

Heartwood Studios makes 3-D virtual stores a reality

BY MICHAEL FITZHUGH

EAST BAY BUSINESS TIMES

Heartwood Studios Inc., a fast-growing San Ramon animation studio, wants to move online shopping into a new dimension using dynamic 3-D virtual stores to sell everything from football jerseys to couches.

The platform, dubbed Cubix, will leverage hooks in Microsoft Corp.'s Internet Explorer Web browser to track shoppers "walking" through the virtual stores, noting the products they view and suggesting complementary items.

Heartwood CEO Neil Wadhawan likened the experience to shopping for furniture displayed in a staged room, complete with art, matching rugs and lamps.

Heartwood Studios Inc.

Business: Digital animation

Headquarters: San Ramon

Founded: 2002

CEO: Neil Wadhawan

2006 revenue: \$961,919

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"As a buyer, you're attracted to that. You want to buy the whole thing and spend double or triple the money (you might otherwise spend). When you're online now, you just find that one couch," he said.

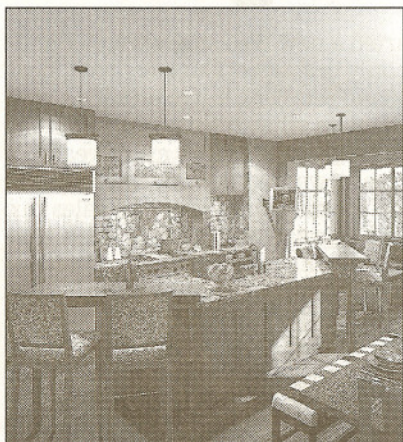
The company secured a \$1 million credit line to get the new project off its feet. It is also opening a new office in New Delhi, which will support the venture with a staff of eight programmers and artists, several educated in the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology, alma mater of

CFO Timo Wadhawan, Neil Wadhawan's father. Raj Raheja, chief innovation officer, is getting the operation up and running.

Heartwood ranked 13th on the East Bay Business Times' fastest growing private companies list in 2007, growing its revenue by 161 percent between 2004 and 2006, when it reported sales of \$961,919. In 2007, Heartwood "will gross several million dollars," Neil Wadhawan said in an interview with Paradigm Communications, a public relations firm for his alma mater, the Northeastern University College of Business Administration, in Boston.

Heartwood expects to complete a beta testing version of the Cubix shopping platform in the second quarter of 2008.

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Courtesy photo

A virtual kitchen, digitally rendered by Heartwood Studios.