



THE EXPERTS: From left, panellists Richard Farleigh, Duncan Bannatyne, Deborah Meaden, Peter Jones and Theo Paphitis

Dragon slayer

Hi-tech teddy creator wins over TV judges

by Nigel McFarlane

BOLTON entrepreneur Imran Hakim has succeeded in winning over the infamous judges of television's *Dragon's Den*.

He won backing of £140,000 to develop an innovative new toy, the "iTeddy", which aims to both entertain and educate.

It is an interactive teddy bear which incorporates a personal media player — a mini computer screen — on its tummy.

The intention is that pre-school children learn as they play.

Mr Hakim, aged 29, from Astley Bridge, successfully sold his idea to the *Dragons' Den* famously tough panel on BBC2 last night.

The show sees nervous would-be entrepreneurs put their ideas to a panel comprising Duncan Bannatyne, Deborah Meaden, Richard Farleigh, Theo Paphitis and Peter Jones.



SUPERTEDES: Imran Hakim celebrates with some cuddly friends after his hi-tech teddy bears won backing from two TV Dragons

At the end of Mr Hakim's appearance, he had persuaded telecoms entrepreneur Peter Jones and Theo Paphitis, owner of the Rymans stationery chain, to agree to jointly take a 20 per cent share in the iTeddy enterprise in return for an investment of £70,000 each.

The iTeddy, which has a provisional retail price of about £55, is due to go on sale at high street outlets such as Woolworths and Argos from the end of March.

The hi-tech teddy, which is

assembled in Asia, will have a first production run of about 100,000.

Mr Hakim said: "I am delighted to have received investment from the *Dragons* — iTeddy is a new brand that provides products and services designed to make a child's first steps in today's hi-tech world educational, fun and less daunting.

"It is fantastic to have had the opportunity to work with such successful entrepreneurs. Through their backing, and a bank of contacts both in the UK and

across the globe, we're looking forward to achieving major success with iTeddy."

Keen to ensure that children get the most from iTeddy, Mr Hakim created iteddy.co.uk, enabling children to download cartoons and stories and take part in online tutorials for basic computer skills. Earlier in the year, iTeddy was put on show at the Toy Fair in London, gaining unprecedented interest.

Roland Earl, deputy director general of the British Toy and Hobby Association, which

organised the Toy Fair said: "The pre-school toy market is buoyant and we're delighted to see new companies such as iTeddy using Toy Fair as a platform to launch their businesses."

Having launched his business career at the age of 15, Mr Hakim graduated from UMIST in 2001 with a BSc in Optometry and Vision Science.

He now successfully runs a group of independent practices, as well as a shopfitting business and a computer sales business.