

## Just-in-case sales

### **Trevco's earthquake readiness tip: Be prepared**

**By Michael Kinsman**

**Sep 6, 2000**

Dran and Dean Reese have come up with a novel business concept: They are trying to sell something nobody wants. Trevco, the couple's company in San Marcos, is a wholesaler of earthquake emergency supplies: adhesives for securing antiques to table tops, straps for buckling down TVs, stereos and other household items and light sticks that supply emergency lighting for up to 12 hours.

When an earthquake hits, they want people to be ready.

"We sell things people need," Dean Reese says. "But it's a very difficult sell because it's a negative sell. We are selling something that is tied to tragedy, and most people don't want to think about that."

It might be a difficult sell, but not an impossible one. Using a network of retailers that includes Home Depot, Lowes, Sears, TrueValue, Bed Bath & Beyond and Linens N Things, the company is a leading supplier of earthquake-related supplies. Trevco this year expects to sell nearly \$4 million in goods.

The company has gone from one to 50 products and expects to add more in the future.

"This is a first-in, first-win business," Dean Reese says. "The company that gets in the door first wins."

At the same time they were building their business, the Reeses decided to home-school their children. A small classroom in a corner of their warehouse allows Trevyn, 8, and Marly, 7, a chance to study five days a week and be around their parents at the same time.

The Reeses say the ability to be with their children throughout the day is one of the motivating factors behind their decision to go into business for themselves.

In the early 1990s, the idea for the business came to Dran Reese, who had been working as a fit model in the Los Angeles garment industry. She had seen one of her cats knock over an expensive piece of crystal and had seen rowdy children accidentally destroy some imported crystal animals.

Reese, then living in the Los Angeles suburb of Monrovia, also was keenly aware that household possessions could be broken in an earthquake.

"When an earthquake hits, things go flying around all over," she says. "You want to try and minimize that as much as possible."

While a business marketing student at the University of Southern California, she had written a 40-page marketing plan as a class project. Eventually, that project would become the blueprint for Trevco.

"I really know the damage earthquakes can do, and I know some things cannot be replaced if they fall off a table during an earthquake," she says. "I knew there had to be a way to secure them."

The Reeses took their idea for an adhesive compound to a chemist, who helped them develop one that would secure objects without damaging either the object or the surface it is on. Quakehold! became the company's first product in 1991, and the Reeses began marketing it over the phone and at antique trade shows.

Dran Reese knew that women would be a key target, so the company geared the packaging and marketing of Quakehold! to women.

With just \$25,000 in savings to finance the company, they had to be smart about marketing strategies. Dran worked out of her home, lining up trade shows and trying to find retailers willing to stock the product. On weekends, Dean, who was running a commercial real estate business in Oceanside, would attend the trade shows.

"Some of the people at those shows laughed at us when we first started out," he says. "But later, when they saw the success we were having, they quit laughing and some even apologized."

The company's turning point came after the 1994 Northridge earthquake, which destroyed freeways, buildings and retail businesses.

Suddenly, Quakehold! seemed like a good idea. The earthquake was a powerful educational tool and the Reeses placed their products in 250 stores.

"It was all because of the earthquake," Dran Reese said. "Unfortunately, it was too late for the damage that had been done, but now people know."

While they have been able to make inroads in many earthquake-prone communities, the Reeses say retailers in San Diego County are more reluctant to add their wares to shelves.

"It's frustrating," Dran Reese says. "We want people to know that they can minimize the impact of quakes." Susan Asturias of the San Diego County Office of Disaster Preparedness acknowledges that

getting San Diegans to think about the dangers of earthquakes is an uphill battle.

"Sure, we have earthquakes in San Diego, but they usually are small ones," she says. "It's easy for people to become complacent about them. But just because we haven't had a big one doesn't mean we won't. We're always trying to hammer that home, but people don't seem to want to listen."

Trevco has earthquake supplies available at more than 3,000 retail establishments and through 10 mail-order services. The Getty Museum, Huntington Library, QVC and the Home Shopping Networks are among its customers.

While the company could build a higher profit margin by selling its products directly to consumers online or through mail order, Dean Reese insists that is not its goal.

Even the company's Web site, designed and maintained by Dran Reese, focuses on education and the benefits of Trevco's products rather than emphasizing sales.

"We are not equipped as a shipper," Dean Reese says. "We want to steer people to retailers where they can find the products. If the retailers are successful selling our products, we'll be successful."

#### **QUICK AUDIT**

NAME: TREVCO

PRESIDENT: DRAN REESE

PRODUCT: EARTHQUAKE RELATED SUPPLIES

LOCATION: SAN MARCOS

Employees: 10

Revenues: \$3 million in 1999

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