

TIA Meeting for Saturday, May 16, 2009.

Location - the 2020 Building in the Oak Ridge Industrial Park. Time - 10AM till Noon. Visitors are always welcome.

Program.

The scheduled speaker is **Igor Alexeff**, who will discuss his Plasma Antenna. He will also demonstrate one or more of the units. Igor was invited to give a presentation as a Distinguished Speaker of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell. This TIA talk will be derived from the previous one.

Meeting Notes

Notes from April 18, 2009 Meeting Care of **Steve Yoder**

Igor Alexeff opened the meeting. Igor promptly introduced Bill Felknor, the inventor of the Topsy Turvy[®] tomato planter, upon opening the meeting.

Bill Felknor, president of Topsy Turvy[®] Garden Products, presented his success story and offered advice for those wishing to follow in his footsteps. Bill graciously offered to speak with inventors and is introduce those with sharp ideas to his contacts within the As Seen on TV business.

Bill opened by presenting us with the Snuggie[®], which he told us had sold over 5 million pieces. His Topsy Turvy[®] tomato planter has become a household name due to the millions of dollars invested in advertising and sales. He said that all of that publicity costs him nothing. It is supported his investor team who uses the infomercial to promote products.

In the Beginning

Bill has been an avid inventor for many years and has come up with hundreds of novel ideas solving life's problems. Bill has always enjoyed gardening, so he often comes up with improvements related to the gardener's job. Many of his ideas have not produced profits. He is always seeking the idea that will be as well received by the public as toothpaste and the loaf of bread.

Bill is responsible for the **artificial snakes** that are used to scare birds away from crops. He noticed one day that two adjacent cherry trees had a significant variation in cherry production. The tree bearing all of the fruit had been treated with cut up hoses that appeared to be snakes. Birds were not interested in spending time in the “snake” infested tree. They preferred the one next to it that had no snakes. He produced some prototype snakes and approached **Burpee**®. After a good laugh, he convinced a buyer to take some samples and try them out. They worked well and a small success was born.

Bill has found that a successful business can be developed when founded on mail-order catalog sales, QVC, and/or Infomercials. His first success was strictly based on catalog sales.

The Loaf of Bread and Toothpaste Test

Bill introduced us to his “Loaf of Bread and Toothpaste Test.” These two products appeal to 99% of the people. When you have an idea that solves a problem of yours, think about the market for selling your product before committing a lot of money to development and marketing. You should ask yourself while considering the market and say, “What percent of the people does this idea appeal to?”

Bill told us that he had an idea that worked great, but he realized that only serious gardeners would appreciate the idea and buy it. This idea FAILED the test. He likes to pursue ideas that have a 60% or better appeal rating based on this test.

The **Topsy Turvy**® Tomato Planter passes the test. For example, he sold 60,000 planters in 7 MINUTES when it was first advertised. His distributors and dealers are unable to keep a supply on hand. It is clear that he has satisfied a need that is very common in societies around the world.

The Topsy Turvy® Tomato Planter

The tomato planter is a very simple device which has been patented. The planter is made up of a vinyl bag, stainless steel cables, and a foam plant retainer. The thing that gardening centers like about this is that they get to sell a bag of potting soil and tomato plants along with this product. Some dealers even sell the planter with tomato and soil installed.

There are several advantages, including:

- 1) NO Hole in the ground
- 2) NO cages or stakes
- 3) NO tying the plant down, and
- 4) NO bending over.

Bill began selling this product in mail-order catalogs first, and then moved on to QVC. Once he was selling on QVC, he got the attention of the As Seen on TV folks, who wanted his product. On the path to success, he has found that giving back to the community is key to building a solid business foundation. Bill discovered that elderly love to use the tomato planter and find it very easy to maintain. Accordingly, Bill has donated planters to nursing homes. He

says he receives call everyday from the homes where people are so excited about the tomatoes and that the device actually works.

Risk and Reward

There are pitfalls in the path to success. When Bill began working with QVC to sell the tomato tree, which is a modification of the Topsy Turvy[®] planter, he ran into a significant setback. Even though QVC puts product they sell through extensive testing, they will not accept part of the loss associated with a recall.

In order to work with QVC, Bill had to provide QVC with inventory, ready to ship, before they began to pitch the product. This is an expensive proposition and QVC will not buy unsold inventory, you get it back.

After 2 years of selling the tomato tree on QVC with no complaints, one day a customer discovered that one side of the tomato tree was doing much better than the other. The customer decided to lift the unit up and rotate it 180 degrees to expose the poor side to more sunlight. When lifting the original tomato tree, the stand would collapse. As a result, QVC recalled all two years of sold product and returned the inventory to him. Bill recommends recall insurance, which his partner had when he began sales with QVC. Without the sweet blessing of this insurance, he may have lost everything at this point.

Now the product is improved and Bill recently sold 10,000 in 7 minutes. Not bad for having been so close to closing shop.

Working in China / Protecting Against Copycats

Bill told us that he is already seeing product in boxes that look just like his, but they have a name like “**upsy downsy**” and they are being sold in unprotected markets. You have to expect that these days. Protect you major markets and expect copies to be marketed elsewhere. He assured us that stores such as Wal-Mart WILL knock off you product. Bill is a strong supporter of maintaining a strong trademark for the best protection. Develop a good name and people will recognize the value in product with your trademark on it.

Bill's Investors

Bill has signed up with an organization that invests deeply into marketing products on infomercials, or “direct response television” as they call it in the industry. The **As Seen on TV folks** have deep pockets. They spend millions of dollars on advertising. Bill recounted an event where he went out of town to shoot a 30 minute infomercial for his tomato tree. They spent over \$500,000 on the set alone.

Products supported by his investors include the **Aqua Globe[®]**, **Snuggie[®]**, and **Green Bags[®]**. If patents are needed, this company will pay for the patents as well as any trademarks. There is an initial test run where 2-3 minutes advertisements are run on 10 stations to determine

marketability of the product. They will also help with design and manufacturability issues. Bill's investors own 20 factories in China, many of which are football field sized plants.

He said that with these investors, you can either sit back and get you check or you can become very involved in the product. He has wisely chosen to get involved with the product. By his involvement, he has been able to thwart at least 100 bad ideas. Many improvements have been made and such work assures him continued success.

A Helping Hand

Bill acknowledges the hand of God in his success. He wants to help others succeed as well, despite being very busy right now. Bill provided us with contact information so that we can reach him if there is anything he can do for us. See below for detailed contact information. QVC is a \$6 billion business. Bill told us that he has a QVC guy who can walk stuff right in to the QVC buyer and get their attention. He is willing to connect us when it will be helpful.

If we are able to bring a great idea to Bill, he is willing to introduce us to his investors. At this time, he has their attention due to the enormous success he is now enjoying. He is now pushing a revolutionary gardening idea. More than the **Topsy Turvy**® planter, he wants to change the way America thinks about gardening by bringing the garden to the patio. We will certainly see more from Bill in the future.

Q&A Session

Taiwan Contacts:

Bill's first Taiwan manufacturing contact was at a Trade Show. Bill recommends attending trade shows to make contacts. Manufacturers will approach your booth and offer their services. He strongly encourages being diligent in your research of a manufacturer. They should be willing to give you business references and allow you to inspect their plant. He said you can search for overseas manufacturers online and ask for pictures of the facilities, etc.

If we contact Bill, he is willing to give us manufacturing contacts.

Closing Advice:

Learn Limitations, Accept Them, and Do What You Do Best

Contact Information

W.A. 'Bill' **Felknor**
President, **Topsy Turvy**® Garden Products
www.etopsyturvy.com
wfelknor@yahoo.com
Office: 865-671-6035

Produces and distributes garden and grilling products for American consumers. These products are originally designed, engineered, and patented by Felknor Ventures LLC and distributed from the ETPP site. As a successful, start up local company, Felknor's rapid growth required the large warehouse space and flexible lease agreement available at ETPP. They operate a warehouse in K-1035 and soon will expand with office space at the site.

Felknor products are advertised on the television retailer QVC, in home and garden catalogs, supermarket chains, and retail stores. The company holds the patents for these products as designed and engineered in Tennessee, manufactured in China, and distributed from ETPP.

Felknor produces four products:

- **TOPSY Turvy Upside Tomato Planter™** with built-in SS wire hanging system. Pictured here, the planter allows home and apartment dwellers to avoid problems associated with tomato gardening. The TOPSY Turvy™ does not require staking, tying, or weeding and avoids ground insects and fungus. It is hung at waist height, allowing for easy maintenance and harvest. It is Felknor's bestseller.

- **SILVER EAGLE Grill Scaping Tool™** is a 20" stainless steel product with hardened cutting blades adjustable to any grill. It cleans faster and better than do wire brushes, which clog after a few uses. SILVER EAGLE™ cleans when users burn off accumulated residue in the flame.

- **FLIPSide Twin-sided Grill Tray™** is the first tray to offer a solution to cross-contamination from cooked food to dangerous bacteria often found in raw meat. One side of the lidded, two-sided tray holds raw meat before grilling. The tray flips and opens on the other side for cooked meat. The lids keep flying insects and airborne particles from food, while also keeping cooked food warm.

- **UPSY Daisy Oversized Planter Hanging System™** is comprised of woven stainless steel wires with a top swivel. The system includes all needed hardware for hanging large resin planters up to 22 inches in diameter and weighing up to 125 pounds. UPSY Daisy™ allows for the first time homeowners to easily and quickly feature "theme park sized" hanging baskets on porches, patios, or decks.



Contact:

Bill Felknor
Felknor Ventures LLC
PO Box 4519
Oak Ridge, TN 37831

Office: 865-241-1611

Fax: 865-241-1614

Email: mckameym@ettp.net

Note from Martin Skinner-Rose Show

The rose show will be Saturday, May 23rd in the Plant BioTech Building at UT. There will be signs on Neyland Drive directing persons to the building. The viewing hours are 1 - 5 PM. There will be many types of roses including the new "low maintenance" roses. It is FREE! The sponsors are the Holston Rose Society (my society) and the Tennessee Rose Society.

Speaker- **Bill Felknor**

