

Success can be measured in emotions

Barry Nelson is making a unique product for a unique audience, so it's only fair that he measures success in a unique way.

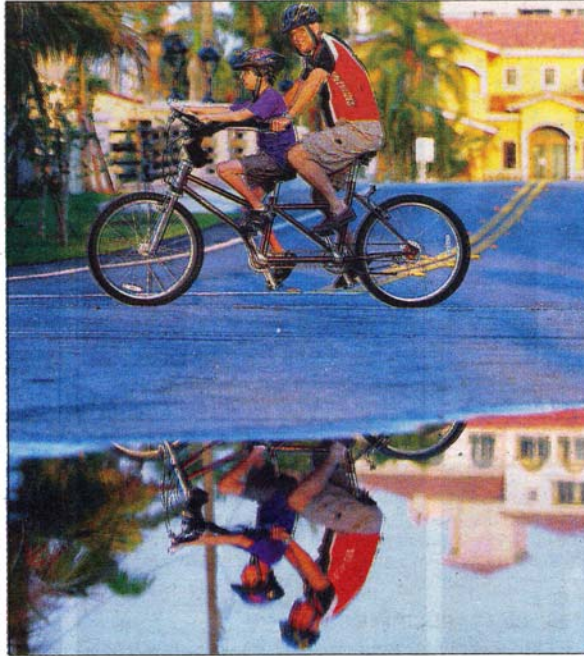
His company, Buddy Bike, makes an innovative tandem bicycle that lets the rear rider steer. The setup is particularly well-suited for parents who want to cycle with their special needs children but also need to keep a close eye on them (something that requires dangerous neck-craning and taking one's eyes off the road on a standard tandem cycle).

Since the Golden Beach resident started marketing the bikes last October, he has only sold 50 but he's rewarded in other ways.

"The people that are most appreciative of this are the parents of special needs children. . . . To see the smile of the parents and the child makes it all worthwhile," he said. "But so far success has been more emotional than financial."

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Nelson started Buddy Bike in 2003 after he took his autistic son, Jesse, now 11, on a spin on one of the unique cycles. The experience impressed him enough that he purchased the



CARL JUSTE/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

BONDING WHILE BIKING: Buddy Bike founder Barry Nelson rides a Buddy Bike with his autistic son, Jesse, 11.

patent and the remaining inventory of four bicycles for \$20,000. Then he ordered 100 more from Asia.

His business plan — which took third place in last year's Business Plan Challenge — originally pegged a retail price

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— BARRY NELSON,
founder of Buddy Bike

for the cycles at \$900 each. But cost over-runs on the manufacturing side and the price of insurance (which adds about \$100 to each bike), have edged their sale price up to \$1,295.

LOWER-PRICE MODEL

Nelson recognizes that's prohibitive for many, so he's pricing a single-speed cruiser, the Buddy Basic, which he expects will open doors to new markets.

"I'm hoping that we can cut \$100 to \$200 off the cost of the bike and that will enhance sales to bike rental companies," he said.

Rental shops are key to Nelson's marketing strategy. Because the cycles are pricey, customers often want to give them a test run before putting down the cash. But with just 100 cycles in production and no distribution network, South Florida is one of the few places where potential customers can test the bikes.

Nelson has also taken out

ads in specialty magazines and is promoting his website (www.buddybike.com).

And customers are responding. A public school in Alexandria, Va., recently ordered two bikes, and a cycle shop in Ontario has placed an order. Nelson also has donated a few to the National Alliance for Autism Research.

But every time a bike goes out the door, he feels like he's expanding his sales force.

"I would hope that the sales volume will mushroom because we believe as more and more people see the bike and use the bike, that will be our best form of advertising," he said.

But the mushrooms aren't sprouting yet, so Nelson is holding on to his day job as an estate planning attorney.

Nelson hopes the business gears up enough to merit hiring staff, or that it even becomes his primary source of income.

"Buddy Bike is more fun than the law," he said. "But I can't quit my day job yet."

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Article correction:

Buddy Bike has donated bicycles to The Victory School for Children with Autism and to the University of Miami's Center for Autism & Related Disabilities (UM CARD). No Buddy Bikes were donated to the National Alliance for Autism Research