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What a turn-on! Replacement remote requires no codes

By **MARTHA McKAY**, STAFF WRITER

When I watch TV with my husband, he controls the remote. I don't always enjoy this arrangement, but marriage is nothing if not compromise. Besides, somewhere in the DNA of most American males is a remote-control gene that the poor fellas are helpless to fight against.

Still, he was unimpressed when I brought home the Miracle Remote the other day. I, however, thought it was pretty handy. It's rare these days for a company to use technology to create something straightforward and easy to use. More often, they pack advanced features into their gadgets, hoping to make them stand out in the overcrowded and hyper-competitive consumer electronics market.

Not so with the remote control experts at Ridgefield-based Miracle Remote LLC. With 30-plus years of experience making and selling remote controls - and listening to consumers - the team of engineers decided the market needed something simple.

The Miracle Remote will operate your TV if you lose or break your remote control, or even if you just want another one. The point is, there are no codes to enter and no programming instructions. You just slip in two AA batteries and, as the company says on the box, "It just works."

And the Miracle Remote isn't aiming to operate all your entertainment devices - just the TV. It promises to operate almost every function on every set made since 1988 by seven manufacturers: Sony, Toshiba, Sharp, JVC, Mitsubishi, Hitachi and Samsung. It also has a model that works on Emerson, Symphonic and Sylvania TVs made since 1998, which have something called a game input button. By the end of this year, the company plans to have a Miracle Remote model for every major brand of TV commonly sold in the United States.

Full disclosure: In our home, we've never lost or damaged our TV remotes. But Ken Gassman, general manager at Miracle Remote, assures me that other families are different. "They lose the remote; they break the remote; the dog ate the remote," he said. Because I've never lost a TV remote, I was blissfully unaware of the difficulty finding a replacement. Most consumers turn to universal remotes, designed to operate several electronic devices, which require you to enter codes with the correct frequency for the TV, DVD, etc. This isn't particularly onerous, although when some people (my older relatives come to mind) hear the sentence "You have to program in codes," their eyes widen with fear.

Even worse, Gassman said, most universal remotes can't do everything your original remote control could do. For instance, he says the Miracle Remote is the only replacement remote that can operate advanced TV features such as picture in a picture (PIP), split screen or picture size. Gassman said the idea of the Miracle Remote grew from customers who kept saying they wanted a remote that would operate just like the one that came with their TV, without having to read instructions or enter codes.

Developing the Miracle Remote was no easy task. It took more than a year, with about 40 people working full time. Much of the time involved testing. Sometimes, company engineers would do the testing in a TV lab designed for the purpose. And sometimes they'd just go to a nearby electronics store with their prototypes, stand in front of a bank of TVs and press the little buttons to put the remotes through their paces. There was a lot of trial and error as the team figured out how to design a gadget that could operate scores of functions on hundreds of television sets.

The company - which calls itself the largest reseller of original equipment manufacturer remotes in the U.S. market, and whose electronics business supplies remotes to the hospital and hotel industry - introduced the Miracle Remote in January and is working to get it into stores. So far, the product is available only on Target.com and in 6th Avenue Electronics stores. Miracle Remote is targeting a growing market. The Consumer Electronics Association estimates that over the last nine years, 700 million so-called universal remotes were sold in the United States.

If you want to buy a high-end universal remote, they are available. But if you want to save time and buy something really simple that works right out of the box, then the Miracle Remote is your gadget.

I tested the Miracle Remote Sony model on our two older Sony TVs, and it worked fine on both. Just don't expect it to end those gender-based remote control battles.

My husband held the Miracle Remote and began to increase the TV volume.

"I call it entertainment customization," he said.

I call it hogging the controller. And I get the last word.

