

CLIENT FOCUS

MaestroMD – A Case of Musical Germs

As cold and flu season descends upon us, parents are telling children to bundle up, wash their hands and drink their juice. But those who have children in the school band should also focus on cleaning their wind instruments.

“Parents have never considered that the rental instrument provided by the school could make their child sick when in fact, infectious microbes can live for extended periods of time in the dark, moist environments provided by wind instruments and their cases,” says Dr. Lorenzo Lepore, who developed the revolutionary MaestroMD system for sterilizing wind instruments.

The practicing dentist and accomplished clarinet player explains that “the inside of a wind instrument is like a Petri dish,” capable of fostering the growth of germs that could cause bronchitis, sinusitis, strep, and more serious infections, such as tuberculosis and meningitis.

Lepore tackled this problem in the mid-90s after a music teacher asked for his medical opinion regarding a school instrument being passed from a student with an infectious disease to a healthy student. “That’s when I learned that wind instrument sterilization was not practiced or even available,” says the doctor.

For the next several years, Lepore searched for a way to sterilize delicate wind instruments without damaging them. The dentist eventually seized upon the idea of specially adapting the methods for sterilizing surgical instruments, bandages and gowns.

“This gas process involves no excessive heat or moisture and does no damage to the instrument, which never has to leave its case,” says Lepore, explaining that he got the idea of working with ethylene-oxide gas from his dental experience.

Finding a solution was only the beginning though, as the dentist-musician had to develop a company that could successfully bring the solution to market. “A friend told me there was no way I could do it all with an active dental practice, and he was right,” says Lepore.

That’s when Lepore sought the advice of Ken Owens, who had relevant management experience gained from launching public offerings, integrating acquisitions, and delivering bottom line growth and results for



Featured Client



LORENZO LEPORE
Founder
Encore Etc. Inc.



KEN OWENS
President and CEO
Encore Etc. Inc.

billion-dollar companies. “Coincidentally, I was at a point in my career where I was looking for a change from the corporate life,” Owens recalls.

After a few lunches with Lepore, the former drummer dove into the task of building a new company, Encore, Etc., Inc. (“EEI”) with the promising MaestroMD service.

In short order, EEI sponsored laboratory studies to prove what Lepore intuitively knew – that harmful bacteria can survive and propagate inside of a musical instrument. The studies not only confirmed Lepore’s suspicions; they showed that most bacteria grow by more than 60 percent in seven days while tuberculosis germs can linger for many months.

Armed with this information, Lepore and Owens were prepared to run the gauntlet of government regulatory approvals to launch their service. They first approached the EPA because ethylene-oxide is a potent gas, but the agency rejected them. “They were supportive of the concept, but the government is not set up to break new ground or to do preventive work,” Owens surmises.

So they spent a year climbing to the top of the FDA. “We did not start there because wind instruments are not a medical device, nor a food or drug, even though they do go into your mouth,” recalls Lepore. The FDA finally agreed that musical instruments were analogous to medical devices cleaned with gas, but they too avoided any formal decision on the sterilization process. “Nobody wanted to add something else to

what they must regulate,” Lepore quips.

But the agency did provide a letter of support for appeal to the EPA. “We agree that [EEI] is addressing a valid public health issue consistent with the universal precautions adhered to in medical/dental settings,” they wrote.

That led to positive results and now, more than four years after its launch, EEI has valid regulatory approvals, patent protection of its process, and sufficient finances from two rounds of private fundraising to be successful.

“We could not have done it all without the guidance of our lawyers,” says Lepore about the long march through the regulatory hurdles associated with licensing, patent protection and private financing. He particularly credits lead lawyer Andy Merken of Burns & Levinson for being “a good and thoughtful counselor who connects us to the right people and takes a true personal interest in our company.”

Owens agrees, adding that “intellectual horsepower is just the rule of entry to the game, but personal interest makes the difference.” He adds that “we have been treated like the most important client at Burns & Levinson since day one, even though we’re a start-up.”

The outside legal team is a supplement to the in-house management team that Owens has assembled, including professionals experienced in finance and technology, software and hardware engineering, sales and marketing, and music education.

Thanks to this team, EEI has inked its first major client to a contract – the Medford public schools – and the company has been warmly greeted by “Good Morning America” and other media outlets. “Our service makes intuitive sense and has the backing of science but the ‘yuk’ factor is a real driving concern,” says Lepore, who explains that “nobody would pick a water bottle off the park bench and drink from it, yet that is analogous to using a non-sterile wind instrument.”

Owens says the company is focused now on spreading the word about “awareness and choice” in sterilization. “We want awareness not just among customers, but the medical community, the school systems, pediatricians and others,” he explains.

“After that the choice is easy – we are the first and only sterilization option. We make it affordable and achievable to be germ free,” Owens concludes.

Interested readers can view more information about the company and its service at www.MaestroMD.com. ■