

UP & RUNNING

Giving winter the finger

A self-proclaimed techie introduces a glove for the texting generation

By Jackie Westelaken



According to the Canadian Wireless Telecommunications Association, between January and March of this year, over 12 billion text messages were transmitted in Canada. In March alone, 4.2 billion were sent, more than 135 million messages per day.

Lincoln McCardle knows all about texting. He lives and works in downtown London and takes evening classes at Western. He's always walking somewhere—to and from work or school—and while he's walking he's usually texting on his cell phone and listening to his iPod.

In the cold weather, however, he would often find himself debating about answering a call, sending a text or scrolling to a new song because he'd have to take off his gloves to do so. He recalls one particularly cold day last winter when he saw a young woman walk by—she was texting while wearing fingerless gloves.

"I'm a 40-year-old guy and couldn't see myself using fingerless gloves," McCardle reasons. But it did get him thinking about where he could find gloves that offered easy access to just the thumbs and forefingers.

McCardle scoured the Internet looking for such gloves, but turned up nothing. He also gave some thought to modifying a traditional pair of gloves to suit his purposes. Then it occurred to him that if he would like a pair of these gloves, there were probably others who would like them as well. And that's how his fledgling company, Twittens, was conceived.

"The first thing I came up with was the name," he recalls. "Twittens is a cross between Twitter and mittens." McCardle

Lincoln McCardle, founder of Twittens.
The gloves feature retractable thumb and index finger coverings

describes Twittens as "the gloves as the text generation." Designed with a pullback section on the forefingers and thumbs, Twittens make for easy texting and scrolling in cold winter weather.

After coming up with the concept, McCardle considered buying gloves in bulk and undertaking alterations himself. But after weighing his options, he decided he needed to find a manufacturer. So last January he began researching and emailing glove manufacturers, pitching his idea.

"I bet I sent about 100 emails and didn't hear anything back," McCardle says. "As weeks went by and I didn't hear from anyone, instead of thinking it wasn't a good idea I [became] afraid someone had taken it. I went for the trademark right away."

In mid-February, one of the glove manufacturers did call him back. McCardle says they loved the idea, and he met with them on several occasions to discuss the product. In the end, however, they decided the company wasn't suited to make them.

"I was kind of disappointed," says McCardle, "but they went on to say they knew of a company in Belleville who made safety gloves and that this company tended to think outside the box." McCardle gave the green light for the company to contact the Belleville firm, and good news followed—quickly.



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WHAT I'VE LEARNED

Lincoln McCardle

Founder, Twittens

- > The amount of time and effort that is involved in bringing something from an idea to the actual product is far greater than I had ever imagined. Things take time.
- > If you don't know, ask. Originally, I didn't want to bug Eric even when I was sitting at home in front of my computer with a hundred million questions in my head. People probably don't mind though, and you won't know until you ask. The worst they can do is say no. At the end of the day, most people won't mind.
- > You have to make sure you're happy with the product and it's something you can be proud of. The temptation was to say the first prototype was great, but bringing a business this far and seeing it through takes a lot more time than you realize, so you have to make absolutely sure you're happy with it.

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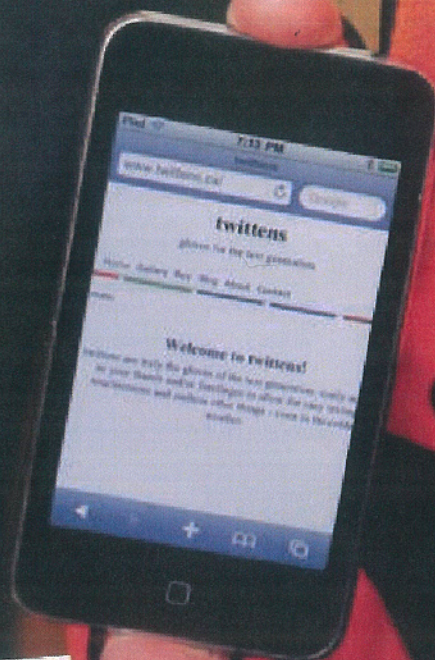
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"Less than 10 minutes later, Eric Lehtinen, executive vice president for Impacto Protective Products Inc., called me. Lehtinen said something like, 'I know I want a pair, and the people I've told about the gloves all want a pair, so it's clear to me you're on to something.'"

Several weeks later, McCardle had the first Twittens prototype on his hands. "They were rough, to say the least, but we were on the right track," he recalls. "It was pretty exciting. That was the first time I realized this was probably going to happen. I still only had one pair of gloves with a name—but they were sent to me by a manufacturer."

McCardle asked friends and family to try the Twittens prototype and let him know what they thought. He then compiled all of the feedback and sent it to Lehtinen in a five-page email. "It was important to tell him not only what I needed, but why. I sent him the feedback on April 20, and I received the second prototype back from him in mid-September. It was



five months later, but the two pairs he sent were 100% exactly what I wanted."

Originally, McCardle planned to be marketing Twittens and pitching to retailers during the summer months. But the five-month production delay forced him to re-think his business plan. "When I first sent him feedback, I thought I'd have something by June and then we could distribute for fall," McCardle says. "Around June and July, I was having a hard time walking the line, but Eric's advice was that it's more important to do things right than quickly, and that was good advice. If I had demanded something sooner, maybe the glove design would not be the right one."

Starting mid-November, Twittens, in a couple of different colours, will be available for sale online at twittens.ca, selling for \$15 per pair.

Part of McCardle's agreement with Impacto is that they will handle sales through their dealer channels as well. As far as seeing them stocked in retail stores, McCardle says it's possible, but not part of the immediate marketing strategy.

And though the product was created with the text generation in mind, McCardle says the gloves are also suited

to other users, including those interested in outdoor photography, fishing and hunting, and people who work in warehouses and outdoor retail.

According to McCardle, the venture has, thus far, required a very modest investment—he estimates spending less than \$2,000. "I wasn't willing to risk my family's livelihood, so it limited my approach and made me find a manufacturer who was willing to partner with me."

The bigger investment has been his time. Despite having weeks and months of down time in the project, McCardle figures he's spent about 100 hours on the business. If he calculates in sleepless nights, he says it's hundreds of hours. "It was not lost sleep in the bad sense, but making mental lists. It's the creative way, where you can't sleep because you're so excited. I never dreamed of being a Twittens production guy, and I'm not convinced this will be a full-time job for me, but that being said, overall I think this is a good product that will be useful to a lot of people."

"I am a techie guy," McCardle adds. "I love my technology, and it makes sense for me to be involved with it. This is a good fit for me, but if Impacto hadn't believed in Twittens, it would not be happening." ■

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