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Media-savvy G-Form YouTube hit Firm's protective padding making inroads in athletic, electronic markets

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COMPANY PROFILE

G-Form

OWNERS: Private ownership group includes senior management team

TYPE OF BUSINESS: Developer and manufacturer of athletic and electronic protective gear

LOCATION: 1 Davol Square, Providence

EMPLOYEES: 17

YEAR ESTABLISHED: 2010

ANNUAL SALES: WND

Be careful where you leave your iPad at G-Form's Davol Square Providence office.

The maker of "extreme" athletic and electronic, protective equipment, known for pounding the delicate tablets with bowling balls and dropping them from planes, is always looking for novel and ever-more-elaborate ways to prove how much punishment its products can take.

"The torture test implies that if it can sustain a crash from 1,300 feet, then it can definitely sustain everyday use," said G-Form President Danny Warshay, referring to a recent stunt where two iPad's clad in G-Form sleeves emerged unscathed after being dropped by skydivers. "We have done more boring videos that demonstrate the efficacy of the product, but people like to see things dropped and smashed."

Since the company's founding in the fall of 2010, G-Form's ability to mix new-media savvy with old-school publicity stunts has brought viral interest in what it's doing, or at least what it's going to try to destroy next.

Now G-Form, which started out making equipment for cyclists before moving to consumer electronics, is turning its hardening-upon-impact technology to military gear.

"We're growing extremely rapidly," said Warshay, who declined to discuss annual sales figures. "We now have a network of 25 distributors who are selling throughout the world."

The technology at the heart of G-Form's sleeves and pads is a chemical with "non-Newtonian" properties that make it soft and pliable until it receives a sudden impact, at which

point it instantly hardens.

G-Form founders, who also work at PolyWorks Inc. in North Smithfield, a company that specializes in using polymers and gels, realized they were able to work with the material in a number of interesting ways.

"The chemical had been used in industrial applications for years, but they were able to mold this particular material in a way that had never been done before – that was the genesis of it," Warshay said.

Company founders with a mutual interest in cycling, including CEO Daniel Wyner, an inventor who had worked with textiles for NASA, got together with plans for making padding for bicycle seats.

They soon realized that the material might best be utilized for collision protection and began making a range of equipment, including elbow, knee, shin, foot and seat pads.

From there, the company crossed over into personal electronics, giving it a unique link to both markets.

"We didn't know there was a logical tie between consumer electronics and sports, but people think if it can protect your elbow or knee, so much better for it to protect my laptop," Warshay said.

In addition to iPads, G-Form's range of sleeves and folding, protective cases can fit laptops, smart-



PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

GEARED UP: Danny Warshay is president of G-Form, a maker of "extreme" athletic- and electronic-protection equipment. The company started out making equipment for cyclists but is now getting into military gear.

phones and e-readers.

G-Form's military division, the newest part of the company, is looking to provide pads similar to their athletic gear to help soldiers endure the physical demands of combat other than taking incoming fire. At this point the pads are not designed to stop bullets, Warshay said.

With an eye toward future military opportunities, G-Form recently hired a former teacher at the Naval War College in Newport and sources its materials domestically, a requirement for defense contracts. The products are cut and sewn at a factory in Fall River.

"We estimate we are responsible for 100 jobs related to what we do," Warshay said.

Although knowledgeable in fields from chemistry and entrepreneurship to endurance sports, G-Form's founding team does not claim expertise in social-media marketing.

For the viral video presence that has made Vice President of Innovation Thomas Cafaro an iPad-tossing,

YouTube star, Warshay credits a couple of recent hires and Brown University graduates for realizing the potential to grab attention on the Web.

The company's first video, in which Cafaro drops a bowling ball on an iPad protected by a G-Form case and one by a conventional hard case, now seems relatively tame, although it gets quite a reaction when performed at live events.

From there, G-Form dropped a protected iPad from a 60-foot-high cherry-picker, then threw one out the window of a Porsche traveling 113 mph. When those tests failed to damage the tablet, they hired the skydivers.

While he wouldn't reveal what stunts G-Form is planning next, Warshay said the company will continue to try to find the most outrageous and eye-catching product tests it can think of.

"I think we are as extreme as anybody and we are looking to raise the bar further," Warshay said. ■