

# 'Never give up – you may be 5 feet from gold'

## Nuttall and pals flipped design into mobile success

Gordon Nuttall is currently president and CEO of a Fort Collins-based Colorado C-corporation now known as Couragent. In

2010, working as Rocky Mountain Ventures Co., he and his team released their first product, the Flip-Pal mobile scanner. The patented technology allows photos to be scanned in their albums or frames to create digital images that can be shared and preserved.



### WHAT'S WORKING

Brian Schwartz

Prior to this venture, Gordon worked as program manager at Hewlett-Packard for 32 years. Couragent creates patented solutions that are designed for simplicity.

**Q:** You completed your first product, the Flip-Pal, in just 9 months. How in the world did you do that?

**A:** We have a tremendously talented and experienced team that worked well with our supplier. It was the flawless

### Flip to the web

Read more about Gordon Nuttall and his team at [www.couragent.net](http://www.couragent.net) and the Flip-Pal mobile scanner at [www.flip-pal.com](http://www.flip-pal.com) or free of charge in the NCBR archives at [www.ncbr.com](http://www.ncbr.com).

execution on the first design that allowed us to launch just 9 months after winning the Colorado Inventors Showcase Consumer Product of 2009 award. Thanks to new Web 2.0 technologies, we were able to offer our product directly to consumers quickly, at a low cost.

**Q:** What have been some of the highlights of your venture?

**A:** We have much to be thankful for at Couragent, but one thing that stands out was getting on the Home Shopping Network and selling out. The team was cheering as we watched the show together. I hear a lot of companies work years to get a shot with HSN. After the initial hard legwork by our sales manager, the product sold itself to the HSN execs. Actually, there were two groups at HSN who both wanted to host us. That show was just one month from the start of Flip-Pal shipments in October.

Another highlight is being featured as a Second Act in Money magazine.

**Q:** Tell me about your initial funding efforts.

**A:** Initially, we pursued angel funding. It was 2008 and a horrible time to be out trying to raise funding for a new startup. So instead of going after a few big investors, we put our energy into finding many small investors using private placements. It was more work, but we raised \$342,000 in just over 12 months from 26 private investors in Northern Colorado.

**Q:** So, today, with your new company, what are you most worried about in terms of risk?

**A:** Getting sufficient funding to do the right amount of marketing on current products, and then timing the development of new products. At this point in our evolution, our growth is limited mostly by available capital. I pay lots of attention to cash flow. The other area I pay attention to is maintaining the culture while growing rapidly. Our members are so jazzed about what they are doing; it's easy to lose work-life balance.

**Q:** How did you get to initially sell your first product?

**A:** We picked the scrapbooking community as our head bowling pin, and it has opened the door to other segments, like genealogy. Our main objective has been to hit that headpin dead on, and leverage the momentum. We go to a lot



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of events and that's where we find people who become affiliates, thought leaders, and resellers. Once we demo our Flip-Pal, customers come up with new and novel ways they would be able to use it and who they are going to tell about it, which shows the multiplier factor of the head pin.

**Q:** How do you personally gauge if Couragent is successful?

**A:** Guy Kawasaki's book, "Enhancement," has a section called "Do something DICEE" — Deep, Intelligent, Complete, Empowering, Elegant. When we attend events and see

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the great reaction from our customers, we know we are on the DICEE track of enriching lives. The testimonials and blogs we get are a great gauge of our success.

**Q:** What's behind the new name for your company?

**A:** One of the most impactful books I have read is "Courage: The Backbone of Leadership" by Gus Lee. That forms the foundation of who we are and how we behave as a company. Gus outlines three levels of values, and Couragent strives for that third level, which sets the character values of integrity and courage as the highest level. That's where our name comes from. Courage-nt is for our first value — Courage — and Cour Agent means that we are Agents of Heart.

From there, we then created our set of core values which I call, "C-I-C-I-C". C is for Courage, I is for Integrity, C is for Collaboration, I is for Innovation, and the final C is for Care.

The first value is courage. To make proper decisions, don't act out of fear. That doesn't mean that you don't feel

fear, or you ignore it, but courage is a decision to go past that fear. It also implies courageous communications.

Integrity and courage go hand-in-hand.

I call Collaboration our 'middle-C' value since it sets the reference point for the others, like the middle-C on a keyboard. Rather than competition, I've observed better results come from collaboration. It is very important to innovation, probably more than being smart. I know my ideas are oftentimes half-baked, but in our safe and open culture, ideas build on each other by listening and talking.

Finally, there is Care. For us, this is closely related to giving back, gratefulness and paying forward. At the end of every day when we can say we are living our character values, I figure that to be another gauge of success.

**Q:** Any final thoughts?

**A:** There were times where I was ready to give up, but the thought that gold was just five feet away kept us going one step at a time when there were no guarantees.

*Brian Schwartz is the founder of 50 Interviews Inc., and can be reached at [www.50interviews.com](http://www.50interviews.com).*