



Pictured: Keith Sturch (left) of Splashplay with Rayhan Abdulmughnee, of the National B2B Centre, and Kate Jerney, business co-ordinator for Vin Technology Services.



Web helps Midlands man make a splash

Birmingham based Splashplay was set up by frustrated guitarist Keith Sturch in 2005 with the intention of making the early stages of guitar playing easier and more enjoyable.

The 35-year-old came up with his idea for a play-by-lights device for beginner guitarists when first attempting to play the instrument himself and becoming irritated with the difficult nature of learning chord patterns.

He said: "I sat down and tried to learn my favourite Eric Clapton songs but the tedious and drawn-out process of learning tablature made it very frustrating."

Keith, from Wolverhampton, developed the idea of a 'dance-mat for your guitar' further after being inspired by the popular console game Guitar Hero, in which gamers simulate playing the guitar by pressing a series of buttons on a games controller shaped like the instrument.

The Splashplay invention works by showing guitarists where to put their fingers to play certain notes using a specially developed light panel.

The light panel is made from thin electro-luminescent material and wraps

around the top five frets of a conventional guitar.

Players can then download videos or MP3s of their favourite songs to a Bluetooth-enabled Splashpod or phone which communicates with the light panel and shows the user how to play along.

Support

In order to get his idea off the ground Keith enlisted the help of the National B2B Centre.

The Centre helped to put Keith in touch with several other West Midlands support organisations, including the Manufacturing Advisory Service, Vin Technologies at Birmingham University and Coventry University's Design Hub, who helped him develop the product and company image.

Keith said: "Aside from helping me to produce the first versions of the product the Centre provided invaluable technical advice and support.

"The other organisations they put me in touch with were really helpful and very supportive.

"Rayhan Abdulmughnee and the other guys from the B2B Centre were a huge

help. They did a lot of work with the website and gave me some really good advice."

Results

As a result of the contacts Keith had built up he was able to produce a prototype of the Splashplay device and entered it into the Google Android Developer Challenge.

The device was one of 1,900 applications submitted to Google from around the globe to be considered for their new Android phone, which is currently in development.

Splashplay proved such a hit with Google that they included the device in the final 50 shortlist of potential applications for the Android phone before they removed Bluetooth technology from on the soon-to-be-launched hi-tech gadget.

The success of the application in the challenge has created a lot of interest around the product and Keith hopes to take advantage of that as soon as possible.

"It was obviously a fantastic compliment to make the final 50 shortlist for the Google Android phone and as a result of the publicity from that we have had several enquiries from retailers.

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"There has been a lot of interest. The Guitar Hero game grossed \$1 billion in its first 26 months because it made guitar playing simple and fun so if Splashplay can tap into that revenue stream that would be great."

The Future

Splashplay is initially being developed for the guitar but there is potential to transfer the concept to other instruments.

Keith also hopes to generate further interest through the company website www.splashplay.mobi with the ultimate aim of launching the product on a global scale.

Keith said: "I will continue to develop Splashplay and put the final touches to the software.

"Hopefully through the interest provided by the Google challenge and the website we can get a few letters of intent and get the product out there as soon as possible."

Rayhan Abdulmughnee, of the National B2B Centre – the e-business centre of excellence for the West Midlands, said: "Splashplay is an extremely technology and software-oriented concept that

many people would shy away from due to its complex nature.

"We aimed to point Keith in the direction of the experts who could help with the technical aspects of developing Splashplay as well as providing expert advice and support of our own.

"The success of the company so far proves that people should not be put off pursuing an idea because they feel daunted by the technical aspects of it.

"There are organisations out there, like us, who can help make these ideas a reality."

Further Information

Can you use mobile technology to promote your business more effectively? Do you have a need to track people or products more effectively? Do you need to capture data from field staff such as sales people or engineers more quickly or more accurately?

If you would like advice on how mobile technology can improve the bottom line for your business then contact the National B2B Centre using the details below.

Can you use mobile technology innovatively?

- Mobile marketing enables businesses to communicate with their customer, wherever they are and describes when a company sends promotions about their products, services, competitions, or offers, directly to recipients mobile phones.

To send mobile marketing messages via SMS (text message) the recipient must opt-in, either by agreeing to receive text messages or by providing your organisation with their mobile phone number.

Bluetooth marketing is also known as 'local proximity marketing' because it enables the sender to send messages to people within a certain radius, via their mobile phones (recipients must accept before viewing), for example, retailers can use bluetooth to entice passers by to visit their shop.

- RFID can accurately track and/or measure a wide range of information. Apart from traditional uses (e.g. temperature, humidity, time, etc), innovative companies are embedding RFID chips in luggage at airport to decrease lost baggage. Event management companies are RFID tagging tickets to reduce time spent in line by concert goers.
- Being able to access real time data, such as inventory levels, product specifications, and client data, helps staff in the field (such as sales and service teams) view and enter data into the company system via a mobile device.

Instant information access by field personnel to the business management system frees them up to make more sales calls and attend to more customers.



The National B2B Centre

Helping growing businesses make smart e-business decisions

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