



iTeDDy launches from the Dragon's Den

Brian Claridge finds out how iTeDDy has become one of the hottest toys this Christmas with the financial backing of Marlow businessman, Peter Jones, and entrepreneur, Theo Paphitis.

WHO would have thought that a teddy bear could capture the attention of two of the country's most powerful businessmen, Peter Jones and Theo Paphitis? Apart from impressing the businessmen with his novel invention on BBC2's *Dragon's Den*, 29-year old entrepreneur Imran Hakim from Bolton succeeded in getting Peter and Theo to invest £140,000 in iTeDDy and to take a joint 20 per cent share in his venture.

Since then, there has been phenomenal interest in iTeDDy from all over the world, with large orders from major retailers worth millions. "We anticipate a multi-million pound turnover within the next three years," says Imran.

So where did the inspiration for iTeDDy come from? I asked the inventor at a London press conference and he explained: "From my one-year-old niece. I was wondering what to give Aaminah for her first birthday and came up with the idea of a teddy which children could interact with rather than just having something to cuddle.

"My aim is to bring the traditional teddy bear into the 21st century with a detachable personal media player in the bear's tummy which allows kids to play their favourite cartoons or games, hear music or even lis-

ten to their favourite bedtime story."

After checking that there was nothing like iTeDDy on the market, Imran set to work on a prototype.

He began by decapitating his niece's teddy and wired up some electronic components in its body. He also carried out some research on the toy, electronics and downloads industry to see what was available. Following this, he applied to go on the popular television series, *Dragon's Den*, with his invention.

After a nerve-racking three-minute pitch to the business experts in front of millions of television viewers, two of the panel, Peter Jones, a telecoms entrepreneur, and Theo Paphitis, a stationery chain boss, agreed to

back Imran's invention.

"It was the longest three minutes of my life," admits Imran. "The hardest part is to convince the experts of your product in front of the TV cameras and to be highly confident. You only have one shot at it and it's easy to crack under the pressure as a lot of contestants do."

What did Marlow businessman, Peter Jones, think of Imran's invention? "I was very impressed with Imran's pitch and see enormous potential for iTeDDy." Theo Paphitis was equally enthusiastic about the product.

It's been a long journey for Imran, from a rough sketch on an A4 sheet, to orders worth millions. He's a qualified optometrist with 18 practices across the north west. Having launched his business career at 15, he owns a number of IT companies and invests in struggling businesses to re-shape them.

iTeDDy is now an important part of Imran's life as he assists with the marketing and publicity of the product, as well as the manufacturing side. The product is currently only available at Argos as an exclusive arrangement and retails at £59.99.

■ For more information about iTeDDy and how to get your paws on one, see my Gadgets Corner (page 33).



Peter Jones, and above, Imran Hakim (left) with Theo Paphitis