

■ Coming Friday: New developments spring up in downtown's southern corridor.

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High-tech toilet makes a splash

BY MICHAEL LIEDTKE
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 he's 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 startup, 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 transform a run-of-the-mill toilet into a bidet — a device that cleanses with a spray of warm water, relieving people from the hassles of toilet paper. The Swash features heated seats, too, and its top-of-line model also 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 by nearly 50 percent 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

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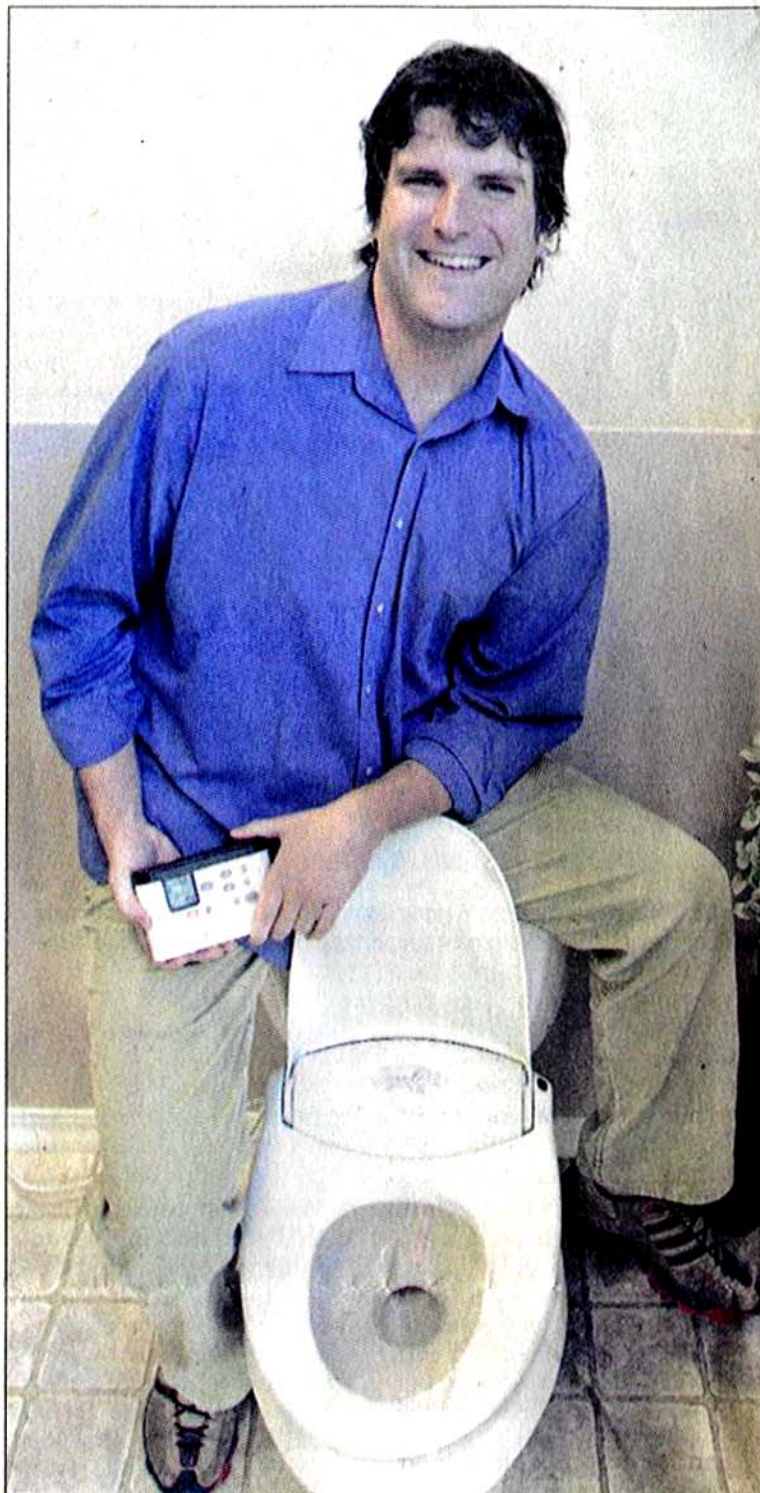
Scott Pinizzotto ■ Brondell Inc.

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, best known as the owner of the Dallas Mavericks basketball team, is an old friend of Brondell's other co-founder, David Samuel. Cuban dived in after he ran into Samuel in October and learned more about the Swash.

"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.



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Brondell President Jim Van Huysse sits above the Swash 600 toilet seat Wednesday in San Francisco. The Swash toilet seat retails for \$439 to \$549. Even so, sales have risen by nearly 50 percent every three months since the seat hit stores a year ago.