

They'd like to teach the world to sing - and may

TECHNOLOGY

DAVE GUSSOW

Times Staff Writer

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TAMPA - Business is humming for Carry-a-Tune Technologies and its Singing Coach software.

"We have sold more product in the first 10 weeks of the year than we sold all of last year," said Carlo Franzblau, the founder of the company and a principal in his family's Thompson Group business in Tampa.

Since it made a PR splash at January's Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, the small company has been working overtime to keep up. By its count, at least a dozen TV stations did stories, as well as print publications ranging from the New York Times to PC Magazine.

CompUSA decided to put it in all of its 229 stores after a trial run. The 65-store Media Play chain picked it up, as did Fry's Electronics. It is being sold on the Home Shopping Network. And starting in May, it will be available in Target stores.

"That's the really big win," said Ken Spiegel, the company's vice president and general manager. "That really puts us on the map. That gives us a national footprint."

The company has signed distribution agreements for Australia and the United Kingdom, which Spiegel attributes to the publicity at the trade show. In the past week, it has received e-mail from people in Ecuador, Chile, Denmark, England and Germany looking for the product.

It has reached No. 78 on Amazon.com's Early Adopter software list. "That's pretty cool," Franzblau said. And Carry-a-Tune (<http://www.carryatune.com>) is adding three jobs to its full-time staff of four (some Thompson employees pitch in, too) and is looking to expand the product line.

The Singing Coach tracks a singer's pitch and grades the performance on a display on the computer screen. A basic version that has fewer songs and handles only three singers costs \$50; a premium version is \$100.

The software also is getting attention in education. A University of South Florida study of some middle school students in Hernando County showed improved reading scores after using the program. Franzblau has been helping pursue grants for more studies on its reading potential.

Franzblau also says a version for duets for two people singing at once will be coming out this fall, as well as a version in Spanish. In addition, the company is looking at ways to use it for teaching foreign languages and how to play some musical instruments.

Franzblau and Spiegel say the pace has been hectic, but it has been a gratifying ride.

"We have a big mission in front of us," Spiegel said. "We want to be a global corporation."

Dave Gussow can be reached at 727 771-4328 or gussow@sptimes.com