

# Business

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## SMELL OF SUCCESS

Moncton man mounts unique ad campaign for air freshener. / D3

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BUSINESS

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# The sweet smell of success

Moncton man takes his new air freshener on the road

By MICHELLE PORTER  
Special

This is Luc Jalbert's \$10-million dilemma: how can he get people to talk about the stink they leave in the bathroom?

The answer, he believes, could transform his kitchen-table air freshener company into a \$10-million success story, almost overnight.

But only if this 40-year-old entrepreneur from Moncton, N.B., can get people talking, that is.

His tool of choice: the toilet bowl. The location: the Montreal Grand Prix and Fashion Festival, Manhattan's Times Square or Toronto's Canada Day.

Equipped with free bottles of Just a Drop, Jalbert is spending June and July on a guerrilla marketing campaign asking people to sit on the toilet, while answering survey questions such as "How long before it's safe for someone to go into the bathroom after you?" and "Are you comfortable taking care of business in the washroom at work?"

Not a bad idea, said Shelley Rinehart, dean of business at the University of New Brunswick in Saint John.

"Marketing has always been about getting somebody's attention. Guerrilla marketing campaigns are just more efficient ways of doing that," she said.

Think about the increase in advertisements masked as personal blogs, or the number of funny advertisements people forward to their friends.

She links the rise in guerrilla marketing (also called viral marketing) to the new wave of small and entrepreneurial businesses that are starting up — all with tight budgets. Faced with global competition and increasingly sophisticated consumers, businesses are forced to be more creative if they want



Just 'a Drop creator Luc Jalbert, who is vice-president of of Prelam Enterprises based in Moncton, takes a seat in Manhattan's Times Square, as part of the Odour Voter campaign. The company has been showing up in various cities across Canada and the United States with its unusual campaign.

(ZACK SECKLER)

to get their message out, she said.

The key is to get people to do the advertising for you — by talking, e-mailing, writing or blogging about your product, or about the buzz generated by some antic or another. Like bringing a toilet to activities

In his day, Jalbert has tried to sell many things, from scooters to laminated plaques, but he never predicted that one day he would be selling a liquid odour neutralizer that people need to put in the toilet before setting their fannies on the seat.

Just a Drop is a product Jalbert discovered during a 2004 trip to China. He brought it home and asked his partner, Don Goguen, to give it a try.

"Just one drop in the toilet before you go," Jalbert explained. Goguen agreed to try the product, but not without scepticism. It was three weeks

before Goguen did try it, Jalbert says.

It wasn't long before the two were sitting at Jalbert's kitchen table, dreaming up brand names, logos and marketing schemes. If they could make the product as essential to bathroom etiquette as toilet paper, their future looked rosy indeed.

The company, Prelam Enterprises, has made about \$1 million a year for the last couple of years. While that's nothing to sneeze at, it's just a fraction of the advertising budgets of many of his competitors.

But how do you tell people you have to put a drop of this in before you have a bowel movement and it will smell great?

They tried the conventional approach first — television commercials. Though the commercials were funny (one featured an ostrich burying its head in the sand, as a voiceover

asks, "Is this what you do after your husband uses the bathroom?") they could not afford high-frequency exposure.

Post-commercial sales did go up — in some areas by more than 100 per cent. But that in-

crease wasn't significant enough to keep the product on Wal-Mart's shelves, or introduce it to other retail giants.

Usher in guerrilla tactics, viral marketing — and marketing company LexPR, hired by Jal-

bert's company.

"(Jalbert's) product set him against the giants like SC Johnson and Procter and Gamble. But he doesn't have the millions they have," explained LexPR's Sherry Lawlor. "The idea was to take a bit more of an alternative approach, something a bit edgier."

With the new marketing plan, the Internet became central to Jalbert's affordable campaign.

A website ([www.odourvoter.com](http://www.odourvoter.com)) invites people to fill out an off-the-wall survey and send an e-mail link to a friend. (The survey is the same one making the rounds with the toilet to Toronto on Canada Day.) A tongue-in-cheek commercial can be viewed again and again, all without the costs associated with television spots.

And people are having fun. "It's marketing that is supposed to be under the radar. You aren't supposed to realize you are being marketed to," Rinehart said.

It's working for Jalbert. Sales, he says, have increased exponentially.

Quebec saw a 2,830 per cent rise in sales after the April-May campaign, for example. (Jalbert couldn't afford to go nationwide, so he is campaigning in one region at a time). Nova Scotia saw a 1,382 per cent increase after the February-March campaign. Sales in New Brunswick, Newfoundland and P.E.I. rose by similar percentages after the guerrilla marketing campaign.

Jalbert expects sales in Ontario to rise even higher when the June-July campaign is over.