nearly a dozen countries, Dr. Lai and her SleepPhones® invention have made a difference on so many levels. From the life changing testimonials on their web site, to Dr. Lai’s willingness to mentor other business owners to hiring local and “buying USA”, Dr. Lai recently received much deserved recognition for her accomplishments receiving the inaugural Governors Entrepreneur Impact Award for the Central Prep Region during the May 2013 Governor’s Impact Award Ceremony. The Penn State SBDC could not be more proud of Dr. Lai, her spouse Jason Wolfe and AcousticSheep, LLC.