

Discover the Amazing Story of the Creative Card Clips, a Failed Invention

The "Creative Card Clips" Children's Toy - Patent No. D286,555

This is a story about my experiences with creating a simple invention. A children's toy in this case, prototyping it, patenting it, getting it manufactured, and attempting to market it. We never actually sold enough product to turn a profit.

I was thinking about building "card houses" out of playing cards. I thought "wouldn't it be great if there were some way to build things out of playing cards so they would not collapse so readily?". I went out to the garage and after looking around a bit at all the crap on my work bench, I spied a piece of 3/8 inch diameter plastic tubing. I cut off several 3/4 inch long pieces of the tubing, and cut down into the end of the tubing with a razor blade, making four slits about 1/4 inch deep in each end of the tubing spaced equally around the openings.

I tried sliding playing cards into the slits. The cards were held firmly. Hey this might work! By about 2:30 a.m. I had a set of about 50 of these little pieces of tubing turned into "card clips".

The next day I gave the clips and a few decks of cards to my kids, to see if the toy was "entertaining". I have four children who at the time ranged in age from 6 to 13 years old. We spent several hours playing with the cards and clips. We were having a great time with them. I called a friend of mine who had two kids as well, and of about the same age. I took the clips and cards over to his house and we tried them on his kids. His kids became quite involved in creating various items with the cards and clips.

Our kids were building quite a variety of things with the cards and clips. They built guns (of course), castles, cars, boats, planes, hats, necklaces, and all kinds of buildings. I built a castle the kids could get inside of it was so big. It took about 20 decks of cards. I also build a robot 6 feet tall.

To get a ball park idea of what the clips might cost we calculated what it would cost to produce the clips using injection molding with a 20 cavity mold. We came up with a cost of about \$0.0125 per clip. (1-1/4 cents per clip). The tooling was about \$13,000.

Next we needed to decide how to package the product. We looked into a variety of packaging alternatives such as blister cards, pre-formed plastic packages, and plain old boxes. We went with the blister cards. They were inexpensive and we could buy the equipment to do it ourselves fairly cheap. We produced the art for the blister cards and made up a catalog sheet.

We wanted to package the clips with a deck of cards, but we found that the decks of cards were way more expensive than the clips. We wanted to keep the retail price low, so we ended up packaging together about 30 clips and a half deck of cards. You could get just clips, or clips with a half deck of cards. I can't remember the pricing details.

We went to our local patent attorney and had a patent search performed. For the card clips we could not get a utility patent as there was nothing new and novel about my clips...basically a paper clip. We could however get a "design patent". You can tell a design patent because it always starts with the letter D ahead of the numerical digits. The patent number for the card clips is D286,555. A design patent simply prevents others from making "exact duplicates". They are easy to get around because if you change anything at all it won't infringe on the original patents.

We figured we could sell the card clips to distributors via trade shows. The shows didn't pan out for us though. As soon as a rep found out we would not be doing national advertising he would loose interest. Buyers pointed out to us that they had no "empty shelves", and would have to eliminate some other item to include the clips. We managed to sell a few thousand packages to Safeway and a couple of catalogs. I imagine that if we had been persistent and attended enough trade shows we may have been successful with the clips, but fate had other plans for us.

A very wealthy acquaintance of my partners happened to notice the clips in my partners office one day, and asked if he could get involved. This individual was highly successful and was selling his product nationwide as well as over seas. We said "yes you may get involved". Duh Big mistake.

The individual gathered together his key personnel, his best sales reps, his corporate controller, his advertising agency, etc. and we formed a corporation. We put up all of the equipment, tooling, and patent, and they put up the cash. It was decided to obtain more professional packaging, and our wealthy individuals "team" would sell it not only nationally, but plans were made for South America and Mexico as well.

We were feeling pretty good. We developed attractive packaging in cardboard boxes covered with photos of assembled projects. We had packages of either red clips or yellow clips. A dozen of the packages fit into a shipper. The shipper was designed to fold into a point-of-purchase display case.

And then we waited. The first sign of trouble was when only the wealthy individual put up any money. None of the others could seem to get around to

paying us for the stock.

To make a long story short, none of the "team" did anything with regard to the clips. They were only involved because Mr. wealthy individual was their biggest client or whatever. Even Mr. wealthy grew bored and quickly lost interest, leaving my partner and I with 100,000 packages of card clips, lots of debts, and no support, no money for advertising, no salaries either.

Eventually the corporation declared bankruptcy. The best laid plans of mice and men...

About the Author

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