

Core Chair's turn in Dragon's Den leaves them overwhelmed with orders



By Brock Weir

Last April 29 was a big day for Aurora's Pat Harrison.

After years in development, his new spin on the traditional office chair, the Core Chair, was just in stock. He and his co-workers were preparing to take the chair into the studios to face CBC's Dragon's Den that day. Oh, and it was also his birthday.

Nine months later, however, the rest of the country was able to see whether they would emerge from the Den victorious, or with a few scratches to dress.

Ultimately, it was the latter, but despite coming out of the show without a deal, the very day after the show aired in February, the fledgling local company was 'totally inundated' with orders.

The Core Chair might not look like an ordinary office chair, but if Mr. Harrison has its way, it will soon become an integral part of office and school life.

A kinesiologist by trade, Mr. Harrison's Core Chair is designed to keep the body active, even in a day of sitting at the desk, through a fully adjustable seat that works the core, similar to an exercise ball.

'Just sitting there, you burn up to 17 per cent more calories,' he says. 'It doesn't mean it's a fat burner, but you're actually using your body. When you sit [in a traditional chair], your body just stops. It's okay for everything to stop when you're sleeping, but to have that go on all day is really detrimental because statistics have shown [when we sit at our desks all day] we really end up with about three hours of activity in our whole 24 hours. That is pretty bleak. We're not designed to be still.'

Mr. Harrison formally launched his product last spring, taking over the former Timberlane Athletic Club for the main event. By that time, he had already booked his date with the Dragons and was brainstorming the pitch.

He says he knew they had a limited amount of time to really make an impact with the message and set out to research each Dragon to see who might be a good fit with their company and vision. He even tracked down a past Dragon and made a telephone pitch to pick up a few pointers that might have proved useful when the cameras started to roll.

'By the time we got there, we had a pretty good idea of what we wanted to get across and our main mission was to get across the benefits of active sitting and share the product,' says Mr. Harrison. 'Whether we got the deal or not was an uncertainty but the

opportunity to be on Dragon's Den was a big thing.?

They didn't, however, have confidence they would walk away with an offer, he says, and he was ultimately right, as the Dragons balked over the amount of money Mr. Harrison has put into the Core Chair over eight years with very little product ? up to the point of taping ? to show for it.

?We have been selling shares in our company to raise capital to get us to this stage,? he says. ?Now, we have been over eight years since we started this product, so it has been a very involved product. It is not a whimsical idea. We worked with the University of Waterloo validating what it is capable of doing and also getting feedback on how to improve it. It costs a lot of money to do that.

?When I went to the Dragons, the main thing I was really trying to do was attract some interest with them so we could get a partner that could add value so they can bring some of their expertise to it. The money wasn't as important as it was trying to get somebody at that level of interest that could actually support our launch. I would have loved to have gone to market many years earlier. The other thing that came up was it has been seven-and-a-half years, but that is how long it takes to get things right.?

Looking back over his Dragon's Den experience, one of the biggest things Mr. Harrison says he is taking away from the experience is the final cut. While they spent over an hour in studio making their pitch, this was whittled down to under 10 minutes ? and a lot of the good stuff was left on the cutting room floor, he contends.

?There is nothing we could have done differently,? he says. ?We have thoroughly designed this product. We had to make a decision whether we wanted a low cost commodity product or whether we wanted to go with a high end high value product. We elected to go with the latter because I just feel when I am buying something I am prepared to pay a little bit more for something that is going to be functional and is also going to last a long time.

?We want Core Chair to be clearly recognized as a different solution and a clear alternative to what is currently available. I want to get active sitting chairs as a standard for children in classrooms [as well] because I think for way too long we have been demanding that kids sit still. They need to have the stimulation to keep them focused.?