

TED conference creator in \$10M lawsuit over sale of spinoff

September 15 2016, by Michelle R. Smith

The man who created the TED conference is embroiled in a multimillion-dollar legal dispute over the sale of a TED spinoff.

Richard Saul Wurman is an architect and graphic designer who founded TED in 1984 to focus on technology, entertainment and design. He created TEDMED in 1995 to focus on health and medicine, and has since sold them both.

In a lawsuit filed in federal court in Rhode Island, Wurman says Marc Hodosh, who bought TEDMED from him in 2008, breached their contract and cost him millions when he resold TEDMED in 2011 without giving him any compensation.

Hodosh, who lives in Massachusetts, has countersued and accuses Wurman of meddling in that sale.

They're suing each other for at least \$10 million.

Wurman didn't return a message seeking comment, and his lawyer declined to comment, saying the filings in the case were self-explanatory. His lawsuit says Wurman's association with the TED conferences allowed them to attract presenters including Bill Gates, Quincy Jones, Yo-Yo Ma, Google founders Sergey Brin and Larry Page, Amazon's Jeff Bezos, Jane Goodall and "many other individuals of world renown."

Hodosh disputes that contention. In papers filed with the court this month, his lawyer accuses Wurman of engaging in "erratic and ego-centric behavior" and "overestimating his importance."

Wurman says that when he sold TEDMED to Hodosh in 2008, he agreed to continue as the founder and creative director through 2011. In exchange, he would receive half the net proceeds of the TEDMED conference business for 2009, 2010 and 2011, plus 12.5 percent of the net proceeds of the TEDMED business from 2012 through 2016, according to Wurman.

In 2009 and 2010, Wurman said his share was approximately \$2 million.

When Hodosh sold TEDMED in 2011, Wurman said he received nothing while Hodosh received \$16 million, with an opportunity to earn up to \$9 million more.

Hodosh said he was the sole owner of TEDMED in 2011 and had the right to sell it. In court papers, he said Wurman interfered with the sale, leading the man who purchased it to reduce his offer for TEDMED by \$9 million.

Hodosh said Wurman became incensed that he was unable to come to his own deal with the buyer in order to continue working with TEDMED and said Wurman also circulated a "false, vindictive and highly disparaging" email about him to members of the TEDMED community. Wurman denies those contentions.

TEDMED is not named in the lawsuit, and a spokeswoman said Thursday they did not have any comment.

The lawsuit was filed in Rhode Island because the deal was worked out when Wurman lived in Newport. He now lives Golden Beach, Florida.

Wurman sold TED to a nonprofit in 2001. Under the leadership of Chris Anderson, TED now runs conferences and puts out online videos that the group says have been watched more than 1 billion times. TEDMED is an independently operated for-profit venture and uses the TED brand under license.

Asked about the lawsuit, Anderson issued a statement saying: "We're sad to see this dispute between TEDMED's former owners."

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Citation: TED conference creator in \$10M lawsuit over sale of spinoff (2016, September 15)
retrieved 23 April 2024 from
<https://phys.org/news/2016-09-ted-conference-creator-10m-lawsuit.html>

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