

by Susan Casey

“WHEN I HAD AN IDEA for an interesting business,” says Dran Reese, creator of QuakeHold!™, “I’d write it down and throw it into an idea box.” Two events prompted her to scribble down “securing antiques and collectibles.” In 1982, the four-year-old son of a friend accidentally kicked over Dran’s collection of Swarovski crystal animals. Three years later, when a magnitude 5.8 earthquake shook the Los Angeles area, Reese ran into her living room to save a precious ivory doll. “I saw it teetering on the mantle,” she says. “Instead of being concerned about my life, I was running to grab a doll. I thought, ‘There’s something wrong with this picture.’”

So, in 1991, when Reese, a fashion consultant in the garment industry, married and was looking for a business to combine with raising a family, she turned to her idea box. “It seemed to me that a single product concept for securing valuables fit a unique niche and could be easily marketed,” she says. So she and her husband, Dean, decided to start a business. “I get credit for the idea,” she says, “but Dean has been instrumental in every aspect of our venture.”



What started in 1992 as a personal

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to tame a quake



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white putty that will hold up to 40 pounds, will not dry out, freeze or melt and is easily applied and removed.

To protect their idea, the Reeses chose the trademark route. They were

DBA (doing business as) under the name of Trevco (for their son, Trevyn) was incorporated three years later and is now a \$4 million-a-year business. Trevco markets an entire line of safety products, often displayed in modules they created to serve as earthquake centers in Home Depot, Lowes, Ace and True Value stores. “To educate customers and advertise our products, we display at earthquake fairs and trade shows and distribute large educational posters to many stores,” she says. “We certainly get our fair share of free advertising every time there’s an earthquake.”

That’s today. But, back in 1991, all the Reeses had was an idea. And they weren’t the only ones to have it. “There were people who’d already thought of the product,” says Dran, “but they were using makeshift products to get the job done — two-sided tape, florist putty, products that can ruin tables and the bottoms of collectibles.” Dran and Dean set out to create a better product, trying caulking, Silly Putty® and even denture adhesive before they found a workable substance that they took to a chemist for refinement. The result was QuakeHold!™, a soft,



reluctant to reveal the composition of QuakeHold!™ and they were short on the cash required for a patent. They ordered 25,000 units of product from a manufacturer, then sat in their garage and packaged it themselves. The first year they exhibited at 33 antiques and collectibles or home and garden trade shows in California and went to the major gift shows in Los Angeles and San Francisco.

To attract attention in a competitive environment, they placed collectibles adhered by their putty on specially created ‘earthquake shake tables’—built on springs on top of a stable table—that bounced to simulate a magnitude 7 earthquake. As people paused, they’d say, ‘How come those aren’t falling off?’ Then Dran or Dean would break the vacuum seal by twisting a glass or vase, pull it off, and say, ‘Because it’s been held down with QuakeHold!™.’ They’d peel off the putty and say, ‘It’s removable and reusable.’ The attention-getting demonstration attracted customers. Savon (a national drugstore chain) was their first major chain client.

When they weren’t doing trade


shows, Dean Reese hit the road. “I would load the truck up and drive from town to town. I wouldn’t come home until I sold everything I’d taken,” says Dean. Then, while Dran was at the San Francisco International Gift Fair in January, 1994, the Northridge quake hit southern California.

QuakeHold!™ made the front page of the business section of the San Francisco paper. “It was a dream come true for a marketer,” says Dran. “After that, so many people were searching for our products that the buyers from Home Depot and other stores came looking for us.” In January 1995, when the Kobe earthquake hit Japan, Quakehold’s™ future was sealed.

The Reeses poured their profits back into the company to expand their product line. To get ideas, they recalled the comments of their trade show customers. “A common issue,” says Dran, “was that collectibles wouldn’t be secure

if a cabinet fell down. That’s how we knew a furniture strap would be a good item.” When some complained that QuakeHold!™ putty left a slight stain on untreated wood, they created a second product—museum wax—for use on the wood. When others suggested they didn’t want to see the putty in their china cabinet, the Reeses created a clear gel with the same properties as the putty.

Rather than trademarking names for their additional products, the Reeses chose utilitarian, descriptive names. “If it secured a TV, we called it TV Strap,” says Dran. The product to hold cabinets, with 1,000 break strength, is called Steel Furniture Cable. Safety Light Sticks are used instead of candles. For internet sales and to appeal to markets outside of earthquake-prone areas, they created alternate names for their signature products, calling them Museum Putty, Museum Gel and Museum Wax. “Our product line is called QuakeHold!™, and our signature product is QuakeHold!™ putty,” says Dran. “All other products have their own name but also fall under the name of QuakeHold!™ and include the logo.”

From one idea, “securing antiques and collectibles,” and one product, the Reeses have developed an entire product line by being attentive to their customers and giving them what they need. They’ve built anything but a shaky business! 

WHAT TIPS CAN OTHER INVENTORS GLEAN FROM THE REESES’ SUCCESS?

- Pick an accessible and narrow target market. “There isn’t a market that hasn’t already been developed,” says Dran, “but you can update the market.”
- Choose product names carefully. “I don’t trust just my opinion,” says Dran. “We ask a number of people to submit names. For the putty we looked at names like Hold It, Stop It, Stick It along with QuakeHold!™. We listed all of them then asked 30 or so people to select ones they liked. That’s still the way we pick product names.”
- Educate your customers. “We realized,” says Dean, “that QuakeHold!™ was a regional product, but we thought it had national appeal. There’s more breakage caused by accidental knocking than any earthquake could ever do. Our product could be used for pet and baby-proofing, as well as for offices, but we had to awaken that need in the customer’s mind.”