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# Startup Showcase: A heads-up approach to motorcycle safety

By [LEAH KODNER](#) | James J. Hill Center

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According to the National Center for Statistics and Analysis, there were 4,586 motorcyclists killed in collisions in 2014. Though this number is down from a peak in 2008, it is still high.

After witnessing a motorcycle crash firsthand, John Henry decided to find a solution. He learned that many car and motorcycle crashes happen because of ineffective brake lights which only light up when the brake is applied and not when a car is decelerating for other reasons. Because of this, drivers may not know that the vehicle in front of them is slowing down, leading to increased risk of collisions.

Henry created the Heads Up Braking System, attachable brake lights that respond to deceleration, not just the application of the brake pedal.

## COMPANY PROFILE

**Name of company:** Innervision by Henry Inc.



**WebsiteS:** [www.innervisionbyhenry.com](http://www.innervisionbyhenry.com); [www.headsupbraking.com](http://www.headsupbraking.com)

**Business Start Date:** Started in 2000. Conducted a soft launch of its first product in 2016.

### ENTREPRENEUR PROFILE

**City you live in:** Minnetonka

**City of birth:** Cocoa Beach, Fla.

**High school attended:** Boca Ciega High School, St. Petersburg, Fla.

**Colleges attended:** University of Minnesota, Bachelor's and Master's degrees



John Henry

## Q&A

### Q. What led to this point?

**A.** I started Innervision by Henry in 2000. I received my first patent for safety devices for recreational and sports vehicles and their drivers in March 2003. A second patent was granted in 2005 that expands on the first.

Prior to founding Innervision, I served in the U.S. Army. I am very proud of my military experience and very committed to contributing in this area. My inventions will enhance U.S. military capability to provide increased safety in a variety of ways.

After completing my bachelor's degree at the University of Minnesota, I joined Best Buy, where I held a sales management position and was responsible for developing many of the earlier sales management procedures for the company. I went on to work at the University of Minnesota Medical School as associate administrator, responsible for operations and grants. While working full time at the university, I earned a Master's degree in education and management. I held leadership positions in a number of university organizations and was promoted to director of minority affairs in the College of Human Ecology. One of my major accomplishments while at the university was the development and implementation of minority student retention programs and mentoring programs at the university and within the Twin Cities community.

As a top pharmaceutical sales person for Bristol Meyers Squibb, I sold over \$18 million for the neural science division, honing my sales skills. I left Bristol Meyers Squibb to devote myself full time to Innervision, the development of its product line, and my patent ventures.

**Q. What is your business?**

**A.** Innervision is the result of my creative application of technology to address critical safety issues beyond just vehicles, their drivers and riders. The first of 10 new products, the Heads Up Braking system (HUB system) is one of most advanced wireless braking light systems for motorcycles, ATVs and snowmobiles. Vehicles often decelerate through dynamic engine braking or down shifting. In both cases, the brakes are most often not applied. Consequently, drivers following any of these vehicles don't see brake lights and have less time to react to avoid a rear end collision. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, motorcycles can stop 75 times faster than cars. Therefore, early warning of deceleration is critical to avoid serious injury or death.

The HUB system's primary function is to automatically apply brake lights upon deceleration, warning drivers that the vehicle in front of them is slowing down. U.S. Department of Transportation statistics indicate that rear end collisions decreased 30 percent when the third brake light was added to cars in the middle of the rear window at eye level.

The HUB System is comprised of two components: a receiver and a transmitter. The wireless brake light (receiver) attaches to the rider's helmet, at eye level, increasing the visibility of the motorcyclist. The transmitter is designed to fit anywhere on the vehicle itself (preferably under the seat) and provides the option to be hardwired to a vehicle for full features.

The HUB system's transmitter will pulsate the brake light on the vehicle during deceleration. This pulsing of the brake light is automatically overridden by the factory brake system when manually activated by the driver.

HUB is an auxiliary brake warning system and not a primary brake system. There is no other technology in the world that provides an early warning of deceleration to other vehicles without manually applying the brakes.

HUB relies on a sophisticated microprocessor and custom firmware combination called the Kelatronic System (KEL). KEL was developed by Innervision by Henry and activates the automatic functions of HUB requiring no human input. KEL will turn the LED's brightness up or down to be most visible day or night. This allows the rider to keep his or her eyes on the road and enjoy the ride.

**Q. Where do you go for help when you need it?**

**A.** I have learned to trust my instincts but I'm also wise enough to share those instincts with trusted advisers before acting on them (most of the time).

**Q. What is the origin of the business?**

**A.** I witnessed an accident between two riders that collided at high speed. The rider in front released the throttle and began to slow down, unknown to the rider behind him. The rider in back inadvertently slammed into the rider in front of him because there was no warning of braking or deceleration at the time. I decided I could do something about that. This led to the HUB system.

**Q. What problems does your business solve?**

**A.** Motorcycle riding can be dangerous in terms of lack of visibility to other drivers. Not only does the HUB system provide visibility when braking, it also provides awareness to other drivers that you are there.

**Q. Where did you pivot in your company's journey? What big obstacle or hurdle did you have to overcome?**

**A.** The biggest hurdles I overcame were finding an engineering team that understood my vision and finding a manufacturing plant that believed in the product.

**Q. What personal strengths or skill sets do you bring to the business?**

**A.** Clarity of vision and a no-quit attitude.

**Q. What are you most proud of?**

**A.** I'm proud of the undying faith of my wife, family, and closest friends.

**Q. What obstacles must you overcome to be wildly successful?**

**A.** The company is at a critical stage where we require capital funding and market expertise.

**Q. How are you funding your business — organically, angel or VC investments?**

**A.** To date we have funded our business ourselves with no loans or investments.

**Q. What would be success for your business in the next 2-3 years?**

**A.** The creation of jobs is important to me; it's my contribution to our state and my community. I'm looking forward to the HUB system becoming a success in the marketplace and the strategic launch of the other 10 products.

**Q. In your opinion, what does it take to be a great entrepreneur?**

**A.** What I think is most important is the ability to be able to turn a deaf ear to the naysayers and to put on blinders that allow you to travel your own road at your own pace for the future you're building.

**Q. What is your business model and how do you make money?**

**A.** We sell to dealerships and direct to the consumer.

**Q. Why do you do what you do? What is your "why," your purpose?**

**A.** I discovered long ago that I do not personally fit into the traditional mold. You've heard the expression "think outside the box" and, quite frankly, *I live* outside the box. Creativity isn't just a spur of the moment thing with me; it's who I am.

**Q. How did 1 Million Cups St. Paul help you? Did you get valuable feedback? Did you get connected to resources? Did you pivot because of the experience?**

**A.** I got what I think will be solid contacts to address some immediate needs.