

Experience... Knowledge... Success.

Nearly four decades of in-depth business leadership experience, knowledge gathering, sharing and application...with a proven track record of extraordinary success.

Executive Profile

- Nearly 40 years building, scaling, and exiting businesses.
- Founder/CEO of multiple venture-backed and technology-driven companies.
- Experience spanning AI, SaaS, consumer products, e-commerce, sports nutrition, and marketplaces.
- Transactions and partnerships involving IBM, Sage, Brady, and numerous major distribution channels.

Selected Highlights

- Built and sold multiple companies.
- US Patent holder.
- Led hyper-growth organizations from startup to acquisition.
- Current ventures include uVino AI, LifeVend, LifeAds, Re-Play Athletics, and Esprit de Sports.

For additional information please visit my website:

www.alandiscount.com

Alan C. Discount	Professional Overview
Page #	Section
1-5	Key Accomplishments
6	Skills and Capabilities
7-10	Detailed Job Experience
11	Career History
12	Business Development
13	Products/Channels
14	Business Philosophy
15	The Company I Keep
16	Education & Training
17	Community Service
18	Personal Information
Appendix	Media

1) Launched and built numerous successful start-up and emerging growth businesses in both stand alone environments and inside large corporations. Highlights Include ...



uVino AI

uVino's AI Sommelier puts the power in your hands. Using the latest advances in AI, we help you find the perfect wine—in seconds—before you even step into a store or open a shopping website. And it's not based on someone else's opinion. It's based on yours.



LifeAds

Advertising consumers want...LifeAds lifestyle enabled intelligent advertising plug-in for digital properties

- Maximum revenue for app owners
- Engaging content/resources for app users
- Affordable prices and high ROI for in app advertising

Our plug-n-play advertising module has 10,000 advertisers and is delivered through hyper targeted algorithms to match your user's interests, when they want it.



Esprit de Sports

Licensable premium, functional sports hydration, energy, recovery, and soft drinks. All natural, refreshing taste. No artificial colors, artificial flavors, or additives. Organic, NSF certified, non-gmo, vegan, gluten free, dairy & nut free, kosher, keto/paleo friendly, NCAA and NAIA compliant. Contain all 6 balanced electrolytes for faster absorption (positive osmolarity). Low sugar (negative glycemic index), and d-ribose for cellular level energy. Formula variations available including sports drinks, daily hydration beverages, energy drinks, soft drinks, elite/extreme conditions (military, first responders, extreme athletes), and adult social beverages.



Re-Play Athletics

Your passion is your sport. You love to play. You have the drive to be a winner. Re-Play is a free app that provides individualized daily training that guides, focuses, and accelerates your physical development. We use your personal information such as the sport(s) you play, the position(s) you play, your age, height, weight, performance and more to create a personalized daily training experience. You log in, follow the video exercises, and in no time, you will see major improvements in your physical capabilities that put you at the top of your game. The system tracks all of your information and automatically compiles a detailed player profile to share with coaches, scouts and others to help you get to the next level.



*CyclesU.S.
Choppers U.S.*

Choppers U.S. is a manufacturing, sales and distribution company in the bicycle industry, selling both 3rd party, as well as our own line of over 200+ proprietary chopper and cruiser bicycles, parts and accessories. I have single handedly designed, prototyped, sourced and promoted a line of “new to the world” bicycles and parts resembling motorcycles, targeted at bringing today’s youth back to bicycling. Choppers U.S. sells product worldwide through a dealer network and major industry distributors. We are represented by hundreds of retail outlets. The company is already self-sustaining and profitable, and has been approached by larger players in the marketplace as an acquisition target.



*Champion
Rescue
Tools*

Champion Rescue Tools is an emerging growth company that has created and patented the next generation of hydraulic vehicle extrication tools. With today’s stronger 5-star crash rated vehicles and construction using exotic metals, the older competitive tools simply cannot handle the first responder’s needs when saving patients at accident scenes. In the first months at Champion I was able to complete an offering and close a round of private placement investment capital needed for marketing and inventory expansion. Repositioned brand, focused on core products and resulting sales increase in the 1st year was 4.3x prior year. Now profitable and generating positive cash flow. Manufacturing is moving towards ISO certification and new management team is now in place. Already been approached as acquisition target. Assume sale some time within the next 12-18 months.



*Personnel
Concepts*

Personnel Concepts is a multi-channel marketer with 2 call centers and a large circulation direct mail plan (17 million pieces) selling labor law, human resource, safety and other published products. I was recruited by the owner of AIO, a privately held Company, with two objectives in mind – 1) aggressively grow the business beyond the plateau the current owner had achieved, and 2) attract a buyer and recapitalize the business to allow the owner to cash out a portion of his holdings. During my tenure, I implemented a broader and more sophisticated prospecting plan (which acquired customers at a profit!) as well as capturing more share of customers through new product development, a redesigned web presence and development of new marketing vehicles. I achieved 50% sales growth in year 1 and 35% sales growth in year 2 while maintaining strong EBITDA levels of 18-20%. I also attracted and sold a majority interest of the Company to SKMGI (investment firm in Dallas, TX) in 10/03 and stayed on for the next year to help build the infrastructure and recruit a senior management team.



HR One, Inc.

Spin-off from national direct mailer G. Neil (a portfolio company of Heritage Partners, Inc. who has \$1.4 billion under management), HR One is a national provider of outsourced human resource products and services targeting the small to medium size business. I was recruited by Heritage to help their portfolio companies create a process and structure for spinning off successful web businesses, and accepted the pilot assignment of President and COO for HR One, Inc. Successfully established operations inside of four months and grew HR One from zero to current valuation of \$40 million (inside of one year) through marketing of proprietary products/services and growth through acquisition (principally stock swaps). Additional M&A efforts positioned the combined enterprise to be the largest HR aggregator in the marketplace. Successful sale/exit to Sage.



Vallon, Inc.

National web solutions provider targeting the small business marketplace with low cost, high performance products and services, delivered in seven days or less. Created entire strategy, built team, secured financing, built infrastructure (including patented workflow system), secured major distribution partners and successfully executed on plan implementation. Went from one to 60 employees and \$0 sales to \$50+ million valuation inside of three years. Raised over \$10 million in financing, principally through private placement. Attracted major distribution partners through positioning company as OEM factory for major sales networks interested in offering high demand web services to their customers. Currently largest volume producer of full service web sites in the world. Core assets were sold to largest customer (IBM) in late 1999.



Queblo Images

Laser printer products sold via direct mail. Built high margin, rapidly growing business (20,000 new customers/month) within floundering, mid-sized privately held company. Utilized sparse resources to launch entire business (developed 700 products, set up all operations, created and distributed direct mail and space advertising campaign, etc.) in less than three months. Successfully sold business to larger company interested in entering this space.

continued...

2) Repositioned and invigorated larger, mature Fortune 1000 companies. Highlights Include -



Deluxe Corp.

Two billion dollar industry leading, mass customized check and form products supplier. Led corporate-wide portfolio analysis project, reviewing all business units, sales channels and products lines. Created methodology, measurements and overall strategy for refocusing company back on core revenue/profit streams and customers. Analysis resulted in stabilization of stock price in a declining marketplace through well executed divestitures, consolidation, acquisitions and cost-cutting measures to maximize profits.



*Williamhouse
Regency*

World's second largest paper converter/outsourcer supplier to the print industry for wedding invitations, greeting cards and business stationery/forms products. Reviewed, refreshed and reintroduced numerous product lines and sales initiatives in a struggling \$200 million business. Cornerstones for success included new dynamic products, competitive pricing, engaging marketing programs and new approach to critical operational areas such as customer service and quality control. Many product re-introductions resulted in staggering sales performance improvements of 300% or more from prior year's performance within the first few months. As a result, company was well packaged and subsequently sold to #1 player in the industry at a premium price.



*Caddylak
Systems*

Major direct mail supplier of time management tools and supplies. Took unprofitable business and refocused product and marketing efforts back towards core customers and original value proposition. Re-established profitability in less than 6 months.

continued...

3) Pioneered, and exploited new technologies to gain competitive advantages such as reduced costs, improved service, expedited delivery and strategic differentiation. Highlights Include -



LifeVend

Seamless guest experiences. One provider. LifeVend brings automation to life, transforming the guest experience. Vending is only a part of what we do. Our complete ecosystem delivers self-service, simplified. Now you can provide experiences your customers never knew were possible. Our experience, scalability, and proven success are why global brands and franchises trust LifeVend again and again to deliver seamless guest experiences - while reinforcing their brand identity and boosting customer loyalty.



HR One, Inc.

First, and ultimately the largest aggregator of outsourced Human Resource services, including proprietary development of eLearning, ASP Online Tools, dynamic proprietary Content and Hard goods marketed through both conventional (direct mail) and web based channels. Proprietary business experienced exponential (5x) year over year sales growth with nominal incremental ad budget. Also responsible for integrating operations and expanded solutions portfolio through acquisition of 4 additional internet businesses. Created vision for revamping both front end web-based venue and back end integration to legacy fulfillment systems (accounting, CRM, inventory, order processing).



Vallon, Inc.

By creating the web industry's first factory infrastructure, or e-assembly™ line, Vallon was able to produce high quality, full service web solutions in an automated, scalable fashion, making them the low cost provider. Co-developed the Discount/Tong patent - a workflow automation and business management tool that monitored and controlled the web authoring process, tracked orders, assigned tasks, balanced employee workloads and provided performance and management reporting. Direct labor costs were reduced from 150+ highly skilled labor hours to just under four lower skilled labor hours per web site project, yielding the ability to produce thousands of sites per month, while improving both product quality and customer satisfaction.



CaddyLak Systems

Early adopter and beta tester of Macintosh computer. Produced industry's first fully digitally produced direct mail catalog titles. Championed new digital prepress technologies to greatly reduce direct mail production expenses, improve product selection and list prospecting as well as expediting full color catalog development from six months to six weeks. By eliminating numerous production steps and their commensurate expenses, we quickly and inexpensively tested new product introductions and prospect lists. As a result of those production successes, I was personally invited to speak at numerous desktop publishing and prepress equipment seminars for the industry leaders such as Aldus and Adobe.

continued...

Although my early professional strengths revolved around marketing and advertising, I have evolved into a strong business generalist over time. I have a proven track record and leadership in the following areas...

AI App, PWA, and Mobile App Development
New Business Development
Capital Planning/Fundraising
Strategic/Scenario Planning
Overall Business Administration
Business Planning and Modeling
P&L Management
Market & Competitive Research
Channel Development/Management Product Design/
Development/Management Lead Generation and
Acquisition Conventional Marketing and Advertising Web
eMarketing and Advertising
Process Engineering
Customer Relationship Building/Retention Alliance
Development
Shareholder Relations
Accounting Practices and Procedures Promoting/Selling
Vendor Negotiations
Organizational Development
Project Management
Team Building
Coaching/Counseling/Mentoring
Salary and Performance Administration Employee
Benefits Management Employee Development/Succession
Planning Consolidations/Cost Management Mergers &
Acquisitions
Affirmative Action Planning
Computer Expertise (Mac and PC) General
Communications
Publicity and Public Speaking
Training Development
Reporting and Analysis

Founder/Architect (*uVino AI*)

Our AI sommelier asks the right questions to match you with wines you'll love — every time. Sister company Aurum & Ash in the cannabis space.

Board Member, COO, CTO (*LifeVend*)

LifeVend is a proprietary new, patent-pending tech platform to engage users, reduce costs, and open up new revenue streams for stadium and venue owners and event promoters.

Founder/Formulator (*Esprit de Sports*)

Stealth mode sports nutrition company focusing on natural and healthy, functional food and drink products, targeted to youth and young adults. Our patent-pending formulas will revolutionize what athletes put in their bodies for fuel and recovery.

Founder (*LifeAds Advertising Plug-In*)

The turnkey, closed-loop plug-in platform for tech property owners (apps, websites, mobile web, digital signs, etc.) to gain control of their advertising programs while generating exponentially more income. Circumvents iOS and Android app tracking process, thereby providing greater insights and results. The platform significantly increases the advertising revenue stream for the tech property owner from the industry standard click or flat fee model to a significantly higher revenue-sharing model.

Founder (*Re-Play Athletics*)

Perfect Game Development was our beta application of this patent-pending enterprise level platform, which despite the economy's impact of the pandemic, is growing quickly with thousands of organic downloads per month and frequently hitting the App Store download charts. Re-Play's latest app spans the top 22 most popular team and individual sports as well as general fitness, delivering personalized training to virtually every athlete at any age.

Principal (*Alan Discount Consulting*)

After spending a successful career building, growing and selling multiple marketing and tech oriented businesses to companies such as IBM, Sage and Brady Corporation. I quickly I found myself in high demand from those who knew me, to assist them in either driving growth in their existing business, or starting new ones.

Some of the Senior Positions I have held:**Chairman and Chief Executive Officer** (*Cycles U.S., LLC*)

Define vision and responsible for entire creation of all products, distribution, marketing, infrastructure, capitalization, etc. for start up bicycle components company targeted to the 'kustom' bike and chopper bike marketplace. Most extensive line of proprietary items, cash flow positive and attained a leadership position in the industry inside of one year.

CEO, President and Director (*Champion Rescue Tools*)

Take pure engineering firm and build entire viable business around it. Focus strategy, create brand and marketing campaigns, personally deliver large sales contracts and raise funds to recapitalize. Now that management team has been recruited and infrastructure can support rapid growth, sales ramp up has begun. Generated 430% more sales year over year and highly profitable business model.

Chief Executive Officer (*Personnel Concepts*)

Took direct mail company that had plateaued and pushed growth 50/35% respectively in first two years while maintaining outstanding profit levels. Sold majority interest to investment group. Management team I put in place has again flipped the investment with a 5x return on investment in 3 years.

Chief Operating Officer and President (*HR One, Inc.*)

Provide strategic leadership and operational guidance for spin-off of successful direct mail business provider of outsourced human resource products and services. Launched new online presence and led marketing competency that quintupled year over year sales growth while improving customer experience through integration to key legacy systems. Rapidly grew both migration and expansion (market share and share of customer) of customer file at low or no acquisition cost.

Chief Executive Officer and Director (*Vallon, Inc.*)

Provide leadership for rapidly growing web services business. Through our patent-pending e-assembly™ process the Company has become the highest volume producer of full service web sites and related services in the United States. Hyper growth in areas of revenues, profitability, staffing and overall shareholder value while building strong corporate culture and high employee satisfaction. Responsible for facilitating major strategic relationships with large distribution partners such as IBM, Kinkos, MailBoxes, Etc. and numerous print and internet service franchises and capital planning/sourcing to facilitate growth.

President/Chief Operating Officer (*Vallon, Inc.*)

Establish and implement strategic direction for Vallon, Inc. Build and coach organization. Heavy focus on support of funding initiatives as well as product development, marketing and distribution.

Director of Product Development/Marketing (Deluxe)

Managed entire Product/Marketing function for Business Systems Division (approx. 70 employees). Responsibilities included profit and loss responsibility for all product lines (\$250MM). Besides management responsibilities also lead portfolio analysis initiative to assess each product line and market channel within the corporation for profit and opportunity measurement. Outcome of this initiative has resulted in much of the business unit and facility closings, spin-offs and sale in recent months. Left Deluxe, in spite of being promised a general manager's position in the near future, in excellent standing, to pursue opportunities with Vallon, Inc.

Group Product Manager (Deluxe)

Responsible for overseeing product development efforts for correspondence product group both domestically and internationally. Worked closely with "sister" divisions such as PaperDirect, T/Maker and Current. Product unit consisted of product managers, associate product managers, product coordinators, business development managers, pricing specialists, marketing specialists and regional field sales representatives. P & L responsibilities totalled approximately \$50MM in annual sales over a number of product lines such as Stationery, Labels, Printed Post-it™ brand notes, Stamps and Commodity Envelopes. Also responsible for developing and managing a number of new distribution channels including business-to-business direct mail, retail, business partners and dealers/wholesalers. Average growth by product line for first 4 months was approximately 20%. Previous efforts over a three year period resulted in marginal or "flat" sales. I was also the guiding force and model for the creation of a totally new product marketing & development organization including overall product development philosophy, job descriptions, financial business case formats, training, etc. Prepared 1995 annual business plan for targeted group sales of \$90MM achieved via increased market penetration, rapid new product development and entry into new channels of distribution while improving product profit margins.

National Marketing Manager (Regency Thermographers)

Responsibilities included:

- Management of commercial marketing efforts in 4 distribution channels (retail, direct mail, field sales, distributors) with a total revenue stream of \$100MM a year, including planning, market positioning, pricing analysis, media and product design and production.
- Complete analysis of existing commercial stationery program including working with MIS department to update and enhance reporting functions and data entry fields on order entry system to allow for more accurate future capturing and manipulating of information to better leverage database.
- In-depth surveying of dealer network as to companies strengths, shortcomings, product selection, quality, service and price.
- Established all new marketing program for business super stores which included brief training video, innovative P.O.P. display, training guidebook and other support materials. Coordinated field training effort. Initial sales response was 300% over previous quarter.
- Designed and produced an all new marketing program to assist VIP sales staff in soliciting large corporate accounts. This included working with general manager and staff to create acquisition and customer promotions.

- Designed and implementation of completely revamped commercial stationery program to revitalize Regency's image and gain back lost market share. Released in 1st quarter 1994, which coincided with an all new dealer support program and interactive order entry, confirmation and processing software at the dealer level. Entire product line was updated based upon analysis of dealer requests and orders received over the previous 6 months. Future plans for this revolutionary program included testing of a user-friendly multimedia kiosk, placed in dealer outlets so that customers can generate orders with little or no dealer involvement.
- Development of the industries first complete line of desktop publishing compatible stationery products for trade markets.

Marketing/Creative Consultant (*Williamhouse-Regency*)

Traveled throughout the corporation in an effort to organize and train the various systems, marketing and desktop publishing departments in facilities located in New York, NY, Waynesboro, PA, Hazleton, PA, Hagerstown, MD, and Chicago, IL. Assisted in smooth transition in the acquisition of Queblo Images (previous employer). This ranged from internal operations to MIS interfacing, to manufacturing and every other step in between. Other responsibilities included complete new product development and related marketing support for the following direct mail divisions:

The Stationery House, Inc., Hagerstown, MD

On-Site Title: **Creative Director**

Direct marketing operation for Williamhouse-Regency Corp. that specializes in imprinted stationery, envelopes, labels, greeting cards and related products. Mails many catalog versions to the business-to-business market. Approximate annual sales \$25 MM+

Queblo Images*, Hagerstown, MD

On-Site Title: **Marketing /New Product Director**

Business-to-business direct mail company offering high quality laser printer papers and accessories to the desktop publishing market. Both company and my services were acquired by Williamhouse-Regency in February '93.

* *Company was sold contingent upon my joining acquiring firm*

General Manager (*Queblo*)

- Establish entire operation as a leader in the desktop publishing industry.
- All staffing, operational and strategic direction associated with general management position
- Conceptualize and implement entire product and marketing strategy in an approximate three month time frame. This includes sourcing and designing all products, establishing vendors, packaging and preparation of all advertising materials.
- Implemented aggressive inquiry generation program via space ads and alternate media - often got ads for free when rented lists for prospecting.
- Coordinated mail plan for first year volume of IMM catalogs.
- Researched and placed product line in alternative distribution channels (i.e. software retail, paper merchants, super stores) other than direct mail, in an effort to increase volume and enhance product recognition.
- Maintenance of program including sales and list analysis, cost of goods, advertising expenses, postage, etc.
- Continued to manage marketing efforts for Caddylak Systems.

Creative Director/Marketing Director (*Caddylak Systems*)

- Total revision of corporate image including determination of customer profile and needs. Utilization of new products and mailing pieces to emphasize new direction.
- Managed product and marketing efforts to bring the company from a loss position to profitability in 12 months by lessening dependence on GSA contract sales and concentrating on business-to-business markets.

03/26- Present

uVino AI - Founder, Principal

12/24- Present

LifeVend - Board Member, COO, CTO

08/22 - Present (Part-Time)

Esprit de Sports - Founder

05/20 - Present (Part-Time)

LifeAds (Lifestyle Enabled Advertising) - Founder

07/14 - Present (Part-Time)

Re-Play Athletics - Founder

02/10 - 01/16

Alan Discount Consulting - Principal

11/04 - 01/16

Cycles U.S./Choppers U.S., LLC - Chairman, CEO

01/07 - 03/10

Champion Rescue Tools - CEO, President and Director

11/02 - 11/04

Personnel Concepts - CEO, Shareholder

Historical Timeline - Company/Position

01/00 - 11/02

HR One, Inc. - President and COO

01/98 - 12/99

Vallon, Inc. - CEO and Director\ 05/96 -

01/98

Vallon, Inc. - President and COO

01/96 - 05/96

Deluxe Corp. - Project Lead/Portfolio Analysis

05/94 - 01/96

Deluxe Corp. - Group Product/Marketing Mgr.

03/94 - 05/94

Deluxe Corp. - Product Manager

04/93 - 03/94

Williamhouse-Regency - National Marketing Mgr.

02/93 - 04/93

Williamhouse-Regency - Consultant

The Stationery House - Creative Director

Queblo* - Marketing Director

08/91 - 02/93

Queblo* - General Manager

10/89-08/91

Caddylak Systems - Marketing/Creative Director

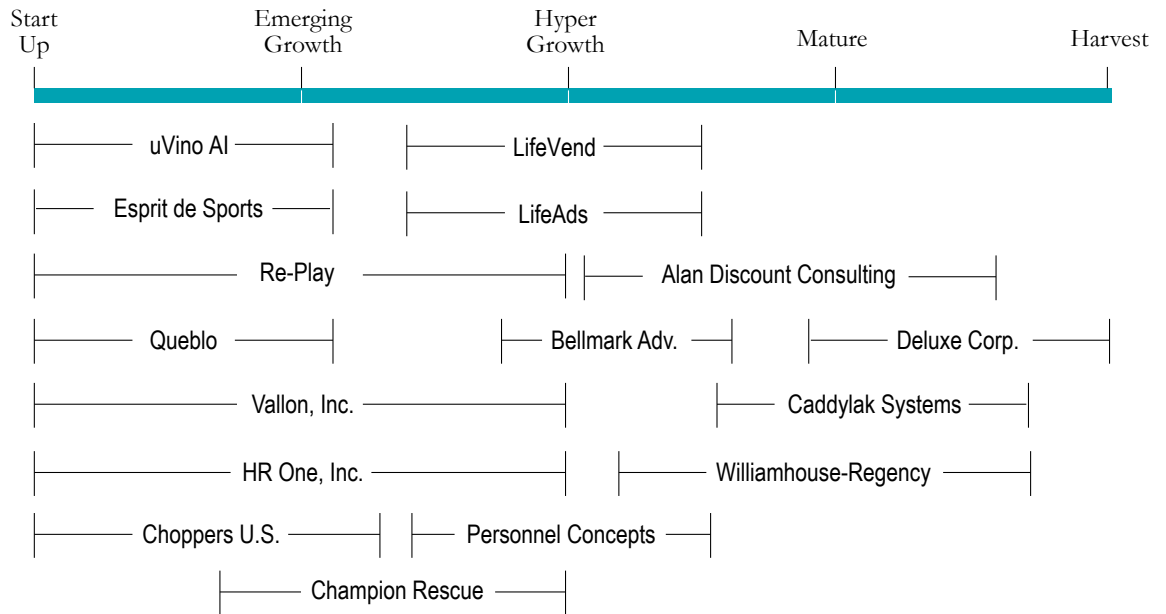
09/79 - 10/89

Bellmark Advertising - Art and Production Mgr.

* Company was sold contingent upon my joining acquiring firm

Experience by Business Development Phase

While I get great satisfaction working on entrepreneurial efforts, I have been fortunate to experience business challenges in a variety of business development phases. Each of these milestones within the business development life cycle brings with it a unique set of objectives, challenges and skills necessary for success.



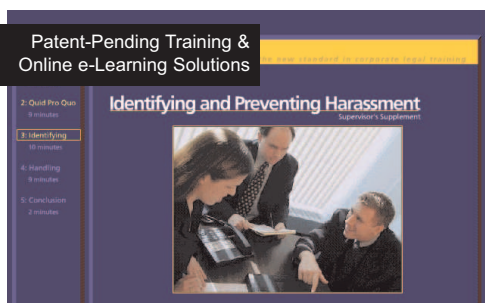
Patented, Turnkey Web Solutions & Consulting Services



Computer Publishing Supplies
Printed Forms & Labels

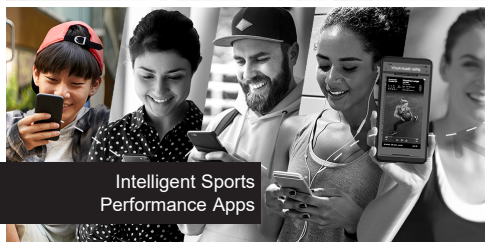
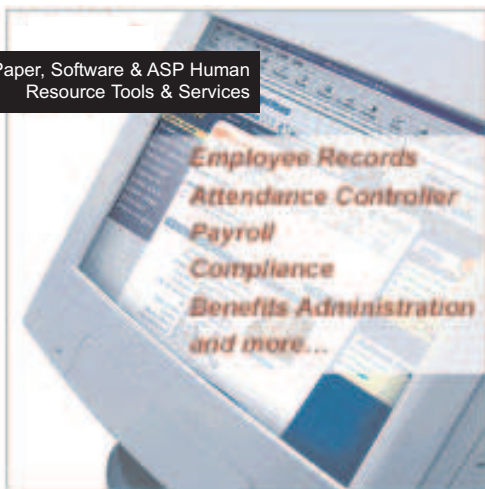


Patent-Pending Training &
Online e-Learning Solutions



Licensable Sports
Nutrition Products

Paper, Software & ASP Human
Resource Tools & Services



Intelligent Sports
Performance Apps

Experience by Product Line

I have managed businesses and product lines in the following areas:

- AI Apps, PWAs, and Websites
- Bicycles, Components and Accessories
- Time Management Products
- Software (Disk, CD, Interactive)
- Web Consulting and I/T Services
- Sports Nutrition Products
- Computer Supplies
- Creative and Marketing Services
- Human Resource Products, Services & Online Tools (ASP)

Experience by Target Customer Group

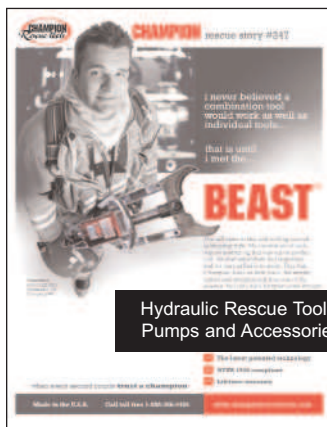
I have managed businesses targeting the following types of customer relationships:

- Business-to-Business (Small to Medium Sized)
- Consumer
- Government (GSA)
- Large Business Accounts (Fortune 1000)
- Dealers, Resellers & Wholesale Distributors

Experience by Sales/Distribution Channel

I have extensive experience creating programs selling products and services through the following sales channels and methods:

- Telemarketing (Inbound/Outbound)
- Space Advertising
- Direct Mail
- Field Sales
- Third Party Resellers/OEM/Bundling
- Retail
- Electronic (Kiosks, PC's)
- Web Based (E-Commerce, Banners, Search Engines, E-Mail - Customer and Prospect)
- Social Media
- Influencer Marketing



Hydraulic Rescue Tools,
Pumps and Accessories

Some of the business philosophies I apply...

Vision without strong implementation is nothing.

Apply creativity to everything you do.

Respect, drive and leverage technology.

Balance risk/reality in line with your business climate.

Maximize your learning and apply it.

Every shareholder, big or small, is a key to your success.

Strong management begins by providing a sound example.

Be disciplined on your course to exceeding expectations.

Never lose touch with the customer/industry you serve.

Constant communication and ongoing feedback are the cornerstone for healthy organizations.

Own your mistakes, give others credit for successes.

It takes little extra effort to have both substance *and* form.

Success breeds happiness. I always enjoy my work.

Some of the people/companies I have enjoyed working and networking with include...

General:

Costco
 3M
 Kinkos
 Office Depot
 Office Max
 Williamhouse-Regency
 Cornerstone Direct
 G. Neil Companies
 Kodak
 Inacom
 Mailboxes, Etc.
 PaperDirect
 T/Maker
 Lotus
 IBM
 First Data Corp.
 USPS
 UPS
 Sir Speedy
 InstyPrints
 American Speedy
 PIP
 Signal Graphics
 Verio
 iMall
 Taylor Corp.
 NADTP
 NAQP
 Lucent Technologies
 Allegra Print & Imaging
 Andcor Companies
 Born Info. Services
 BroadVision
 CAPV
 Corporate Software
 Federal Express
 Knight-Ridder
 Merrill Corp.
 Microsoft

NEBS

Net Perceptions
 Photodisc
 iPrint.com, Inc.
 RH Donnelley
 Network Solutions
 PGA
 QuikPages
 Whistle Communications
 Amex Small Business Svcs.
 SnapTV.com

Banking:

Saunders, Karp and Mergrue
 Parallel
 SKM Growth Investors
 B.T. Alex Brown
 Capital West Securities
 CS First Boston
 Dain Rauscher Wessels
 Equity Dynamics
 Halpern, Denny & Co.
 Hathaway & Associates
 Heritage Partners, Inc.
 Janney Montgomery Scott
 John G. Kinnard
 Ladenburg Thalmann
 MFD Capital
 Miller, Johnson & Kuehn
 NationsBanc Montgomery
 Prudential Securities
 R.J. Steichen
 Safeguard Scientific
 Southwest Securities
 US Bancorp Piper Jaffray

Publications/Writers:

See "Media" Section

My extensive, formal academic and industry training has helped build a solid foundation to perpetuate success, while encountering a broad range of exciting and varied business challenges.

1982-1985

State University of NY at Stonybrook
(Major - Fine Arts, Minor - Business)

1981-1982

Boston University (Major - Engineering)

Workshops and Seminars:

The Institute for Management Studies:

- *New Products, New Processes for New Times*

Dr. Steven C. Wheelwright

University of St. Thomas -

Graduate School of Business, Management Center:

- *Product Market Process* - Chuck McFall

- *Harvesting Creativity* - Roger Ebertson

Mercer Management:

- *Corporate Opportunity Seminar*

Sandy Barrets

Deluxe Corporation (I was corporate sponsor):

- *Winning Lifestyles* -

Finding Personal/Professional Balance

Kate Larsen

- *Getting Accustomed to Change*

Herschel Herndon

I have been quite fortunate during my career to have come in contact with numerous mentors and coaches who have taken me under their wing and nurtured my professional growth. Although we all lead hectic lives, I believe it is our corporate responsibility to make time to share our experiences, transfer knowledge and give those same benefits to our upcoming business and community leaders.

Mentoring:

1998-1999 - Private Mentor

1997-1999 - Mentium 1000, Mentor

1994-1996 - Deluxe Corporation, Mentor

Other:

1996, 1997 - Sponsor National Net Day

1997 - Aberdeen Junior High Web Teaching Project Sponsor

1999

University of Minnesota,

Carlson School of Management

Center for Entrepreneurial Studies:

Entrepreneurial Strategies

Team Coach, Guest Speaker and Course Advisor

1999

University of Minnesota

Technology Center

Lab Sponsor

1998-1999

Northern State University

Corporate Grant Sponsor

Web Publishing Curriculum

Family:

Married - wife, Patricia

Two Children - daughter, Nicole; son, Jake

Six Grandchildren - Xander, Oliver, Miles, Isabel, Charlotte, Sophie

Personal Interests:

Traveling

RVing

Motorcycling (Riding and Building)

Auctions

Antiquing

Woodcarving

Antique Restoration

Cigar Collecting

Coaching

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Website: www.alandiscount.com

Interviews, quotes and references have appeared in the following media:

Microsoft Website Case Study
Bike Rod 'N Kustom
Direct Magazine
Multi Channel Merchant
Top of the Net
Supercharged
Bicycle Retailer and Industry News
Fortune
CNN
Entrepreneur
Investor's Business Daily
Business 2.0
WebWeek
CIO Web Business
Corporate Report
Yahoo!
iBiz
Computer Dealer News
Ventures
Channel 4000
Business Publishing
Personal Publishing
Desktop Communications
Twin Cities Business Monthly
Minnesota Technology
CityBusiness
Aberdeen American News
American Printer
St. Paul Pioneer Press
Minneapolis Star Tribune
Twin Cities Cigar Lifestyles
Smoke Magazine
ForeverCigars.com
Quick Printing
Quick Print Products
Instant & Small Commercial Printer
American Printer
Printing Impressions
sbTV
USPTO Journal
FOX News

A selection of excerpts follows...

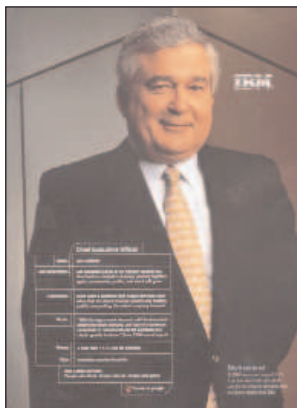


Publication: **FORTUNE**

Issue: 1999 Fortune 500 Special Issue
April 05, 1999

Title: **Giants**
IBM - From Big Blue Dinosaur
to E-Business Animal

Author: David Kirkpatrick



Vallon Excerpt:

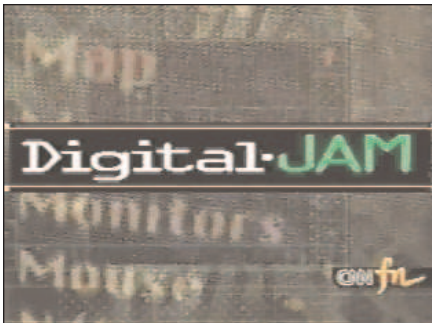
...The e-business campaign is also helping IBM drive into the small and medium business markets. Besides creating software tools to help such companies develop and maintain Websites, IBM has gone so far as to partner with Vallon, a tiny Minneapolis company that has actual website factories there and in South Dakota. Dozens of workers sit next to one another at PCs, cranking out pages for companies looking to Webify quickly. Vallon, which markets under the name NetPropulsion, guarantees to build and deliver a site in seven days for the low, low price of \$150 to \$2,000. Says CEO Alan Discount: "We're doing to Websites what Henry Ford did to the automobile."



This is a partner for IBM? Actually, Vallon started out as a competitor. IBM first ran into it when the two were bidding to develop Websites for customers of Kinko's, the copy-center chain. Realizing that Vallon's service would appeal to small businesses, Big Blue proposed to help the private company financially and create a partnership. Now IBM markets the service and hosts the sites Vallon creates. Gerstner wants to have two million small-business customers by 2001, says Discount, adding: "IBM's vision is that if they own the connectivity to those customers, they can feed all sorts of business processes through that pipe." In other words, once IBM connects with a small business, it will try to sell all kinds of things, such as services to help manage accounting, inventory, or human resources....



For the complete text, please visit the Fortune Magazine website @ <http://www.pathfinder.com/fortune/fortune500/ibm.html>



Publication:



Issue: February 03, 1999

Title: **Interview with Alan Discount**
Vallon, Inc.

Author: Bruce Francis, Digital Jam

Announcer: "Well setting up your business on the Web to do commerce can cost thousands of dollars. A Minneapolis company says it can get you there for as little as \$600."

Bruce Francis: "If you own a small business and you want to add a dot com at the end of its name, Minneapolis based Vallon says, it's got the solution for you. The company offers a product called Net Propulsion that can propel your business into the Web for as little as 600 bucks. Joining us now to tell us more about this e-commerce package is Alan Discount, CEO of Vallon, Inc. Thanks for being with us."

Alan Discount: "Thank you."

Bruce Francis: "At the beginning of the Internet, way back, just a few years ago a lot of people said 'gee there's no barriers to entry. Anyone can be just as powerful as a Walmart or Kmart' because you can just get out there and set up your own website - get out there and set up your own store, but it's not that easy is it."

Alan Discount: "Well, the Web is a great equalizer. If a website's done well a small business can look like a big business on the Web, but the key is doing it well. And a lot of people are attacking the market by offering do-it-yourself solutions for small businesses because they can't afford anything else. We've taken a different perspective, we offer a full service solution, cost-effectively, at price points that small businesses can rapidly afford, comparable to a yellow pages ad and yet it's every bit as functional as some of the larger venues that you'd see."

Bruce Francis: "You provide the design services, the basic software to run it, the hosting, all of that stuff?"

Alan Discount: "It's a complete turn-key solution. It offers everything from design/development, there are a whole host of plug and play components that customers can pick and choose almost like an ala carte menu. And then we do the back end hosting, maintenance and annual programs for updates to the sites. Our customers really need to find a one-stop shop and that's what we provide."

Bruce Francis: "Now, for a lot of companies just figuring out how they're going to do logistics of fulfillment on the Web that's pretty complicated too, can you help customers figure that stuff out?"

continued...



Interview with Alan Discount - continued

Alan Discount: "We can take them all the way through the credit card transaction. We don't do back end integration although we are introducing a line probably around Q2, Q3 that will do some integration with typical accounting software packages. We want to try and separate the upfront marketing and technology of putting a business on the Web and let the Business owner actually focus on doing the business that they like to do. So we will pass it off and seamlessly integrate with those internal processes."

Bruce Francis: "What has your reception been so far in the marketplace?"

Alan Discount: "We've gotten a great overwhelming reception. As a matter of fact we've attracted some very large alliance business partners. Companies like IBM, Kinko's, Mail Boxes Etc. are all reselling our products through to our customer base which is giving us terrific opportunities for rapid growth."

Bruce Francis: "Now we keep hearing all the time that the products you can buy off the shelf, from a number of vendors, to set up your website are going to get easier and easier to do, it's going to be practically just like typing."

Alan Discount: "That's probably a bit of an exaggeration. If you think about it the technology is really only one piece of the equation for a do-it-yourself solution. You also have to know how to market and promote your business. As the technology continues to get more and more sophisticated it's going to be more and more difficult to use those do-it-yourself software as a via portfolio."

Bruce Francis: "At what point do you say 'you're too small' or 'you're too big'?"

Alan Discount: "Too small typically isn't a problem we've got solutions that start at \$150. If somebody just wants to get a placeholder on the web we can easily get that set up for them. Smaller companies actually find the most value in our services. We try not to compete with the larger venues; the venues that get outside our customer components too far. We will do some work, either creative or functional, but we really don't like to get into the competition that's targeting on larger corporations, Fortune 1000 corporations etc."

Bruce Francis: "Are the industry leading software tools that are out there, either Netscape or Microsoft, their commerce applications, are they not suited to the small guy?"

Alan Discount: "Again they're good products if the company would really like to give it a try. But IBM, our alliance partner, IBM's research shows 75-80% of the market doesn't want to give it a try. There's a lot of good packages out there to do your taxes and a lot of people still go to an accountant."

Bruce Francis: "Good analogy. We're going to have to leave it there. Mr. Discount thanks for joining us."

Alan Discount: "It was my pleasure."

Bruce Francis: "Alan Discount, CEO of Vallon."



Publication:

NEW ECONOMY • NEW RULES • NEW LEADERS
BUSINESS 2.0

Issue: October 1998

Title: **Factory of the Future:
The E-sembly Line**

Author: Staff



Alan Discount, the ironically named CEO of Vallon, is applying old-economy production methods to new economic principles with his "Web Factory," a patented process that churns out Websites for a couple hundred bucks apiece. "It really only takes two to four hours to build a Website," says Discount. Does this spell the beginning of strip-mall hell on the Web? Discount thinks not. "We'll give you a one-of-a-kind Website," he promises. "That's the great thing about the Web. You can take a logo and some artwork and make it personal."

- 1) Write copy for your Website and choose your images and links.
- 2) Find a host for your site. You can sign up with a local ISP, or use Vallon for an extra charge.
- 3) Place your order at Kinkos, Mailboxes Etc., or another Vallon partner (Vallon recently signed agreements with IBM and several ISPs). Soon, you will be able to order your site online or Vallon software will be pre-bundled with your PC.

- 4) Choose a one- or five-page site, then pick layouts, colors, typefaces, graphics and enhancements from a binder of options.

- 5) Your Website specifications are sent to Vallon HQ in Minneapolis. A Vallon employee enters the data into the Web Factory.

- 6) Vallon's computer system fits the text and images into your chosen template, secures an Internet address, and sends your preselected search words to 20 search engines (including Yahoo! and Excite). Next, images and text are compressed and prepared, and the finished product is checked against your original request.

- 7) Within a week, you're notified that the site is ready to be surfed. Vallon will update your site monthly or quarterly for an extra fee.

FILTER

Factory of the Future: The E-sembly Line

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GRAPHIC: XPLANE (www.xplane.com)



Publication:



Issued/Filed: January 4, 2000/October 1, 1997

Title: **US Patent # US6012066**
Computerized Work Flow System

Inventor: Alan Discount

THE 'DISCOUNT' PATENT

ABSTRACT:

A computerized work flow system and computerized web site generation are disclosed. In one embodiment of the invention, a computerized system includes a work flow server. The server instantiates a process having a plurality of activities, and tracks completion of the plurality of activities as each activity is independently performed. In another embodiment, the work flow server comprises a web application server that receives Internet world-wide-web site orders. The web application server tracks the performance of the orders such that each activity within a work flow of activities is assignable for independent completion by different individuals.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION:

The present invention relates generally to work flow processes and the generation of Internet world-wide-web ("web") sites, and more particularly to computerized work flow systems and computerized web site generation.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION:

The invention describes a computerized work flow system and computerized web site generation. In one embodiment of the invention, a computerized system includes a work flow server that instantiates a process having a plurality of activities, and tracks completion of the plurality of activities as each activity is independently performed. In another embodiment of the invention, the work flow server is specifically a web application server that receives Internet world-wide-web site orders over the Internet. The web application server tracks the performance of the orders such that each activity within a work flow of activities is assignable for independent completion by different individuals.

Thus, the work flow system permits the tracking of the completion of different activities that make up a process, where the activities may be independently performed. With specific respect to a web application server, this means that the creation and publication of a web site is divided into different activities or tasks that may be performed concurrently by different individuals, who work separately from one another. This allows web sites to be generated efficiently; each individual is responsible only for his or her own task, and is desirably presented by the computerized system with all the information that needs to be known in order to perform that task. Thus, each individual can perform the task separately, without interacting with the other individuals.

In this manner, a large number of web sites may be able to be created easily, since the piecemeal completion of each is tracked by the server. An artist may be responsible for the artwork for all the web sites, for example, while a writer may be responsible for the textual content of all the web sites. If the artist is not completing his or her work on time, another artist may be added to ensure that the work is performed timely. The addition of personnel as needed is permitted by an inventive work flow system that tracks the completion of a process as divided into a number of independently and separately performable tasks. This compares favorably to a prior art work flow system in which the generation of each web site results from the performance of a unique process, such that the addition and/or change of personnel is difficult to accomplish.

In different embodiments of the invention, computerized systems and methods of varying scope are described. Still other and further embodiments, aspects and advantages of the invention will become apparent by reference to the drawings and by reading the following detailed description...



Publication: **Star Tribune**

Issue: December 1998

Title: **Network Neighborhood**

Alan Discount

Vallon, Inc.

Minneapolis

Author: Kevin Reichard

As CEO of Vallon Inc., **Alan Discount** has an insider's view of how **electronic commerce** is changing the Internet. Vallon's flagship product is **Net Propulsion**, A full-service **Web-site** solution for businesses. **Vallon**, a privately held company with **45 employees**, doesn't disclose its revenues, but Discount said sales in 1998 have **tripled** over last year.

Discount's **credentials** in the computer world run the gamut, from **beta-testing** the original **Apple Macintosh** to serving **prominent high-tech** posts. From 1994 to 1996 he was **director of product development** and marketing for the \$200 million Business Systems division of **Deluxe Corp.**, and before that he was the **national marketing manager** of business products for the \$100 million Regency Thermographers division of **Williamhouse-Regency**, a major supplier to the quick-print industry. He's been with Vallon since **1996**.

Age: 36

Family: Wife, Patricia; daughter Nicole

Lives in: Minnetonka

Birthplace: Long Island, N.Y.

Education: State University of New York at Stony Brook

Favorite Web browser: Microsoft Internet Explorer, Netscape Navigator, AOL, WebTV. "I have to use them all - we are, after all, in the Web-development business."

Favorite bookmark: www.eBay.com (an auction service). "As a customer, I appreciate their service, and I often use it. As head of a fellow Internet company, I appreciate their technology and how they have shown yet another way the Web can provide value in people's everyday lives. And most of all, as a businessman, I appreciate how they have engineered and executed their business goals and helped to revitalize the Internet IPO marketplace."

Where computing will be in 10 years: "I believe all business application, communications and processes will no longer be resident on individual computer desktops. As Web bandwidth continues to improve, more of business infrastructure will migrate towards being managed on and through the Web. The individual user's computer itself will become more of a delivery vehicle and less of the engine you will use to accomplish tasks. This will allow a truly dynamic and vast environment of program capabilities, data access and storage."

continued...

Network Neighborhood - continued

Where his company will be in 10 years: “We hope to be a major facilitator of where computing will be in 10 years by building unique, dynamic Web venues for the mass market. The Web site will ultimately become the backbone for the small business’s infrastructure – not only delivering promotional information and order through e-commerce, but also a wide range of additional support services, such as accounting and finance, human resources, consulting and more.”

Where he will be in 10 years: “That’s a tough one. Wherever it is, you can bet I won’t be far from a computer and an Internet connection.”

What he likes about the computer world: “The speed at which it evolves. To be a player, you must be thinking a hundred steps ahead. In our industry, if you can’t move from concept to market introduction in days or weeks, rather than months or years, you die. It really breeds a fast-paced, entrepreneurial environment. Some people hate it. I get a kick out of it.”

What he dislikes about the computer world: “I think we could accelerate our technology advancements even further if we did a better job of creating industry standards. We spend a great deal of time working across multiple platforms, Web browsers and software versions. I don’t think we’ll ever significantly change that, but it sure would be nice to focus on delivering more valuable products and services rather than spending extra time to ensure everyone can use the ones we have already built.”

Favorite toy for purely aesthetic reasons: His Harley-Davidson motorcycle. “I truly appreciate its power and the sense of freedom it gives me. It’s a great way to counteract the pressures of my hectic business life.”

How he became involved with computers: “My Dad had an old Commodore VIC-20 and later a Radio Shack TRS-80. I used to play games on them when I was a kid. I was an early adopter of the Macintosh computer, even though my peers thought I was crazy at the time. I never looked back. And now that technology has revolutionized the product and delivery of the printed word in the form of the Internet. By the way, I have both Mac and PC platforms on my desk today.”



Publication: **Twin Cities**
BUSINESS MONTHLY

Issue: May 1999

Title: **Mass Appeal**
Vallon, Inc. has bolstered profits - and found the ideal pool of employees - by taking a factory approach to Web site development

Author: Joel Hoekstra

Even in November 1996, long before virtual companies became the darlings of Wall Street, it didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that the Internet was a potential gold mine of business possibilities. But for Alan Discount, who has traded a stable corporate job to join Vallon, Inc., the challenge was finding the mother lode marketplace for the startup firm's primary service - developing Web sites. After nearly a year of operation, Vallon had yet to produce more than a few dozen custom-design sites.

So Discount, who is now the company's president and CEO, and the rest of Vallon's managers gathered to brainstorm. "Most early adopters of Internet technology were Fortune 500 companies, because they could afford to invest and not get anything out of it initially," Discount says. "But that's a finite market. For a small company that wasn't well known, it was a difficult environment to compete in. We had to find another source of customers."

In addition, the firm had to deal with the challenge of retaining employees, a well-documented problem that confounds most companies these days, but which is particularly nettlesome for information-technology (IT) outfits.

Gathered around a conference table and eating Thai takeout, the managers mulled over the situation. "We could have pushed the company in half a dozen directions," says Discount. A course of action gradually emerged: Instead of producing custom Web sites, the company would build them from standard components and market them to small and mid-sized firms through business-services dealers.

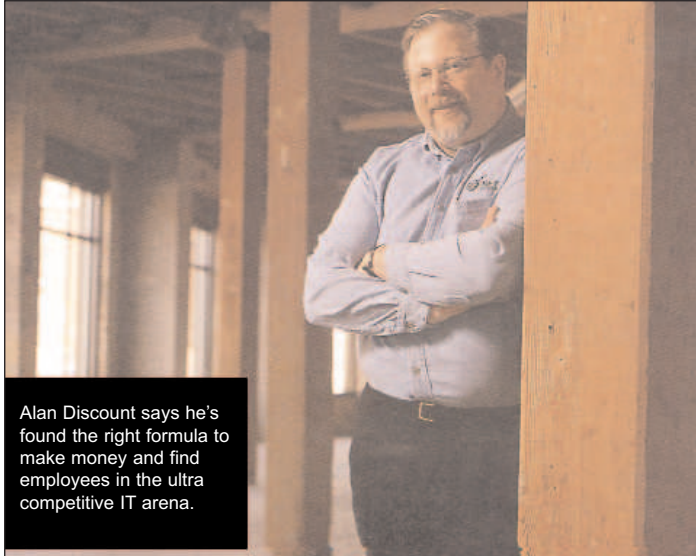
The shift has paid off. Last year, Vallon produced several hundred Web sites. And in 1999, it will crank out several thousand more, which Discount says will make it the world's largest volume producer of Web sites. He says the company's 1999 sales will be 10 to 15 times greater than last year.

Just as importantly, the new approach also has allowed Vallon to deal with the issue of finding and keeping in-demand IT workers.

The Big Market of Small Business

Mass-producing Internet sites is a particularly American enterprise, and Discount likes to capitalize on that democratic posturing. "We've done for the Web industry what Henry Ford did for the automotive industry," he says.

continued...



Alan Discount says he's found the right formula to make money and find employees in the ultra competitive IT arena.

Mass Appeal - continued

It's a grand statement, but Vallon isn't unlike Ford Motors when it comes to making products affordable and available. The firm has targeted small clients that want workable but cheap sites. "Our ideal customer has 100 employees or less," says Roy Schroeder, Vallon's national sales manager. "And 50 or less is even better."

Most small companies would balk at the \$13,000 to \$25,000 charged by some Internet designers to develop a site. In contrast, Vallon's Net Propulsion product line starts at \$800 for a no-frills site.

Vallon, in turn, has kept its costs low by developing ready-made templates. "We did research on the industries and professions that constitute 'Small Business USA,'" Discount says. "We looked at the information they'd want to include, how they'd like to organize it - all by industry type." For instance, Vallon created a real estate site template with the basic elements - house listings, brokerage history - a realtor might have use for. "It's a shell," Discount explains. "They overlay their copy, artwork, and photos." In addition, customers can choose from a wide range of fonts, colors, and display options.

Partnerships with Sir Speedy, InstyPrints, and other national companies provide Vallon with access to consumers. A printshop employee helps the customer fill out the forms, which are then forwarded on to Vallon. Approximately 70 percent of the site can be completed using the Net Propulsion software, allowing Vallon to guarantee a seven-day turnaround.

Low Turnover, High Regards

Vallon's change in focus has made finding the right employees easier - no small task. Discount says his approach to Web site design has been a blessing in that regard. "I'll probably get in trouble for saying this," he notes, "but we don't have to get the kind of transient and temperamental developers who seem to be in high demand."

When it comes to management, the company has relied on search firms to satisfy many of its needs. A recruiter helped lure Discount to Vallon from a secure job at Deluxe Printing, and several other Vallon workers were wooed away from other companies. The firm also now relies on outside assistance - recruiters or temporary-service agencies - to trim the field of candidates for new positions.

Vallon also has a program that rewards employees who recommend candidates who are hired, and offers attractive incentives to entice the best job applicants to join the firm. What's more, its employee stock options - Discount says 90 to 95 percent of employees have some ownership of the company - have attracted new employees.

It also doesn't hurt that the Internet's reputation keeps spreading. Says Bonnie Breezee, Vallon director of marketing: "As a marketer, what better market to be in than the Internet?"



Publication: **Star Tribune**

Issue: March 17, 1997

Title: **Help Wanted:
CEOs are in Short Supply**

Author: Terry Fiedler

First there was a shortage of fast-food workers. Then technical personnel became scarce. Now the booming Twin Cities economy has created an improbable situation -- a CEO shortage.

But before you get a résumé ready, understand that the super-heated market exists for a very specific kind of person in a very narrow subset of companies.

The hot commodities are "been-there, done-that people," well-rounded executives who have put a start-up, emerging company or a smaller division of a large company on the path of rapid revenue growth, said Dennis Anderson, CEO of the Wayzata-based executive recruiting firm Andcor Companies Inc.

Extra points and extra dollars accrue to those who ultimately take those companies public or sell them to someone else, particularly if the companies are in the fields of information or medical technology.

Venture capitalists, flush from successful investments in recent years and ready to invest more in new companies, can't get enough experienced CEOs, chief operating officers, general managers and chief financial officers. The intense competition means that candidates can command increasingly attractive compensation packages.

"The market for experienced, emerging company CEOs is tight," said Mike Gorman, a partner in Bloomington-based St. Paul Venture Capital, an arm of the St. Paul Companies. "Part of the reason is the extremely high degree of start-up activity out there. Private equity firms have raised a fair amount of capital in recent years and it's being pumped into emerging companies."

In a market that's been tight for the last 18 to 24 months, and gotten tighter in the last six, CEOs and chief operating officers for startup companies can command annual base salaries of \$100,000 to \$200,000, Anderson said, though the real attraction is the stock they receive in addition to their salaries.

CEOs can now get up to 10 percent of a start-up company as part of compensation packages, and senior management together -- usually between three and six people, including the CEO -- are often getting 13 to 14 percent of very young companies as part of their pay.

With the strong market for initial public offerings, those stock positions can quickly make executive millionaires many times over.

"Ever ask yourself, when you're driving in some of these suburbs like Wayzata, who owns these big houses?" Anderson asked. "I'll tell you, it's not middle managers at Pillsbury or Honeywell."

continued...





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continued...

CEOs are in Short Supply - continued

Fielding offers

Executives such as Alan Discount, president and chief operating officer of Minneapolis-based Vallon Inc., a development stage company that creates Internet Web sites, can feel the pull of the market even though he has no intentions of entering it.

Discount, whose experience includes jobs as advertising agency art director, general manager of a start-up direct-mail company and product development director for a \$250 million division of Deluxe Corp. in Shoreview, got two calls last week from executive recruiters, and the unsolicited inquiries seem to be coming with increasing frequency.

"I'm very flattered," said Discount, who said he is more excited by the prospects of Vallon, which he joined in 1995. He said he is careful not to think about other prospects because that might detract from his work.

Like Discount, R. Scott Jones, 38, very methodically sought positions

of authority in both small and large companies through the years. He considered jobs in all disciplines, whether in operations, sales and marketing or finance.

Jones was head of a \$400 million X-ray business at General Electric Medical Systems in Milwaukee, Wis., when he started thinking about becoming a No. 1 or No. 2 executive of a young company. He got serious about pursuing such a job late last year.

Then in November and December, he harvested a bumper crop. Jones received offers from three development-stage companies in the Twin Cities area -- one an Internet company and two from medical technology companies -- in addition to offers from a start-up medical imaging company in New York and a Denver medical device firm.

The "lightest" base pay offer was \$135,000, with a \$35,000 bonus, for a general manager's job. The best offer for a senior management position was \$150,000 base, a \$40,000 bonus and 8 percent of the company's stock. The CEO and COO positions he sought offered 5 to 8 percent ownership.

Last week, though, Jones loaded a truck and moved his family to Tampa, Fla., where he will head a recent acquisition of Pharmacy Corp. of America that has annual revenue of \$30 million. He also will have the dual role of vice president of marketing and sales for Pharmacy Corp., which has annual revenue of about \$500 million, he said. "I worked hard to get in this position and looked hard to find a good balance between risk and growth," Jones said. He added that he was "really pleased" with the entire process.

National demand

Demand is high in other technology centers, Silicon Valley most prominently, as venture capitalists seek the people who will increase the value of their investment in young companies.

U.S. venture capital investments rose to a record \$9.5 billion in 1996.

In Minnesota, venture capital investment fell 30 percent in 1996 from 1995, but was still a robust \$124 million, according Jay Hare, director of the technology industry group of Price Waterhouse in Minneapolis.

A better way to look at investments here might be to add venture capital investment and initial public offering proceeds, Hare said. Combined investment rose 56 percent in 1996 to \$743 million.

Any way you look at it, the market for talent is very competitive because so much money is chasing so many deals and ultimately a small group of skilled people.

"It's not as though there aren't talented people here," Hare said, "but demand is outstripping supply."

CEOs are in Short Supply - continued

For every opportunity 10 years ago, there are five today for these executives, Anderson, of Andcor, said. "I've been in the business 32 years and I've never seen it like this."

Brian Johnson, general partner of Capstone Ventures in Minneapolis, said his firm has had success outside the region, particularly in recruiting people from California, for some of its portfolio companies.

In general, companies are "turning more to professional talent to find CEOs, rather than networking through the boards of directors," said Andy LaFrance, a partner at KPMG Peat Marwick.

Longer searches

Some searches also are requiring more time. LaFrance told of one client that needed nearly nine months to find the right person for a senior position, two to three times as long as normal searches in previous years.



Publication:

Issue: November 1999

Title: **Testing 1,2...Your Business IQ**
You've Gauged Your Intelligence Quotient and Your Emotional Quotient. Now it's Time to Put Your Entrepreneurial Savvy to the Test

Author: Geoff Williams



Publication:

Issue: March 2001

Title: **Your Business: Web Site**
To Keep Up With News and Development in Human Resources
Check Out This Site

Author: Robert McGarvey

Tracking news and developments in human resources is tough, but nowadays it's necessary, both so you can recruit and retain quality staff in a tight market and so you don't run afoul of the many laws pertaining to the workplace. A useful bookmark for keeping pace is HR One, which gathers together news, information on laws and advice on best practices. Material is crafted to be understandable to nonprofessionals (meaning you) so when you put in time at the site, you'll leave knowing lots more.

Entrepreneur.com
Solutions for Growing Businesses

Remember pencils? Sure you do. You used pencils on SAT tests and for other odd tasks before completely giving them up for a Palm Pilot. Some of the legends of pencil-making include Frenchman Nicholas-Jacques Conté, who made refinements to the writing tool in 1795. Then there was William Monroe, who in 1812 became the first U.S. entrepreneur to open his own pencil-making business. What (no pencil pun intended) is the point?

History is full of entrepreneurs who saw a need, met it and made a fortune in the process. But if you haven't opened up shop yet, you're probably asking yourself "Do I have the background, lifestyle and personality to be a good entrepreneur? Could I possibly ever measure up to Nicholas-Jacques . . . what was that guy's name?" Well, we're glad you asked! Grab a pencil or pen, and take our easy quiz to determine your Business IQ...

...3. If I start my own business, I should expect to . . .

- a) work around the clock, tirelessly, until the nice men in the white coats come to get me.
- b) not work around the clock. All work and no play makes Jack and Jill a dull couple, you know?

Best answer: "a," of course. **Starting your own business takes a certain level of commitment, and while that shouldn't result in you actually being committed, there will be some nights you'll feel loopy. "I've often found myself waking up in the middle of the night, working out problems," concedes Alan Discount, of his Minneapolis-based, Vallon Inc., which creates Web sites for small businesses. Discount says his schedule is loosening up a bit, but when he started his company in 1995, he was putting in 100-hour weeks, with each day topping out at around 15 hours. Today, Discount reaches the office at 6 a.m. and goes home around 6 p.m. for dinner with his wife and daughter. Afterward, he's frequently in his home office, working from his computer. His philosophy echoes that of the numerous entrepreneurs who have appeared in the pages of Entrepreneur: "The true definition of an entrepreneur is somebody who's flexible. You need to do whatever you need to do to get the job done."**

Lesson: Anything worth anything is a struggle to achieve. If you picked "a," give yourself 10 more points. If you picked "b," give yourself 5. Even Discount admits of his 15-hour days: "You can't do that forever. You burn out."

Complete text can be found on the Entrepreneur web site @ http://www.entrepreneur.com/Your_Business/YB_SegArticle/0,1314,231457,00.html



Publication:



Issue: December 2000

Title: **The HR Channel**
HR One, Sponsor

Author: Carla Ceaser, News Director

HR One is the one source on the web for all of your human resources needs. Choose from the broadest selection of HR products available online. Get advice from leading experts, share ideas within our interactive community and put the power of the Internet to work for your company with the HR Desktop. The HR Desktop is a revolutionary, new online solution. Its easy-to-use tools simplify dozens of HR tasks. The HR Desktop eliminates paperwork and gives you more time to focus on the needs of your business and its people. To learn more visit us at www.HROne.com. HR One. Knowledge. Community. Solutions.



Publication: **Corporate Report**
THE MAGAZINE OF MINNESOTA BUSINESS

Issue: December 1998

Title: **Web Wonders**
Firms Bank on Internet Sites
to Generate More Business

Author: Kevin Reichard

Vallon Excerpt:

...“Early adopters didn’t understand what the business benefits of the Web would be,” says Alan Discount, CEO of Vallon Inc. (www.vallon.com), a Minneapolis Internet marketing firm. “All of a sudden, the business benefits to online commerce have been realized.”

What does it take to implement electronic commerce on a Web site? some expertise, the right software, and the ability to handle electronic transactions. Discount’s Vallon has made a national name for itself offering electronic commerce for Web sites, working on projects for Polaris, Northwest Airlines, American Express and Compaq Computer. He says that financial barriers to electronic commerce have never been lower.

“Through our dealer program, you can set up an e-commerce Web site for \$595,” he says. “on the open market, it could cost you between \$15,000 and \$100,000.” Although Discount may overstate the pricing structures of his competitors - you can find national vendors like MercandiZer from Hip hop Software in Miami offering e-commerce sites for between \$85 and \$100 a month - Vallon’s pricing structure is clearly within reach for any company.

According to Discount, the corporate e-commerce market is divided into three tiers:

- Where a company does all the design work internally and needs some help in actually placing the site online and enabling e-commerce. It can use tools like Microsoft Front Page to administer a site, or catalog builders like Intershop 3 from Intershop Communications in an Francisco to design the online offerings.
- Where a company works with a third party (like IBM and Kinko’s, both of which resell Vallon design services and software) to design and implement the site. After the site is live, the corporation will assume all the day-to-day maintenance tasks.
- Where a company hires an e-commerce specialist to design, implement, and maintain the site.

Publication: **CityBusiness**

Issue: February 03, 1999

Title: **Internet**

Vallon Plucks Plum Web Assignment
From IBM - Will Develop Web Sites for
Big Blue Customers

Author: Henry Breimhurst

In the past, some Web developers have raised an eyebrow at Armonk, N.Y.-based IBM for its Web commercials on TV. While such advertising does raise the profile of e-commerce, they said, IBM wouldn't touch a company that wanted to build a Web site for less than \$50,000, let alone \$2,000.

IBM, as it turns out, was not deaf to that observation. And a Minneapolis-based company is now preparing to reap the benefits of the gap in IBM's service.

Vallon, Inc., a Web developer specializing in low-cost, assembly-line-style sites, is about to launch a new service in conjunction with Big Blue. Small businesses that approach IBM about an Internet presence will be offered all of IBM's support and will be hosted on IBM's servers, but when it comes to building the site, they will be sent to Vallon.

"At the top of the Web development pyramid are the high-visibility, high-end custom jobs," said Alan Discount, CEO of Vallon. "We started there but realized the opportunities were limited. The last time I checked, the Fortune 500 only had 500 potential customers. From the bottom up, there are millions of companies that are untapped."

IBM hated to leave those potential customers on the table, too. "We're conducting a campaign globally to attract and support small businesses as they put their first present on the Internet," said Lee Warren, a solution manager for IBM.

IBM originally expected to attract small business development by making tools available to small businesses with which they could build their own sites. "During our research, we found that no matter how good a tool IBM could provide, there was confusion," said Warren.

Enter Vallon, creator of Net Propulsion. Net Propulsion is a system whereby the customer flips through a folder filled with pre-build components, fills out a form identifying what they want, and a team of less-experienced developers can assemble it in a matter of hours from prefab parts. (Discount calls it an "e-sembly" line.)

This means big business for Vallon. While he wouldn't reveal revenue figures for the privately held company, Discount did say Vallon expects to have 1999 revenues eight to 10 times higher than in 1998, and will add 100 employees to its current 50.



Publication: **Quick Printing**
FOR QUICK AND SMALL COMMERCIAL PRINTERS

Issue: January 1998

Title: Interview: **Web World**
Vallon's Alan Discount Reveals the
Secrets of the Internet

Author: Bob Hall

If one believes the hype, everyone has their own Web site these days – printers, their customers, and their 14-year-old children. The fact is that only about 17 percent of all small businesses even use the Internet regularly. However, there is no denying that this segment is growing and that the electronic community is a fact of life. In an attempt to sort it all out – and to find out if there really is money to be made in cyberspace – QP turned to Alan Discount. Discount is president and COO of Vallon Inc., which developed and markets Net Propulsion, an outsourced Web site production and support service. A beta tester for one of the original Macintosh computers, he has been involved in digital prepress, worked as an ad agency creative director, moved into direct mail, served as national marketing manager for Regency Thermographers, and worked in product development and marketing for Deluxe Checks. He was interviewed by QP Contributing Columnist Karen Lowry Hall. Contact Alan Discount at 612/376-7543.

Q: Starting with the basics, how are the Web and Internet related?

A: The Internet is a global network of computers and information. It was built by the government for communication purposes, later given to the educational system, and then opened up for commerce a number of years ago. The World Wide Web is a single component that is perhaps the most publicized and controversial. Other major components include newsgroups, e-mail, FTP, etc. The Web is easiest to use because of its intuitive interface, cross-platform compatibility, and its ability to incorporate sound, pictures, text, graphics, and video. Some people describe the Web as an interactive book about everything. From a technical standpoint, it is an information resource that is accessed with a PC, standard phone line, and a modem.

Q: What exactly is a Web page or site?

A: A Web page or site can be described as a specific individual or company's page in that interactive book I mentioned. It is typically an advertising or information resource that can be viewed by millions of people around the world at any given time of day or night. Perhaps the easiest way to describe a Web site is to liken it to printing. A Web page or site can take shape as simple as a directory listing or classified ad, or as complex as a full-color, multipage catalog. While mass distribution and accessibility of information are huge benefits of utilizing the Web, there are also many other significant benefits. [Because of] its interactive capabilities, a Web site can be used for both push and pull marketing. And you have the ability to track Web site usage, the "hits" or places people have visited within the site, and how long they stayed there.

continued...

Web World - continued

Q: What are the components of a well-constructed Web site?

A: First and foremost, a Web site must be engaging. It must have an easy-to-understand purpose for existing. The way the viewer moves or navigates throughout the site is also crucial, especially since the information they are looking for may be several pages into the site. It must be well organized. People tend to get impatient when they surf the web. If they don't understand how to use your site, can't find what they want, or it is slow in delivering information, they will leave. That being said, the major components typically include a home page or introduction, a selection of specifically purposed body pages-each with a clearly labeled theme and simple access through point-and-click buttons, contact information, corporate image graphics such as logos and slogans, and a response vehicle such as e-mail or a guest book. And then, [there are] the not-so-obvious components that will help people utilize your site effectively and efficiently such as key work tags and search engine registration, image compression for performance, and compatibility and quality control across all popular Web browsers. Last, it needs the other basics of sound promotion such as accurate spelling and professional layout and design.

Q: What are some of the ways a Web site may be used?

A: This is a wide open topic. Almost everyday, I see a new way to use the Web. It truly is a remarkable medium. Typically, people use the Web to share information-either as a distributor or gatherer-to accelerate and enhance communications, test customer satisfaction, enhance image, or expand reach into the market to generate additional sales leads or revenue.

Q:How much does it typically cost to build and maintain a Web page?

A: Unfortunately, there is a great deal of hype in the marketplace. On the one hand, you will see ads offering free Web sites. Buyer beware-there is no free lunch. The functionality and presentation of these sites are typically poor and the cost is almost always buried in the cost of monthly hosting. On the other hand you hear about large companies spending millions of dollars for sophisticated Web venues. A small to medium business can purchase a professional presence for an initial investment of as little as \$200 to \$1,000. Ongoing costs, annually, usually range from \$200 to \$600 for hosting and updating. That's it.

Q:Can you build your own Web page – what are the advantages of trying to do-it-yourself?

A:There are many complex tools available to create your own Web page. And many people have the time, ability, and interest to purchase, learn, and implement those tools. Those people tend to be the early adopters and more technically skilled users. The obvious advantage to building your own Web site is cost. In some cases, it can even be done for free if you agree to sign on for monthly hosting, which gives people access to your site. The major disadvantages begin with the learning curve and time required to produce a viable Web page and end with issues like image. If you are not technical and creative, the outcome of a self-built site may be a disappointing and frustrating experience for both you and your viewers. Let me give you an example of how we relate the various methods of producing a Web page to that of a business card. I was the national marketing manager for Regency [Thermographers] and people always said to me, "With the advent of desktop publishing, don't you think printed business cards are going to go away because now people can create customized cards for any given moment, using preprinted paper that's already perforated, etc." We weren't threatened by that at all. In fact, we separated the business card market into three major groups. The first was the people who would do that. That means you need to understand the desktop publishing software, have some design capability, and when you print it, it still doesn't

continued...

Web World - continued

have any raised ink or any high-end processes used. There's no engraving, or stamping, or anything like that. On the other end of the spectrum, you have people who would spend thousands of dollars to go to an ad agency to create a high-scale corporate image. They would use those highly specialized services and spend tons of money and come up with a very professional business card. Then you have the whole group in between that goes to the quick printer, typically because they can get a \$19.95 black thermography on white stock, professionally done business cards that meet their needs. That's the lion's share of the market. We separate the Web industry into the same pockets. You've got those people who would either get free software or buy software and give it a try themselves. You have those at the high end who go to a Web shop that has a very good reputation, and they're willing to pay for it. They get all the bells and whistles. But most people, we believe, will turn to some resource – such as a quick printer – who can give value, convenience, knowledge. That's where we see the biggest opportunity in the Web industry, and it's a no-brainer. The Web is really born out of print & publishing.

Q:How can quick printers best take advantage of the opportunities offered by this new technology?

A:You know, the Web and printing are so similar. All of the graphical and text components for a Web site are often already in the hands of the quick printer for other printed projects they have done for their customers. Thousands of quick printers have realized that there are significant opportunities for high-demand, high-volume sales, and profits by selling their customers Web sites. There are basically two ways quick printers can get involved. The first is to acquire the internal resources and knowledge required to build sites. That usually includes buying hardware and software, hiring staff for both sales and production, training, collateral material development, etc. This is certainly a viable way to go, but can be quite expensive and, if the technology is unfamiliar to them, risky. The second is through an outsourced program like Net Propulsion, where the quick printer writes the order, collects the information, and sends it all to us for development, hosting, and maintenance. And we have found that outsourcing, in this case, not only has far less up-front investment and risk, but also can yield higher profit margins for the dealer. This allows them to spend time doing what they do best – interfacing with their customers and generating business.

Q:Do you see quick printers positioning themselves to become the standard resource for people who need Web design services?

A:Absolutely. When you ask most people, "Where would you go to get a Web site?" They say, "I don't know." That creates a significant opportunity for somebody, such as a quick printer, who's already talking to customers about marketing and promotional materials, already has all the components in-house that they need to start the Web site project – like the logo, the copy, and the photos, etc. – and have that link and rapport with the customer of that value and service orientation. They already tell the customer, "You really don't need to understand that. Put it in my hands. You trust me with your printing, now trust me with your Web site." It's kind of the next generation. It just gives them more share of the customer.

Q:What pitfalls and opportunities do you see in the near future on the Web?

A:As long as people can cut through the hype, set realistic expectations, and find a reputable vendor to build and maintain their sites, the Web can be a great tool. And growth of the Web continues to be staggering. Industry experts estimate that some 5,000 Web sites are being built everyday. It is a medium that is growing faster than television. Billions of dollars are being spent on its infrastructure and, with the advent of Web TV and network PCs, it is moving out of the office and into the living room. We believe that it will continue its rapid growth and become a major part of everyone's daily activities. We are only scratching the surface. As infrastructure improves, videos and other technology we haven't even thought of will be viable on the Web. One thing is for sure – it's growing and it's here to stay.



Instant & Small Commercial Printer

Publication:

Issue: March 1997 -
Special Outsourcing Issue

Title: **DL On-Demand**
Outsourcing World Wide Web Sites

Author: Staff

In early November 1996, in a conference room like most others, a half dozen people sat around an oval table and discussed their company's future over cartons of Thai food. As the autumn leaves gave way to Minnesota's first snow of the season, the task at hand for Vallon Inc. employees was to evaluate the climate of the World Wide Web marketplace. Already providing software and web site development for Fortune 500 companies, Vallon was eager to expand its services to capture more to the growing web market.

The project was akin to writing a Farmer's Almanac for a topic that had no history. The products under consideration included a classified ad photo program, new web development software that would be sold over the Internet and an Internet site for yacht buyers. According to the company, to be seriously considered, a new product or services must be unique; utilize Vallon's strengths; provide ample economic benefit; and inspire enough passion to enable Vallon employees to make the idea a reality. After a week of intense review, not one of the suggested ideas passed Vallon's established criteria.

Then, Vallon President Alan Discount, transferring his design and marketing knowledge gleaned from his experiences working with Willimhouse Regency and Deluxe Business Forms, suggested an idea that met all the criteria. Discount, along with Tom Baker, Vallon's creative director, proposed that the company provide an automated web site development program that printers could sell to their customers. Senior Vallon management quickly reached a consensus to pursue the idea, and Net Propulsion was launched. By the middle of November, the first business plans were drafted, web sites were researched, web site development software was being customized and templates were under development.

Less than 90 days after its inception, the Net Propulsion program became a reality as the first dealer "albums" rolled off the presses. Immediately, more than 200 of the books were distributed to printers who had already joined the program in its first weeks of promotion. In January, Signal Graphics Printing became the first franchise to offer the service nationwide.

The Net Propulsion program The Net Propulsion program mirrors traditional outsourcing programs, and was developed to help full-service printers expand their product offering and generate new revenue by providing their customers with personalized web sites.

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Outsourcing Web Sites - continued

"There are more than 60,000 web pages being produced per month, according to some estimates," says Discount. "Now, not only can printers garner a significant portion of that business, but we believe they can create a new demand.

"Most people don't know where or how to get a web site produced. This program is a natural extension of the print shop offering and makes selling high-quality web sites as easy as selling business cards or wedding invitations."

The Net Propulsion dealer album is comprised of more than 152 full-color web site templates and design elements. The album displays everything from basic sites to specialized sites designed for all types of professions to totally high-tech venues. When drafting the album, Tom Baker's experience designing stationery for the instant and small commercial print market kept him focused on the demographics of the market's customer base, and enabled him to produce the one item printers must have in order to sell outsourced products - a



Animated Jump Page



Home Page

- Dynamically Generated "Review of the Day"
- Simple User Interface
- Featured Sponsors



www.forevercigars.com

Title: **ForeverCigars Web Site**
Non-Commercial Website Designed to Test New Dynamic Functionality and Gather Extensive User and Product Data; Home of AOL Cigar Message Boards for Two Years+

Author: Alan Discount

You know that feeling you get. You are relaxing after a tough day. You need an escape. You light up a handmade cigar and suddenly you are transported to another place. No stress. No pressure. And when you're done, things don't seem as hectic as before...

Then there is the feeling you get when you walk into a humidor. The slight dampness of the air. The sweet smell of cedar and fine tobacco. The rows of premium, handmade cigars. You can almost envision the cigar factory where each cigar has been carefully crafted and nurtured by skilled rollers.

Or how about that special bond between two cigar smokers. You may have just met someone for the first time and if they share your passion for cigars, they are already a friend. You have a common tie...

If you can relate to any of these descriptions, then you are part of an elite group. A group that we feel honored to belong to. A group that has a strong common bond and often reaches out to each other to share their cigar experiences (and cigars!). We have learned more from this group about the art of selecting, storing and smoking fine cigars than we could have ever learned from any books on the subject. Real experience is the best teacher.

So we started thinking. How could we use our talents and contacts to help spread this vast pool of knowledge and friendship? How could we give something back to the people who have nurtured our love for cigars? And then it struck us.

In our travels around the country and on Internet message boards, we have seen a wealth of information - information which is more personal and of higher quality than that which is offered by the big cigar magazines. Why is it better? Because it is from you - the real cigar smoker.

That is why we have built forever cigars - for you.

What is forever cigars?

Forever cigars is a website designed to help both new and seasoned cigar smokers share their purchasing and smoking experiences. The site will represent the voice of hundreds (if not thousands) of real cigar smokers just like you. We invite your participation in this project in a number of ways:

continued...



Flat HTML Content Pages
Rotating Banner Advertising (Non-Commercial)



Dynamically Generated Survey Pages,
Collected In-Depth Data for 2 Years on
Thousands of Cigar Smokers, Their Cigar
Preferences, Where They Shop and What
They Like to Drink, etc.

- Drop Down Menus for Data Consistency
- Data Written to Database
- Auto E-mail to User and Admin
- Full Admin Editing Tools



Incentive for Completing Surveys was
Entry Into Weekly Drawing. Sponsors
Supplied Prizes in Return for Promotion on
Site. Weekly Prizes Included Humidors,
Boxes of Cigars, Ashtrays, etc.

ForeverCigars Web Site - continued

On-Line Cigar Survey Form - rate your favorite (and least favorite) cigars with our simple survey form and be a part of our cigar rating panel. The results can be searched by any of the survey criteria - flavor, size, origin, price...to help you create a list of cigars that match your preferences exactly.

On-Line Tobacconist Survey Form - share your comments on the tobacconists you visit with our second on-line survey form. After all, we all would like to know the best places to buy, what their selection and pricing is like, the store's atmosphere, staff's personality, etc.

Personal Humidor - after reading other smoker's comments create a list of your favorite or "must try" smokes

On-Line Message Boards - chat, trade, or purchase your favorite cigars with our state-of-the-art forums

The forever cigars website will be implemented in two phases. The first phase will focus on collecting data - your feedback about cigars and tobacconists. The second phase will allow you to search and sort that data to meet your own personal needs.

Why should you participate in this new cigar smokers venue?

Well, besides being great fun, we will be giving away a forever cigars gift pack in a random drawing to all survey respondents every week. The forever cigars gift pack includes a beautiful etched glass ashtray, a cigar cutter and a premium hand-rolled cigar all packaged in a handsome gift box. The cigar selections will include some of the world's finest - Montecristo, Opus X, Partagas Signature 150, Padron Anniversary Series and more! These selections will be hand chosen by forever cigars from our personal humidors at random and at our discretion - sorry, winners will not be given a choice of cigars at this time.

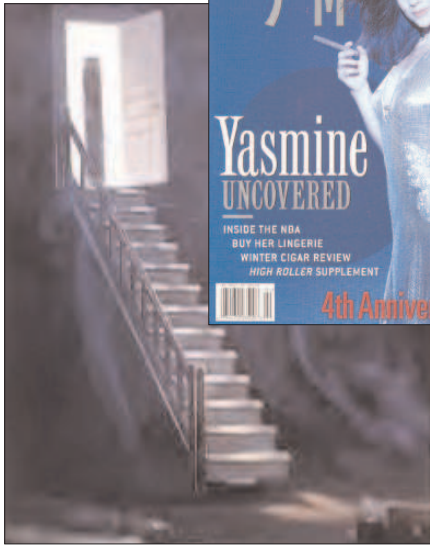
What's in it for us? Why are we doing this?

We currently have absolutely no commercial interest in this project. We simply enjoy interacting with fellow cigar aficionados and always want to learn more about cigars. Some of our best friends, conversations and experiences have happened as a result of meeting fellow cigar smokers and our mutual passion and appreciation for cigars.

Who's behind forever cigars?

The original concept for this website came from two cigar buddies, long time friends and business associates, Tom Baker and Alan Discount. Coincidentally, Tom and Alan have spent their entire careers in the print and publishing industry. Most recently they have worked together to build one of the country's most successful Internet development companies, called Vallon, Incorporated. Vallon™ has done work for clients such as American Express, Northwest Airlines, Mack Trucks, Polaris Industries, and has most recently launched a high-growth website program offered through thousands of local quick printers and copy shops around the nation, called Net Propulsion™. (Some of you were probably wondering why this website looked so professional since we have no commercial interest in cigars - there's your answer). If you have any feedback about this website or just want to talk cigars, you can contact Tom at tomb@forevercigars.com and Alan at aland@forevercigars.com.

We truly hope you enjoy forever cigars and hope that you come back often to share your comments and suggestions. Happy smoking!



The Panelists

Alan Discount (right) is the CEO of Vallon, Inc., a Minneapolis-based Internet solutions company that sponsors www.forevercigars.com, which is currently the home of the AOL cigar message boards.

Greg Varner (left) is a grad student who spends his weekends working in *J.R. Fielding & Co. Tobacconists* in Excelsior, MN.

Publication: **SMOKE**

Issue: Winter 1999/2000

Title: **Smoke Cigar Review**
Don't Be Afraid of the Dark
Maduros

Author: Michael Malone

Whether or not we'd care to admit it, we all had that admonishment directed towards us as children. While this childhood fear of the unknown was easily remedied through kindly parents and the dull glow of a night light, it stays with us, in different forms, well into adulthood. We encounter it nearly every day: A new job opportunity. Investing in a neighborhood dubbed "up-and-coming" by a real estate agent, or in the booming stock market. Trying maduro cigars.

The word "maduro" itself refers to maturity, a pre-requisite for any new venture. In our Winter issue, which celebrates both the ubiquitous Millennium and SMOKE's fourth anniversary, we take a look at the finest maduro cigars available. I personally can't think of a better partner for a pint of dark microbrew in a dark, smoky bar.

And if you still can't handle the dark, not to worry; we've got a stash of non-maduros in the review as well. We won't make fun of you. Standing out amidst the maduros is the El Original Toro, taking top honors with a 4.4 score. Manufactured by Island Smoke Shop in Florida, the El Original wowed our finicky panelists with an exotic blend of filler from five different countries. At just under \$5, it's a steal. Just behind the El Original were the Habano Primero, robusto and the Hoja Cubana XXO, both clocking in with 4.3's.

That same score was good enough to run the table among the non-maduros, as the ST Dupont Churchill bested all comers, including a cache of Cuban interlopers. As one panelist said of the ST Dupont, "This is a cigar that says, 'Welcome home. Sit back and relax.'" We suggest you do the same.

Doing just that in the new cigar room of her Beverly Hills mansion is the staggeringly sexy Tia Carrere, our Celebrity Panelist. You've seen this exotic Hawaiian beauty, who combines almost as many nationalities as the El Original, in *Wayne's World*, *True Lies*, and the new TV program "Relic Hunter," in which she plays a globe-trotting treasure-hunter. Check out what treasures Tia unearths in the Winter review. Thanks for the help, Tia, and thanks also to Scott Smith, of Santa Monica, California. He's the winner of the Winter "Become a Reviewer Contest," which you too can enter by visiting the SMOKE contest page at this site.

Besides the premium cigars, you'll also find a handful of machine-made smokes in our magazine's Winter review. This dirty dozen offers some tasty selections at affordable prices, giving you, quite literally, some bang for your buck. Because you never know when your up-and-coming neighborhood will put in a nuclear reactor, or the booming stock market will crash to earth.



Publication:

CIGAR
Lifestyles

Issue: Summer 1998

Title: **Lighting Up With...**

Alan Discount

Chief Executive Officer, Vallon, Inc.

Author: Molly Quach

It's onward and upward for Alan Discount, CEO of Vallon, Inc. "We started with a company that was worth nothing and now it's worth upwards of \$25 to \$30 million in a two-year period."

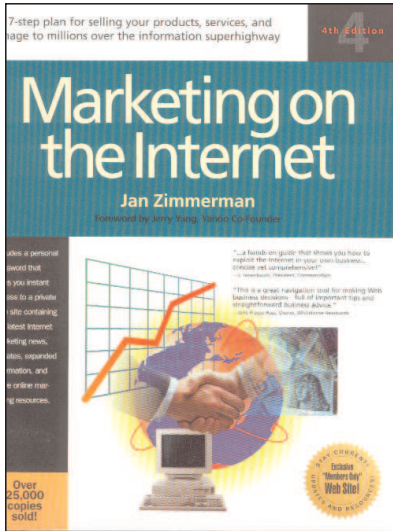
Every day, according to Alan, 5,000 new websites are published. Vallon creates some of those websites. "We are a professional web solutions company that provides internet products and services for small companies," Alan says.

Alan was Vallon's first full-time employee. He was hired in May 1996, although the company started in December of 1995, in a period of research and development. A typical day begins at 6:00 a.m. reading the 50 or so email messages he has received since he left the night before. "I enjoy doing this during my quiet morning time," he says. And when the office starts waking up, Alan jumps in the middle of the action.

Alan likes to make it home to have dinner and enjoys a cigar after work. His cigar preferences include Fuentes, Ashtons and Padrons - especially the Padron Anniversary Series Maduro.

An avid cigar collector, Alan is often on the internet trading cigars with people. He also enjoys cigar crawls and going on crawls in different cities "to have a good meal, visit some cigar shops and see what's available there that's not here."

One of Alan's favorite websites is ForeverCigars, a non-commercial venue started in the fall of 1997 "to represent the voice of real cigar smokers and to help them learn about new cigars, places to buy them and a way to meet new cigar smoking friends on-line."



Publication: **Marketing on the Internet**
 A 7-Step Plan for Selling Your Products, Services, and Images to Millions Over the Information Superhighway (4th Edition)

Author: Jan Zimmerman with Foreword by Jerry Yang, Yahoo Founder

"Having a Web site for your business can be powerful, but most people don't realize that it is as much an exercise in marketing and promotion as it is about technology. Make sure you put your best foot forward in both areas to set yourself up for success."
 Alan Discount, CEO, Vallon, Inc.

Consumers Know Best: Forever Cigars

Forever Cigars is an unusual, so far non-commercial resource. The purpose of the Web site is to "help both new and seasoned cigar smokers share their purchasing and smoking experiences." A consumer-oriented site, Forever Cigars recognizes that users know cigars better than anyone else. Built for friendship and comraderie, its success "has been priceless," says site originator, Alan Discount.

Specifically, the goal of the site is to create two databases that can be searched for recommendations, one rating cigars that match the user's preference and the other rating tobacconists. The on-site surveys are a model of data collection, obtaining information that would take many weeks and much more money to collect any other way. The cigar and store surveys focus not on user demographics, but on product quality and buying experience.

Details about price, shape, draw and burn characteristics, the brand names of recommended beverages, and personal comments turn cigar amateurs into experts while educating them about the terminology used to judge cigars. Simultaneously, the cigar database provides marketing intelligence to tobacconists and smoking lounges about products to stock, and to cigar makers about features to emphasize in their marketing. According to Discount, the site has already gathered data that will be quite valuable; he's already declined offers to write a book about their findings.

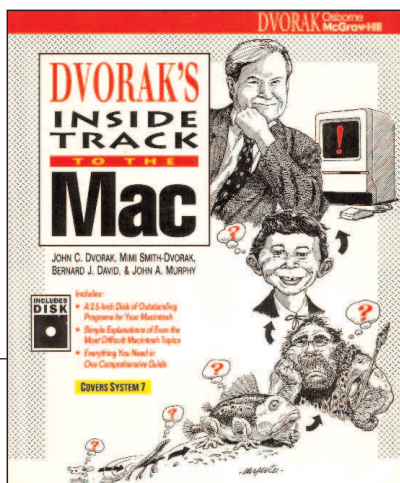
The names of those who submit a survey entry (and other members who e-mail a request) are entered in a weekly drawing for cigar related products from the site's sponsors. Other features on the site include a cigar discussion forum (users must register, but membership is free) and a scrapbook of photos from various cigar-related events.

At the moment, nothing except advertising is sold online, and the creators of the site maintain the site is a labor of love. Site development and maintenance is donated by Vallon, Inc., a large-volume producer of full-service Web sites. Alan Discount, its CEO and long-time cigar buff, explains that the site fuels his hobby, enabling him to "share [his] love of fine cigars, learn more about them and meet people who share the same passion." Indeed, hundreds of active users, many of whom visit daily, have created an online community (and apparently from all the photos also an off-line one).

The Forever Cigars site acts as a testbed for some of Vallon's new products, such as online survey forms and message boards. After AOL decided to drop their cigar message boards, Forever Cigars donated its message board area to the AOL group, which moved to its new home in February 1999.

Originally intended as a temporary tool, the initial development cost, underwritten as R & D, was high due to the complex underlying database and administrative features. According to Discount, Vallon expected to convert the site to demo purposes, rather than keeping it active. But users and interested sponsors, who donate prizes for the advertising exposure, provided an outpouring of support each time Vallon considered shutting down the site.

The company is now committed to keeping the site active as long as the AOL group calls it home, while continuing to use it to introduce new features of the Vallon product line. (There's a lesson here for non-profit organizations seeking a sponsor for their Web sites.) It will be interesting if this high-quality site can survive the pressure for commercialization.



Publication: **Dvorak's Inside Track to the Mac**

Author: John Dvorak, Bernard David

Internationally known author and columnist John C. Dvorak and his co-authors have compiled the definitive, information-packed book/disk package on the Macintosh, loaded with insights, tricks, and goodies that all Mac users - beginners to programmers - could want...

The authors would like to thank all the people who help make this book possible...Praise goes out to the third-party vendors who were extremely helpful...Alan Discount (CaddyLak Systems)...

Publication:



Issue: Multi Channel Merchant
November 26, 2003

Title: **Equity Firm Invest in All-In-One**

Author: Mark Del Franco

Pomona, CA-based signage marketer All-In-One, which mails the safety and signage catalog Personnel Concepts, has scored much-needed capital to continue its growth spurt. Dallas-based private equity firm SKM Growth Investors (SKMGI) has taken an equity stake in All-In-One Products. Terms of the equity investment were not disclosed.

Founder Michael Rode, who started All-in-One in 1989, will remain with the companys board of directors. According to chief operating officer Alan Discount, the marketer will use the funds to grow its signage and human resources business, which has increased 50% during the last 12 months. All-In-One now has more than 500,000 customers.

The companys growth is likely to get a boost next year from anticipated changes in labor laws. "Pending federal labor law changes should create greater growth opportunities for All-In-One, and thanks to our new relationship with SKMGI, we have additional financial and strategic resources to pursue new customers even more aggressively," says Discount. All-In-Ones chief product is a labor law compliance poster, called the Space Saver 1, which provides workplace information mandated by federal and state agencies.

Though the marketer uses direct mail flyers to prospect, it also mails a catalog to "introduce customers to the full range of products," Discount says.



Issue: Catalog Age Magazine
December 1, 2004

Title: **People News**

Pomona, CA-based human resources supplies cataloger Personnel Concepts promoted **Alan Discount** from chief operating officer to CEO.



Issue: Direct Magazine
September 8, 2004

Title: **Short Cuts**

Personnel Concepts Ltd., a marketer of workplace information posters and other human resource products, has named Alan Discount as CEO. Previously, he was chief operating officer of the Pomona, CA-based company.

Publication:



Issue: Volume Seven - Issue One
August 2005

Title: **Interview: Alan Discount and Rick Haynes of Choppers U.S.**

Author: Jim Wilson

Those who've been with BR&K from the beginning will recall that our primary want has always been for "our kind" of frames and components. For most of our history it's been a case of "Make it yourself", "Pay a fortune for somebody else to make it for you", or "See what's in the Lowrider Bike catalogs". We've wanted somebody in the business world to recognize that there's a serious market for our kind of goodies at reasonable prices, just as somebody once recognized that there was a market for affordable Lowrider Bicycle hardware, and before that, that there was a market for musclebike hardware, in the '60s.

Within the past year, we've seen that recognition starting to happen, beginning with the Schwinn Stingray Chopper and its associated parts catalog. Many of our readers have bought the new Stingrays, just for parts-butchering purposes. We even took a stab at hustling a BR&K line of goodies for kustombike builders. Unfortunately, that would have required serious work of a sort which doesn't come naturally to guys who mess around with bikes as a form of creative activity. No, what was needed was for some business types to use their form of creativity to do it for us. Looks to me like it's finally happened.

Since our last issue went up, we began hearing rumors from our sources about a new player in the game. Somebody sent a link to an eBay page, members of the kustombike boards reported wish-list input invitations, and that sort of signs. Then Marty Eden turned in his latest column, with even more intelligence data about these guys named Alan and Rick who were making those waves we'd been hearing about.

When those guys sent us their actual Choppers U.S. catalog, it looked like it was time for an interview. The first thing I asked of them was background info; to see what sort of guys were doing this thing. Alan Discount and Rick Haynes are guys who possess serious business credentials, and who share a common background as (moto) bikers. How they happened to choose kustombicycles and associated hardware and accessorization as a new venture, and their future plans for it, along with discussion of the goodies themselves, will be the gist of our interview with them.

Q: Hi guys. ChoppersU.S. looks like it's off to a great start. How long have you been working toward the release of this catalog, and how did you two hook up in the first place?

A: ALAN: Hi Jim, thanks for having us.

RICK: And we appreciate the kind words about our initial release, we are excited about bringing these new products to the chopper bicycle world. ALAN: Rick and I have been playing on the fringe of the custom motorcycle world for a while - riding and wrenching on custom choppers - and kept kicking new product ideas back and forth over the last couple of years. As that market evolved, and some would argue became saturated, our lack of moving quickly started to close the window of opportunity for us to do anything significant.

In fact, perhaps I should back up a bit. Rick and I met and worked together on our last deal. It was a marketing and printing company that ultimately got sold to an investment group. I was recruited to CA to grow and sell the business and Rick was one of the original founders. We became good friends and, when we left that deal, we were a little disenchanted - we had a few dollars in our pockets (but not as much as we should have!) and were pretty burned out. We both vowed that we would never work for anyone ever again (especially investment bankers), and that whatever we decided to do next, we would like to tackle together, and in an industry we both felt passionate about.

We both made a list of areas we felt met the following criteria:

- Had a large, but untapped, or still fragmented, market opportunity,
- Were in an industry and with people we enjoyed being around,

- Had yet to have an 800 pound, market-leading, gorilla emerge. Whatever we do, we like to do it big <chuckle>.

- Would allow us to be hands on and creative.

As we reviewed each of our lists, many of the opportunities had knock-out factors - too mature, too boring, too saturated. But the Chopper Bicycle Industry seemed to hit on all cylinders. You see, I managed a bicycle shop on Long Island as a kid, and I think I still have grease under my fingernails from building custom bikes.

RICK: And like Alan, I have always been a bit of a "wrench", even though my professional career would show otherwise. Personally, I have built and raced

both dirt track and desert motorcycles and hot rods my entire life. And on the professional side, have always harvested my creativity by designing sales and marketing materials. That combined with the years I spent living on the So. Cal. beaches and seeing the Cruiser craze take hold, and knowing in my heart that the chopper bike world could be the same if not better, drove us to this market.

As a sidebar, more recently, just for fun, I decided to tackle a restoration project - an old Schwinn Beach Cruiser - and had a blast. It made me realize that bicycles were the perfect medium for me - a combination of mechanics and creativity.

ALAN: So with that background, and the explosion of the custom chopper motorcycle world on Discovery Channel, SpeedTV, etc. we felt the mass market was gaining an awareness and appreciation for things on two wheels that also function as art forms. The custom chopper motorcycle industry was saturated, out of reach for many, and feeling the effects of EPA regulations, (especially here in So.Cal) so bicycles had to be it. The rest is history - we agreed that the chopper bicycle world would be the next one to take off.

And with respect to how long it took to put our line together our initial efforts were all about research. We dug deep to see who the players were and what they were bringing to market.

RICK: And what we found was even more interesting. The best work was not being done by the big name-brand bicycle manufacturers but instead being done by a ground-swell effort amongst garage chopper builders. And many of the Discovery Channel motorcycle builders had nothing on them<laughs>. These guys and gals were cutting-edge and super creative. But they didn't always have access to the right parts and tools to work with.

ALAN: So six months ago we took all our research and a stack of garage-built chopper photos and went to work mapping out the product line you see today. Our intent is to accommodate both the complete bike customer, as well as provide basic raw materials such

as rolled fenders and frames to the garage builder. And our approach is definitely unique by another measurement we don't think like the big bicycle companies. We have no preconceived notions about how things are typically done in the bike biz, and basically decided to move forward on new product ideas, borrowing ideas from the motorcycle industry.

RICK: And as long as we both agree that the end product will be cool <smiles>.

Q: Six months from brainstorm to serious product line is extremely impressive, by anybody's standards. You guys are obviously not the sort of businessmen who do a lot of futzing around with focus groups and test-marketing concepts, huh? Otherwise you'd still be analyzing data or something. Does this mean you didn't go the typical start-up route, with a slick business plan to present to venture capitalists? Within the past year, I was toying with the idea of doing pretty much the same sort of thing you're doing, under the BR&K brand, and had started building a network of people to make it happen. But when it got to that capitalization stage, I was overcome by boredom, and got back into what I consider fun stuff. But, if I'd found that hungry young MBA, who was also into bikes, it might have been different.

continued...

I suppose this question is: did you guys have money people just waiting around to hand you some of it to back whatever play you felt like making; or did you bypass the usual time frame of a start-up by (shudder) actually using your own money?

A: ALAN: We were fortunate enough

RICK: or crazy enough

ALAN: True<laughs>to be able to skip the financing step and get right to business. We have both been blessed in the past with successful careers, so the initial capitalization wasn't too big a hurdle to handle on our own. One of the important aspects of selecting this business, which I didn't mention in your first question, was NO investment bankers! <laughs again>

RICK: Besides, we liked this industry and product line so much that we didn't want to give up any ownership or control to anyone else, especially if they didn't share the same passion and interest in the market as we do.

ALAN: We have raised lots of capital, probably in the neighborhood of \$50 million, in the past, for other deals, so if this gets bigger than we can personally handle, financing our continued growth should not be a problem. And we have lots of ideas for new products and ways to help the chopper bike industry grow to a level it has never seen before.

Q: Yes, that "Investment Banker" bit slid right by me. I thought you meant that you didn't want to be Investment Bankers; not that you didn't want to be associated with Investment Bankers. I can see why you relate well to our audience, who're the sorts who build something crazy, then risk their own necks riding it down a hill.

Well, enough about money; I'm getting drowsy. What our crowd's here for, as usual, is to hear about hardware. Since the biggest pieces of hardware you're selling are bike frames, why don't we start there?

You have two basic frame designs, it seems, one with a straight top tube, the other curved, with associated differences. Both are available in sizes for 20" and 24" wheels, and in various finishes. From Marty, I learned that Matt Goodsell's team is making them for you. Did you design them yourself, or did you bring in someone else for that? Some hardcore technorotic info about them would be appreciated, as well.

A: RICK: Alan was the guru behind the frames, so I will let him handle this one.

ALAN: The frame is where it all started. While doing our research, we did look at chopper bicycles, but moreover spent most of our time looking at motorcycle designs. As I studied all the various configurations and builder's trademarks in the American V-Twin arena I had a bit of a revelation that ultimately really helped us move from fantasy/concept to production viable designs. The way I see it, there are really 4 major "body" styles in the chopper world. You have:

The Classic Bagger or Cruiser ala the mainstream Harley - the **Heritage Soft-tail** being probably the most well known. These bikes are meant for distance riding and have a stance and riding posture to match that function.

Then there is the **Old School or Bobber Style** - at some time or another we have all envied the guys riding these stripped-down bikes throwing conformity and rules to the wind with the tall Ape-hanger bars and cool twisted sissy bars and biker bitch on the back. Perhaps the best known builder of this style was **Indian Larry**, may he rest in peace.

The third style is what I would call "**Pro Street**" - long, sleek and lean with nice clean, curvy lines and lots of muscle. Paul Yaffe comes to mind as the front runner in this area.

And finally, my favorite, the full-on **stretched custom chopper** - the more extreme the better. Lots of rake to the fork, low seat, fat rear tire and radical sheet metal work are all signatures of this style, and my favorite builder in this genre of motorcycle has got to be **Joe Martin** of Martin Brothers. Oh, and it has to be orange, green or some other color or crazy paint job that screams "look at me!"

Our vision was to hit the market with multiple designs assuming that, as in the motorcycle world, different designs would appeal to different people (not to mention pocketbooks). But building more than one frame, let alone four seemed risky, if not crazy for a brand new bike company. There are lots of up-front costs in prototyping, tooling, die making etc. to consider. So I continued to look at the designs and then it hit me. The frame styles for the 4 models really fit into two categories. One that had Classic lines (built for comfort) and one that had Radical lines (lots of rake and stretch). My idea was to build two frames, and use different parts and accessories to create the four models we now have.

After I created full scale drawings (or should I say 100 different iterations) for each frame and its related components, we built and tested, and refined and tested our prototypes. Then we went to work seeking out a

production partner. When we chose our name: **Choppers U.S.**, we did so with the intent of keeping as much of our line as humanly possible built right here in the good ol' U. S. of A. But as you probably know, finding a company with the experience, skills and facility to build production bikes here in the U.S. doesn't give you many choices. And we also had to consider supporting the growth we envisioned. We were absolutely thrilled when we found **Matt Goodsell** and the team at **American Legend**. Matt and his team are true craftsman, and a delight to work with. If we can design it, they can build it, and they always add value along the way. It is a true collaborative process to ensure we have the absolutely best product, at the lowest price possible. And I don't want to forget to mention that the owner of that company, the legendary **Gary Turner** (the GT of GT bicycles), has been just fabulous as well. He has done all he could to help us source the best products and introduce us to all the key players in the bike industry. Honestly, without these guys we probably would have been forced to go overseas.

With respect to the technical aspects of our frames, they are all-steel construction (and I am not supposed to tell you, but we also have an aluminum version in the works as well), with laser-cut dropouts and all TIG-welded joints. They have integral disc brake and fender mounts, machined bottom brackets and head tubes, as well as rake and stretch geometry much more like motorcycles than bicycles. And we have some crazy new frame designs already on the drawing board too, but those you will just have to stay tuned to see.

Q: That would seem to be a very efficient set of chopper frame design parameters- four different frames from two basic designs. I have a feeling that you'll be shipping more of the 24" sizes, since most of the people playing this game at this level tend to be adults. Sure, 20" was the basic wheel module during the previous golden age of kustombikes; but that's because it was mostly kids involved back then. Schwinn is sort of responsible for the recent resurgence of 20" donuts, with its new Stingray. That super-fat rear was just too tempting for those of us who were just waiting for some big-ass rubber. Then Schwinn made it worse by bringing out their "Spoiler" with the same donut on the rear. Nice for them, as it saved them from special tooling for their "adult" bike's rear, but bad for everybody else, as a lot of builders got side-tracked into what seems to me, to be a dead end. Let's face it, an adult on a bike with teeny kiddy-size wheels looks like a clown out of uniform. It's nice that you didn't paint yourselves into that corner.

This will probably sound pretty dorky, but the items in your line which really caught my attention are those rolled steel fenders you carry. Fender technology in re: bicycles pretty much died once BMX and fake-BMX took over the bike industry in the late '70s. And the dearth has continued until now. I usually end up making my own fenders, because of the lack of choice. For a while, those ducktail fenders the LRB sources carry were about all there was. I used fronts on the rear to get a nice chrome bobber, at least for a while. Then the Fat 24 X 3" came along. When I wanted a chrome bobber fender for that size rear, I was reduced to buying a moped fender and cutting it up. And I didn't get a kickup at the rear edge. My current chopper project, which is also based on that rear size, has a handmade glass fender. So, you can imagine my pleasure in seeing something that prosaic available in that size. Was it a big deal to find a good source to make your fenders? Those look pretty good, in the photos.

A: RICK: Before we get to the fender question, one quick comment on wheel and frame sizes. Alan and I are motorcycle fanatics who are also Fathers of young boys. Even though our sons are enamored with our motorcycles, it is not really something we can directly share with them. Sure we can wrench on them together and they can ride on the back, but they can't ride alongside us on the street on their own motorcycle until they are driving age, which won't be for some time. We see the chopper bicycle as a catalyst for Father's and sons (or daughters for that matter - we don't want letters from the ladies!) to spend quality time together, having a pair of chopper bikes, accessorizing and wrenching on them together, as well as riding them together.

ALAN: The NBDA (National Bicycle Dealer's Association) has been stressing that the industry needs to get

kids back into riding to generate the customers of tomorrow. We think Chopper bikes are the ticket that just may get kids re-engaged and back on their bicycles. And if the Dad is involved too, we stand a chance of getting them to look beyond the WalMart-quality bikes and into real high-quality bikes. After all, compared to low end motorcycles, high-end chopper bikes are still a bargain!

RICK: On the fender question, we don't mean to sound like a broken record, but once again, we went outside the normal bicycle channels for producing parts.

ALAN: Since we don't necessarily think like bicycle manufacturers, we looked to non-conventional sources. Once we found a company that had the right equipment, getting the fenders built to our specifications was fairly easy.

RICK: Not to mention that we think the fender allows perhaps the biggest area of customization possible on a chopper bike. By starting with one of our "blanks", a builder can chop, sculpt, weld or do anything they want to give it their own personality. It is like a blank canvas. We can't wait to see what your readers do with our fenders!

ALAN: Another important part of our fender line is how they are mounted and supported. We have created a line of interchangeable fender struts and sissy bars that are not the flimsy stamped sheet metal braces everyone has seen for years, but instead super strong and attractive chrome-plated struts that look like they came off of a motorcycle. Our Sissy Bar mounting system is so strong you can even tow a friend on the back using our optional bitch/buddy pad and passenger pegs.

Q: You've definitely got the right idea with those fenders; and getting out of the usual bike-industry vendor pool for product sourcing. Most of the stuff you see

continued...

in bike parts and accessory catalogs is cheesy, flimsy junk. The lowrider parts have better chrome plating than most of the typical "J&B-style" stuff, but it all seems inferior, if you're used to real road machinery and its accessorization.

Speaking of which, I notice you have something in your list I've been bitching about for years. I could be wrong, but that bullet headlight of yours looks just like the one all the lowrider outlets carry. My magnum opus on bike lighting starts out with a rant about those damn things. In my opinion, they're totally useless for anything except looking "sort of like" a real headlight.

Our kind of bikers are the ones who'd be inclined to take a night-time cruise, assuming they had some serious lighting gear that didn't look like it came off the landing craft of the Starship Enterprise. We need lights which look like those bullets, but actually work, and are sturdy enough not to fall apart the first time you hit a pothole. I've had to use those things in the past, for the same reason you have them in your list, I assume: because that's all there is that looks right on our kind of bikes. But I ripped the guts out and put in a krypton lamp a quantum leap more powerful, and powered it with a separate battery ten times as powerful as the pair of AA penlight batteries it normally uses. The light on *my* wish list has those features, looks like that, and is made of metal twice as thick. And good chrome, of course. You could do a lot worse than the light on my current chopper project. It uses an array of ultra-high-power white LEDs inside a conventional-looking rounded rectangular-lensed shell, in bike scale, which has a rounded profile. It runs off a 12-volt system, and is as bright as most motorcycle headlights, while drawing very little current, compared to a conventional bulb that bright. Pricey as hell, of course....

Back to the positive, I like the look of those seats of yours. There's a lot of the bicycle aesthetic I prefer to the motorcycle aesthetic, but saddles are a big exception. Most bike saddles look pretty dorky, compared to almost any motorcycle's, even if you put flames on them, and chrome springs and a crash rail. Yours look just right for a chopper bike. Is there an interesting story behind yours?

A: RICK: Jim, lights have been a personal project of mine- and a similar pet peeve. We had searched all through the market and found the same issues you raise. We thought our only recourse was to go to the Taiwan or Chinese manufacturers and spec exactly what we want - heavier duty metal, quality chrome and gleaming lights (i.e. halogens) but as you know that is a time consuming process.

ALAN: Not to mention counter to our mission of keeping as much of our product sourcing and manufacturing in the U.S. as possible.

RICK: So we would love to know your source for a better solution...

ALAN: With respect to our line of seats...our vision here was driven by a few factors...(1) the Schwinn seat looked just plain goofy, (2) We wanted something that followed the curve of our framesets and hugged low to the frame like a chopper, (3) was comfortable, and (4) was still compatible with conventional bike hardware. You will also notice it is fully adjustable and nice and wide for comfort.

RICK: And it had to look cool.

ALAN: Again we couldn't find anyone in the bicycle industry who could make what we wanted here in the States, so we went outside that industry and teamed up with a well-known hot rod and custom motorcycle seat upholstery shop to get ours done. We offer both leather and vinyl models, with and without stitched raised insets. We made sure we used the highest quality materials. I also had a vision for branding the leather seats, so we had a large electric brand of our logo fabricated. When it is burnished into the leather it almost looks like a **Paul Cox** (of Indian Larry fame) hand tooled leather seat...

RICK: ...without the thousand-dollar price tag!

Q: It's those little details, like branding the leather, which make all the difference. That sounds like something I'd do, being a fiend for detail and all.

I've heard favorable comments about your handlebars from someone almost as cranky as me on the subject. I like them all, actually. I especially like that your ape-hangers aren't cartoonishly tall, like some I could name. I hate being poked in the eye by a grip when I'm standing next to a bike. My current chopper project sports a pair of mini-ape-hangers I pulled off a kiddy bike I found in the trash. It looks very old-school chopper. Those scalloped bars are really tasty, too, as are the swept-back ones. Are your bars made here too, and who's responsible for the designs?

A: RICK: When we looked in the marketplace for the right bars, the closest we could find were either cruiser bars or some crazy BMX designs. And since we wanted our designs to flow from the lines created by our frames and front ends, we knew we had to create our own.

ALAN: I would love to say that we sat down and systematically drew out what we wanted, but in fact, this was one of those tasks that had to be seen in 3 dimensions while literally sitting on the bike. So we had an intense R + D session in our machine shop. We took all sorts of shapes - short curves, straight bars, longer bends - cut them up and just began

tacking them together until we had something that looked and felt right. That's not to say we didn't have a picture in our minds of what would look right for each model, especially since there are so many designs of motorcycle bars out there to borrow ideas from, but the final designs came from doing actual fabrication. The toughest one to get right was the chopper bars - as your readers know, getting those compound miters just right is not easy - but once we did, we fabricated a series of jigs to make sure the bars were perfectly symmetrical and consistent every time.

RICK: We have lots of other bars on the drawing table and in R + D too.

ALAN: Yes, we are playing with some crazy paint, powder coat and awesome plated finishes, as well as a dozen new shapes that are unavailable anywhere else - including designs that use real motorcycle type risers and flow right from the fork legs. This is the stuff we love, it allows us to roll up our sleeves and really get into it.

RICK: Absolutely. And with regard to where the bars are produced, yes, they are made here in the U.S. - at least for now. If we get some designs that really take off, it might be more cost-effective for us to go overseas

ALAN: Which we are still leery of, but would allow us to get the cost to the end customer way down too. The pricing on our handlebars is a little higher than we would like, but keep in mind they are made from high-quality materials, and have a far superior show-chrome finish that is hand polished in between plating steps, which is tough to get from Taiwan or China. Our hope is that people will recognize that.

RICK: We know knock-offs will show up in the market pretty quickly now that we have put these unique designs out there. Buyers should make sure they look at what they are getting very closely. Who wants to ruin a project that they have put countless hours and lots of blood, sweat and tears into with crappy components?

Q: I can relate very well to your handlebar design process. There's nothing to compare to actually playing around with the metal to work out designs in "real 3D". Sure, CAD programs are great, but they're actually slower than just chopping stuff up and playing with the pieces. Maybe some day that'll change; but at the moment, "eyeball engineering" still rules, especially if you don't have a lot of lead time.

Knock-offs will always be with us. The trick is to get there first with the most, and let the imitators rush to catch up to you. By the time they do, the creative guys will already be ahead again.

I like your range of forks. It looks like you've got a good balance there, from entry-level to high-trick. And the high-trick springer has a very nice price on it, compared to others of a similar nature out there now. It's easy to price it to the limit, if you have no competition; but as soon as the market is shared with others, comparison-shopping enters the picture. Makes it tougher for you, if you're competing for the consumer's dollar, but it's great for the consumer. We consumers have waited a long time to have this kind of choices available.

Did existing market competition play a significant part in the design and pricing of your forks?

A: RICK: Wow, I guess we are leaving money on the table, eh? <laughs>. But seriously, we are glad you like our line - we worked hard on creating it and it was actually one of the most complex components to engineer, due to the number of parts that go into an assembly like a springer.

ALAN: Not to mention that our goal was to still allow people the flexibility of adjusting the product to fit their unique needs. We strive to make everything we do oversize so the end user can customize it to meet their application. So you will see features like extra long legs and head tubes that can be cut down, adjusting bolts and joints anything we can do to make the product work for the broadest audience.

And when we looked in the marketplace to see what else was out there, we were indeed surprised how costly (and complex) other springers were - that is once you found them. Of course, the most prolific springer of all is the cheap knock-off single spring fork patterned after the old Schwinn Krato bikes. But I wouldn't put that in the same category of what we are producing. Our stuff looks like fine jewelry, but can take the beating of everyday use too. We CNC machine parts out of thick slabs of 6061 aluminum and polish each piece by hand. And we show-chrome all our steel parts.

But don't let our high-end processes and materials fool you. When you produce these components in quantity, you get economies of scale. And, we agree that we need to price our stuff keeping in mind that competition will start to copy us as soon as they see our designs. We are not looking to make a quick hit in this business and move on. We are in it for the long haul and want to show our customers that we have their best interests at heart.

RICK: And be sure to keep an eye out for our version of single spring and girder forks coming out soon - we think it will blow people away.

Q: I can just imagine you guys plotting your next forks: "Let's see 'em try to beat this one, heh, heh, heh!" This stuff is fun, eh?

I'm looking forward to seeing your take on both the single-spring and girder themes. I have a sentimental attachment to the Schwinn springer knockoffs, because for so long that was all we had to work with. But most of them are pretty junky, and the originals are way too expensive, and scarce, to mess with.

I think we've covered the hardcore stuff pretty well. How about we get into the more "frivolous" aspects now?

continued...

Those who've been with BR&K from the beginning will recall that our primary want has always been for "our kind" of frames and components. For most of our history it's been a case of "Make it yourself", "Pay a fortune for somebody else to make it for you", or "See what's in the Lowrider Bike catalogs". We've wanted somebody in the business world to recognize that there's a serious market for our kind of goodies at reasonable prices, just as somebody once recognized that there was a market for affordable Lowrider Bicycle hardware, and before that, that there was a market for musclebike hardware, in the '60s.

Within the past year, we've seen that recognition starting to happen, beginning with the Schwinn Stingray Chopper and its associated parts catalog. Many of our readers have bought the new Stingrays, just for parts-butcherer purposes. We even took a stab at hustling a BR&K line of goodies for kustombike builders. Unfortunately, that would have required serious work of a sort which doesn't come naturally to guys who mess around with bikes as a form of creative activity. No, what was needed was for some business types to use their form of creativity to do it for us. Looks to me like it's finally happened.

Since our last issue went up, we began hearing rumors from our sources about a new player in the game. Somebody sent a link to an eBay page, members of the kustombike boards reported wish-list input invitations, and that sort of signs. Then Marty Eden turned in his latest column, with even more intelligence data about these guys named Alan and Rick who were making those waves we'd been hearing about.

When those guys sent us their actual Choppers U.S. catalog, it looked like it was time for an interview. The first thing I asked of them was background info; to see what sort of guys were doing this thing. Alan Discount and Rick Haynes are guys who possess serious business credentials, and who share a common background as (moto)bikers. How they happened to choose kustombike and associated hardware and accessorization as a new venture, and their future plans for it, along with discussion of the goodies themselves, will be the gist of our interview with them.

Q: Hi guys. Choppers U.S. looks like it's off to a great start. How long have you been working toward the release of this catalog, and how did you two hook up in the first place?

A: ALAN: Hi Jim, thanks for having us.

RICK: And we appreciate the kind words about our initial release, we are excited about bringing these new products to the chopper bicycle world.

ALAN: Rick and I have been playing on the fringe of the custom motorcycle world for a while - riding and wrenching on custom choppers - and kept kicking new product ideas back and forth over the last couple of years. As that market evolved, and some would argue became saturated, our lack of moving quickly started to close the window of opportunity for us to do anything significant.

In fact, perhaps I should back up a bit. Rick and I met and worked together on our last deal. It was a marketing and printing company that ultimately got sold to an investment group. I was recruited to CA to grow and sell the business and Rick was one of the original founders. We became good friends and, when we left that deal, we were a little disenfranchised - we had a few dollars in our pockets (but not as much as we should have!) and were pretty burned out. We both vowed that we would never work for anyone ever again (especially investment bankers), and that whatever we decided to do next, we would like to tackle together, and in an industry we both felt passionate about.

We both made a list of areas we felt met the following criteria:

- Had a large, but untapped, or still fragmented, market opportunity,
- Were in an industry and with people we enjoyed being around,
- Had yet to have an 800 pound, market-leading, gorilla emerge. Whatever we do, we like to do it big <chuckle>,
- Would allow us to be hands on and creative.

As we reviewed each of our lists, many of the opportunities had knock-out factors - too mature, too boring, too saturated. But the Chopper Bicycle Industry seemed to hit on all cylinders. You see, I managed a bicycle shop on Long Island as a kid, and I think I still have grease under my fingernails from building custom bikes.

RICK: And like Alan, I have always been a bit of a "wrench", even though my professional career would show otherwise. Personally, I have built and raced

both dirt track and desert motorcycles and hot rods my entire life. And on the professional side, have always harvested my creativity by designing sales and marketing materials. That combined with the years I spent living on the So. Cal. beaches and seeing the Cruiser craze take hold, and knowing in my heart that the chopper bike world could be the same if not better, drove us to this market.

As a sidebar, more recently, just for fun, I decided to tackle a restoration project - an old Schwinn Beach Cruiser - and had a blast. It made me

realize that bicycles were the perfect medium for me - a combination of mechanics and creativity.

ALAN: So with that background, and the explosion of the custom chopper motorcycle world on Discovery Channel, SpeedTV, etc. we felt the mass market was gaining an awareness and appreciation for things on two wheels that also function as art forms. The custom chopper motorcycle industry was saturated, out of reach for many, and feeling the effects of EPA regulations, (especially here in So.Cal) so bicycles had to be it. The rest is history - we agreed that the chopper bicycle world would be the next one to take off.

And with respect to how long it took to put our line together our initial efforts were all about research. We dug deep to see who the players were and what they were bringing to market.

RICK: And what we found was even more interesting. The best work was not being done by the big name-brand bicycle manufacturers but instead being done by a ground-swell effort amongst garage chopper builders. And many of the Discovery Channel motorcycle builders had nothing on them<laughs>. These guys and gals were cutting-edge and super creative. But they didn't always have access to the right parts and tools to work with.

ALAN: So six months ago we took all our research and a stack of garage-built chopper photos and went to work mapping out the product line you see today. Our intent is to accommodate both the complete bike customer, as well as provide basic raw materials such

as rolled fenders and frames to the garage builder. And our approach is definitely unique by another measurement we don't think like the big bicycle companies. We have no preconceived notions about how things are typically done in the bike biz, and basically decided to move forward on new product ideas, borrowing ideas from the motorcycle industry.

RICK: And as long as we both agree that the end product will be cool <smiles>.

Q: Six months from brainstorm to serious product line is extremely impressive, by anybody's standards. You guys are obviously not the sort of businessmen who do a lot of futzing around with focus groups and test-marketing concepts, huh? Otherwise you'd still be analyzing data or something. Does this mean you didn't go the typical start-up route, with a slick business plan to present to venture capitalists? Within the past year, I was toying with the idea of doing pretty much the same sort of thing you're doing, under the BR&K brand, and had started building a network of people to make it happen. But when it got to that capitalization stage, I was overcome by boredom, and got back into what I consider fun stuff. But, if I'd found that hungry young MBA, who was also into bikes, it might have been different.

continued...

I suppose this question is: did you guys have money people just waiting around to hand you some of it to back whatever play you felt like making; or did you bypass the usual time frame of a start-up by (shudder) actually using your own money?

A: ALAN: We were fortunate enough

RICK: or crazy enough

ALAN: True<laughs> to be able to skip the financing step and get right to business. We have both been blessed in the past with successful careers, so the initial capitalization wasn't too big a hurdle to handle on our own. One of the important aspects of selecting this business, which I didn't mention in your first question, was NO investment bankers! <laughs again>

RICK: Besides, we liked this industry and product line so much that we didn't want to give up any ownership or control to anyone else, especially if they didn't share the same passion and interest in the market as we do.

ALAN: We have raised lots of capital, probably in the neighborhood of \$50 million, in the past, for other deals, so if this gets bigger than we can personally handle, financing our continued growth should not be a problem. And we have lots of ideas for new products and ways to help the chopper bike industry grow to a level it has never seen before.

Q: Yes, that "Investment Banker" bit slid right by me. I thought you meant that you didn't want to be Investment Bankers; not that you didn't want to be associated with Investment Bankers. I can see why you relate well to our audience, who're the sorts who build something crazy, then risk their own necks riding it down a hill.

Well, enough about money; I'm getting drowsy. What our crowd's here for, as usual, is to hear about hardware. Since the biggest pieces of hardware you're selling are bike frames, why don't we start there?

You have two basic frame designs, it seems, one with a straight top tube, the other curved, with associated differences. Both are available in sizes for 20" and 24" wheels, and in various finishes. From Marty, I learned that Matt Goodsell's team is making them for you. Did you design them yourself, or did you bring in someone else for that? Some hardcore technorotic info about them would be appreciated, as well.

A: RICK: Alan was the guru behind the frames, so I will let him handle this one.

ALAN: The frame is where it all started. While doing our research, we did look at chopper bicycles, but moreover spent most of our time looking at motorcycle designs. As I studied all the various configurations and builder's trademarks in the

American V-Twin arena I had a bit of a revelation that ultimately really helped us move from fantasy/concept to production viable designs. The way I see it, there are really 4 major "body" styles in the chopper world. You have:

The Classic Bagger or Cruiser ala the mainstream Harley - the **Heritage Soft-tail** being probably the most well known. These bikes are meant for distance riding and have a stance and riding posture to match that function.

Then there is the **Old School or Bobber Style** - at some time or another we have all envied the guys riding these stripped-down bikes throwing conformity and rules to the wind with the tall Ape-hanger bars and cool twisted sissy bars and biker bitch on the back. Perhaps the best known builder of this style was **Indian Larry**, may he rest in peace.

The third style is what I would call "**Pro Street**" - long, sleek and lean with nice clean, curvy lines and lots of muscle. Paul Yaffe comes to mind as the front runner in this area.

And finally, my favorite, the full-on **stretched custom chopper** - the more extreme the better. Lots of rake to the fork, low seat, fat rear tire and radical sheet metal work are all signatures of this style, and my favorite builder in this genre of motorcycle has got to be **Joe Martin** of Martin Brothers. Oh, and it has to be orange, green or some other color or crazy paint job that screams "look at me!"

Our vision was to hit the market with multiple designs assuming that, as in the motorcycle world, different designs would appeal to different people (not to mention pocketbooks). But building more than one frame, let alone four seemed risky, if not crazy for a brand new bike company. There are lots of up-front costs in prototyping, tooling, die making etc. to consider. So I continued to look at the designs and then it hit me. The frame styles for the 4 models really fit into two categories. One that had Classic lines (built for comfort) and one that had Radical lines (lots of rake and stretch). My idea was to build two frames, and use different parts and accessories to create the four models we now have.

After I created full scale drawings (or should I say 100 different iterations) for each frame and its related components, we built and tested, and refined and tested our prototypes. Then we went to work seeking out a production partner. When we chose our name: **Choppers U.S.**, we did so with the intent of keeping as much of our line as humanly possible built right here in the good ol' U. S. of A. But as you probably know, finding a company with the experience, skills and facility to build production bikes here in the U.S. doesn't give you many choices. And we also had to consider supporting the growth we envisioned. We were absolutely thrilled when we found **Matt Goodsell** and the team at **American Legend**. Matt and his team are true craftsmen, and a delight to work with. If we can design it, they can build it, and they always add value along the way. It is a true collaborative process to ensure we have the absolutely best product, at the lowest price possible. And I don't want to forget to mention that the owner of that company, the legendary **Gary Turner** (the GT of GT bicycles), has been just fabulous as well. He has done all he could to help us source the best products and introduce us to all the key players in the bike industry. Honestly, without these guys we probably would have been forced to go overseas.

With respect to the technical aspects of our frames, they are all-steel construction (and I am not supposed to tell you, but we also have an aluminum version in the works as well), with laser-cut dropouts and all TIG-welded joints. They have integral disc brake and fender mounts, machined bottom brackets and head tubes, as well as rake and stretch geometry much more like motorcycles than bicycles. And we have some crazy new frame designs already on the drawing board too, but those you will just have to stay tuned to see.

Q: That would seem to be a very efficient set of chopper frame design parameters- four different frames from two basic designs. I have a feeling that you'll be shipping more of the 24" sizes, since most of the people playing this game at this level tend to be adults. Sure, 20" was the basic wheel module during the previous golden age of kustumbikes; but that's because it was mostly kids involved back then. Schwinn is sort of responsible for the recent resurgence of 20" donuts, with its new Stingray. That super-fat rear was just too tempting for those of us who were just waiting for some big-ass rubber. Then Schwinn made it worse by bringing out their "Spoiler" with the same donut on the rear. Nice for them, as it saved them from special tooling for their "adult" bike's rear, but bad for everybody else, as a lot of builders got side-tracked into what seems to me, to be a dead end. Let's face it, an adult on a bike with teeny kiddy-size wheels looks like a clown out of uniform. It's nice that you didn't paint yourselves into that corner.

This will probably sound pretty dorky, but the items in your line which really caught my attention are those rolled steel fenders you carry. Fender technology in re: bicycles pretty much died once BMX and fake-BMX took over the bike industry in the late '70s. And the dearth has continued until now. I usually end up making my own fenders, because of the lack of choice. For a while, those duck-tail fenders the LRB sources carry were about all there was. I used

fronts on the rear to get a nice chrome bobber, at least for a while. Then the Fat 24 X 3" came along. When I wanted a chrome bobber fender for that size rear, I was reduced to buying a moped fender and cutting it up. And I didn't get a kickup at the rear edge. My current chopper project, which is also based on that rear size, has a handmade glass fender. So, you can imagine my pleasure in seeing something that prosaic available in that size. Was it a big deal to find a good source to make your fenders? Those look pretty good, in the photos.

A: RICK: Before we get to the fender question, one quick comment on wheel and frame sizes. Alan and I are motorcycle fanatics who are also Fathers of young boys. Even though our sons are enamored with our motorcycles, it is not really something we can directly share with them. Sure we can wrench on them together and they can ride on the back, but they can't ride alongside us on the street on their own motorcycle until they are driving age, which won't be for some time. We see the chopper bicycle as a catalyst for Father's and sons (or daughters for that matter - we don't want letters from the ladies!) to spend quality time together, having a pair of chopper bikes, accessorizing and wrenching on them together, as well as riding them together.

ALAN: The NBDA (National Bicycle Dealer's Association) has been stressing that the industry needs to get

kids back into riding to generate the customers of tomorrow. We think Chopper bikes are the ticket that just may get kids re-engaged and back on their bicycles. And if the Dad is involved too, we stand a chance of getting them to look beyond the WalMart-quality bikes and into real high-quality bikes. After all, compared to low end motorcycles, high-end chopper bikes are still a bargain!

RICK: On the fender question, we don't mean to sound like a broken record, but once again, we went outside the normal bicycle channels for producing parts.

ALAN: Since we don't necessarily think like bicycle manufacturers, we looked to non-conventional sources. Once we found a company that had the right equipment, getting the fenders built to our specifications was fairly easy.

RICK: Not to mention that we think the fender allows perhaps the biggest area of customization possible on a chopper bike. By starting with one of our "blanks", a builder can chop, sculpt, weld or do anything they want to give it their own personality. It is like a blank canvas. We can't wait to see what your readers do with our fenders!

ALAN: Another important part of our fender line is how they are mounted and supported. We have created a line of interchangeable fender struts and sissy bars that are not the flimsy stamped sheet metal braces everyone has seen for years, but instead super strong and attractive chrome-plated struts that look like they came off of a motorcycle. Our Sissy Bar mounting system is so strong you can even tow a friend on the back using our optional bitch/buddy pad and passenger pegs.

Q: You've definitely got the right idea with those fenders; and getting out of the usual bike-industry vendor pool for product sourcing. Most of the stuff you see in bike parts and accessory catalogs is cheesy, flimsy junk. The lowrider parts have better chrome plating than most of the typical "J&B-style" stuff, but it all seems inferior, if you're used to real road machinery and its accessorization. continued...

Speaking of which, I notice you have something in your list I've been bitching about for years. I could be wrong, but that bullet headlight of yours looks just like the one all the lowrider outlets carry. My magnum opus on bike lighting starts out with a rant about those damn things. In my opinion, they're totally useless for anything except looking "sort of like" a real headlight.

Our kind of bikers are the ones who'd be inclined to take a night-time cruise, assuming they had some serious lighting gear that didn't look like it came off the landing craft of the Starship Enterprise. We need lights which look like those bullets, but actually work, and are sturdy enough not to fall apart the first time you hit a pothole. I've had to use those things in the past, for the same reason you have them in your list, I assume: because that's all there is that looks right on our kind of bikes. But I ripped the guts out and put in a krypton lamp a quantum leap more powerful, and powered it with a separate battery ten times as powerful as the pair of AA penlight batteries it normally uses. The light on my wish list has those features, looks like that, and is made of metal twice as thick. And good chrome, of course. You could do a lot worse than the light on my current chopper project. It uses an array of ultra-high-power white LEDs inside a conventional-looking rounded rectangular-lensed shell, in bike scale, which has a rounded profile. It runs off a 12-volt system, and is as bright as most motorcycle headlights, while drawing very little current, compared to a conventional bulb that bright. Pricey as hell, of course....

Back to the positive, I like the look of those seats of yours. There's a lot of the bicycle aesthetic I prefer to the motorcycle aesthetic, but saddles are a big exception. Most bike saddles look pretty dorky, compared to almost any motorcycle's, even if you put flames on them, and chrome springs and a crash rail. Yours look just right for a chopper bike. Is there an interesting story behind yours?

A: RICK: Jim, lights have been a personal project of mine- and a similar pet peeve. We had searched all through the market and found the same issues you raise. We thought our only recourse was to go to the Taiwan or Chinese manufacturers and spec exactly what we want - heavier duty metal, quality chrome and gleaming lights (i.e. halogens) but as you know that is a time consuming process.

ALAN: Not to mention counter to our mission of keeping as much of our product sourcing and manufacturing in the U.S. as possible.

RICK: So we would love to know your source for a better solution...



Microsoft Retail Management System Customer Solution Case Study



Specialty Bicycle Retailer Chops Inventory, Lands Big Deals, Saves 10X Cost of System

Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Retail

Customer Profile

Choppers U.S. in Upland, California, manufactures, finishes, assembles, and sells kits for bicycles that mimic chopper motorcycles. Sales average U.S.\$237, and most come from its Web site or by phone.

Business Situation

Owner Alan Discount had seen automation poorly done in large companies. He knew he'd integrate all his departments, plus Web site management, into one consistent interface—leaving no data isolated.

Solution

Microsoft® Retail Management System and NitroSell Commerce interoperate to track Web sales, order parts, and revamp Web site words and photos. Owner edits and publishes new product data in seconds.

Benefits

- Monthly sales up 500 percent
- 7 to 8 percent of Web visitors buy goods
- Inventory at \$400,000, not \$1,000,000
- Systems more efficient than two clerks and a Webmaster
- Standard reports plus integration to QuickBooks save 33 percent CPA costs

“Our top benefit was that Microsoft Retail Management System and NitroSell freed me up from retail chores so I could find, work on, and close our sales contract with a very large retail chain.”

Alan Discount, Owner, Choppers U.S.

Alan and Patti Discount started Choppers U.S. in early 2005 to manufacture parts and kits that affluent teens and X-Gens would use to build fashion bicycles that look like chopper motorcycles. Managing some 500 parts seemed easy until it became clear that they could be combined into seemingly endless permutations. Alan's experience reminded him that automation is no cure-all. He'd seen one eCommerce site cost nearly \$500,000, and then not share its information with other systems. A combined installation of Microsoft® Retail Management System and NitroSell products and services gives Choppers control over all their inventory permutations, helps predict what parts to order, reduces staff, and cuts bookkeeping costs. Choppers' eCommerce site was published rapidly and without false steps. Today, that site brings in most of the company's revenue and shares sales and customer data with Microsoft Retail Management System and projected future systems.



“Bicycle retailers often don’t realize that their store is *comparatively* broken. It makes them pedal way too hard for too many hours to do a nominal business. Microsoft Retail Management System fixes that.”

Alan Discount, Owner, Choppers U.S.

Situation

Choppers U.S. in Upland, California, sells “chopperesque” specialty bicycles, kits, and parts that resemble the famous motorcycles that movies have brought into millions of homes. Owner Alan Discount foresaw this market and opened the doors to a 3,000 square-foot building in February 2005. Most of Choppers’ 500 SKUs of parts are proprietary or made in-house. Combinations and permutations of these parts can number into the thousands, so no two bikes need be exactly alike. One specialized front fork assembly has 50 sub-parts, so orders for complete kits can exceed 100 items.

Sales and Operations

Nearly all revenue comes from Web or phone sales to 300 dealers and several thousand retail customers; very little is from traditional walk-in sales. Many customers live in affluent and beach areas where stylish bikes start conversations. Thirty percent of sales come from Europe, and Asian sales are rising. Women and girls buy a rising percentage, but most buyers are males aged 12 to 20. Alan recently signed a contract to supply a special series of bikes to one of the United States’ largest retail chains.

Because many orders request only parts, not whole kits, the average sale is approximately U.S.\$237, still remarkably high for an unassisted online transaction. Monthly sales in 2006 are 500 percent higher than in 2005 and gross margins top 60 percent. Alan and his wife, Patti, are Choppers’ only fulltime employees, but independent sales representatives help boost income.

The Planning Stage

Alan applied his background in high-tech, dot-com management to planning the business long before its doors opened. “I had worked in companies with spotty automation. I’d seen companies delay automation then kick themselves when they saw that retro-automation costs and hurts twice as much. One company put \$200,000 into a Web site, another \$200,000 into its interface. Then it crashed unpredictably, and training took months because it was so illogically designed. Employees and customers were irate. Learning and ancillary costs were four times the software cost.

“I saw late automation, no automation, and automation that couldn’t integrate different islands and departments of information. I vowed I’d do it right, so I put hardware and software into my initial business plan and budget. You can spend relatively little on automation and pay yourself back many times in saved labor and time.”

Solution

“When I heard how Microsoft® Retail Management System and NitroSell Commerce interoperate to help manage in-store and Web sales,” Alan says, “I stopped looking. We looked at other contenders but didn’t find one other all-encompassing, integrated retail/ Web solution for the price.”

Alan met Jim Morrison, Sales Manager of Netsys Incorporated in Fayetteville, Arkansas, while searching eBay for point-of-sale (POS) hardware. Netsys sells several retail systems, so Morrison listened carefully to Alan’s concerns, his plans for Web sales, and tight budget demands. Morrison knew Microsoft Retail Management System Store Operations would manage inventory, purchasing, customer histories, cash flow, and reporting in the store. He also introduced Alan to NitroSell Commerce, a Web-enabling product and service package that enhances and

A few of the 500 SKUs that Microsoft Retail Management System helps staff gather and ship in thousands of product permutations.



integrates with Microsoft Retail Management System for highly efficient Web sales. "Their seamless integration was a heavy persuader," says Alan. "I'd seen other companies sink tons of unbudgeted money into ongoing software upgrades. But I knew Microsoft would always improve its own software, so I wouldn't have to."

Easy to Install and Use

"The demo CD of Microsoft Retail Management System showed me it would be easy to figure out and get started," Alan adds, "so I was very comfortable buying from Jim long-distance. We sent the POS terminal to Netsys for software installation and tailoring, then had everything set up an hour after getting it back. We got a complete one-lane wireless setup with receipt and label printers, dual flat-panel displays, barcode scanners, multiple machines, and an HP point of sale terminal for under \$10,000. Bank of America merchant services works smoothly with Microsoft Retail Management System, and they got us running very fast."

Morrison adds, "We're confident in offering Microsoft Retail Management System and NitroSell to faraway customers because both companies have excellent tech support if we're not available. The products are so flexible that we know they'll adapt to a wide variety of retail environments."

Morrison flew to California to train Patti and Alan. "I highly recommend that expenditure," Alan asserts. "Since then, I don't think I've opened up the manual five times, and I've never

needed the Help screens. Both systems are so logical and intuitive that they speed your learning curve. In a day, you can learn to process sales, check in stock, set up new customers and vendors, and update inventory on the Web. Additionally, the customer service we have received from Netsys and NitroSell has been outstanding!"

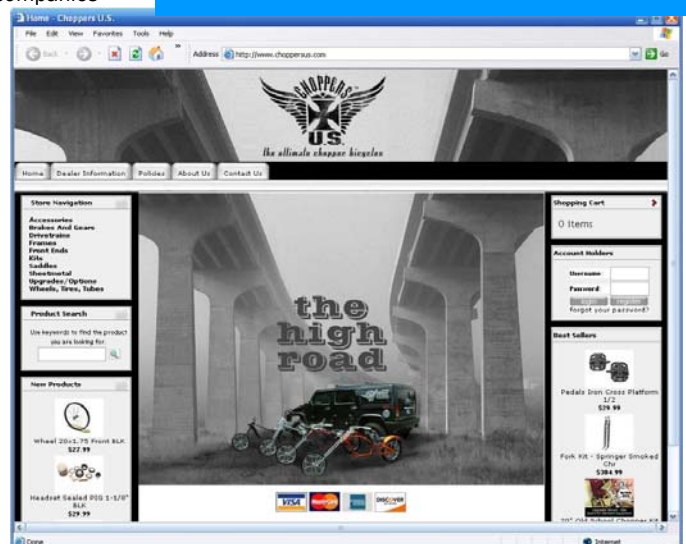
Like One Program

"NitroSell and Microsoft Retail Management System are so well married that we don't even think of them separately," says Alan. "We liked NitroSell's ready-made templates, but wanted our WebStore to be branded with our logo and style. We customized a NitroSell template with own graphics and a CSS stylesheet. We were surprised how far we could stretch its capabilities."

Integration is so smooth that thousands of items in the Store Operations database can initially be put online in a few hours. Retail's constant changes in prices, photographs, and product descriptions are done in Retail

Choppers' NitroSell Commerce WebStore turns 7 percent of visitors into customers whose purchases average \$237. Shoppers can drill down three levels to find exact products.

NitroSell Commerce products and services empower fast publication, instant updates, and fast, reliable servers for WebStores.



Management System, then exported to the store's Web site with a click. To ensure end-to-end compatibility and single-vendor responsibility, NitroSell hosts the Choppers WebStore on one of NitroSell's secure Web farms, engineered to provide highly secure performance and zero down-time. These sites' multi-homed Internet connectivity, enterprise-class security and hardware, and database and application clustering combine to maximize these benefits and deliver 365x7x24 availability and speed.

NitroSell's Business Development Director, Tom Keane, added "It was a real pleasure Web-enabling Choppers. Alan really gets today's need for multi-channel retailing, so he instantly saw the benefits of NitroSell Commerce WebStore working like a part of Microsoft Retail Management System.

Benefits

"Our hugest benefit was that Microsoft Retail Management System and NitroSell freed me up from retail chores so I could find, work on, and close a sales contract with a very large retail chain," says Alan. "I can spend time on Web advertising, adwords, metatags, and hitting Internet message boards."

"Our marketing site converts a very high percentage of Web visitors to buyers—far above what I saw in previous companies, which was 3 percent if we had a great month. Here, we get 7 to 8 percent, partly because we don't disappoint visitors. Microsoft Retail Management System tracks our stock-outs, and we've configured our NitroSell WebStore to ask customers who

want such products to phone us. That puts customers in touch. We get their contact data and can put them on a waiting list or offer a substitute item. Web retailers, in particular, need a high CSI—customer satisfaction index—and we have it. That's the single issue I really need to keep happy: the customer relationship."

"The worst thing a retailer can do is to attract customers to a Web site, then disappoint them. That doesn't happen here because the system tells us when to reorder what. Since we can calculate our lead-time from vendors, we have a 99.5 percent fill rate and nearly all orders go out perfectly the same day they're received. Even though we have complex orders with hundreds of items, having a pick list in your hand helps us get it right." A pick list is a list of items needed to fill an order.

"When previous customers call in," Alan says, "Microsoft Retail Management System instantly tells us whether it's a dealer or a retail customer, so pricing is automatically correct for everyone."

Search engine optimization was high on Alan's requirements list when he went hunting for a WebStore Solution and he was delighted how well NitroSell understood the importance of Web customers' being able to find his WebStore. NitroSell goes to great lengths to ensure that all product information is Google, Yahoo, and MSN search friendly. Dynamic database-driven Websites have problems in this area. But NitroSell's special techniques ensure that all product pages and data are registered with, and easily indexed by, the major search engines. Alan signed up for NitroSell's low-cost Froogle integration feature, which uploads all product data and pictures to Google every three hours.

Keeping Money, Saving Time

"As a small business owner who watches every dollar," Alan says, "I see dozens of ways

These "chopperesque" frames are tightly tracked and ordered in Microsoft Retail Management System to keep inventory 60 percent below untracked levels.



“Microsoft Retail Management System will save owners 75 percent of their time—even more if they run a WebStore. They can just ‘bolt on’ NitroSell Commerce.”

Alan Discount, Owner, Choppers U.S.

This fast-selling classic chopper bike will soon attract eyes and comments on a beach road or suburban side street.



this solution proactively helps us conserve cash. It's paid me back ten times its cost. "Currently, we have \$400,000 in inventory. Without the tight records and visibility in this system, that could be a million dollars. I can look at our inventory list and know what sub-parts make up the assemblies I see. This lets us pull sub-parts to build an assembly item that we originally thought was out of stock."

"Without this system, I'd need two clerks at \$30,000 to \$35,000 a year to process orders, generate pick lists, track inventory, cut POs [purchase orders], and create accounting reports. Microsoft Retail Management System takes the manual labor out of knowing what you have so you can order the right things. It keeps records of prices you paid previously, so you can compare. It's also very fast at cutting POs.

"The inventory system is fabulous. Even though a customer selects three products, that means we might find and ship 40 items.

This automatically generates a pick list that specifies every part we need to fill the order."

Choppers speeds service and cuts shrinkage by bar-coding all parts in a logical numbering system. The SKU number tells staff what the part is, and even customers know its patterns.

Alan says his CPA "loves the reports it turns out. I download our sales and receipts into QuickBooks. The finished reports it generates save me a third of my accounting costs."

NitroSell's Speed and Ease

"NitroSell thought of everything. It's very easy to build a site and change it as business evolves. NitroSell's

Content Management System lets me add new tabs and pages specific to us. It makes the site easy to navigate and order from. It avoids upsets by not selling out-of-stock items. It encourages phone communication from customers. Then it dumps all your Web orders into Retail Management System so you see sales totals and the inventory consequences of your day's sales."

"The NitroSell user interface is so easy and tightly integrated that when we create new items in Microsoft Retail Management System, they're on our WebStore within an hour of opening the box. Then I go to the message boards; advertise new arrivals, and new Web money starts flowing in."

Experience Is the Best Teacher

"I learned by my own and others' pain," Alan points out. "Retailers should select a system proved in situations similar to their own."

"Too many bike stores are slow to change," he says. "Our industry always introduces improvements in accessories, machinery, and materials, and we all sell these to our customers. Yet, for ourselves, we often have an 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' attitude. Bicycle retailers often don't realize that their store is *comparatively* broken. It makes them pedal way too hard for too many hours to do a nominal business. Microsoft Retail Management System fixes that.

"If you've disciplined yourself to the demands of running a store, you can learn automation. Microsoft Retail Management System will save owners 75 percent of their time—even more if they run a WebStore. They can just 'bolt on' NitroSell Commerce. Count up the cost of the hours you put in, and what you pay staff. Yes, there is a time investment up front, but you get paid back fast and handsomely."

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For more information about Netsys Inc. products and services, call (479) 283-1709 or visit the Web site at:

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For more information about NitroSell, Ltd. products and services, call

USA: (617) 261 8443

Ireland:+ 353 (21) 453 6124

or visit the Web site at: www.nitrosell.com

For more information about Choppers U.S. products and services, call (909) 946-

Microsoft Business Solutions Retail Management System

Microsoft Business Solutions Retail Management System offers a complete store automation solution for small and medium-sized retailers, streamlining point-of-sale (POS), customer service, and store inventory management, and providing real-time access to key business metrics. Microsoft Retail Management System is a comprehensive solution for single-store and multi-store retailers that empowers independent proprietors, store managers, and cashiers through affordable and easy-to-use automation. Microsoft Retail Management System has the flexibility and scalability to grow with a retailer's business. It works with the Microsoft Office System, Microsoft Windows® Small Business Server, and leading financial applications to provide end-to-end support from the cash register to the back office.

For more information about Microsoft Retail Management System, go to:

www.microsoft.com/businesssolutions/retailmanagementsystem

Software and Services

- Microsoft Windows XP Professional
- Microsoft Office System
- Microsoft Retail Management System

Services

- Bank of America merchant services

Third-Party Software

- NitroSell Commerce Web Services

Hardware

- Sony Vaio PCV-A11L server
- Hewlett-Packard rp5000DT point-of-sale terminal
- Metrologic MS8520 Voyager scanner
- Epson TM-T88III thermal receipt printer
- Cognitive Solutions barcode label printer
- Cherry 7000 compact POS keyboard with magnetic stripe reader
- MMF cash drawer

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Publication: **SVPERCHARGED**

Issue: August 23, 2006

Title: **Industry News:**
Choppers U.S. in Europe via Pimpgarage

Author: Staff

This scoop just landed in Supercharged's inbox:

PimpGarage Custom Bike GmbH is pleased to announce it has recently acquired the official exclusive distributorship for Choppers US parts in Europe. Choppers US is one of the biggest US custom bike companies, marketing and manufacturing a range of American made components and complete bikes. The Choppers US products fit the PG product range perfectly.

Choppers US LLC applies all of their collective knowledge, expertise and experience from the motorcycle industry to making bicycles. Pimpgarage GmbH markets, among lots of other items, Deuce Spinners and a wide range of custom frames.

Publication:

Issue: August 21, 2006

Title: **Top of the Net:**
Choppers U.S. Tricks Out its Site

Author: Staff

Upgrading is something we see in every facet of life. Sometimes you upgrade your seats on a plane to first class. Many of us watch TV shows like "Overhaulin" and "Trading Spaces" that show how you can turn old into new. Even Stewie Griffin from "Family Guy" tricked out his Big Wheel once, although he did admit to it being a waste of money.

So it comes as no surprise that people are spending money on upgrading their run-of-the-mill bicycles into the beasts of the road...choppers. Choppers U.S. makes parts to put on a standard bicycle to get bicyclists riding in style. The company carries more than 500 parts in its warehouse for customers to mix and match their way to a completely unique and custom-designed bicycle. Choppers does most of its business online, drawing a majority of customers from beach towns in the US, Europe, and Asia. So far this year, sales have risen 500 percent.

With this surge of Web traffic, Choppers needed better e-commerce support. However, the company was wary of investing in an e-commerce platform that would offer the wrong automation functionality, thus costing hundreds of thousands of extra dollars to re-work the Web site.

Ultimately, Choppers selected the Microsoft Retail Management System. Microsoft's ever-updated software relieved Choppers' concerns that it would have to sink unbudgeted money into software upgrades. The improved e-commerce platform has allowed Choppers not only to be able to handle high-volume ordering and improve overall customer service, but also freed up a lot of time that can be focused on working on contracts with retail chains and advertising campaigns. Choppers can also put out orders on the same day they are received, and keep inventory well-stocked and prepared.

So whether you're trying to improve that ratty old Huffly you have in the back of your garage or just looking for an excuse to use a banana seat again, Choppers is hoping to have the right product for you. Just don't ask about rims for your Big Wheel.



Publication:

NitroSell News

Issue: August 31, 2006

Title: **Featured Customer:**
Choppers U.S. Bicycle Retailer

Author: Staff

Alan and Patti Discount started Choppers U.S. in early 2005 to manufacture parts and kits that affluent teens and X-Gens would use to build fashion bicycles that look like chopper motorcycles. Managing some 500 parts seemed easy until it became clear that they could be combined into seemingly endless permutations. Alan's experience reminded him that automation is no cure-all. He'd seen one e-commerce site cost nearly \$500,000, and then not share its information with other systems. A combined installation of Microsoft® Retail Management System and NitroSell products and services gives Choppers control over all their inventory permutations, helps predict what parts to order, reduces staff, and cuts bookkeeping costs. Choppers' e-commerce site was published rapidly and without false steps. Today, that site brings in most of the company's revenue and shares sales and customer data with Microsoft Retail Management System and projected future systems.

As Alan Discount states, "Our top benefit was that Microsoft Retail Management System and NitroSell freed me up from retail chores so that I could find, work on, and close our sales contract with a very large retail chain."

To find out more about Choppers U.S., continue reading the case study at Microsoft.com or visit their WebStore at www.choppersus.com.

Publication:



Issue: November 2006

Title: **The Planner's Toolbox:**
Tools Predict Consumer Demand and
Add to Bottom Line

Author: Dave Kelley

Retailers have been using forecasting and replenishment tools for some time, but the tools traditionally used are no longer sufficient to gain competitive advantage, or even to survive. The traditional tools are unable to provide pinpoint forecasts of demand for specific locations and specific products. However, new, more sophisticated tools are giving retailers the ability to accurately predict consumer demand on a store-by-store and product-by-product basis, providing solid bottom-line benefits.

"Because we like to run lean and mean, we rely heavily on forecasting," says Alan Discount, owner of Choppers U.S., an Upland, California-based retailer specializing in bicycles that mimic chopper motorcycles. "This minimized obsolete inventory, excess inventory, and unnecessary use of our working capital."

To provide accurate forecasting, Choppers U.S. deployed Microsoft Retail Management Software (RMS), operating on a wireless network of Sony Vaio computers "that handle virtually all aspects of our business," according to Discount, "and, for the most part, do it in an integrated way. Because we use RMS, we can view sales reports and adjust restocking levels accordingly. We then use the purchase order function to place orders."

Discount says that the implementation was relatively trouble-free due to a couple of crucial decisions. "We put our entire system and tools in place right from the start," he says. "I didn't want our systems to slow our growth, not support our growth, or cost a fortune to upgrade in the future. So before we even did our first transaction, we had a complete business plan in place and the tools to handle both front- and back-end functions." The result: "We know our tools are sound and they work. We have recorded positive results for the past 14 months."

Power Tools of Forecasting

Forecasting tools, like retailers, have individual strengths and weaknesses, but experts agree that state-of-the-art forecasting tools share certain traits, including statistically based algorithms combined with high levels of automation. Other important capabilities are: causal-based forecasting, adaptive self-learning, reporting and analytics, exception management, and customization.

By combining these features, sophisticated forecasting tools enable retailers to create personalized templates that use historical data, run rates, and scenario analysis to generate accurate forecasts. More importantly, however, these tools also give retailers the ability to generate "what if" modeling and analysis of projects or promotions for any given time period or business cycle.

"Testing a model gives you the power to ask and answer the question: 'What should I do?'" explains Alan Sue, director of Test & Learn for Famous Footwear, a Madison, Wisconsin-based family shoe store chain with more than 900 stores in 50 states (and a division of Brown Shoe Company). He believes that many retailers focus strictly on the forecast outcome of a specific initiative rather than modeling multiple strategies to determine which has the best prospects for success.

Multipurpose Forecasting Tools

Famous Footwear uses Applied Predictive Technologies' APT Suite, which, Sue says, "allows us to model and test practically anything, including product mix, staff hours, competition proximity, even weather. If you can think of it, we can test it and forecast how it will affect our business."

Sue is nearly evangelistic in his enthusiasm for forecasting and its impact on a retailer's overall performance. "Retail is very intuitive," he explains. "It's filled with smart people, and their intuition is often right, but now we're able to support and validate that intuition."

At Famous Footwear, Sue says: "We start with a hypothesis, then we winnow down the variables to find the big idea that offers big returns. We do this by setting up analytics around the program to make sure we test what we think we're testing, and to make sure our test and controls are clean. We run tests anywhere from a few days to 13 or 26 weeks, with updates and reviews scheduled throughout the testing process."



Publication: **NitroSell** WEBSITE

Issue: December 6, 2006

Title: **Nitrosell Featurette:**
Cycles U.S./Choppers U.S.

Author: Dermot Hurley

Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Retail

Customer Profile

Choppers U.S. in Upland, California manufactures, finishes, assembles, and sells kits for bicycles that mimic chopper motorcycles. Sales average \$237, and most sales come from its Web site or by phone.

Business Solution

Owner Alan Discount had seen automation poorly done in large companies. He knew he'd integrate all his departments, plus Web site management, into one consistent interface—leaving no data isolated.

“The NitroSell/RMS solution has really helped us streamline our business, so that we can focus on more important activities like helping customers and driving sales. It has saved us tons of time and cost!”

Alan Discount, Owner, Choppers U.S.

Alan Discount explains that his decision to install Microsoft® RMS was absolutely based on his original decision to purchase NitroSell eCommerce. “NitroSell and Microsoft Retail Management System are so well married that we don't even think of them separately,” says Alan. “As a small business owner who watches every dollar,” Alan says, “I see dozens of ways this solution proactively helps us conserve cash. It's paid me back ten times its cost.”

Alan Discount says, “The NitroSell user interface is so easy and tightly integrated that when we create new items in Microsoft Retail Management System, they're on our WebStore within an hour of opening the box. Then I go to the message boards, advertise new arrivals, and new Web money starts flowing in. NitroSell thought of everything. It's very easy to build a site and change it as business evolves. NitroSell's Content Management System lets me add new tabs and pages specific to us, and it makes the site easy to navigate and order from.”



Issue: March 7, 2007

Title: **Champion Brings in New Management and Funding Adds Bench Strength to Support Rapid Growth**

Author: Industry Wire

Upland, CA, February 28, 2007 -- Champion Rescue Tools, the leader in patented hydraulic rescue tools, announced today that they are closing a new round of funding and have recruited a new senior management team to support the growth of their business. Although Champion is one of the newer faces in the fire rescue tool market, they have been around for nearly 2 decades building world class hydraulic tools across a variety of industries. With the recent introduction of their new BEAST multi-tool, the Company has aggressively jumped into the fire rescue and first responder industry as a real player. With that new endeavor came the need to build out the team and infrastructure to support their rapid growth.

"I couldn't be happier to see Champion evolve to the next level", said Tom Patton, founder of Champion Rescue Tools. "Even though we knew our tools were the best, due to a lack of resources, we have always been a lower tier player, picking up the scraps from the big guys. With this new round of funding coupled with our new leadership, we are ready to give the big guys a run for their money. And more importantly, get more of our tools in the market and save more lives."

As Tom drops back into a Chief Engineer role, the Company will be lead by veteran executive, Alan Discount. "Alan's background as a CEO-level manager over the last 2 decades, with a strong focus on capitalization, driving rapid growth companies, and realizing a strong ROI for investors through mergers and acquisitions and/or follow on offerings, is a strong fit for Champion. Over the last 10 years, he has raised tens of millions of dollars in financing and driven hundreds of millions of dollars in value through delivering both operational and M and A results. We are truly excited to have him on our team."

Prior to joining Champion, Mr. Discount has driven numerous successes as a Senior Leader:

- Owner and Founder of Cycles U.S., a market leader in the custom (chopper, cruiser and lowrider) bicycle industry, including securing a network of over 300 dealers and a contract to sell their products through Costco Wholesale in their first year of business.
- Grew Personnel Concepts, a direct mail Company, to a market leader (35-50% growth per annum) and sold a majority interest to a mid market private capital investment firm within three years, in which the owner went from holding an "on paper" valuation of \$10 million to ultimately realizing over \$50 million in cash proceeds.

- Managed portfolio companies for Heritage Partners, a billion dollar private equity firm that focused on providing investment capital and executive leadership for family owned businesses poised for rapid growth, across a variety of industries.

- Served as CEO and Director for Vallon, Inc., a national web solutions provider targeting the small business marketplace with low cost, high performance, technology products and services. Alan was the visionary and architect of the Company's revolutionary workflow automation process patent, which allowed Vallon to build complex, high quality websites using non-technical, entry level personnel. Under his leadership, Vallon became the nation's highest volume producer of full-service web sites sold through major resellers such as IBM, Lucent, Kinkos and others. IBM marketed Vallon's as the brand 'IBM e-business solutions', and ultimately acquired the assets of the business.

- Served in a variety of senior management positions for Deluxe Corporation, a \$2 billion industry-leading, mass customized check and form products supplier, including growing a \$250 million division in excess of 20% per year. He also led a corporate wide portfolio analysis for the Board of Directors, in which numerous key strategic acquisitions, divestitures and internal restructuring efforts were undertaken to refocus their core business. The project got praise from industry analysts and resulted in an excellent boost in Deluxe's stock price.

- Managed the commercial products division of Williamhouse-Regency, the world's second-largest paper converter and outsource supplier to the print industry for wedding invitations, greeting cards and business stationery and forms products. Grew sales through major retail channels 300% in his first year.

Mr. Discount has also been quoted as an expert and interviewed in numerous national media outlets, including Fortune magazine, on CNN, Investor's Business Daily, Microsoft's website and Business 2.0.

"I am extremely excited to join Tom and the family at Champion Rescue Tools", said Discount. "I can honestly say that of all of the rapid growth companies I have been affiliated with, Champion has the best products and opportunity to quickly grab significant market share, of all of them. Their products are extremely superior to their competitor's, their pricing is very competitive, and what better value proposition could you ask for than producing a product that can save lives?" Discount continued, "It is also quite reaffirming that the financial markets have endorsed Champion's position as we close the Company's first round of outside investment capital." The Company would not disclose the amount and source of funding they have raised, but Discount commented that the proceeds would primarily be used for aggressively driving sales and marketing efforts.

Champion Rescue Tools, originally founded as Patton Hydraulics, Inc. in 1978, has built high quality cutters, spreaders, and numerous other specialty hydraulic tools for a variety of specialized applications and industries including numerous high profile customers such as Sandia National Laboratories, Saturn, GM, Ford, Toyota, Nissan, Mitsubishi, Honda, Chrysler, Princeton University, Westinghouse, Savannah River, etc. Their most recent line of cutters, spreaders, rams, power units, pumps, valves and accessories built especially for the fire rescue market, can be seen on their website at www.championrescuertools.com. For sales literature, a DVD of their products in use, or to set up a live demo, contact Champion toll free at 1-888-396-2426.



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Champion Opens Expanded Facility

Jan 12, 2009 2:43 PM

Champion Rescue Tools, maker of hydraulic rescue tools, has completed its move to a new, expanded corporate headquarters in Upland, Calif. The new facility includes classroom and hands-on training facilities for the company's 5-star Extrication Training Academy.

"Champion's sales continue to grow rapidly requiring us to move," CEO Alan Discount said. "We were extremely pleased to find a location that both met our expanding administrative and production needs and provided a west coast base for our new national training academy, which will commence in January 2009."

Founded as Patton Hydraulics in 1978, the company has built specialty hydraulic tools for a variety of industrial applications for customers including GM, Ford, Toyota, Nissan, Mitsubishi, Honda and Chrysler.

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Champion Rescue Tools Unveils New Corporate Website

Including Competitor Technical Comparisons and 5-Star Extrication Training Video

Champion Rescue Tools , Editorial Staff

Posted: Tue, 03/10/2009 - 01:00

Updated: Tue, 03/10/2009 - 18:05

Upland, CA, March 4, 2009 - Champion Rescue Tools, the leader in next-generation, hydraulic rescue tools able to access the passenger compartments of the safest, 5-star crash rated vehicles, unveils its new corporate web site, www.championrescuetools.com.

The highlights of this new web site include:

- Technical specification comparisons between Champion's rescue tools and each industry competitor using an easy-to-use drop down box;
- " Training video from Champion's no-cost 5-Star Extrication Training Academy classes and class registration details;
- " Complete set of downloadable Champion product brochures with all technical specifications;
- " Downloadable user manuals.

"Champion Rescue Tools has always been in business to save lives, so we wanted our new web site to provide the information to allow informed rescue tool purchase decisions," said Alan Discount, Champion Rescue Tools' CEO. "Our new web site provides the most comprehensive technical comparison of rescue tools available today."

"We are also excited to share streaming video highlights of our inaugural 5-Star Extrication Training Academy classes," continued Discount. "Seeing our tools easily cut up over \$200,000 of brand new Volvos is an amazing sight given the growing rescue concerns of fire fighters with new car construction technology."

Champion Rescue Tools, www.championrescuetools.com, is the technology leader in next generation, hydraulic rescue tools for the first responder. The company's patented line of vehicle extrication tools is proving to be the most effective and efficient tools to remove victims of serious vehicle accidents, particularly in the safest cars being manufactured today. Founded as Patton Hydraulics in 1978, the company has built specialty hydraulic tools for a variety of industrial applications for customers including GM, Ford, Toyota, Nissan, Mitsubishi, Honda, and Chrysler. Champion is the sponsor, along with Volvo and leading fire equipment manufacturers, of the no-cost 5-Star Extrication Training Academy.



OFFICIAL BLOG OF VOLVO CARS OF NORTH AMERICA



Aug 26, 2009

CHAMPION RESCUE TOOLS AND VOLVO

The Fire-Rescue International conference is going on this week in Dallas. At the conference, Champion will release the training video that they made using a veritable fleet of Volvos we donated. A segment of the training video appears below the press release.

Enjoy,

Dan

Upland, CA, July 30, 2009 – Champion Rescue Tools, the leader in next-generation, hydraulic rescue tools able to quickly cut apart the safest, 5-star crash-rated vehicles, and Volvo Cars of North America continue to demonstrate their mission to keep vehicle passengers safe and help firefighters save lives. Their jointly-sponsored Five Star Extrication Training Academy proudly announces the upcoming national release of its latest free new vehicle technology (NVT) extrication training tool for firefighters: the Five Star Crash Course training DVD.

This NVT extrication training DVD features the latest new vehicle construction, exotic materials, updated extrication techniques, the most advanced hydraulic rescue tools and safety. To date, the Five Star Extrication Training Academy has trained thousands of firefighter training officers and their departments in the latest techniques and tools to speed extrication of victims of serious accidents involving the safest, 5-star crash-rated vehicles.

This unique training tool will be introduced, and handed out free, to qualified fire fighters at the Fire-Rescue International conference in Dallas, TX, August 25 – 29, 2009 at Champion's exhibit booth # 2343. Attendees of FRI will not only be able to receive this free training DVD at Champion Rescue Tools' exhibit booth, but also to meet and talk with the Five Star Extrication Training Academy's nationally-recognized fire service instructors. A video introduction to the Five Star Extrication Training Academy is available on Champion Rescue Tools' homepage: www.championrescuertools.com.

"Champion's no-cost Five Star Extrication Training Academy has received great acclaim and attention from fire departments around the country," said Alan Discount, Champion Rescue Tools' CEO. "Our mission is to save lives; and the huge interest in our free training academy made us realize the best way to train more firefighters in the best techniques and tools to get victims out of 5-star crash-rated automobiles was to make our training academy classes available at no cost on DVD."

"Every day victims of serious accidents in 5-star crash-rated vehicles wait while many fire departments use obsolete tools to cut through the tougher metals used in new vehicle technology construction," said Carl Haddon, Champion's National Training Director. "This waiting time is crucial in the 'golden hour' fire fighters have to extricate injured accident victims and get them to needed medical treatment. Our hope is that the new information provided in our Academy classes and this DVD will help firefighters work more effectively and safely when dealing with accidents involving newer, 5-star crash-rated cars."

"Volvo has been thrilled to provide in excess of \$700,000 of new cars this year alone to help firefighters learn more about new car construction and how to be successful in quickly performing passenger extrications," said James Hope, Senior Manager Product Communications for Volvo Cars of North America. "By partnering with Champion Rescue Tools and a variety of additional sponsors that make up the Five Star Training Academy, we have been able to help train firefighters, and indirectly save more lives – which is one of Volvo's core values. In fact, in an effort to further expand the distribution of this much-needed training information, Volvo will be posting the Five Star Crash Course training DVD on its www.volvotechinfo.com website and its blog, www.thecarthatstopsitself.com, after its debut at the FRI conference in Dallas, August 25th."

Champion Rescue Tools, www.championrescuertools.com, is the technology leader in next generation, hydraulic rescue tools. The company's patented line of vehicle extrication tools is proving to be the most effective and efficient tools to quickly remove victims of serious vehicle accidents, particularly in the safest cars being manufactured today. Founded as Patton Hydraulics in 1978, the company has built specialty hydraulic tools for a variety of industrial applications for customers including GM, Ford, Toyota, Nissan, Mitsubishi, Honda, and Chrysler. Champion is the sponsor, along with Volvo Cars of North America and leading fire equipment manufacturers, of the no-cost Five Star Extrication Training Academy.



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Idaho Adds Five Star Extrication Academy to State's Certified Firefighting Curriculum

New Vehicle Technology Extrication Training will Help Save Lives

Brian A. James Simpatico Communications

Posted: Fri, 11/06/2009 - 18:03

Updated: Thu, 11/12/2009 - 12:21

Upland, CA, November 6, 2009 – Champion Rescue Tools, the leader in new vehicle construction hydraulic rescue tool technology, and Volvo Cars of North America proudly announce that the State of Idaho's Emergency Services Training has approved their jointly-sponsored Five Star Extrication Academy as the state's official curriculum for instructors' advanced auto extrication training.

This day-long training academy was first developed in 2008 by Champion Rescue Tools and Volvo Cars of North America to help firefighters save lives of victims in the safest cars on the road today: 5-star crash rated vehicles. Five-star crash rated vehicles use new vehicle construction technology (NVT) which incorporates stronger metals and metal combinations that firefighters' older extrication tools cannot quickly cut.

The Five Star Extrication Academy curriculum includes classroom descriptions and graphics of the latest new vehicle construction technology, metals and metal combinations, and updated extrication techniques. The hands-on training (HOT) portion of the Academy allows firefighters to use the most advanced hydraulic rescue tools and late model Volvo cars for hands-on training. To date, the Five Star Extrication Academy has trained firefighter training officers around the country and their departments in the latest techniques and tools to speed extrication of victims of serious accidents involving the safest, 5-star crash-rated vehicles.

Idaho firefighters are conducting an increasing number of victim extrications at auto accidents involving 5-star crash-rated vehicles where older extrication tools and techniques simply aren't cutting apart these cars quickly enough. Getting injured victims of serious auto accidents out of their mangled cars quickly, and to proper medical care, is paramount to reducing the severity of injuries and potentially death. "The Five Star Extrication Academy's train-the-trainer curriculum will be sent to all of Idaho's extrication instructors to be used as instructor upgrade training. This information will better prepare our instructors to deliver the most current information on new vehicle technology systems and high strength metals that we have been able to find, and will be of great value to our emergency responders," according to Jeff Cappe, Training Coordinator, Idaho Emergency Services Training.

"Champion Rescue Tools' mission has always been first and foremost to save lives," stated Alan Discount, Champion CEO. "That is why we teamed up with Volvo, a safety leader in the auto industry, to develop the Five Star Extrication Academy which we offer free to firefighter training officers." Continuing Discount said: "The State of Idaho is showing foresight and leadership by including advanced five-star vehicle extrication in its training curriculum as the number of NVT, five-star crash-rated vehicles on our roads increases."

Volvo Cars of North America has been a supporter of Champion's Five Star Training Academy since day one because of the Swedish carmaker's core company value of protecting and preserving life. Since 2008, Volvo has donated nearly \$1 million worth of vehicles to the academy. "It's often said that Volvo builds cars for the worst day of your life," noted Adam Kopstein, Manager, Safety and Compliance at Volvo. "With Champion's Five Star Training Academy Volvo gives firefighters access to the latest in vehicle design and occupant safety systems."

Champion Rescue Tools, www.championrescuetools.com, is the technology leader in five-star new vehicle technology hydraulic rescue tools. The company's patented line of vehicle extrication tools is proving to be the most effective and efficient tools to quickly remove victims of serious vehicle accidents, particularly in 5-star rated vehicles, the safest cars being manufactured today. Founded as Patton Hydraulics in 1978, the company has built specialty hydraulic tools for a variety of industrial applications for customers including GM, Ford, Toyota, Nissan, Mitsubishi, Honda, and Chrysler. Champion is the sponsor, along with Volvo Cars of North America and leading fire equipment manufacturers, of the no-cost Five Star Extrication Training Academy for firefighters.

A PRECURSOR TO THE SECOND GOLDEN AGE OF KUSTOM BIKING?

It seems like only yesterday that we interviewed CEO Alan Discount regarding the launch of Choppers U.S. then (2005) a new company devoted to selling frames and components for our kind of bikes. Since then, I've been continually impressed by the progress of the endeavor. The company, now called Cycles U.S.- reflecting a broader marketing base, has continued to grow its selection of excellent wares. Every time I've periodically visited their shop-site, I've been thrilled to see all the new kustom goodies available. Just today, I discovered that they now carry rubber fork bumpers, for only \$5 a pair! This solves a problem which, in the past, I've had to solve by making something to mechanically limit the rotation of the fork, in an attractive way, of course. What a great idea! Not only that, but they look really good- like the rubber boots used on "oleo strut"-type fork legs. Needless to say, clever kustom bike builders will find all sorts of other uses for them, because of their cool visual texture, usefulness, and low price. For a commercial job, I once needed something very similar, and spent hours and days designing and making a pattern and rotational-molding rig to produce a couple of them in black-pigmented silicone RTV rubber. The cost to the client for those puppies made those legendary \$600 Air Force toilet seats look like chump change. And C.U.S. is selling virtually the identical things for \$5 a pair. That's what's so great about quantity production. By on-line retailing of many more items like that, along with the original line of frames and components they initially offered, they've enabled a huge advancement in the possibilities available to practitioners of our art, at affordable prices.

Now, our game has changed again, with the announcement of a "brick-and-mortar" Cycles U.S. retail store in Southern California.

Why is this so great, you may ask? Principally, because it exposes the kustom bike craft and culture to those who aren't already a part of it. For those of us who've been playing the game for quite a while, and are already in the market for kustom components, we're already able to find an on-line source for what we want, especially one as highly-regarded and web-visible as C.U.S. However, for someone made only dimly aware of our thing by the occasional glimpse of someone riding a very cool bike, walking into an actual store and seeing this stuff for sale is bound to be an eye-opening experience. Those who have been reading John Brain's ongoing series on the History of Kustom Biking, or who were actually around at the dawn of the Golden Age of Kustom Biking, beginning in the 1960s, will be aware that the game blew up when companies began making kustom-style parts and getting them stocked by local bike, toy and hardware stores. Then as now, kustom bike parts were incredibly cheap compared to kustom car parts, making them affordable for kids, who usually didn't have cars to mess with anyway.



As soon as I learned about the new store, I got in touch with Alan to suggest the next stage of what's needed to get North American (or World) youth and their fathers involved in bike kustomizing: pre-fabricated display units stocked with the most desirable, affordable and simple-to-install kustom bike parts from the C.U.S. line, to be sold by local stores everywhere. I remember when I walked into my hometown Western Auto store and first saw inexpensive apehanger handlebars, banana saddles and other kustom goodies on display. I was in college at that time, and already owned a car, of sorts. But seeing those wild bike parts reminded me that my younger bro Dave's old 20" cantilever-framed sidewalk bike was gathering dust, rust and bird crap in our barn, and just begging to be used for something interesting. So, I bought the kustom parts, as well as some fresh wheels and tires from Western Auto's normal bike parts inventory, and built a kustom muscle bike. At the time, my cars were always cheap old beaters, and I couldn't afford to kustomize or hot rod them; but I was able to build up a really cool bicycle. The same holds true now, actually, which is why I'm still at it, except now I don't bother with owning a bloody car.

Of course I and other O.G. bike kustomizers such as John Brain and many others whose work you see in our Gallery pretty much build from the ground up now; but back in the day we started with stock frames, bolt-on kustom parts and rattle-can paint, like any unskilled kid would today. But we gradually gained those skills because we kept at it, as it was a lot of creative fun, and deeply satisfying because we could ride our art/craft objects

around the neighborhood to receive ego gratification from family, friends and neighbors for our efforts. And the gratification is still just as sweet! Especially now, as everyone in the neighborhood wants to buy the bike.



We should all encourage **C.U.S.** to expand their parts availability to stores everywhere, and make suggestions for merchandise to offer. Many local bike stores already carry Lowrider Bike parts, and I'm sure they sell lots of them to kids who are exposed to them at that level. But exposure and access to Kustom Bike parts would be even better for our society. Creativity is a wonderful thing. Unfortunately, what with school budget cutbacks killing off "inessentials" from school curricula, kids are left to their own devices when it comes to developing creative thinking and craft skills. And with concentration on prep for testing rather than hands-on experimentation, even physics is suffering. There is absolutely no better personal laboratory for learning physics, math and allied ways of thinking than simply messing around with bicycles in a creative way. This also has an important side benefit of getting kids off their obese asses and putting them on a bike saddle to show off their work while gaining in physical fitness and having non-digital-non-passive fun.



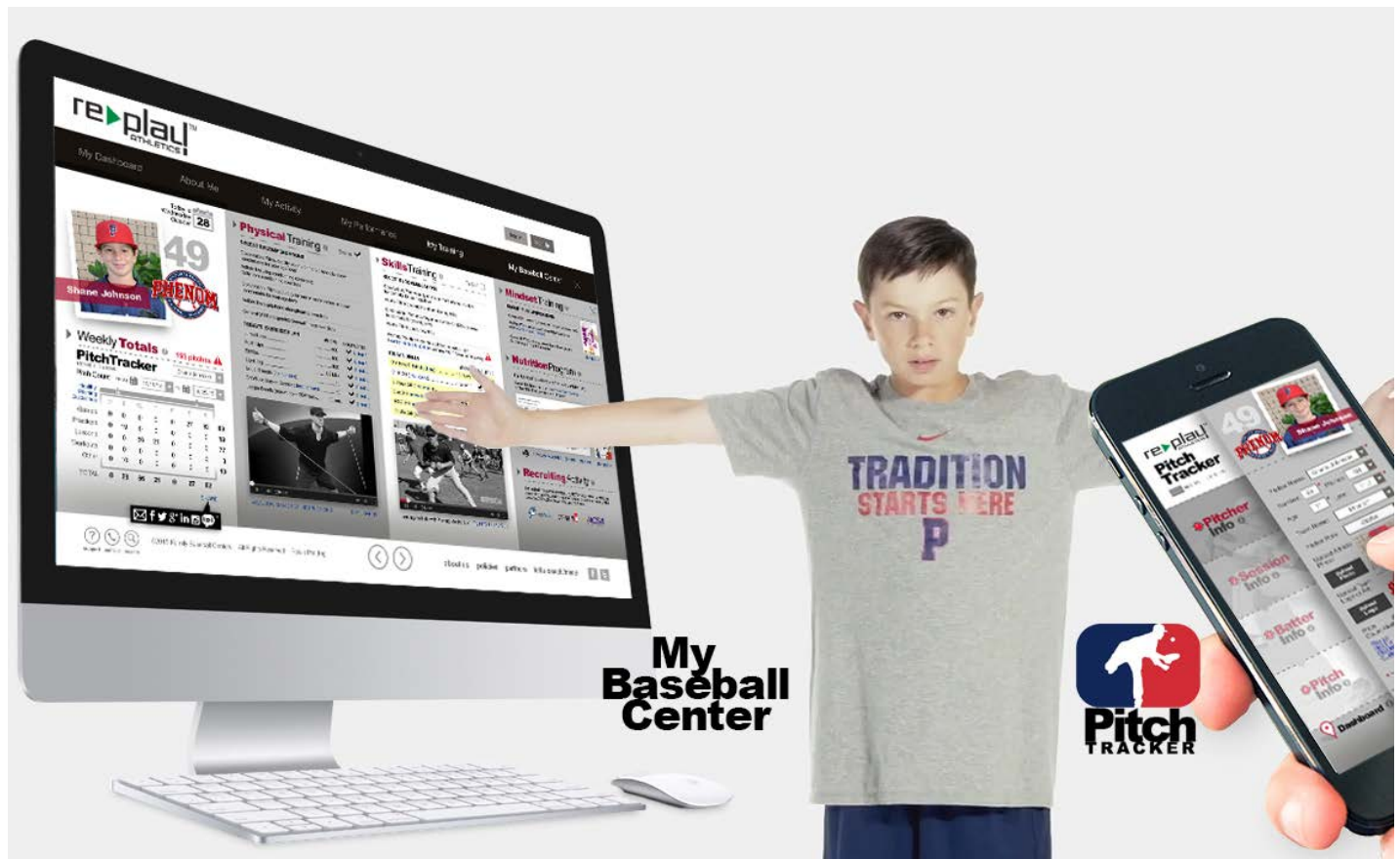
The **C.U.S.** store is sure to become the **SoCal Mecca of Kustom Bikers**, in the same way that the original **Frederick's of Hollywood** store is the So Cal Mecca of naughty ladies wear fanciers, and the **Dudley Do-right Emporium** was for me, on my first stay in Hollywood, in 1981, at the **Chateau Marmont Hotel**.

Jim Wilson

SportTechie

Tech Startup Re-Play Athletics Making Performance Data Mean Something for Youth Sports

Analytics, Apps | March 6, 2017 | Tim Wheeler (Sports Tech Writer and Division 1 College Assistant Coach)



Re-Play Athletics, a data-driven cloud-based training platform for youth sports, has announced the beta launch of its initial baseball product offering.

Re-Play designed its [MyBaseballCenter.com](#) web portal in conjunction with its [PitchTracker mobile application](#) to make confusing analytics actionable and baseball players more prepared.

A Nike™-sponsored nationally recognized Youth Baseball Academy agreed to onboard 15,000 athletes across 17 states to demo PitchTracker and MyBaseballCenter as part of Re-Play's large scale beta test.

“Our platform analyzes performance data to more safely and scientifically develop athlete training programs,” Re-Play Athletics CEO Alan Discount said. “Our algorithms build a bridge to connect large, often unused, data sets and predictable, actionable outcomes to develop athletes better, stronger and faster.”

MyBaseballCenter provides each user a detailed player page that serves as a hub for statistics, training plans, scheduling, and sport-based communications. Players have the option to share most information available on their player pages via digital messaging and social media.

Using data collected via the PitchTracker application, MyBaseballCenter’s algorithms generate personalized training programs for each user. The PitchTracker application also comes preloaded with national pitch count recommendations and safety guidelines developed by Major League Baseball and PitchSmart. Players utilizing Re-Play technology receive a more comprehensive training plan, but coaches also reap the benefits.

“The coaches’ reaction has been exceptionally positive,” Discount said. “They don’t see it as a threat at all. They see it as an opportunity to be a much more effective coach and get their players to a higher level faster.”

Each player’s training plan on MyBaseballCenter auto populates around the unique schedule that is inputted. Full color step-by-step infographics accompany exercises that are suggested for players. MyBaseballCenter’s layout promotes growth beyond physical performance, with areas dedicated to mental and nutritional training as well.

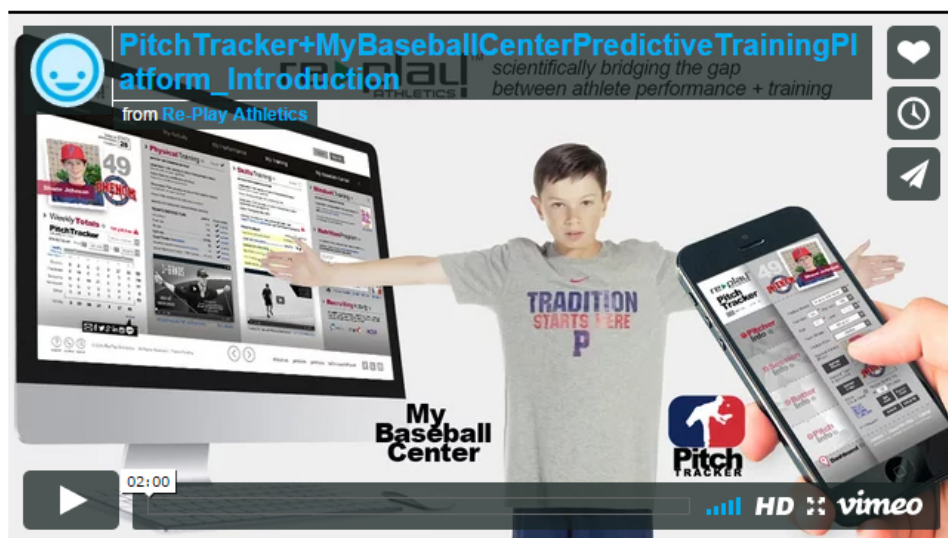
“This platform becomes the athlete’s lifestyle center for performance reporting, training, socialization, team and family scheduling and communications,” Discount said. “Over time, our platform builds each athlete’s history and projectability required by recruiters and scouts to evaluate competitive athletes.”

Re-Play’s framework ultimately caters to the data. While its initial offering is limited to baseball and primarily pitchers, Re-Play plans to expand to multiple sports and integrate with sensor technology in the future.

“Our platform, with our open architecture, allows us to work with any sensor company or software company or video analysis company to take their data and then make it actionable,” Discount said. “If I get data around what my kid’s bat speed is or bat angle or swing angle, the average consumer doesn’t know what to do with that information. We’ll be able to take that information and form it into a training program that helps deficiencies in that player’s performance across any dimension.”

In a tech market that is currently being flooded with sensor technology tracking next generation metrics, there is a need for a family friendly company to bridge the gap between connoisseur and consumer.

“The big question everyone has is, what do you do with it?” Discount said. “We answer that question.”



PitchTracker+MyBaseballCenterPredictiveTrainingPlatform_Introduction from Re-Play Athletics on Vimeo.

NASTY STUFF

Matt Martell
12.17.17

Little League pitching is awesome, but what are the implications?

SOUTH WILLIAMSPORT, Pa. — Connecticut's Ethan Righter faced a mighty task on the opening day of the Little League World Series last August. His opponent was a club from Holbrook, New Jersey, that averaged more runs — eight — than any U.S. team headed into the tournament.

Not a problem.

Righter pulled his ball cap low over his wavy hair and shut down New Jersey, striking out seven batters and allowing just two runs as he picked up the win.

The next day in South Williamsport, three pitchers from North Carolina threw a combined perfect game against South Dakota, while striking out 10.



CARSON HARDEE IS PART OF THE NORTH CAROLINA POWERHOUSE TRIO OF PITCHERS THAT THREW BACK TO BACK NO-HITTERS. ~ PHOTO BY ERIN O'NEILL.

And the pitching performances at the LLWS only got better from there.

North Carolina threw a second no-hitter in its next contest against California, and Righter faced New Jersey again less than a week later, striking out eight as his team from Fairfield, Connecticut, eliminated Holbrook, 12-2.

"They throw strikes. They work the strike zone. They change speeds," North Carolina manager Brian Fields said of his team after the second no-hitter. "They get ahead of hitters and that's what you need to do in Little League."

In all, there were a total of seven shutouts over the first 21 games at the LLWS this season and nine out of 30 games once the tournament had concluded.

While the all-time record for shutouts in a tournament is 13, set in 2006, the bottom line is the caliber of Little League pitching is devastating, and may even be at a peak that will last for many years to come, a statement that's not hyperbole since the tournament plans to age out some of its older competitors.

It isn't enough, anymore, for Little League pitchers just to throw hard once they reach the World Series. Most hitters in the LLWS can catch up to a 70-plus-mph heater thrown over the middle of the plate – they wouldn't have made it this far if they couldn't – which makes pitch location and breaking balls that much more important.

Pitchers have responded by learning their curves and sliders before they're allowed by mom and dad to see a PG-13 movie.



PITCH COUNT LIMITS ARE DESIGNED TO PROTECT A PITCHER'S ARM. BUT MANY IN THE LEAGUE ARE CONCERNED THAT IT'S NOT ENOUGH. ~ PHOTO BY JOHN BEALE

Righter's fastball in the opening game against New Jersey, for instance, was clocked consistently around 68 mph, a velocity that most LLWS hitters can barrel up.

What made that fastball so effective, however, was his knee-buckling curveball that crossed the plate about 10 mph slower. Batters had to think about prolonging their swings enough to connect with the curve. Factor in the tailing bite to Righter's breaking ball, and hitters were baffled, reacting to where they thought the pitch would be when they got their bats around. All this happened in less than a second.

For fans watching in the stands or on ESPN, it was amazing to see.

But there's a catch to all this brilliant work on the mound.

There's widespread concern about the strain placed on young pitchers' arms from breaking balls, and there are conflicting thoughts regarding when it's appropriate to begin throwing them.

And how much pitching is too much? Little League sets pitch-count limits for all its players, but it can't control how often an athlete pitches when he's not playing in a Little League game. With the emergence of travel baseball leagues at a younger age, many Little League pitchers also take the mound for select travel clubs.

Plus, baseball is now becoming a year-round sport for kids, many of whom are focusing on playing baseball, and only

baseball, before they even reach high school. The additional throwing these pitchers do in the time they used to spend playing football, basketball, soccer and other sports can also put more stress on their arms.

All of this, together, begs the question: Is there a correlation between Little League pitching dominance and arm fatigue and injury for those pitchers as they get older? And if so, is the injury risk — up to and including Tommy John surgery — worth it?

The Three Stooges

One thing that adds a twist to Little League are the pitch counts, which are in place to ensure these pre-adolescent players aren't putting too much stress on their arms.

Once a player throws more than 20 pitches, he has to have one rest day between his appearances on the mound. He has to have two days of rest if he throws between 36-50 pitches, three days for throwing 51-65 pitches, and four days once he throws more than 66 pitches. He must leave a game after his 85th pitch (Little League games are six innings).

At the LLWS, four days might as well be an eternity. In four days, a team could lose twice and be eliminated from the tournament.

The North Carolina team had an interesting strategy for using its three most dominant pitchers: Chase Anderson, Matthew Matthijs and Carson Hardee.



NORTH CAROLINA'S CARSON HARDEE IS PART OF THE THREE STOOGES, THE TEAM'S DOMINANT TRIFECTA OF PITCHERS. ~ PHOTO BY JOHN BEALE

Instead of starting one of them and riding him as long as they could, Fields, the team's manager, elected to use all three of them each game for a set number of pitches. That way, the self-proclaimed "Three Stooges" could take the mound more frequently — ideally, every game — with fewer days of rest.

The trio combined for 17 strikeouts and two walks over their first two games. Anderson thrived with his pinpoint accuracy, giving the team a strong anchor to start the games. Matthijs' 76-mph fastball translates to a 99-mph heater in the major leagues. Hardee's specialty was a knock out curveball that worked wonders at the back end of games.

The North Carolina squad, from Greenville, didn't end up winning the tournament. It didn't even make it to the LLWS championship game, despite losing only one game by one run, which came in the U.S. bracket's finals against Texas.

Still, John Beauge, a reporter, editor and photographer for The Patriot-News in Harrisburg, said North Carolina was "by far" the best U.S. team, mostly because of its pitching staff. Beauge has been covering the LLWS since 1957, and he called the back-to-back no-hitters feat "highly unusual." No other U.S. team has ever thrown consecutive no-hitters.

The team that represented the U.S. in the championship game, from Lufkin, Texas, was the first team to record a hit off North Carolina in the tournament, though Greenville still won the game. Texas, however, got the best of Carolina the second time around.

Texas, too, had a dominant pitcher as Collin Ross struck out 13 batters and posted a 2.81 ERA in 10 2/3 innings during the LLWS. He pitched Texas to victory over North Carolina in the U.S. championship game to send his team to the finals.



Collin Ross of Texas, champion of the Southwest region, pitches in the first inning of the US Championship of the Little League World Series. Photo by Erin O'Neill.

The difference between Ross and two of the Three Stooges, though, was their number of appearances. Anderson and Mattijs each pitched in four LLWS games, while Ross made each of his two eligible starts, maxing out his pitch count in both games.

Overall, pitching has been so dominant over the past few seasons that Little League is taking measures to counter the lack of offense. Starting next season, the age cutoff for Little Leaguers will be moved back from its current April 30 date to Aug. 31. Any kid who turns 13 before the Aug. 31 deadline will no longer be eligible to play in the World Series.

The decision to change the cutoff date was announced in 2015, and at the time, Little League spokesman Brian McClintock said the decision wasn't made to reduce the gap between pitchers and hitters. Instead, the league found the children wanted to compete with and against players from the same grade as them. A player's age at the end of August often determines his grade in school.

But even if aging the older players out of the LLWS does level the supposed advantage 13-year-old pitchers have over 12-year-old batters, changing the cutoff date does little, if anything, to help the pitchers preserve their arms.

Pitchers use the same tools to dominate on the Little League mound as they do when they reach the full-size field, which is where they play once they reach the cutoff. By moving the cutoff date forward, kids actually have to graduate to the larger field dimensions sooner.

Those pitchers whose 13th birthdays fall between April 30 and Aug. 31 will now have to throw to batters from 60 feet, 6 inches away instead of the 46 feet they would've been throwing from had the cutoff not been changed.

A Coach's Perspective

Tracking the number of pitches a player throws is undoubtedly a productive means to make sure he doesn't overuse his arm. But as youth baseball evolves, many wonder whether it's the most effective method for preventing injury.

Rob Cooper, the head baseball coach at Penn State, said he was once a big proponent of pitch counts. But now, as he digs into more studies regarding arm care, he wonders about the legitimacy of the pitch counting metrics.

"Why do we come up with the numbers that we come up with for pitch counts? They're just arbitrary," Cooper said. "If a guy throws 101 pitches, all of a sudden, we think he's throwing a lot. If he throws 99, he had a good pitch count. Right? That's a difference of two.

"To just say, 'Hey, he's only going to throw this amount of pitches right here,' it's almost like we're just putting that in place so we can say we're taking care of the kid's arm. I feel like that's not good enough."

As a Division I coach, Cooper is constantly searching for the next group of players to recruit, many of whom are pitchers. Sometimes, he's evaluating high school freshmen, who aren't much older than those competing in the LLWS. While recruiting, Cooper not only has to project how these players will develop as they get older, but he also has to factor injury risks into his decisions.

On top of that, Cooper has two sons playing competitive youth baseball, and through them, he sees how arm use affects pitchers even before they play high school and college ball. To him, counting pitches isn't a one-size-fits-all method to curb injury and fatigue.

Cooper's younger son, Jake, has had recurring arm issues, and the coach would take his son to the doctor, who would conclude Jake needed rest to cure what was diagnosed as tendonitis.

After resting for the prescribed period of time, Cooper said, Jake would start throwing again. Not long after, the pain would return.

"I put him on one of the arm maintenance programs where he throws something every day, along with workouts and stretches," Cooper said. "He has no more arm pain."

Cooper did say a more accurate measure for limiting arm use would be to keep tabs on the number of pitches a player throws in a week. Or even better, he said, it'd be best to tally each of his throws during the week, not just his number of pitches.



JAPAN'S RIKU GOTO. DOMINANT PITCHING AT THE LITTLE LEAGUE LEVEL COMES WITH CONCERNS ABOUT THE LONG-TERM IMPACT ON A YOUNG PITCHER'S ARM. ~ PHOTO BY JOHN BEALE

“When you’re 10 years old and you’re not pitching, you’re probably playing [another position],” Cooper said. “And you’re going to loosen up and throw. You’re going to play catch, you’re going to make throws in a game. They’re not constantly repeated throws, but those are still throws.”

Some people within baseball agree that tracking all the pitches a player throws in a week, such as during bullpen and training sessions, warm-ups and games, is the most reasonable way to control arm use, even if the players throw other than when they’re on a mound. New technology makes what sounds like a tedious process much easier than before.

Re-Play Athletics, for example, has a pitching-development technology that tracks pitches on its platforms for each player who uses it and allows that information to be shared between him, his parents and all of his coaches. It sends alerts via push notifications to smartphones and tablets that inform users when a player is approaching and has reached his maximum pitches threshold. Additionally, the technology’s platform can track a pitcher’s performance.

With all this information, pitchers are given a recommended workout program, nutrition plan and rest guidelines.

Alan Discount, chief executive of Re-Play Athletics and the product’s architect, said he created the technology because he was disappointed with the lack of information available to most volunteer youth coaches when it comes to injury prevention for pitchers.

“Many parents and coaches have adopted a win-at-all-cost mentality,” Discount said. “For them, the outcome justifies the means. Everybody talks about player development and safety, but sadly, that competition makes development secondary to winning.”



BILL SEITH, OF VIRGINIA BEACH, VA., JOINS IN A WAVE DURING THE LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL WORLD SERIES U.S. CHAMPIONSHIP GAME BETWEEN TEXAS AND NORTH CAROLINA, THE SOUTHEAST AND SOUTHWEST REGION CHAMPIONS. ~ PHOTO BY LINSEY FAGAN

'The Hook and the Fastball'

Aside from the different types of throwing — as a pitcher, a position player or with a friend in the backyard — certain pitches also have varying effects on a player's arm.

It's long been established that a breaking ball puts stress on a pitcher's arm, especially when he's still growing. Some sports scientists advise children to wait to throw curveballs until they reach age 13 or 14. Cooper at Penn State argues players should only throw fastballs until they reach high school.

Still, that doesn't stop youth players from snapping off breaking pitches from 46 feet away. With the way youth baseball has progressed, pitchers are at a disadvantage if they don't throw curveballs.

Without a breaking pitch, it becomes that much more important for a Little League pitcher to locate his fastballs on the corners. But if that pitcher has an off-speed pitch, batters have to react to the speed of the incoming pitch instead of just sitting on the fastball. That's what made Righter, the ace from Connecticut, so effective.

"He's not overpowering," Connecticut manager Mike Randazzo said of Righter. "But because of the speed differential between the hook and the fastball, he kept the hitters off balance. He didn't have to have a great curveball."

Randazzo said he doesn't have a definitive answer about when kids should start throwing curves. But after reading and listening to sports doctors who specialize in arm care and injury prevention, Randazzo said he doesn't worry so much about kids throwing curves as he does about them throwing too often.

"I'm an overuse guy," Randazzo said. "I think if someone has thrown too much, whether it's just fastballs or a combination of fastballs and curveballs, that's where I object."

Counting pitches, Randazzo said, is the best way to prevent overuse, though he doesn't think simply following the limits set by Little League is the most effective method to do this. While no youth pitcher should exceed the maximum that Little League has put in place, Randazzo said, age isn't the only variable that should determine how many pitches an individual should throw.

The time of year (season and specific month), geographic location and physical preparation factor into the number of pitches a player should throw to avoid overuse.

Considering all of this, Fairfield American LL, the Connecticut team's local league, sets its own pitch-count limits that are more stringent than the maximums Little League sets nationally.

For example, Fairfield American has a rule in place that prohibits any pitcher from throwing more than 50 pitches in any game played before May 1. Before then, the weather in Connecticut is still cold, and throwing in the cold too much increases the risk of arm tightness and fatigue.

Plus, many youth pitchers in the Northeast don't start conditioning their arms for the season as early as they should, due to the winter weather, and therefore don't have the stamina to safely throw more than 50 pitches in a game.

And after pitching, players need rest, especially those with developing arms.

Many times, for a coach who wants to prevent overuse, the biggest obstacle isn't the 12-year-old pitcher nagging him for the ball. Instead, Randazzo said, parents have a tendency to want their kids to pitch as frequently as possible without weighing the negative consequences that could surface in the future.

While it's great to have so many opportunities for young athletes, caution is still the watchword for those who have been around the game.

"Don't peak at 12 years old and don't ruin your [kid's] career at 12 years old because you're trying to win a championship," Randazzo said. "The boys need rest."