

**Small Business Development Center
Penn State**

Helping businesses start, grow, and prosper.



**“Whenever I have a question I send my consultant an email, and within a short time she will get back to me with a thoughtful and reasonable response. Working with the SBDC has been very helpful to our business success.”
Wei-Shin Lai , MD, CEO
AcousticSheep, LLC**

Client Name Wei-Shin Lai and Jason Wolfe

Company Name: AcousticSheep, LLC
Address; 179 Jefferson Circle
City, PA Bellefonte, PA 16823
County: Centre
www.SleepPhones.com

Industry: Manufacturing, Online retail

Year Founded: 2007

SBDC Assistance: Marketing, HR, Financial

Additional Partners: Bucknell Engineering Design Services, Penntap

Penn State SBDC
Heather Fennessey, Interim Director
The 329 Building
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 863-4293
sbdc@psu.edu
www.sbdc.psu.edu



SleepPhones: Pajamas for Your ears

In 2007, family physician Wei-Shin Lai, MD struggled with falling back to sleep after late night phone calls from patients and hospitals. She wanted to listen to soothing lullaby sounds to relax, but could not find a comfortable pair of headphones for sleeping. Jason Wolfe, her significant other and business partner, looked all over the Internet and could not find any soft headphones either. So Wei-Shin and Jason did what so many entrepreneurs do when they are beset with a problem: they solved it. They created headphones that could be worn comfortably during sleep out of fleece. It worked so well for Wei-Shin that she had more energy to do other things! Wei-Shin and Jason decided to start a company manufacturing SleepPhones in order to help other people sleep better.

Wei-Shin hand sewed the first SleepPhones with a needle and thread. Prior to that, her very limited sewing experience consisted of hemming pants and iron-on patch repairs. When Jason bought her a sewing machine, she was able to finalize the design. Next, they tested countless speakers, finally choosing a manufacturer who was willing to work to design high-quality speakers in a very thin metal shell. Jason is a computer game developer, so he was in charge of creating their website. Learning to sew, sourcing components, and making a website rank highly in search engines were just a few lessons in running a business.

Since neither Wei-Shin nor Jason had any prior business experience, they were happy to find that the local PSU SBDC provided free business advice, inexpensive classes, and inside access to the local business community. Their business advisor facilitated a flattering newspaper article about SleepPhones which increased sales dramatically and precipitated a wave of press coverage. Wei-Shin took many SBDC classes to learn about writing business plans, accounting, and taxes. With the help of her advisor, she was invited to join a local business association where a variety of entrepreneurs gather to share ideas.

Within a year, Wei-Shin and Jason had sold their SleepPhones to customers on nearly every continent in the world! They were able to manufacture SleepPhones and keep working as a doctor and a computer game developer for the first six months of launching the company. But as their sales increased, they needed to hire employees. The SBDC classes taught them the intricacies of becoming employers. Their business advisor gave thoughtful and insightful answers to human resource management and quality control issues very promptly. Their consultant also referred them to other business resources to investigate exporting, develop a more efficient method of assembly, and find backup sources for raw materials. Wei-Shin worked with the EDS group at Bucknell and also with a Penntap manufacturing specialist and e-commerce specialist.

With the support of the PSU SBDC, AcousticSheep, LLC has grown to be a successful sustainable local manufacturing company employing eight Centre County residents with living wages. It enjoys a steady annual sales increase of 150%, with customers from every state in the US and every continent in the world.

*“I haven't slept in months and have tried everything - one week with the SleepPhone System and I've gotten more rest than in the past 6 months.”
– Altoona, PA resident*