

# Company wants to make shopping easier

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ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

02/05/2010

The idea for **Aisle411** was born out of frustration. Specifically, it was the frustration of co-founder Nathan Pettyjohn, who found himself one day in October 2007 searching fruitlessly for a surge protector at a Lowe's home improvement store. After 20 minutes, he gave up and left. And started thinking.

His thoughts eventually gave birth to **Aisle411**, a small St. Louis start-up — the company launched last summer — that offers phone-based searches.

The idea is fairly simple. Shoppers at participating stores — among the company's first clients is Ace Hardware — call a toll-free number and tell the automated system what they're looking for. Using the store's own inventory system, **Aisle411** will tell the user where to find the product. The system can also be used to send, by text message, store coupons to the customer.

While Pettyjohn and co-founder Matthew Kulig are also looking at things like smart phone applications, they are a bit leery. While smart phone sales may be rising, they are still vastly outnumbered by traditional cell phones, Pettyjohn said. With that in mind, he said they're taking a cautious approach to fancy applications aimed at iPhones and the like.

"That's neat for a buzz factor," Pettyjohn said. "But is it really helping the majority of consumers? What we have is phone neutral."

## **Talk about the business and the response you are getting.**

**Aisle 411** allows consumers to locate items in a retail store down to the section of the aisle that it's in by using a phone and dialing an 800 number and using their voice to search for that item. We found that consumers like to hear landmarks within the aisle. So you might hear that the grommets are next to the hammer section in aisle 15, as opposed to 10 feet down and 5 shelves up. ...

The feedback has been very good. There's kind of this "wow" factor, like, I can't believe this even available. I can talk to my phone and it will tell me where to go.

With so much emphasis these days on texting and Internet-based searches, how does a voice-based search fit in?

Voice is really emerging right now. The technology has gotten very sophisticated just within the last one to two years. What you are seeing is that a lot of the technology we use now in terms of search is about convenience. Voice can take that to another level, especially when you are mobile.

The mobile phone is really driving a lot of that voice technology because people are out and about. They don't always have all their hands free ... so voice becomes a very convenient way to do that.

## **Are there certain industries or businesses that make the best fit for Aisle411?**

What consumers tell us is that large-format hardware stores and large-format discount retailers are their ideal places for creating value.

The bigger the store, and the less frequently they shop at the store, creates the most need for a customer to use our product.

## **Talk about the business that's lost by retailers because customers can't find what they are looking for.**

It really comes back to the time constraints on shoppers today. We're all living busier and busier lives. And we have this purchase intent when we walk into a store. But because stores have gotten bigger, there's more products on the shelves and we have less time, we go in and say, "What's my priority?" Shoppers, in essence, leave the store out of frustration or lack of time without buying everything.

## **Where does it go from here?**

Right now, it's about growing the company and continually staying ahead of the curve in terms of product development. We know that technology changes very quickly. As we've been in the marketplace, we're sure there are other people working on something similar in a unique way. So it's our job to stay ahead of that curve.