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Brondell: Billionaire's sit-down gives toilet firm something to go on

DealData

The company:

San Francisco-based Brondell Inc.

The CEO: Scott Pinizzotto.

The investors: Private investors led by Mark Cuban, the billionaire owner of the Dallas Mavericks basketball team. Brondell chairman Dave Samuel also contributed to the round.

The money: \$1.3 million.

The deal: Brondell will use the cash to hire employees, develop products and boost marketing efforts for the Swash.

The lowdown: Brondell's co-founder and chairman, Dave Samuel, bumped into Mark Cuban at a technology conference in San Francisco. Samuel had a pitch ready to go.

Up next: Brondell will likely double its full-time staff from four employees to eight; new hires will include a sales director and product manager.

Of all the startups trying to make connections at October's Web 2.0 conference, **Brondell Inc.** may have been the least likely to end up with one.

After all, most of the attendees at the Argent Hotel confab were tech-focused and talking about things like and user-generated content. So was San Francisco-based Brondell, but in a much different way: It makes high-tech toilets that rinse and warm people's bottoms.



Adrienne Sanders

Dave Samuel, Brondell's co-founder and chairman, was attending the popular conference on behalf of his other company, **Grouper**, a 2-year-old peer-to-peer music service. Fortunately for Brondell, which didn't actually attend the conference, Samuel bumped into an old friend in the Argent's jam-packed hallways.

Samuel, 33, was filing in to watch an afternoon session about the future of entertainment when

he spotted one of the panelists, **Mark Cuban**, owner of **2929 Entertainment**, in the corridor.

The two men had become friendly in the mid-1990s at industry trade shows. They first met at Las Vegas' Hard Rock casino in 1996, at a broadcasting conference. Three years later both sold their former companies — Cuban's Broadcast.com to **Yahoo** for \$5.7 billion and Samuel's last Internet music service, **Spinner.com**, to **AOL** for \$320 million.

Fast-forward to 2005: The pair caught up quickly as Cuban prepared to go on stage. Samuel told Cuban about Brondell, a 2-year-old company intent on changing the way Americans spend their time on the throne. He rattled off a quick elevator

pitch:

"Every man, woman and child on this earth goes to the bathroom. Statistics say people sit on the toilet between 1½ and 2½ years of their lives. So why not make that experience more enjoyable?" Samuel recalled. As an addition to the pitch, he said, "The toilet has seen little to no innovation in the last 200 years."

Samuel followed up with Cuban via email, explaining more about the startup, which began selling the Swash in January 2005 for about \$500 each. Sales were rising by nearly 50 percent every three months since then and Brondell had landed partnerships with retailers including **Bed, Bath & Beyond** and **Home Depot**.

Two weeks after the conference, Cuban agreed to invest and join Brondell's advisory board.

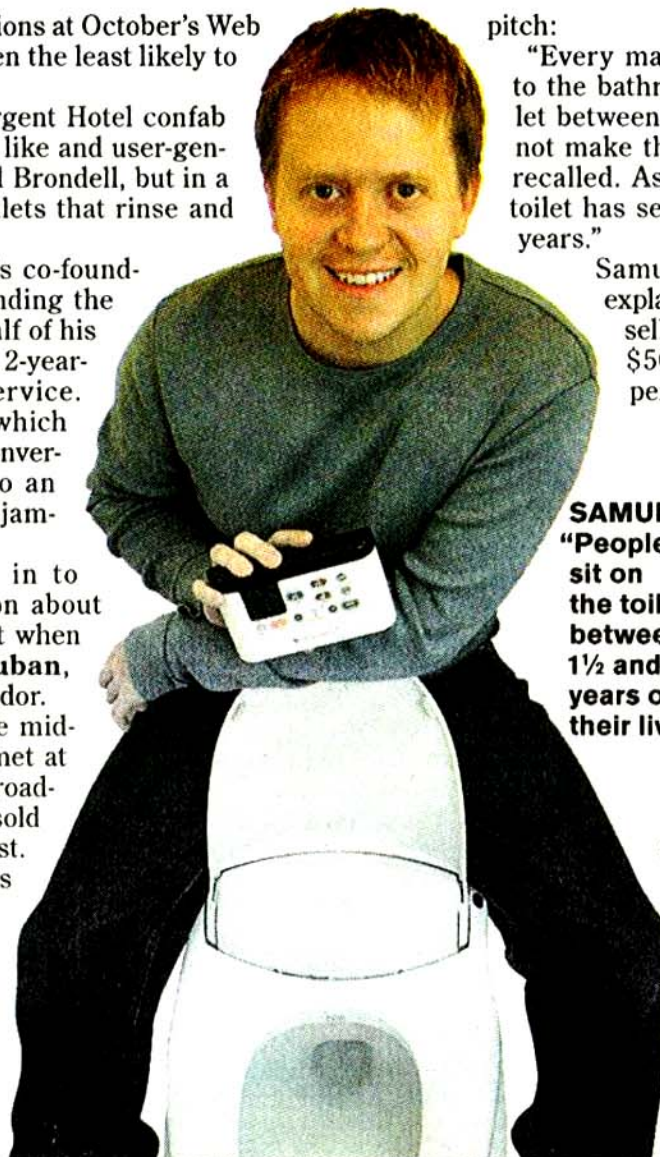
"I have always been interested in innovative and cutting edge-technologies coupled with a large market opportunity," Cuban said in a statement.

Large market indeed.

"There are 220 million toilets in the U.S. and little to no product awareness," Samuel said. "And our product is awesome."

Brondell will use its fresh cash to hire new employees, expand its distribution and marketing efforts and develop new products.

SAMUEL:
"People sit on the toilet between 1½ and 2½ years of their lives."



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