PayTap splits bills among friends

Carrollton-based PayTap Inc. wants to make it easier for you to split the bill. Say the children of elderly parents want to get together to ensure their folks’ bills are paid on time. Using PayTap, everybody can know which person paid how much for what bill, and when. Or, if a group of people want to join forces to send flowers to a sick friend, they can use PayTap to pay the bill and ensure everybody’s contribution is accounted for. The cost: $1 for each bill that PayTap handles.

That may sound simple to do, but it’s not, according to Gabriella Draney, CEO of Tech Wildcatters LLC, a Dallas seed accelerator from whose 12-week program PayTap graduated in late 2011. “Being able to handle that money flow is challenging,” she said. For one thing, PayTap must get tied into the billing system of every vendor with which it works, she said. There also are registration requirements in every state.

PayTap’s ability to handle those challenges is why the company is special, Draney said. “There are major barriers to entry” to other would-be rivals, she added.

“We have had a lot of legal advice and have been fortunate in getting a number of industry experts to advise the company,” said Sean-Michael Daley, CEO and co-founder. “More recently, we have been able to partner with a number of companies to help us deliver the service.”

Daley said Tech Wildcatters “forced us to get focused on our go-to-market strategy. The mentors (at Tech Wildcatters) gave us multiple perspectives on our business model, (making) us constantly rethink our value and how to build upon it.”

So what’s the plan now? “Our desire is to disrupt the market and then have on one of the companies we disrupt buy us,” Daley said.

Professor sets out to calm parents’ fear of SIDS

In 2008, J.-C. Chiao, a professor in University of Texas at Arlington’s electrical engineering department, visited a hospital maternity ward when one of his graduate students gave birth to a baby boy. As he looked through a window at the babies in the nursery, Chiao couldn’t tell if some were simply sleeping soundly or if they had stopped breathing. Realizing that his concern mirrors that of every new parent who is fearful of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, he set out to find a solution.

Chiao and a team of UTA researchers are working on a sensor that can detect concentrations in the air of carbon dioxide, which humans exhale after breathing in oxygen. If a child stops breathing, carbon dioxide levels near them will drop while those of oxygen will rise. The sensor will send a signal wirelessly to a baby monitor, which in turn will alert parents.

Chiao, who foresees the UTA invention as being a feature on somebody else’s baby monitor, is working on building prototypes and putting them through what he describes as “rigorous testing” to identify and fix any manufacturing or reliability issues that might crop up.

UTA’s TMAC, formerly known as the Texas Manufacturing Assistance Center, is assisting Chiao in squeezing out costs from the manufacturing process. “I don’t know how to do that, but they do,” he said. “They help tremendously.”

By year end, he foresees having negotiations with various companies about possibly bringing the technology to market. So far, UTA’s technology transfer office has found at least one unspecified business interested in Chiao’s idea.

Chiao foresees other uses for the carbon dioxide sensing system, such as testing for sleep apnea and asthma attacks in humans, problems with manufacturing machines in factories, and outside air quality.

“We believe this not only has a good market, but it (can save) many children’s lives,” he said. “So this is worth doing.”

Chiao, like any entrepreneur, will face two big challenges going forward, according to Mark Sesummes, director of TMAC Metroplex. One is how much time it will take to get the product to market.

“It will attract early adopters and copycats. You’ll have all this competition. The ability to take the initial design and enhance it so it’s desirable to the market, that’s a big deal.”

In addition, the way Chiao makes his products must become more competitive over time, he added.