



## AN AMERICAN DREAMER

*Inventor of a novel cargo organizer makes the transition to entrepreneur. Despite his numerous mistakes the invention begins to prosper.*

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Certainly one of America's enduring dreams has to be: "Inventor creates the ultimate gizmo, makes the transition to successful entrepreneur, and becomes America's newest millionaire." Who among us has not thought of inventing something that became wildly successful? What would it be like to see your invention in every home in the country and make a tidy profit because of it?

Meet Robert Brand - husband, father, and grandfather - retired Navy man, truck driver, woodworker, inventor and entrepreneur. Motivated by his wife, who was tired of chasing after "runaway" soda bottles in the back of her SUV, Robert created the Adjustable Interlocking Panel System (AIP System ). The panels connect end-to-end and across, without tools, allowing the user to make barriers, compartments and supports in the load space of almost any vehicle. The prototype worked so well Robert decided to get a Patent on his idea and on 16 January 2001, US Patent # 6,174,116 was issued for his invention.

In the 25 months that his patent application was being scrutinized, Robert forged ahead with his dream. He experimented with various materials, investigated several design possibilities and continually perfected his idea. He found that the AIP's could be made into nice supports to hold cargo or even act as a portable seat. With modifications the AIP's could conceivably become shelving units, closet organizers or even toys for his grand children. Surely something this useful had to be brought to market!

Convinced of his invention's utility, Robert created AIP Systems, LLC to make and sell his systems. He teamed up with a savvy manufacturing representative who knew the injection molding business and obtained a mold to make the panels. More time and money went into the consumer packaging design. To protect his idea further he obtained a Trademark for the term AIP System  and a copyright for the gorilla character used as a Logo. He wrote business plans, ad copy, quote requests, and brochures. To ensure his business was on the right track, he consulted with the local SCORE chapter, the Small Business Development Center, the local Technical College, numerous government agencies, lawyers, accountants and other professionals.

Finally, after nearly 18 months of hard work, 2nd mortgages, and maxing out his credit, Robert had a consumer ready product. He was now faced with the monumental task of teaching the public about his product and showing how it might make their lives a little easier. He exhibited at a Business EXPO and received some favorable local press. At one point he had the product in 17 retail outlets in the Charleston, SC area.

## AND THEN THE DREAM WENT SOUR.

Due to his inexperience at marketing, Robert made several marketing no-nos. With no marketing study to determine his target market and no feel for suitable pricing he rapidly destroyed what little credibility he had managed to create. The selling price varied wildly up and down for months. Limited advertising dollars were spent on radio ads for a product that needed a visual medium.



Floundering, Robert entered into an exclusive agreement for someone to handle the Internet marketing of his product. Big mistake! The webmasters put up a site that, in Robert's opinion, did not look real and once again the selling price varied wildly. After 3 months the relationship was terminated.

Having depleted all of his resources and faced with his wife losing her job to government cutbacks, Robert shelved his dream and returned to the workplace.

## THE DREAM IS REBORN

For months Robert only sold his product to friends, family and co-workers. Their feedback was very positive, but Robert feared they were just being polite. Then one day he stopped to buy groceries on his way home from work. His system had been removed from his pickup truck over the weekend to haul yard debris, so when the car pulled in front of him his groceries sailed to the front of his load bed. After unloading the groceries and putting his system back in the truck, Robert knew he had to try again. There was a market for his invention and he would find it.

Knowing he needed a visual medium, and lacking the funds for television, he once again decided to try the Internet. Only this time he would control its content and pricing. [www.cargoape.com](http://www.cargoape.com) opened for business in August of 2001. As a result of good search engine placement, revenue and page views began to climb. Today AIP Systems, LLC is paying its own bills and may even show a profit this year.

By no means a webmaster, Robert is slowly learning e-commerce. He knows he has a useful product and it's priced where people are actually buying it. Is he wildly successful and getting rich? Not yet! But as long as people like Robert are willing to work and dream this American dream endures.

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