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“Geeks” on the run as Best Buy protects its brand

Calgary, AB — The war for on-site computer services is heating up as Best Buy opposes trademark applications from smaller “geek” information technology (IT) service firms around the world. The Geek Patrol, a small Calgary-based company operating since 2001, has had its trademark applications opposed in both Canada and the USA by corporate giant Best Buy.

The dispute is over rights to use the name of “The Geek Patrol,” a Canadian company established in 2001. Best Buy Co., Inc., a Minneapolis-based Fortune 100 growth company, and its wholly-owned subsidiary, Best Buy Canada Ltd., allege the name is confusing with its computer support arm, Geek Squad, a company that Best Buy acquired in 2002.

If Best Buy wins its claim, The Geek Patrol will have to change its name and brand, losing hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of marketing efforts over almost five years. Smaller firms are put at an immediate disadvantage when dealing with claims like this. Unlike large corporations with large budgets, small firms usually have fewer financial and staff resources to defend themselves from legal actions of this magnitude.

The trademark dispute between The Geek Patrol and Best Buy has been going on for almost two years, draining The Geek Patrol’s much needed resources normally reserved for sales and day-to-day business operations. John Leishman, President and Chief Executive Geek of The Geek Patrol, states, “The financial impact and the impact on my time has been tremendous. I have learned more about trademark law than I ever wanted to. It has been an important learning lesson though. If you are considering growing your business domestically or internationally, trademarks and patents would be the first issue of business I would take care of after incorporation.”

Trademark registration can take years for approval. The Geek Patrol applied for trademark registration in Canada in July 2003 and in the USA in December 2003. Leishman says, “The trademark process can take years and so the sooner you file, the less potential for issues down the road when your company is larger. It’s also much easier to apply for trademark registration now than it was a few years ago. Today, applications can be made online, sometimes for just a few hundred dollars.” Best Buy has opposed nine “geek” or “squad” applications in the USA, Canada and Australia over the last four years.

The Geek Patrol is a two-time winner (2004 and 2005) of Alberta Venture’s Fastest Growing Company in Alberta award and is on Profit Magazine’s 2005 list of Hot 50 Growth Companies to Watch in Canada. The Geek Patrol provides on-site and remote computer support for residential and business users, including business clients from small home office operations to Fortune 500 companies.

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