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## Brothers take aim at sport hunting market

Presented by



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Brian Yppercie Photo

The Canadian Youth Business Foundation provides startup financing, mentoring and online resources to entrepreneurs aged 18 to 34. In a regular series, the Financial Post features CYBF alumni who discuss the hurdles faced en route to success. This week Yan Gagnon talks about how he and his brother, Sebastien, gained confidence and, ultimately, sales through advice provided by their mentor.

Jean-Guy Furois doesn't pull any punches about how to make sales: Find the biggest trade show and make an appearance. Next, he says, go visit every person who attended the business's booth and be sure they buy the product.

However, entrepreneurs Yan and Sebastien Gagnon didn't have any money left to rent space or build a booth for their fledgling company, Mont-real-based G.G. Telecom, never mind travel around Quebec to woo potential customers.

"So I said, 'Okay, you don't have any money, so you sleep in the car, buy a loaf of bread and jar of peanut butter and eat that for a week, you're not going to die,' " Mr. Furois told the brothers. They did manage to raise money for a booth and after, it was Sebastien, the younger of the two, who set out with a shoestring budget to meet potential customers. "Sebastien went all over the province and when he came back, he had contracts and orders," Mr. Furois says. "He didn't know, but he had built a distribution network."

G.G. Telecom designs and manufactures security monitoring systems. Yan, an electrical engineer, came up with the device while designing a security system based on motion detection for a relative's cottage that didn't have electricity. Surprisingly, sales of the devices have taken off in the sport-hunting market, and now comprise 80% of the company's sales.

"We thought at first sport hunting was a smaller market than the security," Yan says. "Because we didn't have any experience, we started with that and thought if we missed our chance, we could go after the security market."

The sports trade show Mr. Furois encouraged them to attend in 2004 launched their product beyond their expectations. In preparation for the show, Yan says he and his brother "worked from 7 a.m. to midnight every day

for two weeks for the production, because we didn't have the money to hire any body to produce the cameras."

At the show, their product sold out. "Our plan had been to try selling these to some stores and to see how they would sell," Yan says, adding they would not have considered the trade show venue if not for Mr. Furois. Mr. Furois knew first-hand the effectiveness of trade shows; he founded Graphicor Ltd., a trade show booth display company from which he is now retired.

As for the brothers, their next stop was obvious, Mr. Furois says. That same year, he took them to Las Vegas for the Shooting, Hunting and Outdoor Trade show (SHOT). The rest is history: G.G. Telecom has achieved tremendous success for its size: With a staff of four, the company has its products in 200 stores throughout Canada. Within the coming year, however, Yan says the company is ramping up to make deals with distributors in the U.S. market, which will significantly bolster their business. "It's something like 90% of the total hunting market of North America," he says of the U.S. sport-hunting market.

Mr. Furois, who received CYBF's Outstanding Mentor Award earlier this year, is proud of his relationship with the Gagnons. "When I saw they weren't being aggressive enough, I told them off," he says. "They could have told me to shove off but they've always been very respectful."

Yan says, while he and his brother initially were reluctant to embrace their mentor's insights, they now recognize the value he has brought to their business.

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