

Innovation

Walker-Chair

Form and function

The Zeen is a four-wheel, height-changing, hybrid walker/wheelchair designed to help people sit, stand, and walk without another person's help.

Innovators Garrett Brown and Chris Fawcett

Ages 74 and 58

Chief executive officer and chief technology officer of Exokinetics, a five-person Philadelphia startup that began this summer

for his teacup poodle, Tylee. "We wanted to create a more convenient way to shop," he says. "We also didn't want to lose the authenticity that comes with your local pet store." A crew of 40 uses three soundstages to produce pet-care tutorials for the company's YouTube channel.

Chewy has raised \$236 million from investors

including BlackRock and New Horizon, the venture arm of mutual fund T. Rowe Price. Billionaire e-commerce veteran Mark Vadon, Chewy's chairman, says he's the reason the company largely kept itself out of the press for its first five years. "I advised Ryan and Michael to lay low," he says. "It's better to avoid competition." Two people familiar with the startup's finances say Goldman Sachs is helping it prepare for an initial public offering next year.

Cohen says he isn't concerned about the Amazon threat hanging over his and every e-commerce business. Chewy's auto-ship subscription program works a bit like Amazon's Dash Button, setting customers up to regularly reorder such staples as pet food and kitty litter. The bigger question: If Chewy can't turn a profit now, with \$880 million in revenue, when can it? "It's not so much that there are barriers to entry," says Vadon, who took his online baby supply company Zulily public in 2013. "There are barriers to doing it well at scale."

Chewy won't say how much it spends on portraits and other perks. Cohen acknowledges the overhead is high but says it's worth it. "People want that great customer experience that we specialize in," he says. By early 2018 the company plans to add three 600,000-square-foot warehouses in the U.S., doubling its current footprint. "Making sure we can maintain what we've built is the focus now," Cohen says. "We'll find a way. We are going to be No. 1, or we will die trying." —*Olivia Zaleski*

The bottom line Chewy is on track for \$880 million in annual revenue but hasn't been able to make its model profitable.

B Edited by Jeff Muskus
Bloomberg.com

1.
Standing The user sits on the seat and fastens the seat belt, then leans forward slightly to be lifted from a seated position to a saddle-supported standing one. Leaning back slightly shifts it back to a sitting position.



Origin Brown, the Oscar-winning inventor of the Steadicam, started working on a more active wheelchair alternative in 2012, when his father's health was in decline.

Price Brown says he aims to charge \$2,000 to \$3,000.

Funding Exokinetics says that by yearend it will close a \$2 million investment from Select Medical, which runs hospitals and other facilities, and venture firm Founders Fund. "We don't normally partner with device makers, but this could be revolutionary," says Select President and CEO David Chernow.



2.
Walking To walk, the user pushes the armrests all the way forward or back to unlock the wheels and lock the seat at the desired height. The user's hands are then left free to work, carry things, or perform household activities.

Next Steps

Exokinetics is starting supervised tests in U.S. retirement homes and rehab centers. Brown says the team will decide next year whether to seek approval for the Zeen as a medical device. Either way, the product could be on sale by 2018 or sooner, he says. "Once older people go from walker to the wheelchair, there's such a huge decline," says Liron Sinvani, director for geriatric services at Hofstra Northwell School of Medicine in Manhasset, N.Y. "This really has the potential to improve quality of life." —*Nick Leiber*