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Today's high-powered world needs individuals who can naturally adapt to its fast-paced nature. Teachers want to prepare students to be successful future leaders, but the current educational system cannot do it alone. Although countless teaching methodologies are available, educators often find it frustrating to build lessons that resonate with students and encourage them to grow. In situations akin to these, the role of an educational curriculum company becomes more vital.

Education is evolving, and John McCurdy, CEO of Studies Weekly, ensures that his company continues evolving with it. Studies Weekly has been a curriculum company dedicated to state-specific, standards-aligned content that helps

teachers engage and inspire children in learning from the beginning. Studies Weekly was started in 1984 in Utah by elementary school teacher Paul Thompson when he couldn't find a state-specific social studies curriculum for use in his fourth-grade class. He wrote his curriculum in a weekly magazine format. At first, Paul made materials just for his students. But as word spread, other teachers came to him asking him to share what he'd created. Soon, the demand for fun ways to teach social studies quickly became a side business.

Years later, Paul's son-in-law, Ed Rickers, who shared Paul's passion for helping teachers efficiently educate students, expanded the company's products nationwide. Ed spent much of his career going from state to state, digging into

the standards and the history unique to each state and building it into a curriculum tailored specifically for that state. Once Ed had built up the company to be a significant competitor in the textbook market, he sought out John's business consulting services to help transition the company from a grass-roots entrepreneurial endeavor into an organization that would be the foundation for education in every area. In 2018, Ed asked John to officially become CEO and lead the company to the next level. John also has a passion for the education process. It has become his mission to take Studies Weekly from a small company to a thriving business that leads the industry, so Studies Weekly's publications and online resources can be available to all students and teachers across the United States. Under Paul, Ed,



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and now John's leadership, Studies Weekly has continued to adapt to the changing needs of students. True to its roots, the curriculum is still uniquely presented in a print periodical format, but it also pairs with Studies Weekly Online, a robust interactive online learning platform. John recently oversaw the monumental evolution of Studies Weekly Online. Using the feedback of teachers who regularly use the digital learning platform, Studies Weekly's software development department completely overhauled the platform to serve teachers and students better as they utilize technology within the classroom and remotely. *"Studies Weekly Online is based on the same articles and images in the magazine and newspaper but includes further*

enhancements and extended learning opportunities," John said.

John knows the value of creating solutions that work. During his 30-year career, he managed teams that formed partnerships with hundreds of Fortune 1000 commercial and public sector accounts. Prior to Studies Weekly, John's teams created solutions that became integral frameworks for companies in financial services, transportation, logistics, healthcare, retail, online services, communications, hi-tech, energy industries, state and local governments, and higher education.

Studies Weekly began as a provider of supplemental social studies materials. Now the company has expanded the curriculum into a

comprehensive elementary social studies program that has been adopted in states across the nation, including California, Texas, and Florida. Each publication is built upon primary and high-quality secondary sources in images, historical documents, and data, using grade-level appropriate chunks of information to scaffold and focus student research. Sources are contextualized in foundational concepts, guided evaluation, and application. For each state's social studies adoption, Studies Weekly curriculum specialists work directly with state subject-matter experts to ensure the content aligns with standards while sharing the stories and events important to each state. As any business leader knows, this type of product



John McCurdy
CEO

Studies
Weekly

Dr. Noelle Carter

customization increases costs. But John is financially-minded and a strong fiscal steward of company assets. As an experienced leader, coach, and manager, he focuses on peak performance in the areas of operational efficiency, customer intimacy, and product excellence. Prior to Studies Weekly, he led and grew teams in many businesses

and start-ups that became leading solution providers. Five of those companies were successfully acquired or underwent Initial Public Offerings (IPOs). Under his leadership, and to efficiently streamline customization, Studies Weekly's production teams updated their processes, basing them on Lean Sigma, so teams now build

grade-level state-specific content at the same time that other teams create grade-level general social studies and science content. John also oversaw the development of a completely new Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) curriculum that is phenomenon-driven while also integrating English Language Arts literacy skills. Weekly lessons align with NGSS performance expectations while supporting the K-12 Framework's 3D approach to learning. Lessons also include assessments of 3D learning and student performance. *"This approach engages students much better than traditional science instruction because doing science is*

the best way to learn science. We emphasize age-appropriate, hands-on learning as an integral element of all curriculum levels,” John said.

Just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, these curriculum teams also began building a well-being curriculum to help educators teach and support growth mindset skills. Students explore and develop skills in self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationships, and good decision-making. This research-based and preventative behavioral health program helps students and teachers manage their responses to unique challenges and global stressors and empowers them to shape a positive portrait of their future. *“It’s been validating to get our well-being curriculum in children’s hands and see how well it works,”* John said. The pandemic hit schools, teachers, and students hard, and when schools went remote in March 2020, John and his executive team quickly responded by opening Studies Weekly Online for free to any educator, customer, or parent. Every teacher had access to the full curriculum to give them additional online resources for distance learning. *“No one was prepared for the situation in 2020. As educators scrambled to find online resources, it just felt right to offer all our online curriculum for free for the remainder of that school year to support teaching during that difficult time,”* John said. This type of forward-thinking is helping Studies Weekly rapidly take over the well-established textbook market. Often, during social studies, science, or language arts block in an elementary classroom, students have a large textbook on their desk, but their teachers only choose a few pages from it during each lesson. Studies Weekly curriculum teams craft grade-level and reading-level content appropriate

for elementary students without all the extraneous fluff. Images are purposefully chosen – similar to a typical newspaper – to allow additional comprehension and access to the content through contextual clues.

Students love the unique format because the periodical publications are hands-on materials that they can highlight, annotate and manipulate for projects. The updated version of the user-friendly online experience now mirrors the familiar layout of other learning management platforms, so teachers and students experience a smaller learning curve when introduced to this technology – quickly becoming comfortable with the program and easily navigating through the content. While traditional social studies textbooks simply focus on the dates and facts requested in each state’s education standards, Studies Weekly presents that information to students through the stories of history to provoke their curiosity and inspire them to solve real problems. *“We like to say that the educational standards inform, but stories inspire. Stories of people and events that changed our world and authentically celebrated all student experiences are empowering. This focus, and our unique periodical format, set us above other educational publishers,”* John said. This vision successfully drives subscriptions of the Studies Weekly curriculum, but company representatives don’t stop working with customers once they purchase. Instead, Studies Weekly regional managers, customer service, curriculum coaches, and production teams maintain strong relationships with educators, partnering with them to truly support the needs of both teachers and students. *“Becoming the market leader is a function of providing*

and facilitating thought leadership to those we serve with innovative solutions,” John said. *“I believe a company only earns half of their business when a customer purchases its solution. The other half is earned when the customer reaches the desired outcome for which they purchased your solution.”*

Company representatives connect with educators at the individual, school, and district level, at education conferences, customized professional development training, and webinars or face-to-face meetings. *“I have been an outspoken proponent of providing training, and we have invested heavily to put an infrastructure in place to help educators achieve the best outcome,”* John said. *“Our goal is for teachers to reclaim some of those precious hours they spend each day to serve all the needs of their students best.”*

In addition to providing the tools and research-based professional development that can be completely customized to each school’s unique needs, Studies Weekly leadership rolled out its teacher advocate program last summer. Teacher advocates are available through email, scheduled phone calls, or video conferencing and have multiple years of classroom experience. They partner with teachers to help them effectively use the curriculum and integrate it into their instruction. Teachers can ask for assistance with lesson planning and activity ideas or just work with a teacher advocate to bounce ideas off someone familiar with the curriculum. Studies Weekly also encourages teachers to provide real-time feedback via an online feedback form, which is reviewed daily. Many of these suggestions

become part of the product roadmap. *"Our customers keep asking us to teach other education vendors how to work with educators. That's one of the highest compliments,"* John said.

John is eager to improve the learning experience for all students and always does what is best for students. This desire is a strong influencing factor in all of his decisions, and this year, John launched an initiative to provide a new curriculum nationwide. While this content refresh may not seem directly beneficial for the company, especially at a time when many companies are considering downsizing, John has ensured a solid financial foundation for the company

that enables him to maintain a customer-centric approach. Thus, Studies Weekly has been able to recruit new teams of tenured educators and historians to update every state publication. These professionals will provide enhancements in content and lesson plans that would normally only be available in completely new editions. John also directed his executive leadership to hire other teams to move the company into completely new markets. *"For the last few years, school districts have been clamoring for us to expand into the middle school market. Their students love our content and want to continue to grow with it,"* John said. John's focus for the company is to continue to innovate its product

offering, educational technology, and positioning. *"We hope to be a leader in education materials and trends while revolutionizing how people are taught,"* John said. *"Education is evolving, and Studies Weekly is evolving with it."* Because of John's financial acumen and his laser focus on providing a customer experience that is truly a partnership, Studies Weekly is able to provide integrity in its product offerings and service that makes it stand out in the crowd. Those customers who have visited the company headquarters or attended one of its national educational summits all agree that Studies Weekly supports teachers, cares for students, and hopes to share a brighter future for all through education.

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