

# Dragons' marketing power reaches beyond the den

Those who were rejected on CBC's *Dragon's Den* stick to the adage that any market exposure is good exposure

By Curt Cherewayko

When **Kerry Pollock**, owner of Vancouver-based fitness apparel design firm **Public Myth**, appeared on the entrepreneurial pitch show *Dragons' Den*, he didn't expect to get any cash out of the dragons, given the early stage of his company.

Rather, the May 2009 taping was largely a marketing exercise for the young entrepreneur, and he prepared for it as such, bringing with him to the show four young models who sported Public Myth's wares.

Despite the fact that Pollock ran into an unexpected grilling by Canadian fashion icon **Jeanne Beker** during the show – a grilling that largely left him in a negative light to viewers when the show aired last January – the appearance has helped business.

He and other entrepreneurs who have failed to woo the dragons are finding that the old adage, any exposure is good exposure, rings true.

And with that adage in mind, some entrepreneurs who make it to the den do so with no other intent than to market their company, product or service to a national audience.

"I went on there not necessarily trying to get money from them, because they are sharks, right – they try to take a good percentage of people's companies for very little," said Pollock.

Public Myth's brand is more recognizable now as a result of his appearance on the show.

"I still talk to people all the time that saw me on there."

But the largest benefit from his appearance has been the traffic directed to Public Myth's website from the *Dragons' Den* website.

**"A lot of people go on that show and they're in last chance saloon – they spent all their money, they're desperate and will pretty much take any deal"**

– Steve Chapman, co-founder, Virtual Outdoor Adventures

**Steve Chapman** also appeared in the den with little hope that he would convince the dragons to invest in his company, Vancouver-based **Virtual Outdoor Adventures** (VOA), which is developing a series of digital guidebooks for bikers, hikers and other nature lovers.

"A lot of people go on that show and they're in last chance saloon – they spent all their money, they're desperate and will pretty much take any deal," said Chapman.

"What people will walk out with is a steal for the

dragons. What you're really looking for if you're going on that show is the publicity and the connections that one of the dragons may have to help you get your product marketed and sold."

Chapman still uses his experience in the den as a conversation starter and as a lead-in to sales pitches.

He wants to include on VOA's packaging a reference to his appearance on the show, but has to clear trademark use with the CBC.

Coquitlam's **Wendy Armbruster Bell** recently pitched her business, **Snugabell Mom and Baby Gear**, which sells a mechanical breast pump for the fashion conscious and on-the-go mother.

She'll know in the coming months whether that taping makes it to air or not.

Like Pollock of Public Myth, she also took advantage of her potential air time on *Dragon's Den* by making a marketing splash during taping: she was accompanied on the show by a model who was fashioned after a '50s pin-up girl and wore a Snugabell breast pump.

**Brett Wilson**, the dragon who made his millions in oil and gas and real estate, told *BIV* in the spring that it can be a stressful thing to be on the wrong end of a grilling or rejection by the dragons.

"But giving [entrepreneurs] the access – because

its not always available – to half an hour in terms of support and ideas, that's invaluable," he said.

He noted that the *Dragon's Den* and, to a lesser extent, pitch forums like those hosted by angel investor networks, are inspiring backyard entrepreneurs to pursue their ideas.

"That's one of the key reasons I've stayed with the show – to help celebrate the entrepreneurial concepts that people come up with," said Wilson.

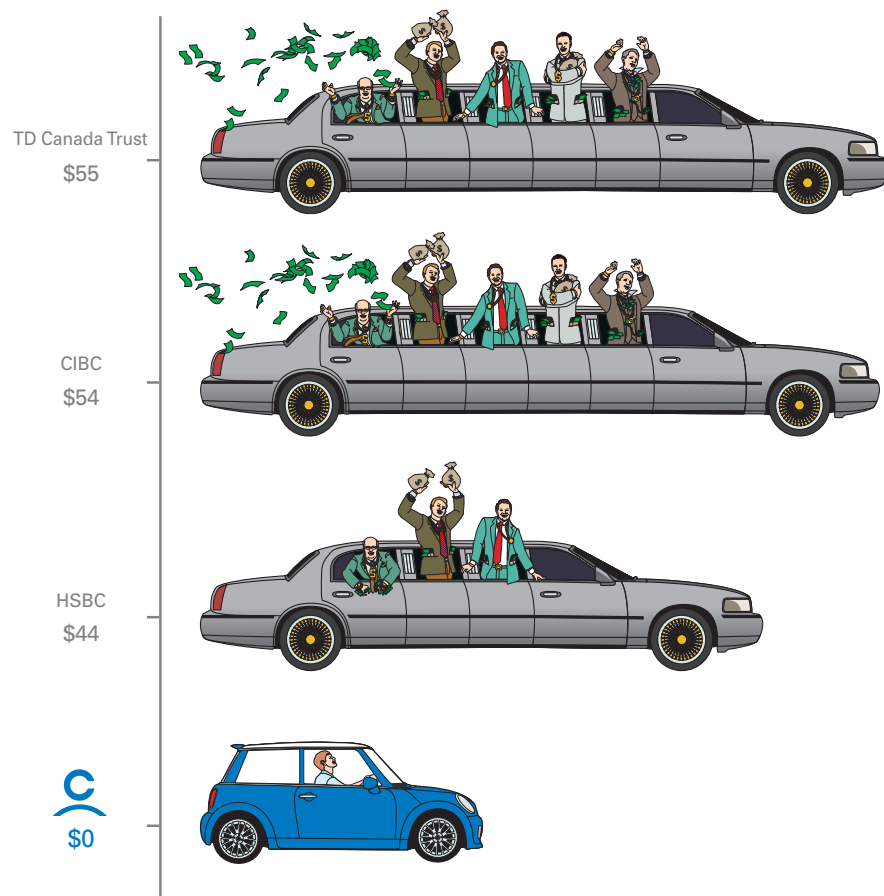
"We may take shots at some of these ideas, but I would never try and undermine the spirit and heart of the entrepreneur." ■

cgc@biv.com



Kerry Pollock, founder, Public Myth: the biggest benefit from his appearance on *Dragon's Den* has been a major boost in visitor traffic to his website

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from *Network*, 13 Meet Up groups.

"They all have something unique to offer," she said. "My sales have more than doubled, with quality people developing into deeply trusted business relationships."

The **Entrepreneurial Success Network** (ESN), founded by entrepreneur and business coach **Deborah Browne**, presents a unique networking and mentoring opportunity. With more than 300 members and 5,000 business owners through its doors annually, ESN holds monthly speed-networking meetings, boat cruises,

wine tours and signature trade shows, the next being on September 30 at the **River Rock Casino** with more than 80 exhibitors and 800 attendees expected.

"What makes us successful is providing a positive, fun, energized and inspired atmosphere where entrepreneurs from small, medium and large companies can take off their business armour and be themselves," said Browne. An individual membership is \$249 annually and comes with a fully deductible extended health plan.

New ESN member **Rachale Cavanagh**, the **Car Wrap Lady**, said she'll be

doing a full car wrap at the upcoming trade show.

"It's great exposure to demonstrate my product to 800 people," she said. "ESN has given me great support to succeed."

**Elliot Blitzer**, owner of **From the Beach Marketing**, said he's grown his business by 20% with ESN over the past four years.

"ESN is now building the corporate side with a sponsorship package for companies who want to get involved with small-to medium-sized business members," he said. "It's a great time to join on the up-curve of new people." ■

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