A Fireside Chat: How Wall-E Inspired the Ninja Sphere

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Using sensors and actuators, the Ninja Sphere learns about its environment and knows when something is out of place – even the dog. The next generation of environment control, the sphere monitors temperature, light, energy, and location.

View: Kickstarter of the Week: This Ninja Triangulates Everything in Your House **[1]**

The team behind the project has already launched a successful product on Kickstarter with the Ninja Blocks campaign last year, and this time around they are looking to be just as successful, already surpassing their goal by more than $280,000 with 12 days left to go. *PD&D* recently caught up with the CEO, Daniel Friedman, to learn more about the popular product and his hopes for after the campaign ends.

***PD&D*: What inspired the design?**

Daniel Friedman: We wanted something simple, clean, and modern that somebody wouldn't be ashamed to put on their coffee table. We also drew some inspiration from Eve from WALL-E. Cocreators [2], our industrial design partner, really took this inspiration and delivered.

PD&D: **Why did you turn to Kickstarter?**

Friedman: We had already launched our first Ninja Block on Kickstarter in March 2012. It just made sense once we decided to crowdfund Ninja Sphere.

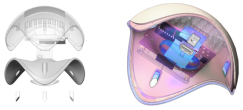
PD&D: **What were the projects biggest challenges?**

Friedman: Both the gesture control and trilateration features have presented really interesting challenges we have had to work through, especially around the industrial design of such a unique shape. Specifically, ensuring we could pack all the electronics inside.

PD&D: **What do you think will be the product's biggest impact?**

Friedman: We hope it will continue the discussion about how we interact with all the new connected devices coming onto the market, especially around whether mobile apps are really the best interface.

PD&D: **Describe the prototyping process you went through:**



Friedman: A lot of iteration around reducing complexity of our designs to ensure that we can reliably deliver on time. On the software, our existing platform served as the basis for designing Ninja Sphere. We really brought together everything we learned through the process of building and delivering Ninja Blocks.

PD&D: **What is the most innovative aspect of the design?**

Friedman: It's hard to name just one. We're really proud of the work cocreators [2] has done on the design. Also, we think the gesture control will blow people's minds when they play with it.

PD&D: **How does the gesture control work?**

Friedman: Your Spheramid gateways connect to one another in your home network and exchange information about the entire state of all your connected devices. Over time they build a model for how everything operates, and uses this model to alert you when things look out of place. For example if nobody is at home and the heater or AC has been left on. We also have implemented in-home location of many of your devices. Phones, laptops, tags that can be placed in wallets, on keys, and on pets, or valuables allow you to find them precisely in your home. Using our gesture control, you can control your smart bulbs, connected air conditioners, and many other devices a bit more naturally than pulling out your smartphone.

PD&D: **How do you think most backers will use the Ninja Sphere?**

Friedman: We hope that with Ninja Sphere, users are able to control their energy usage a bit more smartly. We think backers will use it ensure they don't spend money on appliances unnecessarily, to interact with their homes in new and exciting ways, and spend a bit less time searching for all the little things they have to constantly keep track of.

PD&D: **What are you hopes post Kickstarter hopes?**

Friedman: We want to place Ninja Sphere onto shelves by Christmas 2014. We want to keep iterating on our code, and connect any device we can.

PD&D: **Are there any anxieties about the demand from Kickstarter?**

Friedman: Obviously, we must deliver on our commitments, and that does add a bit of pressure in terms of risks that are out of our control. We've taken all our experience, and advice of our partners, to set a realistic timeline. However, there are always the 'unknown unknowns.'

PD&D: **In relation to the industry, what are you excited to see next? What makes you nervous?**

Friedman: We're excited to see the proliferation of smart bulbs into people's homes. We're also excited by how people are using fitness wearables, introducing data science into the how they manage their health. I'd say we're most nervous by the data sovereignty and security implications of a ubiquitous connected world.

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