

High-Tech Investor Cuban Gives Toilet-Seat Maker \$1.3 Million

By ROBERT A. GUTH



Privy Equity: The Swash toilets have heated seats, an air dryer and other high-tech features run by a remote control (shown on wall).

SAN FRANCISCO—Mark Cuban, the billionaire technology entrepreneur and owner of the Dallas Mavericks basketball team, is investing in a maker of high-tech toilet seats.

Mr. Cuban will lead a \$1.3 million investment round in **Brondell Inc.**, a San Francisco start-up company. Founded in 2003, Brondell is attempting to attract more consumers to an idea widely accepted in Japan but that hasn't caught on in America: heated toilet seats that use warm water to clean their users.

The outspoken investor will join Brondell's advisory board and said that he expects to help the company in sales and marketing. "There is certainly no shortage of opportunities," Mr. Cuban said in an email interview.

The Brondell seats operate much like bidets, the bathroom fixture popular in Europe, but can be mounted on traditional toilets. Under the brand-name Swash, the heated seats use a retractable wand to clean with warm water. One model can be operated by a remote control and includes a warm-air dryer.

The investment brings together two entrepreneurs who profited from the late-1990s technology-stock boom before it went bust. Mr. Cuban built an Internet company called Broadcast.com that he sold to Yahoo Inc. in 1999 for \$5.7 billion. The following year Mr. Cuban bought the Dallas Mavericks National Basketball Association team and in 2003 bought the Landmark Theaters chain.

Mr. Cuban also co-owns HDNet, a high-definition television cable and satellite broadcaster.

Brondell was co-founded by David Samuel, an entrepreneur who sold his Internet company, Spinner.com, to Time Warner Inc.'s America Online unit in 1999 for \$320 million. Later Mr.

Samuel co-founded Grouper.com, an online media company.

In building Brondell, Mr. Samuel has tried to tap his technology connections to promote the product. Earlier this year, he gave free versions of the Swash to 100 Silicon Valley luminaries. The products, which start at \$429, are sold through Bed Bath & Beyond Inc. and Home Depot Inc.'s online unit, among other retailers.

Mr. Cuban said that he sees a market for the seats in new-home construction.

"The competition for sales among new homes is so intense right now, there is a great opportunity to get the products designed into new homes as a differentiation," he said.

Mr. Cuban noted his past experience in consumer marketing and introducing new products. "People tend to approach technology the same way, whether it's in front of them, or behind them," he quipped.



Mark Cuban

What's News—

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Business and Finance

■ **Pfizer** is raising its quarterly dividend 26%, in a move to appease investors who are restless over the drug maker's stock price.

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■ **Tech entrepreneur Mark Cuban** is investing in Brondell, a start-up maker of high-tech toilet seats.

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—Markets—

Stocks: NYSE vol. 1,405,574,980 shares, Nasdaq vol. 1,627,125,779. DJ industrials 10767.77, ▼ -10.81; Nasdaq composite 2260.95, ▲ +4.22; S&P 500 index 1260.43, ▲ +1.06.

Bonds (4 p.m.): 10-yr Treasury ▼ -6/32, yld 4.557%; 30-yr Treasury ▼ -7/32, yld 4.749%.

Dollar: 119.72 yen, -0.92; euro \$1.1952, +1.35 cents against the dollar.

Commodities: Oil futures \$61.30 a barrel, ▲ +\$1.91; Gold (Comex) \$528.40 per troy ounce, ▲ +1.40; DJ-AIG Commodity 178.107, ▲ +2.816.

VENTURE CAPITAL

Mark Cuban, Flush With Cash



The tech entrepreneur invests in toilets (very high-tech ones). Page C3