

City firm hoping Red the Robot's abilities will reap rich rewards

BY ROB FLEMMING

AN Exeter based company is hoping that a robot will turnover millions of pounds over the next few years.

A Westcountry invention, Red the Robot was the brainchild of Martin Richards, managing director of Head Start Learning Systems, and was originally conceived in 2007.

Red, an acronym for rapid educational development, is a three dimensional talking and reading resource for primary school children of all ages and abilities.

The small robot, only available through its own website and standing 40cm high, costs £130 and comes complete with a full set of interactive resources.

The storybook library and upgradeable learning cards support all six phases of the government's new phonics programme, Letters and Sounds.

Mr Richards said: "We believe we are delivering the world's only complete range solution for literacy and numeracy applications in a unique and engaging way.

"Red is not a toy but a valuable teaching aide that has taken three years of research and development supported by leading educationalists and one that has been endorsed by the Institute of Education. Nevertheless, he is still a robot and children believe in them on many levels, especially as this one is allowed in the classroom."

Head Start Learning Systems is part of the Impact International Group which markets and distributes a range of unique toys from its headquarters in Exeter. The design, development and manufacture of many of its products is managed at the company's other base in Hong Kong.

The maintenance of the Far Eastern operation ensures a tight control over price and quality at all



Head Start Learning Systems hopes Red the Robot will prove a hit in schools

times. However, the funding for Red's development has once again been local, supported by Nick Porter at the Exeter branch of the Clydesdale bank and Bruce Friday of F and T Consultants. Commenting on Red's success, Bruce Friday said: "The investment now looks to be paying dividends. Red is being

used in over 250 schools and will be the subject of some in-depth discussions with the Department for Children, Schools and Families in the near future.

"The potential is huge, particularly when you consider developing Red for older children and as a resource for teaching En-

glish as a foreign language."

The introduction of Red the Robot followed the call by the Schools' Secretary, Ed Balls, for a 'national revolution' in improving children's reading ability both at school and in the home.

Mr Richards added: "Our aim is to get Red into every primary school and nursing facility in the country and to achieve a turnover for this product of £5m within two years."

Red the Robot joins an impressive line-up of products marketed by Impact including licensed properties such as Bob the Builder and Sonic the Hedgehog.

Have your say

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