Hay Fever Horror – The Original Inspiration

Summer of 1997 – the day is hot and sunny. I am on a day trip with a friend to the countryside and he is a sufferer of Hay Fever, but he is not going to let this most malign of conditions spoil his day. We pull into a village pub for lunch and on entering look at the menu, of all the selections printed – there are only 2 items that could be enjoyed by my friend, hot soup (not very practical) or a soft mushy egg sandwich. Finding it hard to breathe anyway, he selects the egg sandwich and following its arrival, he spends over one and a quarter hours trying to consume it. It is this single moment that has inspired me to try to find some way in which people like this can have a restored quality of life.

The Scale of the Problem

Research shows that in the UK in 1997 some 1 in 7 of us suffer from this palliative illness. This figure will grow over the next five years to 1 in 5; this equates to 12 million people in the UK or 15% of citizens. Carried through to a global position, this figure reaches nearly 200 million people that suffer from Hay Fever. Add to that other allergies which are encompassed by the terminology ‘Allergic Rhinitis’, and the tally goes sky high.

The Inventor’s Brief

Preliminary research showed me that the answer did not lie in the use of full face masks as had been used in the past, items like the ’Goldfish Bowl’ were just not feasible and would not improve any quality of life; it had to be a small, personal and above all discreet item which would act as a barrier for the allergens from reaching the sinus areas, which when affected were the critical regions.

Hay Fever is a reaction of the body’s immune system to reject and repel the intruders by whatever means possible: sneezing, running nose, coughing, running eyes and so on. Medical experts have said for years that the only way to beat the effects of pollen are to avoid it in the first place and that is exactly what I set out to achieve: to develop a product which blocks out all allergens.

Development: The Long Hard Slog

The original development, called Hay Fever Guard, saw the outer shape of the entire nostril area; my first draught was a ‘cover’ for the end of the nose which would have a filtration system acting as the barrier. This was not very successful or indeed visually aesthetically pleasing and it was hack to the drawing board. The second attempt was a similar type cover, but this time just the nostril area and allowing the filtration material to enter the nostrils creating the barrier. This was essentially successful, but over a short time the filters became wet with moisture from the nose and this aspect showed that the exterior housing was the problem and that the filters would have to have a non porous protection skin.

Initial testing involved the use of condoms with, yes, a small hole cut in the end, but as many people are latex / rubber sensitive this was not to be a real possibility. However, it did point me in the right direction, and my first real attempt to create this product soon changed to a requirement for an injection moulded housing. I set about locating a moulder that would have the foresight to also see the potential for this product and eventually found a small moulder based in Cornwall who would help.

When we produced the first test mouldings we found that the material was too stiff and very uncomfortable. We decided that for softness and comfort we would have to use a PVC which would also have to be of a medical grade. This design turned out to be too cumbersome and it was again back to the drawing board. After four weeks of adjustment to the tooling and tests on the finished product we had finally achieved our first commercially acceptable product. Over the next eight months developments continued but very slowly.

During late 2000 it was suggested that this product should be covered by medical
legislation under the Medical Device register. A voluntary application was made and the product was duly registered as a Class 1 medical device early in 2001.

As we progressed into 2001 I approached our local TV station, Carlton Westcountry, for a rate chart. Having requested the information, I put this aspect into the rear of my mind and went on to the next. I had no idea that this simple operation was soon to have far reaching effects on both the product and the timed plan for market. At around this time our country began to feel the effects of the devastating attack of Foot and Mouth Disease, and in April this station came back to me and asked if I would help them with a feature based on Hay Fever which they were preparing. I agreed to do so, attended the filming and gave an interview based on my product which was to be screened on the 20th June 2001 at lunchtime and which lasted for less than 2 minutes on a Monday.

Foot and Mouth Disease

The effects of this horrendous disease on Hay Fever sufferers was not apparent to me at the time, but I was soon to discover that the lack of cattle and livestock eating the crops would mean that the amount of pasture going to seed would be higher; a result the pollen would be higher and the effect on the sufferer would immense.

Soon, as we know, large areas would be established to render the carcasses of animals slaughtered and locally we were to have one of these sites, which during the burning, gave off much smoke and stench which was affecting not only staff but residents in the locale. My mind began to wonder whether using our product in this area would help a large number of people and help to offer some nasal protection from any elements within the smoke and I began to approach the powers of DEFRA and MOD in order to attend this burn site and conduct some testing of our product.

During late April and early May I was based at the Holsworthy, Devon site and the staff were using the HayFever Guard in their normal daily activities, in some cases in preference to the full face masks and respirators supplied. The results were amazing; in extreme conditions our product was effective in its use and when I tried it personally, I walked between rows of burning carcasses in smoke which not only had a maximum visibility of less than a foot but was acrid and nauseating without the HayFever Guard. However, with the HayFever Guard, in place it was like walking next to a normal bonfire, no acrid stench and actually quite pleasant. This was quite a significant discovery.

Hay Fever Guard® could be used for many conditions, including Hay Fever, Asthma, Mite Allergy etc... Soon other products were developed: The Asthma Shield, Night Shield, Clear Air which would be used in normal activity by pedestrians, cyclists and literally anybody who would prefer to breathe clean air and not pollution.

As we passed into June we were making progress in production and assembly but on a very limited scale, we did not have a saleable product yet but we were on track for our intended 2002 launch. It was now that the TV programme went live and I was about to be, unknown to me, thrown to the lions.

Media Bonanza

A local newspaper picked up the article and ran the story. From this The Times ran it followed by the Express and nearly all the UK papers, international press picked it up and the story appeared in The New York Times, USA Today, The Australian, The Canadian Nationals, Hong Kong Press, South African and so on. I was requested to take part in live interviews by BBC Radio 5 Live, Radio 2, Local Radios around the UK. The product was featured on GMTV with Doctor Hilary Jones, This Morning on ITV with Doctor Chris Steele, Channel 5 with Gloria Hunniford and so on, and there was only going to be one outcome of this.

Four days later, cheque after cheque arrived at my home, the addresses were so vague that it was hard to understand how they ever reached Cornwall. In six days we had over 1,500 enquiries, the addresses were simply, “The makers of Hay Fever Guard, Cornwall” or Mr. Adrian Soper, Cornwall and in days my small home village appeared to become the centre of the universe.

My home changed to a mail office and at this point we were on a very limited scale, we did not have a saleable product yet. My home changed to a mail office and at this point we were not in full produc-
At the beginning of the year, I was informed by telephone that this production company had gone into receivership the evening before and that we could not proceed. This was a devastating blow; months of work and planning had gone and at no time was I aware or was I informed of their plight. 

Through the next few days I racked my brain as to how I could carry on. I had sunk all my money, time and effort into this, I had proven the product had a market and worked, but there appeared to be no way forward. A reality check directed me towards closure, unemployment and possible bankruptcy.

This position remained until September 2002 when I was placed in the position of either going bust or trying to create a Phoenix. Several injection mould companies had approached me wanting to produce the product for me, and now the time was so critical that I took the bull by the horns and rang them. The response was fantastic, positive and they were willing to throw some funding into the pot to take the product forward.

We reached a gentlemen’s agreement to proceed and a consortium was formed, a tool maker, an injection moulder and a robotics company joining the marketing company with a common aim, to make this product and make it work.

In November 2002, I was joined by a marketing man who would formulate a full marketing strategy and with over 20 years experience in retail marketing I had now put the last link to my chain; the Phoenix was rising.

Clinical Research

Having now, finally got into a position where I could at last look forward again, I had to look at all the relevant information relating to the product so far and decide which route to follow to gain optimum results. Hay Fever Guard as a product name pointed to only one area of performance that this product could all be assisted by this product without the use of drugs - a chance at prevention rather than treating the illness. This was a total shock for me and as this information settled in it became clear to me and my marketing director that the name would have to reflect all of this and not just Hay Fever.

The effects of the past year were taking their toll on my health by this time and with setting up a marketing company, creating a manufacturing consortium and still running the old company, I was failing, unable to keep up with everything, effectively suffering from Corporate Schizophrenia (wearing several hats to achieve some sort of sanity). However, marketing was being led by a new man with 20 years experience in this field, production was firmly in the hands of key people. All they had to do was gel into an organisation capable of producing a product suitable for mass market and in vast quantities and effect the changes from version 1 to version 2 which would include the encapsulation of the filters. This meant brand new technology, a process never before achieved, using Hot Runners instead of Cold Feed for Injection Mould processing, adapting robotic technology to this system to create a 24/7 production line with each line (cell) producing a different size in the range and packaging supply to match. As by now it was February, time was not on our side. Product would have to be available within 6 weeks to meet the first hay fever season; the only problem was that the tooling would take 8 to 10 weeks, the robotics would take 14 weeks and marketing could not expect to see any product until May.

Everything was in place and production rolling before the start of June 2003 when the weather changed, the sun came out and Hay Fever Guard was supplied for the first time under the new generic name of NasalAir Guard®.

Clinical Properties of NasalAir Guard®

NasalAir Guard® is a product which will not only filter out the effects of Hay Fever but all Allergens, the causes of Allergic Rhinitis and summer ailments during the period from February until August which is usually associated with Trees, Grasses and Flowers but will assist in reducing the effects of poor air quality in the period from July to September caused by trapped ozone, fungal spores related allergy in the period from September until November and illnesses caused by viruses and bacteria such as cold and flu in the period from September to March.
This all year round product can be used during normal daily activities except swimming and air travel. Tests and trials have shown that these small filters can filter out the effects of passive smoking and can be used by visitors to pubs and clubs to help protect them against this problem. We have been advised by current customers that using the NasalAir Guard® has improved their quality of life by allowing them to access the outdoor life in summer and not be a prisoner in their home, has reduced the asthmatic conditions experienced before using the product and reductions in size of polyps inside the nasal cavity. In many cases our customers partners have thanked us for ‘saving their marriages’, as the use of this product has stopped their partner from snoring. This was not a result we expected, but are pleased to accept.

**Current Status**

NasalAir Guard® is no longer a seasonal product but an all year round product in a full colour range in the future to enable it to become a fashion item and therefore more readily acceptable to the vast majority of potential users.

I have, very much enjoyed relating to you my story of toil, trepidation, excitement, dismay, financial exposure and risk, rejection and potential failure. This is also a story about overcoming the down side of entrepreneur life, the seeking of good help and advice such as my patent agents and legal associates, the jubilation when a plan comes together and finally the elation of seeing your idea, born out of some spark of inspiration finally become a trademarked finished product, ready to be shown to the world and then, even more so, to see people buying it, trying it, using it and benefiting from it and finally telling you, Thank You, for changing their lives albeit in a small way. It really makes it all worth while.

As I bid farewell, I can announce that we are now firmly in discussion with three major high street chains, two distribution chains for wholesale, one international business to business distributor, one global airline and one distributor for the middle east.

We have also made contact with a major academic in Australia who is working on a similar product but in a different style. His is based on sound immunology and respiratory findings from clinical trials, which also corroborates the soundness of our approach.

So this is it, time to say goodbye and thank you for reading my story.

**About the Author**

Adrian Soper is a former forensic pathologist. He can be contacted via adrian@designtechideas.co.uk

**Further Information**

NasalAir Guard® may be purchased via our order line Tel: 0845 066 22 44; www.nasalairguard.com

Those wishing to discuss any element of the product may contact Design Tech Ideas via nigel@designtechideas.co.uk; info@designtechideas.co.uk

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