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Solar panel maker generates buzz at CES 2012 17 Quebec firms at conference; Montreal's Nature Power Products among those showcasing their wares

BY JASON MAGDER, THE GAZETTE JANUARY 10, 2012

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For most people, the most irritating part about going camping is having to leave their iPhones or iPads at home.

Well, that's no longer a problem thanks to a Montreal company called Nature Power Products.

The firm specializes in solar-and wind-power products, and one of its bestsellers is the Power Bank 5.0, a pocket-sized solar panel that stores solar power during the day, and can charge two devices at a time for up to five cellular phones before needing to be exposed to the sun again.

Just two years in, the company is in growth mode.

"We're growing really quickly," company CEO Dan Kruger said Monday from Las Vegas. "We opened an office in Vancouver about six months ago and we're in hiring mode."

The company is but one of 17 firms from Montreal and the province exhibiting at CES in Las Vegas - the premier conference for gadgets, which gets under way on Tuesday. Quebec is far better represented at the conference this year. Just 11 companies made the trip in 2011.

Kruger said he's hoping his company will stand out in a new section reserved for green technology.

Another one of the company's top sellers is the 72-Watt mini-solar farm that acts as backup power for RVs, trailers and cottages. It charges 12-volt batteries that can then power televisions and lights.

The company had a bit of a spike in sales in Japan after last year's earthquake and tsunami left many without electricity.

Kruger said he has a strong customer base and distribution channels, but he's at CES to showcase the company's products and generate more awareness.

Another Montreal firm presenting at CES is generating a lot of buzz in the tech world. Tamaggo is unveiling its 360-imager - a camera that the company calls the first consumer picture-taking device with fully integrated, built-in 360 panomorph technology. The small camera allows users to take 360-degree images with one click. Other companies from Quebec making the trip:

--St. Hyacinthe's Castiv Inc. - a product design that makes accessories for smartphones and tablets.

--Longueuil's D-Box Technologies Inc. designs, manufactures and markets theatre seats.

--Montreal's Kronos Audio Inc. manufactures the world's first counter-rotating dual platter suspended turntable to play vinyl records.

--St. Laurent's KVD Kleer Vu Deluxe Albums supplies photo albums and accessories, and has been in business since 1931.

--Montreal's LightSpeed sells retail and point-of-sale systems that can be used with iPods and iPhones.

--Montreal's Mediaparc Inc. sells software to create personalized photo books, cards, calendars, posters, photo objects and business stationary.

--Sherbrooke's Oracle Audio Technologies manufactures CD players, record players, and other stereo equipment.

--Terrebonne's Plasticase Inc. sells NANUK: A carrying case for cameras and other electronics that is watertight and claims to be nearly indestructible.

--Montreal's Sensio Technologies, Inc. provides a 3-D compression software for use in televisions and movie theatres.

--Boucherville's Simaudio Ltd. makes luxury audio and hometheatre components.

--Montreal's Sonomax Technologies Inc. makes custom-fitting earphones.

--Montreal's Toon Boom Animation Inc. creates animation applications for children, home users, creative professionals and students.

--Montreal's Tribair is a global network of voice-over-IP hot spots where members turn their personal or business Wi-Fi into hubs for other members to use and get cheap long distance calling.

--Granby's Vdera Inc. is a rubber slime that is used to clean cars, electrical appliances and home products.

--Quebec City's Verity Audio Inc. makes high-end loudspeaker systems.

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