

Media splash launches company's success

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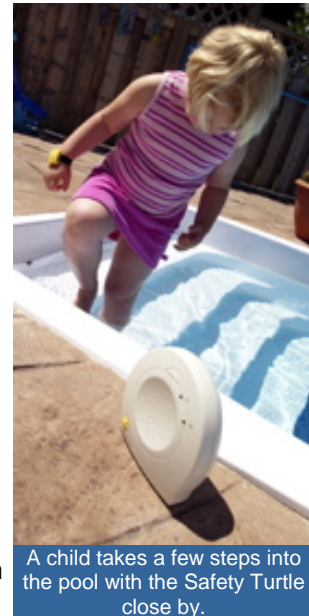
As Bob Lyons knows, good things come to those who wait.

The president of Ottawa's Terrapin Communications Inc. has lived and breathed this age-old axiom for several years, as he waited for the public to show widespread interest in his company's water alarm product.

The Safety Turtle, a wristband alarm device meant to prevent children from drowning, has been on the market for the past six years. But interest has only taken off in the past year, as illustrated by coverage from major American TV networks.

Last week, the device was featured on ABC's *The View*. A few weeks ago, it appeared on *Good Morning America*. Before that, it was part of a pool safety feature on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*.

"This has really done it for us," says Mr. Lyons of the appearances. "Once you get that kind of media attention, you start to get the attention of safety organizations."



A child takes a few steps into the pool with the Safety Turtle close by.

Getting such groups as the Safe Kids Coalition or the Lifesavings Society to endorse a product can be challenging, he says, adding lawyers who represent these groups are extremely cautious since a misguided endorsement of a failed product can result in lawsuits.

Typically, safety organizations wait until the product has been tested and approved, either formally or informally, by consumer groups or the public before jumping on the bandwagon, he says.

"To create a bandwagon for something like this was very difficult. But it was the same thing with car seatbelts. At first, they had a tough time getting them into cars and getting people to use them."

Rick Hega, executive director of the Lifesavings Society in Ottawa, says his organization is always interested in products designed to enhance pool or lake safety. The key, though, is to ensure the device complements other safety precautions, not replace them. For example, parents still need to supervise children as they normally would and pool owners need to fence in the entire swimming area.

No technology should ever be viewed as a tool to allow the parent or pool owner to let everything else slide, says Mr. Hega, adding this is something Terrapin recognizes.

Widespread interest in the Safety Turtle began with the launch of a new public relations strategy focusing strictly on the numbers, says Mr. Lyons.

A recent poll revealed only 19 per cent of Americans knew the number 1 cause of accidental death among children under five is drowning. Armed with such findings, Todd Appleman, president and founder of California-based E-Safety Alert, advised Terrapin on a new approach to product promotion focusing exclusively on the dissemination of statistical information and prevention methods.

Mr. Appleman set up a web site, www.esafetyalert.com, that presents information on water safety from various third parties, such as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. The site, dubbed "the official reseller" and "authorized dealer" of the Safety Turtle, "got all kinds of media attention" upon its launch, Mr. Lyons says.
