



Success Story: Kontrol Freek

Gaming Manufacturer Takes Kontrol of a Niche in the Market

In 2009, Ashish Mistry was already known as a serial entrepreneur. Having either founded and exited or been a part of a startup since he graduated from college, Mistry was looking for his next venture.

Around this same time, Mistry met his current business partner, Billy Harbert. The two believed there were opportunities for simple new products within small niche markets. They approached their third partner, PUSH product design, an industrial design firm to develop product ideas for potential capital investments. When the team discovered that the top problems amongst enthusiast gamers were precision and comfort, one of the designers ideated a product that addressed both issues at once. An improved analog thumbstick was designed that would attach to the native video game controller, increasing stick length to dramatically improve precision and reduce fatigue. Five years later, the original product – FPS Freek Classic, is still the top selling item among the 35+ variations that KontrolFreek now makes.

Situation

Wanting to ensure the business had the tools it needed to be successful, Mistry, now the CEO of KontrolFreek, decided to move the company from Birmingham to Atlanta to be a part of the Advanced Technology Development Center (ATDC) at Georgia Tech. To support technology startups focused on specific industry sectors, including manufacturing, life sciences/biotech, medical

Since launching KontrolFreek in 2008, with the help of ATDC, GaMEP, and Georgia Tech resources, Mistry and his team have:

- *Developed 35+ variations of their product.*
- *Grown the company to over a dozen employees.*
- *Expanded outside their online sales channel, recently launching into 1,000 Best Buy stores across the country – accounting for a 10 percent increase in the numbers of units sold in the first month.*



devices, mobility, and more, ATDC rents space to startups, in an area of midtown Atlanta coined Technology Square – where technology intersects with Georgia Tech campus to further connections and drive innovation. Having twice previously been an Entrepreneur in Residence (EIR) with ATDC, Mistry knew that the resources associated with ATDC would help propel the success of the company.

To further help in this effort, KontrolFreek applied to become an ATDC Select Company. Chosen through a rigorous selection process, ATDC Select includes a small group of startups whose products or services are considered industry changing, scalable, and supportive of ATDC’s mission of bringing economic value to Georgia.

»» Solution

Once KontrolFreek was accepted into ATDC Select, they were put in contact with another program located in Technology Square, the Georgia Manufacturing Extension Partnership (GaMEP). The GaMEP is a part of the same umbrella organization as ATDC, and provides funding and resources to expand ATDC’s reach to product-based manufacturers. The GaMEP also provides direct services and support to emergent and small manufacturers. Don Pital, growth services manager, and Bob Wray, project manager for the GaMEP, met with Mistry to discuss ways KontrolFreek needed to align to be manufacturing ready when it was time to expand their product base. Working closely together, the two programs were able to utilize their skill-sets in coaching, R&D, and connections to help KontrolFreek thrive.

In addition Mistry and his team continue to take advantage of resources associated with Georgia Tech. They have worked with the industrial design department, sponsoring a team of students to dedicate their time to creating iterations of existing product designs to continuously improve. KontrolFreek also uses Georgia Tech equipment to develop 3-D scans of products that they can test and tweak, saving them weeks of going back and forth between an outside manufacturer to perfect a product before its’ ready for market. In the near future, KontrolFreek will also be able to take advantage of a new Maker’s Space in Technology Square because of its association with ATDC and GaMEP. This space will allow them and other startups to get hands-on experience with different types of manufacturing equipment and create and refine prototypes.

By creating a market demand through a niche product, KontrolFreek has developed a loyal customer base. Due to this, they have been able to begin introducing new products to their catalog, including products designed specifically for those dedicated to sports gaming, graphically designed shields to protect controllers from dirt buildup, and bundle packages that include KontrolFreek products for multiple gaming systems. Recently, KontrolFreek began expanding their sales channels from online only to retail stores. As the company continues to grow and now employs more than 10 people, they are looking for other opportunities to fulfill needs within the gaming industry.

“By being located in Technology Square, KontrolFreek has access to both people and machines to create prototypes and constantly update designs. This allows us to quickly create full 3-D scans and continuously tweak the product until we feel it’s ready to be tested. Without these resources on site, it would take us weeks to accomplish the same thing we are able to do in a few hours.”

– Ashish Mistry, President and CEO

See what all the “Buzz” is about.

» Connect with the GaMEP



gamep@innovate.gatech.edu



404-385-0630

