

# MP3 Toy More Than Child's Play

BY C.J. WILKINS

**M**ore Calgary toddlers have something to sing along with this holiday season if Dan Lemay, founder of SweetPea Toy Company gets his way. SweetPea is a Calgary-based company that manufactures the SweetPea3 – an MP3 player aimed at babies, toddlers and preschoolers.

Four years ago, after reading a biography of Steve Jobs, the man behind Apple and the iconic iPod, Lemay discovered that there was an untapped market for MP3 players aimed specifically at young children. Wasting little time, Lemay – an engineer by training – got to work developing a prototype player.

The prototypes evolved from Lemay's first concept into a stylish yet rugged player that would become the production model – a 1 GB MP3 player with a built-in speaker, rubberized surfaces and large handle, three buttons and built-in parental controls.

Short on cash after spending months developing the new prototype, he picked up a job providing engineering consulting services over the summer of 2007 and began to seek investors to help him reach the production stage.

To help focus his pursuit of investment dollars, Lemay took an Entrepreneur Boot Camp offered by Calgary Technologies Inc. (CTI). "Boot Camp was a big eye-opener. I learned a lot about raising money, what angels and venture capitalists are interested in, and I honed my skills to seek for what investors are looking for."

Soon after his Entrepreneur Boot Camp training, Lemay delivered an investor pitch with Venture Alberta that led to an investment. Lemay was able to start production of the SweetPea3 in just time for Christmas 2007. However, with no marketing and little awareness of the player, significant sales failed to materialize. Undeterred, Lemay continued to fund the production of the players with his own money and that of his investors.

A big break came for Lemay last year after the Canadian Toy Testing Council named the SweetPea3 the 2009 Energizer Battery Operated Toy of the Year. CTTC's summary of the SweetPea3 was exceptional stating, "This is truly a wonderful toy for children to love and grow with."

"CTTC really liked the product," says Lemay. "It allowed me to boost production and increase sales during the holiday season of 2008."

Gaining momentum, SweetPea Toy Company signed a deal with an Italian-educational distributor to sell the player as an English-as-a-second-language tool worldwide.



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With these recent successes under his belt, Lemay is looking to continue growing his business by expanding and refining his marketing activities. To help him reach his goals, Lemay enrolled in the Go-To-Market program with CTI. The four-month program will pair him with a mentor who has extensive marketing experience and equip Lemay with the skills to develop a comprehensive marketing plan.

"At the end of the day I'm an engineer. I can do a better job marketing and know that Go-To-Market will help me focus my energy with the benefit of an experienced mentor. A program such as this can open doors."

Stay tuned. Maybe a child growing up listening to a SweetPea3 will wind up reading a biography of Dan Lemay and develop another great idea.

The SweetPea3 is available for \$64.99 at Gracie & Gruff Fine Toys, Bug & Blossom as well as online at [www.sweetpeatoyco.com](http://www.sweetpeatoyco.com). For more information about CTI programs and services, visit [www.calgarytechnologies.com](http://www.calgarytechnologies.com).