



NEW BRUNSWICK

ICER's INC.

ROSS HANSEN built his business with a cool invention that became a hot commodity almost overnight. He did, however, go through 26 prototypes before his product satisfied his own rigid specifications. When he decided the product was ready for patent, the market was ready to buy.

Icer's Inc. manufactures and wholesales a unique safety product known as ICER's (formerly SuperSoles). These durable, self-cleaning, rubber safety soles are equipped with metal studs and act as studded snow tires. Simple velcro straps allow customers to wear the soles over regular footwear, providing instant traction and stability on slippery winter surfaces.

Based in Fredericton, New Brunswick, the business is owned by Ross, his wife Diane, and partner Peter Baldwin. The idea for the soles actually came from Ross's own experience. He suffered a broken neck in a car accident in 1980 and went through years of exhausting rehabilitation. "People told me I'd never walk again, but I knew I would eventually. Over time, I progressed from a wheelchair to a walker, then to a cane. But I discovered I had a lot of difficulty walking on slippery snow or ice. I kept falling down and needed help to get up so, eventually, I just stopped going out in winter."

Since many people with disabilities experience the same difficulty and fear, Ross figured a product like this could make life a lot easier. The business also afforded him a chance to be his own boss in a situation that matched his needs and abilities.

"Basically, I had an idea, a lot of faith and \$15,000 in financing," he recalls about starting his business in 1989. "In our first year of business, we made \$70,000 in sales." Sales



Barrett and Mackay

figures now exceed \$400,000 annually in Canada alone, and more than \$1,000,000 world wide. This success results from addressing the needs of a wider market than previously identified. "We originally thought of seniors and people with disabilities," Ross adds. "But then we were approached

invention now also sells in Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Japan, England, Germany, Denmark, and Austria.

Apart from the usual difficulties with financing, Ross contended with equipment problems. In fact, there wasn't any actual equipment available since his product was a new inven-

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by Canada Post." The postal corporation ordered a pair for every letter carrier in the country (21,000 in total). They claim the product reduces letter carrier injuries and saves 3,500 days a year in lost time.

Icer's Inc. licenced a well-known American company to distribute its product in the United States, thus tapping into an even greater market. A second production plant was opened in Portland, Maine. Ross's simple

tion. They designed and modified machinery themselves.

Owning your own business is a huge responsibility. "You're always at it," he explains. "Sometimes leaving your work at the office is hard. At one point, I wore so many hats, it was hard to keep on top of everything. Now I'm able to delegate more often. This comes with the stability of your business."

WHERE TO REACH ROSS HANSEN

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