

## East Ventura County startups carve out phone case niche

By [Marissa Nall](#) / Friday, March 17th, 2017



**Mega Tiny Anti-Gravity Case**



**ClimateCase**

Two East Ventura County startups hope to add value for cell phone users and differentiate their products in the crowded accessory market.

Providing hands-free use anywhere there's a smooth, flat surface, Westlake Village-based Mega Tiny Corp. began as a passion project among UC Santa Barbara and UCLA friends that hoped to capitalize on the selfie craze, said founder Josh Neumann.

The team engaged engineering partners to test various micro-suction materials, looking for maximum adherence, without stickiness, dust or the risk of taking paint and plaster with it.

A few prototypes later, they put a demo case on the wall and "within that two seconds, we knew we had a company," Neumann said. "Everybody around the table had a different use for it."

Similarly, the ClimateCase in Newbury Park took on new dimensions from the idea its creator Lisa Lambert first envisioned while on vacation in Arizona with her twin children.

In August of 2012, the temperature by the pool kept overheating their cell phones, driving them back inside and ruining their relaxation, Lambert said. A little online research indicated that people who live in cold temperatures had similar difficulties, and that manufacturer recommendations limit most phones to use in areas between 32 and 95 degrees.

“But for the person who’s working in the snow, or the construction worker, the roofer, they don’t have the option to get out of the elements or cool their phone down,” Lambert said. “So, it’s not just inconvenient when you’re laying at a pool.”

What started out as the Phone Fridge evolved into the ClimateCase, a pouch that, when frozen or microwaved, can keep a phone at the recommended temperatures throughout the day or restore it to optimum temperatures if it stops functioning.

She had prototypes by late 2015 and went into production in early 2016 after testing the neoprene and gel product in microwaves, freezers, and with dry-ice. Later, she certified the case through the Bureau Veritas Group and for Transportation Security Administration compliance.

“I was shocked because, when you think of something in your head and then actually hold it in your hand, you don’t know if it’s going to do what you envision it doing,” Lambert said, adding that, while she went through a lot of iPhones testing the product, “It worked better than I had envisioned.”

For Mega Tiny, even the name was an instant sell for the founders, Neumann said — playful, contradictory and ironic “but it’s really at the root of who we are.”

With functional attachments like a mirror, wallet and bottle opener in its product line, the company focuses on expanding niche markets into the mainstream.

“Philosophically, it’s a small company but we have big vision,” he said. “We’ve created a category. Other people have come out to this but we still own the product and the marketing. Small differences, small ideas can have huge impacts.”

For ClimateCase, the biggest obstacle was money, Lambert said. After drumming up some funds from friends and family to get the project off the ground, her first run sold around 3,000 units. Now, she’s gearing up for a second run, adding new colors and patterns, but growth is dependent on demand for an operation still running on a shoestring.

The former paralegal and stay-at-home mom caught a couple breaks when the product hit the Fox 2016 Gift Guide and the social media posts of Olympic Skier Hannah Kearney. While she couldn’t disclose the name, an NFL franchise in a cold state has also expressed interest in marketing it to fans, Lambert said.

The 12-person Mega Tiny team raised around \$164,000 for the product in its first Kickstarter campaign, another \$43,600 later on Indiegogo, and almost \$27,000 for an offshoot product it calls the Powerbulb.

“A consumer product business with inventory, it’s very expensive,” but the more important factor is building a customer base and differentiating the company in a crowded field, Neumann said.

“It’s literally the most competitive space,” he said, with trademark infringement and knockoffs already emerging. But, “everybody has a case, everybody has a smartphone. So if you get .01 percent of the market, you’re gold.”

Upgrade cycles, holidays and widely anticipated releases like the iPhone 8 generate new sales, while adding products and attachments helps reengage existing customers.

“There’s a huge roadmap for this and it’s really interesting. It’s a personal item. It’s not only function, it’s identity.”

The two companies are part of a growing east county niche that includes Technocel Wireless Accessories and its subsidiary Tylt, which opened global headquarters in Simi Valley in 2014, housing more than 250 employees and around 20 brands.

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