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Doreen Dotto

A New Entrepreneur

- Inventor of uKloo and Founder of uKloo Kids Inc.

By Angela Wood

Photograph by Ron Wood | www.ukloo.com



We all know the saying "once a mom, always a mom" Doreen Dotto's boys are now grown up, but she has started a new business that grew out of

her "mom experiences" Doreen is the entrepreneur founder of uKloo Kids Inc., which launched mid-2010. The company's first product, uKloo, a learn-how-to-read game for young children, came on the market in December. Currently, uKloo is sold in twenty retail outlets across Canada. An aggressive marketing campaign aims to increase retail distribution significantly over the next few months.

Doreen's success to-date is the result of a solid business plan, a resourceful personality, and a heap of creativity. Previously, Doreen was the V.P. of Content Development at Inventive Women, an online resource for women who invent, and later Game Development at Inventive Kids. She met and interviewed many women who had invented new products and who had started businesses based on their inventions. She took what she learned from inventive women/kids and applied them to her own venture.

Doreen began to develop her business in 2009 after hearing several neighbourhood moms talk about the difficulties their children were having learning to read. More than a decade earlier, Doreen had invented a game to help her reluctant 7-year old learn how to read. Unlike traditional reading games that children played while stationary, Doreen's game took learning to read into the physical world. She made her game a treasure hunt, and combined solid teaching methodologies with play. This combination was particularly beneficial to her son, who was not happy sitting still while learning. The game was a hit with her two sons, and she was sure it would be with other kids. One of the first things Doreen did was take

an evening course in business development at the Toronto Business Development Centre. "The most beneficial advice I got was to do lots of research to determine if there was a market for my product," says Doreen. She created a short survey using SurveyMonkey, a free online service, which she then emailed to moms and teachers to see if there was interest in the type of game she was developing. The survey also asked questions about price point, and what motivated product purchase decisions. She checked out other reading games through store site visits and online searches. It was only when she was sure her product was unique and would attract sales did she move on to the next stage which was to develop a prototype and the game's brand.

Doreen has a huge advantage in these areas. She has an arts background, having graduated from the Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto and Concordia University in Montreal where she earned a Master of Fine Arts. Her husband is a retail store designer and was able to connect her with an exceptional package designer. Fortunately, for others who do not have connections in the design world, organizations such as Graphic Designers of Ontario can connect new business owners and product developers with designers. Once the prototype was completed, she hired a consultant that she found through LinkedIn to test it with a focus group representing potential customers. She also made many presentations to teachers and principals, tested the game with children, and often asked strangers on the street their opinions of the package design and the game's name.

Initially, readers miss-pronounced the name saying "uckloo" instead of "you-clue". By shifting the positioning and size of the letters, the problem was solved. She then began the trademark process in Canada and in the United States. In addition to using traditional marketing methods such as tradeshows, Doreen is using social media to broadcast information about uKloo. "I have posted two videos on YouTube that show how uKloo works. These videos have been extremely helpful in driving sales since they help parents visualize how the game will work with their kids," says Doreen. No doubt there will be a lot of satisfied parents in the future and plenty of kids who were struggling with learning to read. As one happy parent wrote to Doreen, "I get quite choked up when I reflect on how far my 5-year-old has come in the month we've been playing uKloo at home."