

Executive Inc.: Nevoa President Ernest Cunningham is tackling Covid-19 with disinfecting robot (Video)

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Ernest Cunningham, co-founder and president of Tempe-based Nevoa Inc., understands Murphy's Law well, the adage that anything that can go wrong will go wrong.

“If you plan on something taking one year, it's going to take two,” he said. “So plan accordingly. Murphy's Law will come out.”

Cunningham, his father and two other co-founders started tech company Nevoa in 2009. But it wasn't until 2013 that Nevoa started focusing on the technology they

offer now — a whole-room disinfection system using an atomizing fogging process. It's been full steam ahead since — they hired engineers, outside consultants and started going through an Environmental Protection Agency process to safely fog a hospital room. The EPA process alone took two and a half years.

Nevoa began marketing the Nimbus robot, controlled via iPad, and Microburst Solution in late 2019. The hospital-grade disinfectant solution is 99.99% effective against coronavirus, the company says, as well as other deadly pathogens found in hospitals like MRSA and H1N1. The technology is aimed at eliminating any human error associated with regular cleaning.

The Covid-19 pandemic is creating a long-term opportunity for Nevoa to showcase its disinfecting robot and to help combat deadly pathogens



JIM POULIN | PHOENIX BUSINESS JOURNAL

Ernest Cunningham, president of Tempe-based Nevoa, with the company's room-disinfecting robot used in hospital settings.

across many types of health care organizations, Cunningham said.

Plus, he said Nevoa is already looking at other technologies that it can develop for markets outside of health care, like transportation, state correctional facilities and more.

Nevoa now has 20 to 25 investors with around \$7 million invested. Cunningham said he hopes Nevoa technology will be active in around 15 or 20 hospitals by the end of 2020.

You and your father founded Nevoa Inc. in 2009. What drove you to create the business? We were developing other technologies and through some collaborations with other people, we kind of kept talking about, "How do we take some of the technology and get involved in health care?" A lot of the people that have invested in the company and that are on the board come from health care backgrounds. And so our technology originally was developed for internal combustion engines, where we would fog or atomize catalysts into big diesel engines so that we could actually make them more efficient. But we knew there were other applications we could start using the technology for, and everybody that we were working with and was mentoring us, seemed to be from the health care background. So we kind of moved and shifted the company.

What are some projects you are currently working on? Our core focus is hospitals, so obviously we're looking at other verticals that come off of hospitals; maybe it's long-term health care, maybe it's dental facilities, maybe it's rehab facilities or clinics, outpatient surgery centers. Even though they're somewhat related to health care who have different needs. So as an example, a dental office might not have door barriers or full walls that you could enclose a room and seal it off and properly fog the room. So we're looking at other ways that we can actually have a different type of system or different type of technology that we could achieve that same level of disinfection in that type of environment versus say, a patient room in a hospital that's very easy to close off. Those are some of the things that we're really working on in the future that we're planning to be introducing probably in late 2021.

What have you learned throughout the years developing Nevoa as a company? Some lessons I've learned in our past from Nevoa is always find smarter people than yourself to bring into the mix because while you might

be an inventor or an entrepreneur, there's always things that you're not seeing because you have these kinds of blinders on. You're hyper-focused on your own project but might miss some of the hurdles or bumps in the road that you just don't see coming from the outside. Then always plan on things taking two to three times longer than you ever anticipated because they just will.

Other than family, what are you most thankful or grateful for? My health and my friendships. I cherish being healthy because it affects so many things in your life, especially when it comes to being productive at work and active in life. But, I'm probably even more grateful for my friendships. My friends span the globe and include people that I grew up with to people I have met along my life's journey. People have asked me how many close friends I could call tomorrow and invite to dinner and my answer is always, "How big is the hotel?" You can never have enough friends, and fortunately, building that network comes naturally to me. I am very, very lucky.

Ernest Cunningham

Title: President

Age: 54

Company: Nevoa Inc.

Number of employees: 11

Who was your mentor? My high school basketball coach, Don McCool, took a young skinny kid and taught him how to work extra hard every day, especially when people were not watching.

Your favorite way to relax? I absolutely love nature. So much so that my kids tease me and ask where I'll be watching the amazing sunset from today.

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