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Cover Story: Seattle's Top 25 Innovators & Entrepreneurs

From successful serial entrepreneurs to fast-rising novices, we've compiled our fourth annual list of the top business innovators who are shaping the future of the Puget Sound area's business community.

By Jeff Meisner and Myke Folger (additional reporting by Jeff Bond, Kayvon Sharghi, Kim Sklar and Niki Stojnic)



Darren Berg runs 11 companies. That's right, 11 companies! The hyperactive Berg is constantly coming up with new ways to improve his burgeoning empire, which includes everything from a motor-coach service to a real-estate operation to an event ticketing service. He even admits to analyzing how to more efficiently run his local coffee shop as he stands in line for his morning cup of java.

Cyberspace mogul Richard Barton, the man

who changed the travel world with Expedia and is still helping to alter the real estate business with Zillow, is back with Glassdoor.com, a company that may help alter the way employees choose new jobs.

Power players such as Barton and Berg are examples of the kind of entrepreneurial spirit you will find throughout Seattle Business' fourth-annual list of the state's Top 25 Innovators and Entrepreneurs. From a cyberspace visionary to an energy developer trying to make algae the biofuel of the future, we've searched the region to find the innovators that may just change the way we live our lives.

Our list of current and (potentially) future business moguls was compiled after talking with academics, business owners, consultants and association leaders from various industries about whom they saw as the region's emerging business talent.

As usual, we couldn't quite limit our list to 25 people as we searched for the best new innovators in such categories as consumer goods, online services and serial entrepreneurs. But with that said, we are always eager to hear from you about the worthy candidates that we left off this year's list. After all, there is always next year.

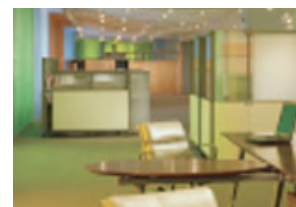
Of course, not all of these entrepreneurs will be the power players of tomorrow. But they all have shown the indomitable spirit needed to overcome the odds and bring a creative idea to life.

The Eyes Have It: John Hafen CEO, Eyealike

(Pictured in main photo)

Let's say you're single and you have a thing for celebrity hotties like Jessica Alba or Christian Bale.

While technology firm Eyealike can't get you close to the real Alba or Bale, the



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company may soon make it possible for you to get a date with someone who looks like them.

The Bellevue-based startup has developed visual search platform technology that helps return search results based on images that include face shape, skin tone and hair color.

"Let's say you're looking for a date," says Eyealike CEO John Hafen. "You can tell the application to find you someone who looks like this or that celebrity, or someone who has brown hair or a certain skin tone or eye color."

Hafen says the Eyealike Faces application would be a good fit for sites such as Match.com, True.com, Yahoo Personals or any of the many other online dating sites out there. But that approach is only the most obvious use for Eyealike's technology. It can also help solve one of the internet's stickier problems: copyright infringement. By tracking copyrighted images online, purveyors of original content, such as Hollywood movie studios and pro sports franchises, can employ the technology to identify websites that illegally include licensed images and content.

"We can use the technology to scan user-generated content sites," Hafen says. "The license holders can then go to those sites and ask them to take those images down, share any revenue generated by the use of their images or even deploy targeted advertising."

Eyealike has other applications in the works that feature the same visual-recognition technology, such as delivering targeted advertising to online consumers.

"The application scans photos and images on the internet and identifies [customers] by the images they clicked on," Hafen explains. "Advertisers can then target customers with appropriate advertising. For example, if someone clicks on a sports logo or a picture of a motorcycle, we can target them with advertising around those areas."

The company's search platform is the result of five years of research and development. The company was founded in 2003 by Dr. Jeff Reed as an internal project within its parent company, Logicalis, a United Kingdom-based technology business with offices in the United States. In 2007, Eyealike was launched as a wholly owned subsidiary of Logicalis.

While web surfers may not necessarily want to be targeted by Eyealike's customized advertising, it's doubtful they'd turn down the chance to go to dinner with Angelina Jolie or Colin Farrell. Or at least someone who looks like them. —*Jeff Meisner*



Running in Style: Sally Bergesen, Founder, Oiselle Running Inc.

A few years ago, Sally Bergesen got fed up with running marathons in high-waisted shorts that didn't fit well and looked even worse.

The longtime distance runner decided to ask her friend, Liz Stahl, who is now Oiselle's operations director, what she thought of their running outfits. They both agreed: The clothing was lousy.

Following her instincts, the branding strategist and writer decided to launch Seattle-based Oiselle Running Inc. in 2006.

"I wanted to apply the skills I had honed in branding and naming to an area that was intensely personal for me, which was running," she says while sitting in the Greenlake Starbucks with a slice of banana bread and drip coffee she bought using a giftcard a friend gave her for her 40th birthday.

Bergesen's innovation is in the shorts; they are low-rise with a comfortable liner and a fashionable look. She designed the shorts based on how she felt as a competitive runner and as a typical woman. She used her running friends as her focus group, and there was unanimous support for the shorts. After substantial financial backing from friends and family, Oiselle took flight.

While the private company isn't releasing financial results, it appears Bergesen's business instincts have been on target. The Oiselle line has grown from being sold in six stores in the spring of 2007 to 40 stores across the country this year. During that time, sales have jumped 263 percent. Oiselle is now setting its sights on the international market.

The product line will be available in Japan this fall, and Bergesen plans to enter the Canadian and European markets in 2009.

Still, there are problems being a small player in a market dominated by the likes of Nike, including the fact that textile suppliers scoffed at her microscopic fabric orders.

Bergesen needed only one sample dye lot to complete her entire line of clothing during her first season.

"I thought that was pretty innovative," says the Seattle resident and mother of two. She also ignored the fashion industry's tendency to declare what colors will be in fashion in each season. "Lesley [Feldman, her designer] and I just pick colors that we like," she says.

Instinct is essential for innovation, Bergesen adds. Instinct is the product of experience, and she applies it in great doses when making decisions. She doesn't like the lumbering bureaucracy of most corporate cultures and demands gazelle-like speed when running Oiselle.

Bergesen knows as the company grows, maintaining the ability to make quick decisions will become an issue. But she also believes that the personality of a company stems from its CEO; if she maintains a desire to flee from bureaucracy, then odds are the business will follow.

As the founder and president of Oiselle, Bergesen will continue to run, anywhere from six to 20 miles at a time.

That is when she gets her best ideas. Currently, those thoughts include next spring's new line of GoodForm sports bras and shimmels (or sleeveless tops).

"Innovation is easy," Bergesen says with her characteristic confidence. "People have ideas all the time. It's the execution that will define you as a true innovator." --Myke Folger



Fabrics for Life Patty Grossman & Leigh Anne Van Dusen Founders, O Ecotextiles

Sisters Patty Grossman and Leigh Anne Van Dusen first entered the organic fabrics

business four years ago because they wanted to produce beautiful materials that had little or no impact on the environment.

The result was Seattle-based O Ecotextiles, a company that produces fabrics in the most environmentally benign manner possible. The two founders have a collection of textiles made of bamboo, organic cotton, hemp, linen and silk that is being used by star interior designers such as London-based Emily Todhunter, who is well known in Britain for her designs in fashionable clubs and restaurants.

"The textile industry is a gigantic industry and gigantically polluting," says the 55-year-old Grossman. "The industry uses some of the most toxic chemicals known to process fabrics. Chemicals that include chlorine, chromium, copper, mercury, fluorocarbons and lead."

The five-employee fabric company uses natural substances—such as aloe vera, beeswax and vitamin E—to soften its fabrics, and low-impact, fiber-reactive chemicals as dyes, says Van Dusen, 59.

With today's hyper-focus on environmental issues, one would think it would be easy to find such fabrics. But Grossman and Van Dusen say that wasn't the case. "It's taken us five years to learn how to produce gorgeous fabrics without all those chemicals," Grossman says. "I was a tepid environmentalist when we started this, but now I'm a rabid one. We've been reading scientific studies for five years and it's alarming what we found."

One of their primary goals was to locate manufacturing partners that were truly interested in creating fabrics that had a low impact on the environment, Grossman says. The two women didn't find any interior designers or textile manufacturers that seemed dedicated to creating and using such fabrics until 2007.

Today, O Ecotextiles has a line of 17 different fabrics with Pacific Northwest-inspired names, such as Chinook, Tacoma, Tonasket, Ross Lake and Lopez. The startup's future looks bright. Its unique push for natural fabrics and processes has brought considerable media recognition and a number of industry awards, including the "Best Merchandise" award at Decorex 2007, one of the interior design industry's biggest trade shows. The company also won the 2008 Zino Society Green Investment Fund award of \$50,000 earlier this year.

In addition, Grossman and Van Dusen recently caught the attention of the perfect audience: the entertainment industry. Furniture sporting their company's fabrics was used in retreat spaces at the Grammy Awards and the Sundance Film Festival in Utah, a gathering of Hollywood's elite independent filmmakers and actors. —*Jeff Meisner*



The Algae Alternative: Michael Weaver, Co-founder Bionavitas; Mark Tegen, Co-founder, Inventure Chemical

Michael Weaver has seen the future and it is green—algae green, to be exact. The 47-year-old CEO of Redmond-based alternative fuel startup Bionavitas first started researching biofuels, such as soybean oil and canola oil, a few years ago when he realized how much diesel he was burning through on his boat and plane.

"That's disconcerting for someone who considers himself something of an environmentalist," says the native New Yorker. "My research brought me into contact with Imperium Renewables, whose technology is used in the refinery of biofuels."

But the more Weaver read about canola and soybean oil, the less sold he was on the two crops as sustainable sources of fuel. He saw a larger opportunity for, of all things, algae.

What Weaver and others have learned is that one acre of algae produces up to 20,000 gallons of oil per year, whereas one acre of soybeans or corn produces only 100 gallons of oil per year. Algae also has a distinct advantage over other biofuel sources like canola and soybean oil because algae doesn't need nearly as much space or water to grow, it grows faster than those crops and it doesn't disrupt the global supplies of food that results from using corn, soybeans and other edible crops for biofuels.

Weaver isn't alone. Inventure Chemical Inc.'s Mark Tegen, 37, also believes the slimy green stuff is one of the answers to our energy needs. He is also trying to figure out how to produce biochemicals and fuels from algae, agricultural by-products and waste biomass in a cost-effective manner.

"The opportunity for algae is pretty tremendous," says Tegen, who cofounded Seattle-based Inventure in March 2006.

Tegen contends that if algae are developed into a major fuel source, they will have to be grown in large freshwater and saltwater pools. These pools will most likely be located next to power plants that produce large amounts of carbon dioxide, the all-important food for the algae. One added benefit to the algae ponds is that the one-celled organisms produce oxygen.

Algae also need large amounts of light to grow in the quantities required to make them a viable fuel source, Tegen says. That means deserts—areas that don't have a high population or a lot of farming—are ideal for growing them.

Still, it will be a long time before biofuels made from algae are available.

Weaver says that while algae produce very rapidly, the blooms get thick and block sunlight from reaching new algae growths. Algae farmers end up getting usable algae only from the top few centimeters of a vat or pond.

Weaver's Bionativas is working to increase the algae yield by using optical systems to allow sunlight or artificial light to penetrate deeper into the algae pools. "You end up with deeper and thicker layers of algae," he says. "This can also be done using artificial light, so algae could actually be grown indoors."

While Weaver says the technology so far "works in the lab," it has yet to be tested on a large scale. But he maintains a full-scale experiment is coming. The company is in the process of expanding its Redmond laboratory to include closed bioreactors that will use its technology. The next step for Bionativas, which currently has six employees, is to build a demonstration lab close to a power plant somewhere in Eastern Washington or in the Southwest, where sunlight is abundant.

Inventure Chemical's algae efforts also remain in the research phase. In 2007, the eight-employee startup raised \$1.6 million from Seattle-based Imperium Renewables and a consortium of angel investors. The money was used to build a 70-gallon "reactor," or tank, to grow and process algae and other potential biofuel sources. The next step is to raise a second round of venture capital to pay for a much larger pilot facility.

"We want to build a mini-processing plant that will allow us to work out the bugs before we try to mass produce any biofuels," says Inventure's Tegen. "It'll be about five years before algae is a major component of the alternative fuel industry." -*Jeff Meisner*



Banking on Green: Michael Butler: Chairman & CEO, Cascadia Capital LLC

Michael Butler has had a hand in raising capital for and selling off some of the Seattle area's best-known technology companies since opening the private investment bank, Cascadia Capital LLC, in 1999.

Worldwide Packets, Speakeasy, Purcell Systems, Zones—the Wall Street-connected Butler has touched all of these companies, from the early startup phase through to maturity.

Now, Butler has set his sights on helping to develop the region's nascent alternative-energy sector, and he is convinced this industry is the next mega-trend in finance.

"About a year and a half ago, a lot of venture capital funds, hedge funds and growth equity funds were telling me that tech and [telecommunications] were becoming slower-growth sectors," Butler explains. "They didn't see much innovation there anymore and they were looking for [new] areas of growth."

Institutional investors started to whisper in Butler's ear that they were intrigued by the alternative-energy sector.

That prompted Cascadia to begin a six-month analysis, during which Butler and his staff picked the sector apart piece by piece.

"Fossil fuels are expensive and finite," says Butler of his move to green energy. "You combine that with the whole issue of the war in Iraq, the need for economic security, and global warming, and you've got an inflection point in alternative energy that dwarfs the opportunity in the tech sector. This is where the next big wave of innovation will begin."

Butler has since backed up his predictions with plenty of mean green. In January 2007, Cascadia advised the Seattle City Employees' Retirement System—a pension fund for city workers—about backing Seattle-based biodiesel firm Imperium Renewables.

The pension fund ended up investing a reported \$10 million in Imperium, one of the nation's largest biodiesel companies.

In August 2007, Cascadia helped engineer a \$25 million investment in Lynnwood-based Clearwater Compliance Services Inc. from a Greenwich, Conn.-based hedge fund, Plainfield Asset Management LLC.

Clearwater provides water treatment services and equipment to construction, industrial and marine sites.

One of the challenges Clearwater faced was a lack of understanding by potential investors, both early-stage and later-stage.

"The VCs didn't understand the company or the sector and were wary," Butler says. "Unlike the information technology sector, where VCs know the entrepreneurs and vice versa, alternative energy is really nascent."

While Imperium has struggled to survive amid changing market forces this past year, Butler remains a believer in the young but developing alternative-fuel industry.

Along with places like Calgary, Alberta, he says, cities such as Denver, Portland and Seattle are well positioned to be leaders in the alternative-energy wave. "Denver is really interesting because that's where the National Renewable Energy Lab is," Butler notes. "Portland is one of the greenest cities in the country, and Seattle has an environmental ethos combined with experienced entrepreneurs." -*Jeff Meisner*



The Web's Great Disruptor: Richard Barton, Serial Entrepreneur, Co-founder, Glassdoor.com

Richard Barton enjoys being a disruptor.

One of Seattle's most famous and successful young entrepreneurs, Barton has long been a leader in commercializing internet data mining. Now, he is back with yet another company aimed at giving individuals more workplace information and eliminating many long-held corporate taboos.

Barton first upended the travel industry while working for Microsoft in the 1990s when he started Expedia.com. The site was a pioneer in online deals and comparison-shopping for travelers. He went on to help revolutionize the real estate industry with Zillow.com, which offers homeowners a treasure trove of information about buying and selling houses and the value of individual properties.

Recently, Barton launched yet another rule-breaking startup with Glassdoor.com, a website sure to increase the ulcers in corporate America. The California-based company provides job seekers with insights and real-time employee accounts about one of the last major employment taboos—how much people earn.

The site lists current salaries and benefits packages at specific companies. It also offers other interesting tidbits about corporate life, such as whether certain bosses have "rage issues" or if a specific company offers amenities, like flex time or bagel Fridays.

This latest company, the seventh startup that Barton has been involved with, may prove to be just as disruptive to industries as some of his earlier projects. But the serial entrepreneur's attitude is that such changes are part of the evolving business world.

"That which can be known will be known. That which can be rated will be rated. That which can be free will be free," Barton philosophizes. "Those are the fundamental principles of 'web 2.0' to me."

With those ideas in mind, Barton has figured out a way to extract the intangible, albeit subjective, information about corporations—that water-cooler talk he says job seekers look for when considering employment opportunities.

Employer reviews on the site cover the gamut: culture, perks and management style. One anonymous reviewer adored the "intelligent, opinionated and extremely knowledgeable" staff at Microsoft, but kvetched about the company's senior leadership and its penchant for tilting at windmills (i.e., Microsoft's failed attempt to buy Yahoo).

To ensure that reviews are genuine and not just someone badmouthing an ex-employer, Barton brought on Stephen Kaufer, the CEO and cofounder of TripAdvisor, to install a screening system for Glassdoor.com. Part of that process requires posts to be helpful but not to divulge trade secrets.

"Over the years, Kaufer has come up with a bag of tricks, some robotic and some human, and we're employing that same bag to great effect," Barton says of Glassdoor's screening process. "We have a hair trigger on pulling smelly content."

An industrial engineering graduate from Stanford University, Barton is now chairman of the year-old Glassdoor.com, as well as chair and CEO of Zillow.com and venture partner at Benchmark Capital, which has funded such startups as legal industry navigator Avvo and social network Bebo.

What continues to excite him and stir his innovative juices is helping to empower individuals by making information transparent and available.

"It's provocative, but it's a positive thing," he says. "Better information makes marketplaces better, more efficient. Hiding information makes markets inefficient. I believe in the free flow of information and how that lubricates marketplaces." —*Myke Folger*

ONLINE SERVICES

Alerting the Masses, Rob Monster (Founder & CEO, Alerts.com)

Want to know where to find the cheapest gas prices in your area? How about the most economical flights, the latest sports scores or even the birthday of your youngest niece?

Rob Monster would like to help you keep track of all these random bits of information with his newest innovation, Alerts.com. The serial entrepreneur has developed a firm that allows users to receive the information they want from various sources through alerts or notifications via e-mail, text message or even voice.

Monster saw that nobody had come up with a single-source alert platform that would notify people about information that they wanted while simultaneously blocking pervasive junk alerts. So he bought the domain name from IBM and recruited former Microsoft executive and ITNetworks cofounder Pascal Stolz to run the venture for him.

"I started it because I believe that there is no existing way today to manage personal alerts," Monster says. His idea was to "create a central proxy in which you receive and manage information from various sources," much like the way the human brain functions. Alerts.com is just the latest of Monster's projects. He's had a hand in dozens of other companies, particularly through his own angel investment firm, Monster Venture Partners.

And where does he envision Alerts in five years? A leader in outsource platforms and, Monster predicts, the most important "way for people to access information they care about." —*Myke Folger*

The Next Generation of Online Advertising: Anupam Gupta (President & CEO, Mixpo)

In an age when video on the web is ubiquitous, advertisers need to be sharper in their approach and flashier in their delivery to get today's internet audience to pay attention. Banner ads just won't cut it anymore.

That's where Delhi, India, native and MSN alum Anupam Gupta comes in. The 34-year-old president and CEO of online video ad startup Mixpo has developed a set of web-based services that help local businesses advertise online in a measurable and results-driven way. "Over the last few years, video has grown online, and much of that is consumer video on sites like YouTube," Gupta says. "There are a ton of eyeballs out there, so it's natural to have advertising follow where the eyeballs are."

Mixpo, with 17 employees, has developed a number of applications and platforms designed to make it easy for just about anybody to develop his or her own audio/visual advertisements that can be added to a website or embedded in other sites.

"Let's say a real estate agent has 10 high-resolution photos of a house he's trying to sell," Gupta says. "You can use those images to create some compelling video using the Mixpo platform."

The company, which raised \$6.5 million in venture capital in 2006, also offers clients an extensive series of tools that allow businesses to track how many people click on an advertisement and even the general area where these people are located. Mixpo's suite of web applications measures the number of impressions an ad generates, how many people start watching an ad and whether those people click on interactive components of the ad, such as a coupon. This information lets businesses of all sizes tailor advertisements specifically to a target audience, geographic region or even an individual community.

Mixpo rolled out its first web-based services at the beginning of 2007 and has steadily added new capabilities since then.

"It's not just about creating and posting an ad online," says Gupta of Mixpo's power. "It's about getting those videos discovered by search engines and putting them on local newspaper sites where people will see them." —J.M.

Life's a Picnik: Mike Harrington, Darrin Massena and Jonathan Sposato (Co-founders, Picnik)

For Mike Harrington, Darrin Massena and Jonathan Sposato, the co-founders of award-winning online photo site Picnik, this year started off with one accolade after another.

The team's photo editing site, which launched in 2007, has been lauded by industry heavyweights such as CNET and Macworld. It now averages 10.3 million unique visitors per month and is available on popular social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace and Flickr.

Like industry leader Adobe Photoshop, Picnik allows users to manipulate their photos in a variety of ways. With a few clicks of the mouse, users can remove "red eye" effects, fix underexposed images and rotate, crop or resize photos. Color can be brightened, dimmed or changed. And that's just the free stuff.

By signing up for the premium Picnik package, users gain access to different fonts and frames for their pictures as well as technical support when something goes wrong. The site is designed for everyday folks, so you don't have to be a professional photographer or software expert to make your pictures better. Photo qualities, such as color, sharpness and brightness, are manipulated with a set of easy-to-use sliders.

The company's success has come a long way. Massena and Sposato first met when they worked at Synergistic Software while attending high school in the 1980s. It was a time when, according to Sposato, "you could be a scruffy teenager with a lot of talent and software companies would hire you." Soon after, the two crossed paths with Picnik's third founder, Mike Harrington.

Following years of starting and selling other firms (Sposato, for one, founded Phatbits, which was later sold to Google), the three serial entrepreneurs formed Seattle-based Picnik in 2006. Today, the 11-member company is growing fast by filling a need in the photo marketplace.

"Even just a year ago, to do anything with your photos, you had to download a desktop application or buy expensive software," says Sposato, the company's CEO. "It gives everyday people photo-editing super powers." —J.M.

Health Care's Sweet Spot: Henry Albrecht (Founder & CEO, Limeade)

Ever feel like just another number when dealing with health-care organizations and their websites? So did Henry Albrecht, and he decided to do something about it.

Albrecht, 39, who spent four and a half years designing accounting software at Intuit Inc. in the early 2000s, decided that what corporate America needed was a wellness service for employees that considered the "whole person."

The result is Limeade, a service that deals with everything from securely storing an employee's health information in one place to offering wellness information, community forums, social features and the latest mobile applications for helping workers stay fit and feeling well. On the all-important return-on-investment front, Limeade maintains that keeping your workforce healthy and happy increases worker efficiency and productivity, and also cuts costs.

Founded in February 2006, Bellevue-based Limeade produces online snapshot reports for employers, which explain how the Limeade system improves the health and productivity of employees. The 10-employee firm's main customers are businesses, health-insurance brokers, consultants and health plans.

So far, Limeade has signed up several national health-insurance brokers and has about 10 companies and thousands of employees using the service. Limeade also won the 2008 Washington Technology Industry Association Investment Forum's award for web services.

With health-care costs continuing to rise and employers looking for ways to create a healthier and more efficient workforce, Limeade may have found a sweet spot in the health-care marketplace.

"Employers are facing global competition for recruiting people," Albrecht says. "And they're trying to build profitable companies. They want and need high-performance employees." —J.M.

Bringing Insurance into the 21st Century: Joel Gendelman (Founder & CEO, N2uitive)

One of entrepreneur Joel Gendelman's first jobs out of business school many years ago was with a small company that processed outsourced claim transcriptions for the insurance industry.

"I could see how inefficient it was," says Gendelman, founder and CEO of N2uitive. "Basically,

claims adjusters had to go to the accident sites, record their notes on tape and then have those tapes transcribed. It took a lot of time."

That complicated and archaic process stuck with Gendelman through the years and was the seed that inspired him to found N2uitive, a company that uses the latest technology to help claims adjusters work more cheaply, efficiently and securely. Gendelman, 44, founded N2uitive in September 2006 as part of the entrepreneur-in-residence program at the Bellevue-based venture capital firm Ignition Partners.

Claims adjusters can dial into N2uitive's telecommunications system and record their notes and conversations digitally. The audio files are then stored on a server that adjusters can consult whenever the need arises.

This activity may sound like a minor problem, but the potential market is large. N2uitive officials estimate that 75 million to 100 million claim investigation interviews (or recorded statements) are conducted every year for insurance purposes. And 95 percent of the interviews are then stored in paper files for seven to 25 years. N2uitive's alternative is a more efficient and less expensive way to save this information.

The company, based in Tukwila, appears to be touching a nerve. It already has 5,000 insurance adjusters on its system and this year was named the "Best and Brightest" company from among the 26 technology firms presenting to investors at the annual Washington Technology Industry Association Investment Forum. —*J.M.*

Television's Biggest Buddies: Andy Liu and David Niu (Co-founders, BuddyTV)

Are you dying to find out the meaning of the "Easter eggs" on the television program "Lost"? Or how about the latest inside dirt on the latest idol on "American Idol"?

If so, then you have probably already heard of Seattle-based BuddyTV. It is one of the most successful websites devoted to television-obsessed fans, boasting 5.7 million unique visitors and 35 million page views a month.

The brainchild of entrepreneurs and longtime buddies Andy Liu and David Niu, BuddyTV was launched in 2005 as a site where viewers could discuss and comment on television shows in real time as the programs aired.

But the two technology entrepreneurs, who had also been executives for the website software company NetConversions, soon realized that visitors were more interested in details about the shows than talking online during the episodes. They began to build the site as a place for fans to come and learn about their favorite programs.

"We morphed into the largest independent television fan site," Liu says. "It is a place where fans can read and watch their favorite shows and learn about the stars."

But what really put BuddyTV over the top was in early 2007 when the site focused on the popular cult television series "Lost" and Federal Way-based "American Idol" phenomenon Sanjaya Malakar. The site listed all the information the staff could compile about "Idol" and the show's budding star.

"We would get more than 5,000 comments just on Sanjaya's profile," Liu says of the "American Idol" information listed on the website. "It generated so much interest in the show and a lot of controversy. We'd have strong opinions we'd throw out there on our website and get all sorts of strong opinions back."

Today, the site is backed by about \$9 million in venture capital and is using the money to expand BuddyTV's editorial staff and its ever-increasing list of features. Next up for online television's new dynamic duo is to expand into the movie business and possibly even host films on their popular website. —*Jeff Bond*

CONSUMER GOODS AND SERVICES: Purifying the World John Kaestle (CEO, HaloSource)

John Kaestle believes everyone should have access to safe drinking water.

"That's the thing that gets us up and excited in the morning, coming to work and building this business," says Kaestle, CEO of HaloSource, a Bothell-based company that has developed a water-purification system that eliminates 99.99 percent of disease-causing bacteria and viruses from contaminated water sources.

Since 2006, HaloSource has been able to deliver HaloPure, its water filtration system, to millions of people living in emerging consumer markets around the world, providing an affordable way to get clean water in compromised-access environments.

"The technology [we developed] is a first of its kind in really the last 25 years to come all the way through, from the laboratory to the regulatory hurdles, to make it to the marketplace,"

Kaestle explains.

Kaestle hopes to take a healthy portion of the \$18 billion global drinking-water purification market eventually, but for now, he is focusing on commercializing the HaloPure product. In mid-July, HaloSource raised \$11.5 million from several venture funds that invest mainly in China and India. —*Kayvon Sharghi*

Where Work is a Party: Christopher Hughes and Leanne Mumm Pardo (Co-founders, One Hour Parties)

Coming from a busy marketing firm, Christopher Hughes and Leanne Mumm Pardo knew how impossible it was to switch into party-planning mode when the occasion arose.

That problem gave the two Seattle entrepreneurs an idea: Why not offer almost-instant office celebrations for busy companies?

The result was One Hour Parties, which was launched in 2001. Originally, the duo aimed their one-of-a-kind services toward the office scene. But they quickly decided to expand to other types of parties.

"One minute, I will be delivering cupcakes for a Hannah Montana birthday party," Hughes says in his usual excited manner, "and the next, I will turn around to set up an ice-cream social."

Besides compiling cupcake supplies, One Hour Parties has also commissioned an ice luge sculpture for chilling vodka for a Russian-themed Christmas party at Edelman Public Relations Worldwide, delivered truckloads of pumpkins and carving tools for a Halloween party at Google, and shipped 1,200 ice-cream-sundae making kits to Lockheed Martin offices across the country.

Not only are the parties inventive, they're also affordable. Punch buckets cost \$1.50 per person, while a more elaborate event such as a baby shower, which includes baby-welcoming accoutrements, costs about \$6 per person.

The catering team is currently planning a national rollout. With 11 licensee units already open in the Puget Sound area, including one in Seattle, One Hour Parties launched its first out-of-state franchise store in San Diego this past August. Soon, Hughes and Mumm Pardo plan to have at least one store in every major metropolitan area in America. —*Kim Sklar*

SERIAL ENTREPRENEURS

The Ideas Man: Darren Berg (Serial Entrepreneur)

At one point early in his career, Darren Berg recalls feeling bored. In need of a challenge, he daydreamed about someday being so busy, he'd have no time to think.

"I asked for this and I got it," laughs Berg, who now has 11 businesses to keep him on his toes. Since striking out on his own more than 20 years ago, the sleep-deprived entrepreneur has created an empire of companies that span the mortgage-lending, transportation, technology and green-home industries.

"I am in all the growth industries at the moment," says Berg, clearly relishing his position. When he's not traveling up and down the West Coast handling his hobby-turned-behemoth charter-bus company MTR Western, Berg strolls through his downtown Seattle headquarters, checking in on several businesses at a time. On one floor sits Meridian Group, a well-established, full-service mortgage enterprise that encompasses smaller auxiliary companies, such as loan-servicing software creation NoteMinder. On another floor is the newly minted GeoGenius, an ambitious global positioning system (GPS) software project. The company provides in-depth location information on any GPS-equipped mobile device.

"We visualize it as a Discovery Channel-style, hour-long special on wherever you happen to be at that moment," says Berg, who explains that the idea grew out of the need to provide more location information on the MTR coaches. The GeoGenius staff of eight is currently working on developing content for the San Francisco area, with Seattle and Vancouver, B.C., to follow.

Though he somehow keeps up with all of his companies, Berg spends the majority of his time managing the mortgage services portion of his empire, which has also expanded into the sustainable home-building market with developer Meridian Greenfield.

As if that weren't enough, Berg quickly adds that yet another new software project is in the works: Ticketing Manager, a system that manages event ticket inventories in real time across platforms. The product will hit motor-coach trade shows this fall, making it more feasible for passengers to purchase bus tickets from multiple venues, including the drivers themselves.

And all indications are that Berg has more companies to come. "I am cursed with this capacity to look at something and see how I could make it more efficient," he says. "When I'm standing in line for a cup of coffee, I'm counting the people behind the counter and in line, and thinking 'How could it be done better?'" —*Niki Stojnic*

A Smart Office Solution: Brent Frei (Chairman & Co-founder, Smartsheet)

When it comes to innovators, Smartsheet founder and chairman Brent Frei has worked with some of the best. That includes former Microsoft executive and local Renaissance man Nathan Myhrvold of Bellevue's controversial Intellectual Ventures.

Frei also spent some time working at Microsoft before founding Onyx Software Corp. back in the 1990s. Onyx made customer relationship automation software and was sold for \$92 million in 2006. While Frei was building Onyx, the idea for his latest venture, Smartsheet, was hatched.

"The thing that plagued me the most while I was at Onyx was trying to find a way to track whether things are getting done in the workplace," Frei says. "I knew there was a silver bullet out there, but it took me some time to figure it out."

That proverbial silver bullet, Frei hopes, is Smartsheet, a software-as-a-service startup he founded in June 2005. Smartsheet gives small businesses a fast and easy way to collaborate on projects and to share files, even if employees are in different offices or in different countries. Facing stiff competition from similar products developed by Google and Microsoft, Smartsheet, with its 13 employees, is focusing its products on the underserved small- to medium-sized company niche that the bigger players have so far overlooked.

Frei acknowledges that workplace productivity is not a new problem. He just thinks that he and his team have built a better mousetrap.

"We're placing a big bet," Frei says, "that we can go into an old market, where everyone has tried, but not succeeded, and build the killer app." —*J.M.*

VENTURE CAPITAL**Cyberspace Visionary: Vanessa Fox (Entrepreneur-in-Residence, Ignition Partners)**

Vanessa Fox seems too busy for one single human being. The prolific blogger, writer, lecturer and consultant somehow finds time to also be the "entrepreneur-in-residence" for the Bellevue-based venture firm Ignition Partners.

That laundry list of jobs is the price one pays for being among the hottest visionaries around concerning the future of cyberspace.

Fox, who jokingly acknowledges that she may have a touch of attention-deficit disorder, seems right at home with her assortment of jobs. She started off developing websites, before moving to Google where she created Webmaster Central. Now, she analyzes startups for Ignition, searches for the next big thing, and speaks to corporations about the importance of websites and the online search process.

Her current interests include marketing and web development. From Fox's perspective, companies need to understand online marketing in a new and different manner now that the web is playing such an important role. Developers should also be acquainted with the technical side of marketing so they can help, not hinder, companies that want to be noticed on web search systems.

"We need a holistic approach to understanding online marketing and search analytics and how they affect all parts of a business," Fox says.

While she remains coy about her specific plans, Fox acknowledges she is giving thought to launching her own company that would deal with the convergence of marketing and web development.

It only makes sense that Fox would fit in at an innovative venture-capital firm that specializes in high-technology bets. The home to the state's largest venture fund, Ignition's team is comprised of people who helped build such firms as AT&T Wireless, McCaw Cellular, and Starbucks.

Earlier this year, Ignition announced that the China venture fund it launched two years ago with a group of veteran investors had raised \$320 million to make early-stage and expansion-stage investments. The fund, Qiming Venture Partners of Shanghai, is investing in everything from health care to technology to consumer products. —*J.B.*

SOCIAL NETWORKING**From Solo to Social: Dan McComb & Lara Eve Feltin (Co-founders, Biznik)**

Dan McComb and Lara Eve Feltin used to think that attending business networking events totally sucked. That was until they founded Biznik, a first-of-its-kind web community dedicated to bringing small businesses and solo entrepreneurs together through a combination of networking, educational and social events.

With a slogan of "business networking that doesn't suck," Biznik has seen its member base grow from about 12 friends meeting over coffee in Seattle to more than 15,000 people worldwide, spanning 118 countries. At its second annual networking conference, called "BizJam," Biznik drew 250 Seattle-area attendees to hear more than 30 speakers provide business tips over two days in July.

Utilizing the best in breed of "web 2.0" technology, the Biznik.com site allows members—many

of whom work from home or via laptops in coffee shops—to create personal profiles, send messages, publish and comment on articles, and post photos and videos of themselves, akin to Facebook and MySpace. However, Biznik takes social networking a step further by encouraging members to host events so face-to-face interaction can take place and real business connections can be made.

The powerful combination of web-based networking and in-person events has earned Biznik some industry praise this year, including an Official Honoree designation at the Webby Awards and a Best in Class title at the Interactive Media Awards.

McComb and Feltin value the role Biznik plays in promoting the business success of its members, understanding that, at the “solo-preneur” level, a person’s business becomes an extension of his or her identity. “I just love the fact that we are helping people express themselves in a way that helps them make a living, too,” McComb adds. —*Kayvon Sharghi*

Online Music Men: Ali & Hadi Partovi (Co-founders, iLike.com)

By the age of 10, twin brothers Ali and Hadi Partovi had taught themselves to play guitar and program a computer.

By the age of 33, the brothers had programmed their social networking music site, iLike.com, which allows fans, artists and third-party companies to track, enjoy and promote their favorite music.

Ali, also the CEO of GargageBand.com, and Hadi, a former Microsoft programmer, collaborated to create “a more tasteful social music site” than ad-ridden competitors such as MySpaceMusic.com or less artist-friendly sites like Napster.com.

Their music site alternative struck a nerve among users and became an online phenomenon virtually overnight. Within the first six months of launching iLike in 2006, the site amassed 5 million users.

After teaming with Facebook in May 2007, the “iLike army” expanded exponentially. Today, the music service has attracted more than 30 million loyal users.

A unique aspect of iLike is that, rather than trying to create new markets for itself, it grows by syndication across other sites and services. With a majority of the company’s users based on Facebook, MySpace, Bebo, Orkut and hi5, Hadi says only 20 percent of their customers subscribe directly through their site.

As for the future, Hadi Partovi says they are working to double the number of iLike’s users. The company also plans to launch an application that will allow users to gain access to external music libraries from anyone linked to iLike.

“With more and more people on the web, users will want to explore full music libraries outside their own collections,” Hadi explains. “We want to provide the means for users to do that easily and legally.” —*Kim Sklar*

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Picture Perfect: Dan Shapiro (President & CEO, Ontela)

Dan Shapiro has been in the wireless and software businesses for years.

So when he wasn’t able to figure out how to send photos from his mobile phone to his computer a few years back, the 33-year-old techie figured other people might have the same problem.

“I found it to be such a pain in the neck,” Shapiro says of the process of transferring photos. “My phone was rendered little more than a coffin for pictures.”

Shapiro notes that while millions of people now take photos with their mobile phones, the majority of users don’t understand the complex, multiple-step process needed to transfer those photos to a computer or other device. He decided to do something about the problem.

In December 2005, Shapiro launched Seattle-based Ontela, a software company that simplifies the process to just a couple of steps to save pictures from a mobile phone to a PC hard drive or popular photo sites such as Flickr, PhotoBucket, Blogger and SnapFish.

So far, the startup is working the kinks out of the system with AllTel Communications LLC, Cellular South and Cincinnati Bell Inc. But Shapiro has bigger dreams for his service. The 35-employee company currently has venture-capital support from big names such as Oak Investment Partners, Voyager Capital, Hunt Ventures and Steamboat Ventures, an affiliate of the Walt Disney Co.

Shapiro says his goal is to launch with one of the large national carriers. After that, he’s got his sights set on taking the photo service to the global market. —*J.M.*

Causing a 'Whrrlwind': Jeff Holden & Darren Erik Vengroff (Co-founders, Pelago)

The co-founders of Seattle telecommunications startup Pelago appear to have touched a nerve with their social networking application, called Whrrl, even winning a place for the service on Apple's iPhone.

These two former Amazon.com executives are making a splash in the nascent location-based services sector with this innovative service. Whrrl lets users locate business colleagues, friends and family members with a mobile device.

The system works by using a mapping application that homes in on the global positioning system signal emitted from a mobile device. Pelago also uses search services to show just about any location nationwide on a nifty map that is displayed on your cell phone's screen. For those concerned about being "tracked" through their mobile devices, the system allows you to control who accesses your information and location; you can also elect to not be shown.

The venture-capital community appears very interested. A number of investors, ranging from Amazon.com's Jeff Bezos to Silicon Valley venture capitalists Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers, have ponied up more than \$22 million to support the venture. Part of that money will be used in the next few months to roll out the Whrrl service internationally.

Aside from locating people, Pelago officials expect Whrrl to be used by subscribers as a mobile city guide, offering preferences and even giving recommendations. —*M.F.*

Enhancing Wireless: Brian Lent (CEO, Medio Systems)

Before "smart phones" like the BlackBerry and iPhone came along and provided mobile online access, Medio gave people the ability to type, click and search their way to desired information on feature-limited cell phones.

Today, Medio is still a key player in the mobile-search market, with subscribers in the United States, Europe and Asia.

Co-founded in 2004 by CEO Brian Lent—an alumnus of the same research lab at Stanford that spawned the progeny of internet search titans Jerry Yang, Sergey Brin and Larry Page—Medio's aim was to revolutionize wireless search and advertising. Among Lent's innovations were a service that offers specialized recommendations based on a user's unique search behavior as well as voice-operated search.

Over the past four years, the Seattle-based company has won a string of accolades for playing a leading role in the mobile search arena, including the 2008 Technology Pioneers award at the World Economic Forum and a spot on IDC's list of "Top 10 Wireless Entertainment Companies to Watch."

At this year's CTIA Wireless conference in April, Medio expanded its search capabilities with the launch of its Mobile Content Partner Program; later this year, the firm plans to unveil its uSearch service, powered by personalization and analytics technologies. —*Kayvon Sharghi*

BIOTECHNOLOGY**The Smell of Success: John Hoekman & Dr. Rodney Ho (Co-founders, Impel NeuroPharma)**

John Hoekman and Dr. Rodney Ho believe they have invented a better way to deliver drugs to ill patients—and it is as obvious as the nose on your face.

The two co-founders of the new biomedical startup Impel NeuroPharma have developed a direct-to-brain delivery device in the form of a nasal spray, or in the parlance of the biomedical business, a "pressurized olfactory device."

Hoekman, a University of Washington doctorate student, teamed with Ho, an associate dean for Research and New Initiatives for the UW's School of Pharmacy, to develop the drug delivery system in 2006.

Last May, those efforts were rewarded when Impel won the \$25,000 RealNetworks Grand Prize at the annual business-plan competition run by the UW's Foster School of Business Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

While plenty of other nose-to-brain drug delivery devices have been developed, Hoekman says no other option offers the direct distribution to the olfactory region of the brain like his product. In simpler terms, Impel's new technology could lead to major improvements for patients with ailments such as chronic pain, Alzheimer's and brain cancer.

Hoekman says their breakthrough will allow doctors to prescribe a lower dose of the drug, which will lessen such side effects as liver and kidney toxicity and constipation. Impel's delivery system also allows the drugs to quickly take effect, often within five minutes. That time frame is much quicker than the 30 to 60 minutes needed for more conventional methods, such as the ingestion of pills.

Although Impel's product is still in the animal-testing stage of development, Hoekman says the team hopes to raise \$1 million from investors and begin human trial studies within the next year. —*Kim Sklar*

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