With brightly colored markers in hand, four-year-old Nadia Marlovics scampered to the wall of her family’s suburban Chicago home, paused momentarily, turned and grinned slyly at her father. Dieter Marlovics quickly recognized what was about to become an indelible mural by a budding artist and offered his daughter an intriguing alternative.

“I’ll take a photo of the wall, and you can color that instead,” Marlovics said. That fast fatherly thinking inspired Marlovics’ most recent entrepreneurial adventure, ReallyColor, an online company with a patent-pending technology that allows customers to convert real-world photographs into printable coloring book pages.

ReallyColor is not the first start-up venture for Marlovics, a self-described serial entrepreneur. In 1997, while studying electrical engineering, he and fellow McCormick student Paul Silevitch (’99) founded Hypermeals, a forerunner to the now ubiquitous online restaurant ordering sites.

“I love to observe the world around me and create something others will use,” Marlovics says.

Inspired by Sandra Bullock ordering pizza online in the 1995 film, The Net, Hypermeals’ founders enlisted restaurateurs and then promoted their brainchild by roaming around campus in purple sweaters, knocking on doors, and handing a $50 bill to everyone who had Hypermeals as their Internet home page.

“When you’re trying to grow a business, you have to be willing to abandon your own insecurities,” Marlovics says, adding that his McCormick education compelled him to approach challenges with discipline and confidence.

While customers proved eager to try the new platform, operational issues on the food service end plagued Hypermeals. “The restaurants just weren’t ready for this,” Marlovics confides.

In 1999, Marlovics joined Gelber Group, a proprietary trading firm, where he conceived of and built the firm’s electronic trading division. His subsequent work helped establish Gelber as one of the premier technology-enabled trading groups.

Around 2011, Marlovics again felt his entrepreneurial spirit stirring. Inspired by daughter Nadia’s artistic intentions, the idea for ReallyColor sprang to life. Marlovics contacted an image-processing scientist, created sample coloring pages, and tested the idea on the market.

“I knew nothing mattered unless the technology worked, and kids wanted to color,” Marlovics says.

Motivated by promising early results, Marlovics officially launched ReallyColor in October 2013 and just recently unveiled an online tool for editing during the photo-to-coloring page conversion process. The company also plans to launch a mobile app in the near future.

“I love taking technology and turning it into a business,” Marlovics says. “That’s the work that inspires me.”

Daniel P. Smith