

MOM CREATES INNOVATIVE DIGITAL BOOKMARK OUT OF NECESSITY TO TRACK DAUGHTER’S READING TIME

Previous Publishing Experience Helps Launch Product Initially in Leading Book Stores

Maureen Farinella never expected to be an entrepreneur with her own patented product design. But after her innovative digital bookmark won “Best New Product” at a national publishing trade show in 2004, she was well on her way.

A native of Phoenix, Maureen attended the University of Arizona where she received a B.S. in Management Information Systems. Throughout high school and college, Maureen worked for B. Dalton and Software Etc – two companies in the Barnes and Noble family of retail stores. After a short hiatus from the retail sector, Maureen returned to the B&N family as both a store manager and then a district manager and eventually moved into direct sales for a software publisher.

Then came baby. Shortly after the birth of her first daughter, Jordann, Maureen left the work force to focus on raising her family. Four years later came a second daughter—Megan. During that time, Maureen stayed busy by volunteering for committees and leadership roles for PTAs and PTOs. She stayed close to her children by serving as a teacher’s assistant in the classroom and as a girl scout leader.

But in 2004, Maureen’s role as a stay-home mom would change drastically. Ironically, it was Maureen’s own daughter who caused her mom to rejoin the ranks of working moms.

Like most school-age children, Megan was required to read every day at home as part of her school assignment. Fortunately, Megan loved to read. She read while eating breakfast. She read in the car on the way to school. She read at the park. And she read at bedtime. She read so much, and in so many different intervals, in fact, that it was difficult for Maureen to accurately track her reading time and document it for all the various classes that had reading requirements.

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What Maureen wanted to make this daily task easy and more verifiable was a product that fit neatly into a book and stored reading time until the reader deleted it. She wanted a product that could be started and stopped whenever the reader wanted to read just a little more. It would also need a countdown timer with an alarm so children could get absorbed in a story without the distraction of checking on the time every few minutes.

Since there was no product currently on the market that met all of these demands, Maureen and her husband, Joe, set out to make one of their own and, thus, the innovative Mark-My-Time digital bookmark was created. With only a cardboard prototype in hand, Maureen and Joe filed for their first patent. Thanks to Joe's extensive business and sales background, they successfully secured manufacturing and warehousing and then set out to create packaging and build a website to support an online business.

A major turning point came at the Farinella's first trade show—the 2004 BookExpo America where they had the good fortune of winning the show's "Best New Product" award. As a result of the positive publicity from the show and the award, along with Maureen's previous experience in the publishing field, the Mark-My-Time digital bookmark became a regularly stocked item on the shelves of both Border's and Barnes and Noble. In late 2004, national discount drug giant Walgreens picked up the innovative product on a test-pilot basis during the holidays. The product was so successful that Walgreens placed an order to carry the product nationally in time for 2005 back-to-school sales. In the meantime, other leading retailers have also expressed interest in making the Mark-My-Time digital bookmark a part of their back-to-school promotions for 2005.

Thus, what started as a simple solution to her daughter's reading assignments is resulting in a nationwide business. Today, in addition to still volunteering her time through the school, Maureen finds herself busy filling retailer orders and attending leading industry trade shows. Working side-by-side is Joe who handles overall operations and is responsible for much of the retail sales success.

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Along the way, Maureen has heard from other parents and teachers who have used the patented digital bookmark. Not only has it proven to be effective in monitoring multi-session reading, but parents of not-so-motivated readers as Megan have found it helps to make reading fun which, in turn, motivates children to read more. As a result, Maureen might find she has contributed to her own vision of raising a generation of children who read just for the fun of it!