

Aurora business aims to wow the Dragons with a desk chair ? but this isn't your grandfather's desk chair



By Brock Weir

When is a chair not a chair? When Aurora's Pat Harrison gets his hands on it.

The Aurora entrepreneur and his team have turned the traditional desk chair on its proverbial ear with the development of the Core Chair, a new spin on an old padded friend, they hope goes a long way to quiet alarm bells over potential hazards of sitting at your desk all day.

While the product is now ready to hit the market, there is an important step ahead. On April 29, the Core Chair team will step into CBC's Dragon's Den to make their pitch to the new roster of Dragons. Anticipating a fall airdate, Mr. Harrison and his team are quietly confident in what they have ? so much so they held something of a trial run last Thursday for what the Dragons might dish out, holding a launch party at Timberlane Athletic Club.

?I have some friends who I would stack up against the Dragons in their tenacity, so I am letting them beat me up and grill me,? says Mr. Harrison.

?For the most part, we're pretty organized. It is just making sure we have our numbers straight and we know what kind of deal we want to make, and as quickly and efficiently as possible get our message across on the value of what we've got.?

What they have got is an ergonomically designed desk chair that combines the seat of a traditional desk chair, minus a high back, with the movement one can get doing their office work sitting on an exercise ball, all with the ability to adjust tension, strength, and resistance.

?When you sit on a ball and you think about where the pivot point is, it is somewhere down in the floor,? says Mr. Harrison, who made his way in business developing seating solutions for wheelchair users. ?What I wanted to do was ensure we were getting maximum benefit in terms of the movement we got and the movement we need is in the joints of the hips, pelvis and spine. Rather than swaying, I wanted it to have movement immediately beneath the centre of balance, which seemed easy in the beginning.

?I think our first prototype was something akin to a trailer hitch ball and socket. Then we introduced springs and eventually went to hydraulics. Throughout this whole process of trying different things, we ended up coming up with a current mechanism which is a fairly sophisticated pivoting system that uses tension for resistance.?

There is mounting evidence, he says, that the way we sit throughout the day is ultimately detrimental to our health. Sitting for long periods of time leads to 'soft tissue creep' where supportive ligaments and soft tissues around joints become imbalanced, making one prone to injury.

This is not new, he says, and just under a decade ago it became a growing trend for people to cast aside their ergonomic chairs, taking exercise balls to work instead to introduce some movement into their day.

'The problem with balls is they're balls and they don't really provide any kind of postural support, so they had other problems coming out of that,' says Mr. Harrison. 'We set out to design an active sitting chair that was a little bit more conducive to the office setting and much more thorough. It very nicely fits into the mould of being a health and wellness chair that you do exercises on and use as an office chair for long periods of time.'

This is a chief selling point, he says, in tangling with the Dragons.

'What we have got right now is something that is unconventional and different from what we can all relate to as a chair,' he says. 'To actually get people to try it, we need to get the word out there, we need them to realise that this has a lot of science in the design of it and it has a lot of value in terms of it being a new concept in the way we have done forever. The main thing I would like to get from this is an addition to our brain trust so to get people like one or more of the Dragons who may be able to contribute to our thought process in terms of how we get our product to market. Our launch stage is probably our most important phase, so we want to make sure we do it right. If one or more of them can bring something to the table on that, it would be a huge outcome.'

In the meantime, they are not sitting on their Core Chairs, waiting to hear 'Action!?' The Core Chair is an evolving product and in six months or so they hope to introduce technology into their models to enable users to measure their movements, how many calories they are burning while programming their chairs to follow exercises from their website. Also in the works is a Core Chair twist on stools used by dental hygienists, and ergonomically designed stools for elementary and high school students.