

BUSINESS

Thursday, December 15, 2005

latimes.com/business

Aiming for Cushy Bottom Line

From Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Scott Pinizzotto is used to the giggles whenever he brings up high-tech toilet seats that rinse and warm people's bottoms.

Yet he continues to believe that he is sitting on a potential gold mine.

"This is the next evolution of the toilet," Pinizzotto said of the Swash, an upscale seat made by his San Francisco start-up, Brondell Inc. "We are trying to educate people that there is a more hygienic and comfortable way to go to the bathroom."

Introduced nearly a year ago, the Swash is designed to unite a run-of-the-mill toilet and a bidet — a device that cleanses with a spray of warm water. The Swash also features heated seats and its top-of-the-line model comes with a warm-air dryer and a remote control.

Pampering the posterior isn't cheap. The Swash retails for \$429 to \$549, yet sales have risen every three months, said Pinizzotto, the company's co-founder and chief executive.

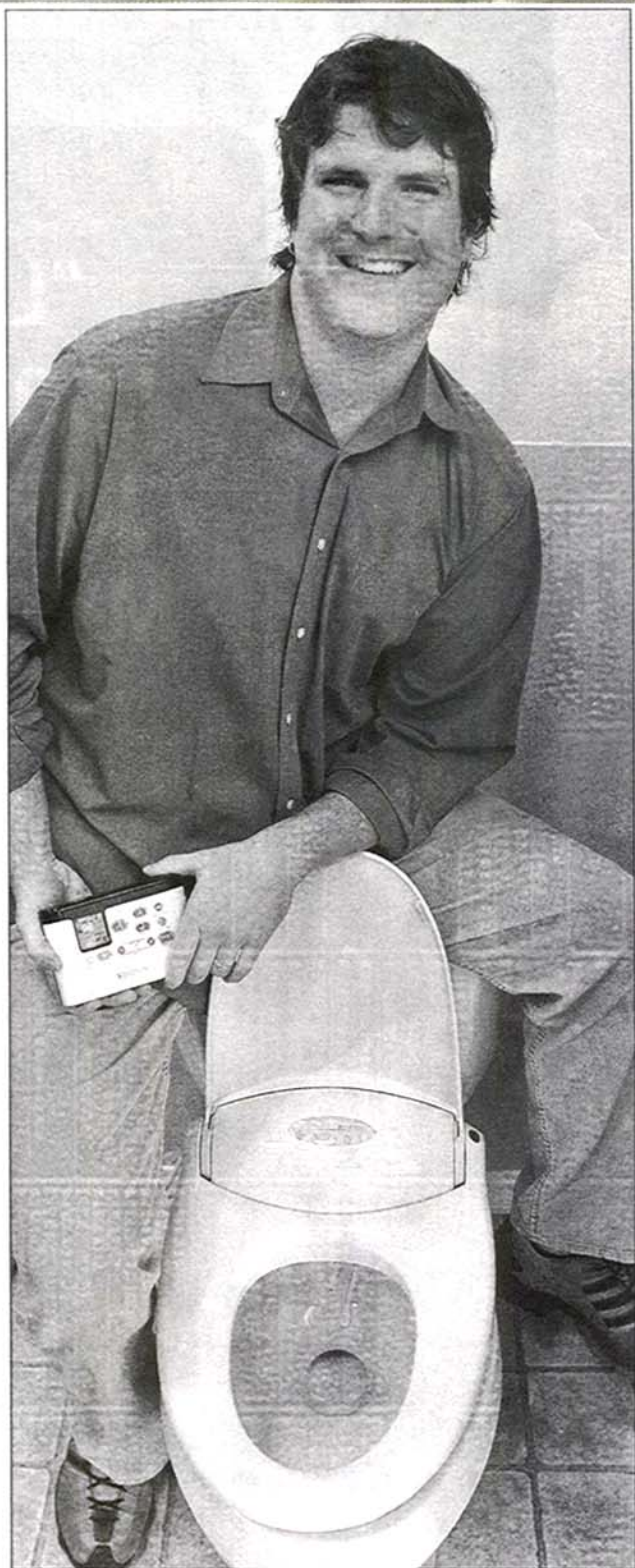
Although bidets are common in Europe and parts of Asia, the high-tech toilets haven't made much of a splash in the United States.

Brondell, named after the 18th century inventor of the flush-valve toilet, is trying to change that with the help of a \$1.3-million investment led by Mark Cuban, who became a billionaire near the peak of the dot-com boom in 1999 when he sold Broadcast.com Inc. to Yahoo Inc.

Cuban, owner of the Dallas Maverick basketball team, is an old friend of Brondell's other co-founder, Dave Samuel.

"I have always been interested in innovative and cutting-edge technologies coupled with a large market opportunity," Cuban said in a statement.

Like Cuban, Samuel already is flush with money. Before he turned 30, Samuel sold his Internet music service, Spinner.com, to America Online Inc. for \$320 million in 1999.



BEN MARGOT Associated Press

THE SWASH: Brondell President Jim Van Huysse displays the Swash 600 toilet seat, which comes with a remote control and a warm-air dryer. Billionaire Mark Cuban has invested \$1.3 million to help the bidet-type toilet seats make a splash in the U.S.