



By Rebecca Dibbelt

profile: marci andrews, age 35
nancy scott, age 36
jana sinclair, age 35

Friends create harmony in the health business.

INSIGHT: B.L.I.S INC, CALGARY, AB • www.healthpod.ca

Company: b.l.i.s Inc. **Industry:** Health records / journaling
Years in Business: 1 **Employees:** 3

Advice For Starting a Business: (Nancy)

1. Be persistent – sometimes it seems so far away.
2. Have great people around you who support and inspire.
3. See the big picture. Don't get wrapped up in minor details.
4. Have Fun.
5. Work Hard.

Most Difficult Part of Starting a Business:

Marci: Learning to be realistic with how long things take.

The Easiest Thing About Starting a Business: (Marci)

Finding resources and people to guide and mentor us. Professional resources such as AWE (Alberta Women Entrepreneurs) were so helpful in getting us started.

What Entrepreneurs Should Do To Promote Their Business:

Marci: Connect with people who will endorse your product.

She's not a mother yet... Marci Andrews has been too busy designing and launching a product that may save the sanity of thousands of parents.

Andrews, a University of Calgary graduate and born-and-bred Calgarian, is one of the brains behind an innovative new product that stores your child's vital health and medical information, from pre-natal right through school age. Her partners are Jana Sinclair and Nancy Scott, both moms. The trio is a formidable combination of determination, expertise and experience.

One Saturday morning three years ago, Andrews was enjoying her regular weekly breakfast with Sinclair and Scott. An engineer, Scott had put together a binder of health and medical information to help her cope with her son's chronic ear infections. It tweaked the interest of Sinclair, another mother in the group, as well as that of Andrews, who recognized a good idea when she saw one. Together the three women decided to explore the idea of bringing such a product to market.

They contributed \$30,000 seed money to manufacture the first run and produce marketing materials.

"It's critical to perform your due diligence if you've got an idea for a new product," counsels Andrews. "Talk to consumers; find out if and how your product is unique and what might give it the competitive advantage." Some three years later, HealthPod Baby - an all-in-one non-electronic professional guide in a zippered binder (easily transportable in a diaper bag, purse or suitcase) - is set to launch through Internet sales and at specialty baby stores.

The women have done their homework. First they conducted research to see if this product was already available - it wasn't. Then they consulted the end-user to determine its design. In addition, they enlisted the help of those whose jobs could be made easier by such a product - doctors.

"We went to health care professionals to help us design the most efficient product," explains Andrews.

The manufacturing component was perhaps the most lengthy part of the process, says Andrews. "Negotiation skills are critical in getting what consumers want, at a price they're willing to pay."

Perseverance is key. "We found you really have to work to keep the vision in front of you, and at times it's very frustrating. But dig in, keep at it and above all, maintain your enthusiasm. If you've done your homework, and it's a good product, you'll get there," says Andrews.

"Our company vision is to have a HealthPod Baby in the diaper bag of every parent in North America," she enthuses.

Andrews' belief in the product is based on a sound complement of education and experience. After graduating with a Bachelor of Commerce degree from the University of Calgary, Andrews signed on with Procter & Gamble in Vancouver, was transferred back to Calgary and led the re-launch of the Max Factor brand in Western Canada.

Eventually her success led her to operating her own sales and marketing company.

"For me, the creativity involved in marketing is a huge draw. The ability to influence the way people think about things and in turn improve their life is so much more appealing than just selling a product."

Andrews sees HealthPod Baby as a great opportunity to do something creative with close friends. "Exploring that and taking our friendship to a new level has been extremely exciting," she says. "Even if we had just ended up designing a prototype for ourselves and a few friends, the experience would have been enough."