



The Huntsville Times

Grandma's need launches business

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MyHalo monitoring device draws positive response from families

Grandma was living alone in Huntsville. She needed her daughter to take care of her.

Sound familiar?

Chris Otto, now the CEO and president of Halo Monitoring, was aware of the facts about aging in America.

There were about 36 million people in the United States who were 65 years old or older. About 11 million of them were living by themselves.

One of them was his grandmother. His grandmother enjoyed her independence, but she needed the help of Otto's mother.

One day, as Otto was completing his master's thesis at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, he heard his mother discuss a lack of resources for the elderly.

Her words carried weight. Otto's other is a nurse at Huntsville Hospital for Women and Children.

Thus began the idea for what is now Halo Research, one of the city's top fledgling small businesses.

Halo Monitoring features MyHalo, a personal monitoring and emergency response system.

It's a strap, more or less, that's worn across the sternum. The strap has a transmitter that sends data on vitals - heart rate, temperature and activity level, among other things - to a wireless router.

Caregivers can access this information over the Web.

"The reaction has been overwhelmingly positive," Otto said. "Everyone we talk to - seniors, caregivers - say, 'I wish I knew about this when I was going through something like this.'"

Halo Research has received notice in The Los Angeles Times. Earlier this year, it was featured as one of the standout companies and technologies at World's Best Technologies Showcase in Arlington, Texas.

The WBT Showcase, held in late March, is considered the world's premier event to show undiscovered technologies.

MyHalo offers advanced fall detection and alerts without pushing a button.

A chest-strap transmitter detects most falls and automatically contacts a call center.

Otto says Halo's future plans include expansion in 2010. Currently, MyHalo is offered in Huntsville, Chicago and New Jersey.

Cost is \$65 per month, with the first month free. Otto says Halo is currently working with CASA to donate MyHalo to seniors who are unable to afford the cost.

Otto, 33, is a former design engineer for Lewis Innovative Technologies and Adtran.

Among his first major breaks came when he and Dr. Chirag Patel, a former coworker at Adtran and college classmate at UAH, compiled the initial two-page draft for a business plan for Halo.

The plan was featured at the Alabama Launchpad business plan competition and received second place. The company's prizes were \$50,000 cash and \$25,000 in services.

Since then, Halo has expanded to 13 employees.

"This was a nice weekend thing" until then, Otto said. "That allowed us to quit our day jobs. The big validation of what we were doing."

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