

8th September 2011

The Chair Senate Inquiry: Recent ABC Programming Decisions

Dear Sirs

Three years ago I encountered an invention that was revolutionary in its field.

A family friend, Mr Collin Anderson, mentioned to me over lunch that he had spent nine years developing a custom-made mask for the treatment of his obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). The standard masks available for his life-sustaining CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) therapy were then and remain universally uncomfortable.

Around 40% of people who start on CPAP therapy abandon it quickly citing discomfort and side effects from poorly-fitting masks. The population health consequences of this disorder are significant, so applying his engineering talents in this field was being done not just for personal comfort but also for the greater good.

In the way of many engineers and inventors, Mr Anderson spent countless hours tinkering and trying, prototyping and developing. Eventually he was able to develop a mask that solved all of the known problems with standard CPAP masks as well as a unique process for manufacturing.

Made from a mould of each user's face, this mask represents the gold standard of treatment for this insidious condition which effects 5% of the population. It remains a world exclusive product – Australia is the only place in the world where a custom-made CPAP mask is available.

Mr Anderson had made a number of his masks for friends and for fellow sleep apnea sufferers who had managed to find him. However, despite his hope that this product would change the world, he found it difficult to "get the word out".

In my experience, what Mr Anderson found is not uncommon. Inventors have a way of looking at the world that is different from most of the population. The way inventive minds explore problems and seek solutions are well-suited to innovation, but are often (not always, but often) challenged by the complexity and rigidity of regulatory, promotional and commercial considerations.

This world-beating product stood a good chance of going nowhere.

Eventually, my wife and I created a business and licensed Mr Anderson's invention. We now have a growing business which is working hard at getting the word out to the sleep medicine community and to OSA sufferers around Australia, and tonight several hundred of Mr Anderson's masks will be providing comfortable treatment to people around the country.

We are currently seeking regulatory approval for entry into the North American market and anticipate a genuine global presence in this industry within the next five years. We currently employ 5 staff and expect this to grow to around 50 over that timeframe.

An Australian manufacturing business, begun during the global financial crisis, offering something unique to a global market: we are a rarity, perhaps an endangered species, but we are here working hard to build this business every day.

The main challenge that the business faces is still marketing. There are many people who could use our product, but advertising for a start-up business using family assets can be a bottomless pit. We have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to date in promotion, advertising and marketing.

Then we got a call about our application to *The New Inventors*.

Mr Anderson and his mask featured on the program in the medically-themed 22nd June 2011 episode. The TrueFIT™ Mask won the show that night, and it changed everything for us!

The response to *The New Inventors* was unbelievable. Before 8:30pm on the eastern seaboard when the show ended our website had received 13 enquiries, three of which were firm orders. Over the days and weeks that followed, we recorded over 1,000 contacts from OSA sufferers, their friends and their families all clamouring for information about the mask. This has translated into immediate orders that will provide the necessary revenue to help us to reach our dreams.

But more than that, *The New Inventors* was a game-changer; our entire profile has been transformed by this experience. Our weekly website statistics have reached a new plateau which is five times greater than before the show aired. We have also been contacted by many in the sleep medicine community, from sleep clinics, doctors, retailers and therapy support staff.

Acurest® and the TrueFIT™ Mask are now part of the CPAP landscape in Australia, and *The New Inventors* was the catalyst for that change.

I am deeply disappointed by the recent decision by the ABC to axe this much loved, inspirational and quintessentially-Australian television show. It's ratings continued to be extremely strong, the level of interest extraordinary and the waiting list for getting on the show indicates that there is no shortage of Australian inventive talent just waiting for a break.

Given the climate of economic doom and gloom that pervades the media, *The New Inventors* represents a tonic; a sense of optimism and hope for the future that will be essential for our recovery.

I urge Senators to apply whatever pressure is possible to reverse this decision, to ensure that this historic program is not lost.

Sincerely

Scott Coulter
Managing Director, Acurest®