

## Picton inventor relies on television to drive sales

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Inventor/Owner Dave McGee pose for a portrait with the AuggieDog, the power stool tool in Picton, Ont., on Saturday Oct. 19, 2013. The Auggiedog is power auger that picks up after a dog. Lars Hagberg for the Toronto Star

**By: Ashante Infantry** Business reporter, Published on Tue Oct 22 2013

Dave McGee invented a clever product for dog owners, but getting auggiedog, his power pooper scooper, in consumers’ hands hasn’t been easy.

“You deal with buyers of large companies and they make you jump through hoops,” said Picton-based McGee. “We had opportunities to go into some major retailers, but it’s scary the terms and conditions that they demand. I could see us, because we are a startup company and at the start of things, making one little mistake and be out of business pretty quick.”

The automated stool tool — “No stooping, no touching and no plastic bags!” — is available at select pet stores in Ontario and the Maritimes and on the company’s <http://auggiedog.com/websiteEND>.

Retired dairy farmer McGee, and his two partners have found online selling equally challenging, even though their patented device won a Best New Product award at the 2012 Global Pet Expo in Orlando and received a five-star rating from the American Pet Association.

“We talk to e-commerce marketers and they promised us the moon and quite frankly, whether it was just them or us, things didn’t deliver. I guess it’s because it’s a brand new product.

“I was fairly naive about that side of things, but I am learning. I had people bombarding me every day: ‘We can improve your Google placement,’ but if people don’t come looking for you on the Internet, you really don’t sell anything.”

A finely-tuned online strategy is now essential for small and medium-sized businesses, says a new survey from the Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC) released to coincide with BDC Small Business Week which runs through Oct. 26.

The impact of the Internet, along with the buy-local movement, rising health awareness, frugality and mass customization of goods are the leading consumer trends that will have a permanent impact on Canadians’ buying habits, said the study.

While some businesses, have, for instance, “begun catering to the increased demand for healthy, well-priced local products,” e-commerce has been slower to catch on in Canada, lagging behind that of most other nations, with some of the lowest penetration levels in the developed world, according to the report.

“A lot of entrepreneurs are not very familiar with technology; and there’s also a perception that it’s very complex and costly, which it’s not anymore,” said Pierre Cl  roux, Chief Economist, BDC.

“People don’t realize how much Canadians are ready to buy online and how much Canadians are making their decisions online. We’re not as successful as American retailers online. A lot of companies who are doing it (here), it’s because they had one employee who was really passionate about it and convinced the boss.”

The survey of 1,023 Canadians found 42 per cent search online to find the best place to buy; 41 per cent buy products or services online; and 70 per cent trust consumer opinions posted online.

The BDC urges businesses to build and develop an online presence; be aware of online competition; monitor review sites and react quickly; and consider marketing through online banners, email propositions and social sharing.

After limited success with Google and Facebook ads, McGee is counting on traditional promotion to spur online interest in auggiedog. The company is debuting its first TV commercial this month.

“We hope it will drive people to our website so the social media aspect will start to go viral,” said McGee. “After our direct TV campaign has run its course, then we’ll go aggressively after major retailers. We hope (the TV ad) creates the buzz about the product, so we can pick the retailers we want, rather than go with hat in hand. And this way, there’s a lot more money for us initially. You talk to the major retailers and they hammer you in price pretty good; and the margins are so slim. So we want to make some money upfront (selling it online).”