

[Taking ‘comfortable seating’ to a whole new level](#)

Posted: March 8, 2016 | Author: [Dave Veale](#)



Shawn Léger and his partners have patented a better seating system for drivers and operators in the trucking and heavy equipment industry.

Shawn Léger has been helping people get into the right wheelchair for 15 years. He’s what you call a “seating specialist”.

He became a partner in Medi-Chair in Moncton eight years ago and worked closely with occupational therapists and physiotherapists to ensure comfort for his clients.

Shawn’s most recent and exciting foray into the startup business world has taken comfortable seating to a whole new level.

As president and CEO of Force 3 Innovations, Shawn and his partners have patented a better seating system for the drivers and operators of the trucking and heavy equipment industry.

This groundbreaking technology was meant to help increase seating tolerance and reduce back pain for truck drivers, but there have been even more unexpected benefits discovered through recent testing, along with a clear opportunity to change the trucking industry.

Voted one of Atlantic Canada’s top 15 entrepreneurs in 2011, Shawn was very generous with sharing his time and experiences when I spoke to him about his remarkable new product. We discussed Shawn’s startup business journey and going to market for the first time, including all the bumps along the way.

I began my conversation with Shawn by asking him how his new company, Force 3 Innovation, was born. I had a hunch there was an interesting back story.

A: Force 3 Innovation was born out of supporting people who need wheelchairs. People get in their wheelchair early in the morning and get out at night so, from the wheelchair industry perspective, we came up with a concept of how to help people sit for a prolonged period of time. We took some of the technology from one industry and put it into this space. We did what we call a cross-industry.

Q: What do you mean by “cross-industry”?

A: We targeted the trucking industry first, because we knew people spend long hours in a bouncy, rough-road vehicle. We started looking at what they had for seats and found that there was a lot of technology in the suspension but very little in how your pelvis is positioned and how you’re supported in the seat, which leads to bad posture. We took some of the technology from the wheelchair industry, put a patent around it, and now we’re trying to commercialize it.

Q: How did you get started with your product?

A: Our first prototype was this clunky office chair that we stripped apart. We decided to add panels to control the pelvis. We made sure that we could control the pelvis and put it in a neutral position – when you do that it just lines everything up. It allows you to sit longer in a better position. We patented a way to be able to control the pelvis for different sizes of people, from 100 to 400 pounds. Nobody else is doing this so far.

Q: How does that all fit together, from generating an idea to actually entering the marketplace?

A: It's not very simple. I don't know if there's a proper way to do it. We probably didn't do it the best way. We just came up with an idea and the first thing we did was validate it. Are we really solving an issue or problem? We needed to prove it.

Q: How did you validate it initially?

A: We brought our idea to occupational therapists. We were already in the field so it was easy to find some validation there for what we were doing. Then we needed to find a market that had a big pain. In the trucking industry people drive a lot of hours. We also had a few drivers stopping by our shop asking for cushions that could be controlled, to put on an existing seat. We didn't really have anything that was made for them but we tried to accommodate them as much as we could. We started tearing apart truck seats that people are buying now to see what kind of technology they're using. That's when we realized there's very little technology there. So we decided to move forward into the market.

Q: What happened next?

A: We formed a company, applied for startup funds, put a little bit of cash into it to cover some of the costs and decided to build a prototype. We brought the prototype to three universities to compare against other seats to see if it was better. We just recently got the tests back from those universities and it shows that there is cognitive difference here that no other seats have. That's the validation part.

Q: You had your validation, so what was the next step?

A: Once the idea was validated, we applied for a patent – we did a patent-pending first to protect it. We're patented in North America and we have until June to decide if we're going to patent it worldwide, which is probably going to happen.

Q: How have you been funding your efforts?

A: We've been doing this part time – we still have our full-time jobs. We have very low overhead and we're running as lean as we can to go as far as we can. There are all kinds of grants available if you have a project that makes sense. Now, to move into the next level, we are probably going to be a group partnership with manufacturers or key partners to bring in a little bit more cash so we can bring it to market and actually start selling it.

Q: You've been at it for almost three years, what keeps you going?

A: That's a very good question. There are ups and downs. What really keeps us going is belief in what we are doing and knowing that we can make a difference out there.

Q: If you were to give advice about bringing a product to market, based on your learning in the last three years, what would it be?

A: There are three key things that need to line up in order to move forward. First, research the market. Second, find the resources that you'll need. If you are an inventor, you'll need to find a business skill set to make it to the next level. You may need a partner or two. Third, go out there and share your story. Don't be afraid. If you don't share it and show it to people, how are you going to know it's a good idea?

Q: I understand that your research had some surprisingly positive results?

A: We knew we had a seat that could probably prolong seating time, a seat that could probably lower some back pain or prevent back pain. What we didn't know was that if you're sitting with better posture, you're actually going to be alert longer, which is a big claim to have. Nobody else that we know of can claim that, by sitting in our seat versus another seat, you're more awake. Obviously this is very important if you're driving a truck or you're operating a heavy machine. You reduce the risk of accidents.

Dave Veale is a business and leadership coach and founder of Vision Coaching Inc. in Saint John. Email Dave at Dave@VisionCoachingInc.com or follow him on twitter [@dave_veale](https://twitter.com/dave_veale).