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Doggedness key to prolific Delray game inventor's success



Business Wire

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Richard Levy helped create the Furby, a talking toy that set off a craze when it debuted in 1998.

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Damon Higgins/Palm Beach Post

Richard Levy in his home Tuesday July 6, 2010, office surrounded by hundreds of toys that he has created or helped to invent over the years.

By **LONA O'CONNOR**
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

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DELRAY BEACH — Richard Levy has one thing to say to inventors about what lies between an idea and success: WD-40.

"WD stands for water displacement and 40 means that was the 40th try," says Levy, who became one of the icons of the toy world when he co-invented the Furby, the must-have talking toy of 1998.

Levy is sitting in his study, where a WD-40 can sits among the dozens of neatly stacked games and toys he has collaborated on since then.

The "40" is his message: Keep trying.

"I've made a lot of mistakes. I have more scars than medals," he says.

The nice thing about Levy is that he is unlike most inventors, who he says are either "paranoid, or more paranoid. They don't even trust their patent attorneys."

He likes to share. He has just produced the second edition of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Cashing in on Your Inventions*, a step-by-step guide in 300 pages.

"I don't even like calling myself an inventor. I'm more comfortable

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with the term producer."

On his most recent game, WarStone, a collaboration with a Canadian woman who was selling it out of her basement, there is a list of credits, just like on a CD or a movie.

"I even thanked some of the kids who tested it. Then someday they can say to someone, 'I was a product tester,' and they're on their way."

This is the statement of a born collaborator.

"You know, Ronald Reagan once said, 'It's amazing what you can accomplish if you're willing to give other people credit.' Anybody is only as good as his team."

The Furby was a nice moment on his résumé, but the hyperkinetic Levy was already working on his next idea and writing one of the dozen or so books he has authored.

"Richard just loves doing this; he doesn't need the money," said Michael Brown, one of his collaborators on WarStone and other projects. "He loves seeing things through and being successful."

Levy soon will be off to Indianapolis to Gen Con, a gaming convention, to promote WarStone, which started out in 2002 as Warball, a muslin bag of marbles with decals stuck onto them, and has morphed into something not quite as scary as World of Warcraft, with fantastic creatures reminiscent of Pokémon and friends. It has a website complete with thunder, lightning and a challenge: "Can you survive?" The site is loaded with tips and instructions and has information on a tournament with \$50,000 in prizes. The marbles for this fantasy game now have centaurs and dinosaurs embedded inside them, and Levy added instruction cards for what to do with the characters.

In August, he will be "working the booth" for WarStone, which is produced by Duncan, the yo-yo company, and presiding over demonstration games. And he'll be giving a workshop at Gen Con on how to prototype, pitch and license inventions.

"I started work on developing and pitching Warball back in 2002. Today it is the summer of 2010 and we are rolling it out as WarStone. How's that for keeping an eye on the prize?"

Eager to share his wisdom

Richard Levy's advice for fledgling inventors:

Think big and then kick your idea into place.

Brand equity rules, so try to match your idea to an existing brand. If you create a trivia game, for example, pitch it to Hasbro as an extension of its Trivial Pursuit franchise and not as a stand-alone game.

Instead of trying to do it all yourself (a common mistake), seek collaborators with expertise and think about getting a larger company to license your idea. You'll give up control, but you'll have a life.

Recycle. Cadaco launched Levy's Adverteasing social interactive board game in 1988, and has just released a new and updated edition.

Embrace problems. For his race car trivia game, Levy originally approached NASCAR but was rebuffed. Then he asked himself, 'What trumps NASCAR?' The answer was legendary driver Richard Petty, who loved the idea of a game and endorsed it.

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Tim,

I am also a inventor of many products one being The original Thermofork which was voted top ten best gifts for dads by the Wallstreet Journal. I would like to get in touch with Richard levy. I am working on something simular that I would like to collaberate with him. Is there anyway I could get Richard's e-mail or cell number. Or maybe you could contact Richard and give him my contact information. charlie.norcross@gmail.com my cell 561-722-3383.

Best Regards

Charlie Norcross

Charles Norcross
6:42 AM, 7/10/2010

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I read artical in Sun Sentinel on 07 14,2010 about Richard Levy. Very inspiring to hear from a born inventor to keep pushing. i would like to find out more about the work shop at gen con. can you send me more info on this

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