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RETAIL NOTEBOOK

CES success earning Canton firm a rep

By Keith Griffin

kgriffin@HartfordBusiness.com

Today

This time last year, iDevices, a Canton company, was promoting its iGrill at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. It would leave the show with Bluetooth.org's 6th annual Best of CES 2011 Award as Innovator of the Year.

The iGrill, which had seen sales of \$200,000 in December 2010, would absolutely explode after CES and iDevices would end the year with gross revenue of \$6 million and sales of 45,000 iGrills.

So, it's no wonder that iDevices was back in Vegas with an even bigger presence, including a Maxim Magazine "Hometown Hottie" Mayra Tinajero as its booth babe. Its space last year was six feet by eight feet. The booth this year grew more than eight times in square footage to 20 feet by 20 feet. About \$100,000 was spent setting up the booth in the prime iLounge area of the show, which highlights products targeted towards Apple users.

This year's hot device at CES in terms of retail appeal would have to be its iShower (and not just because the booth babe was wearing a towel to promote it). The iShower is waterproof, naturally, and streams music via Bluetooth from up to five devices

What could be the company's biggest advancement in 2012 is Bluetooth Low Energy that is being developed in conjunction with Texas Instruments. Christopher Allen, iDevices' CEO, described it as "pushing the envelope" when it comes to energy conservation for the chip that runs Bluetooth. "You'll see these being embedded in every smart phone," he added, further explaining that Bluetooth Low Energy will be used to control home appliances because its best application is for



Christopher Allen, CEO of iDevices in Canton, increased his presence at CES after last year's success of the iGrill.

occasional use and not constant demand like one would find in a Bluetooth headset for example.

Its Bluetooth low energy chip will prove popular, Allen said, because it already has FCC approval for use and a range of 200 feet for its signal. “Nobody gets that with a Bluetooth,” he claimed.

iDevices is moving beyond the strict product development that helped launch it to retail stardom in 2011. Now it’s putting its Bluetooth technology and app development business to work with other company’s products.

“We’re taking [other’s] products and making them app enabled,” Allen said during the opening moments of the 2012 International Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas.

One example is iDevice’s partnership with Targus, maker of top-selling laptop computer cases and accessories. The two companies have formed a partnership for the design, development and distribution of the iNotebook — a new device that allows iPad users to wirelessly transfer what they write on paper directly to their iPad. It requires a special stylus but not special paper as most other similar writing devices do. The iNotebook will be available in June at an MSRP of \$149.99.

Allen said his company is profitable. In August, it took venture capital funding to expand its research and development.

Connecticut Innovations (CI), the state’s quasi-public authority responsible for technology investing and innovation development, announced in late October that it committed \$150,000 in financing to iDevices through its Pre-Seed Fund. The company has secured matching funds, as required under the program, from several investors.

That seed money is going to help iDevices continue its employment growth. What had been a company of two in December 2010 grew in 2011 to nine employees. By the end of this year its employment rolls should hit 25 with the addition of app developers and software engineers.

Allen isn’t concerned about attracting talent to the Farmington Valley from Silicon Valley. “People are willing to move to a good opportunity,” he said. “They want a company with substantial growth in front of it.”

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Reselling is the future

A new study finds that woman buyers aren't so much interested in returning items but in reselling them. A recent study finds that 75 percent of women think about resale value when shopping, up 10 percent from six months ago. The study, from Women at NBCU, a division of NBCUniversal Entertainment & Digital Networks and Integrated Media, also found that 76 percent of the 2,000 women it surveyed report that they are buying and selling products either at online auction sites or sites where people buy directly from other consumers.

One-third of those surveyed say that sites like eBay (women's third-most-visited site) and Groupon (women's seventh-most-frequented site) have given consumers as much control as brands in setting the prices of products. And 22 percent think that within 10 years, the majority of purchases will be made between consumers, rather than between consumers and brands, according to a story posted at Marketing Daily.

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Macy's works customer loyalty

Macy's, which has numerous stores throughout Connecticut, does business with 70 percent of all U.S. households annually. That's the claim made by Macys CMO Peter Sachse at a session entitled "Customer Loyalty is Not a Tactic But a Way of Doing Business: An Inside Look at Macy's Holistic Customer Journey" at the National Retail Federation's "Big Show" in New York City last week. Sachse said, "We don't need new customers. We need to keep the ones we have and get more out of them."