

# PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW

## Gumband guys stretch cartography's limits

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DeepLocal wants to throw a party to celebrate something many technology companies only dream of -- surviving a full year.

Only they're too busy.

"Right now we have more work than we can handle, which is a great thing," said Nathan Martin, 30, co-founder and CEO of the Carnegie Mellon University spinoff.

Founded by Martin, Jeff Maki and Carl DiSalvo -- whose group picture more closely resembles that of a punk rock band than a geographic software company -- DeepLocal is generating buzz among area tech experts.

"It's the kind of company that sets the stage internationally for people to understand that Pittsburgh is a platform for design in new media," said Illah Nourbakhsh, associate professor in CMU's school of computer science's Robotics Institute. "That's a big deal, because that really is the future."

DeepLocal's name comes from the idea of communicating information that might be so deeply hidden in a community that it is only stored in the stories shared by people who live there. Its slogan is "we make maps speak" and its main product, Maphub, uses Web-based maps to organize information.

For example, a map created for the nonprofit Bike Pittsburgh geographically shows where cycling accidents happened with little icons. Clicking on the icons brings up more information about the collision. Anyone with Internet access can add to the map, update information and upload photographs, video or sound recordings.

However, geographic mapping is only part of what DeepLocal does -- or what it hopes to do in the future.

"We want to be a product company," said Martin, the only founding member still at DeepLocal in Pittsburgh. Maki left the company about six months ago to pursue an art career and DiSalvo recently moved to Atlanta to work as a professor in the School of Literature, Communication and Culture at Georgia Institute of Technology, though he's still on the DeepLocal staff.

They've developed a technology called Gumband, which uses cell phone text

messaging to send information. They are working with the nonprofit Sprout Fund to use the technology to share information about landmarks that might be hidden in Pittsburgh -- such as the location of historic battles. A code could be posted at locations, and people could text it to a phone number and receive information about the significance of that site.

The company introduced it in Pittsburgh last month to run a scavenger hunt for the Alternative Transportation Festival.

Other clients include the Hill House Association, NASA, the East Side Community Collaboration and the Warhol Museum.

"Not only are they really professional," said Scott Bricker, executive director of Bike Pittsburgh. "But just their process of working -- coming in and brainstorming with you -- is really conducive to how we work."

DeepLocal's biggest challenge has been cracking into Pittsburgh's "old boys" network, Martin said.

"Big companies here very rarely work with small companies that are home-bred," he said. "Very often they hire people outside, and that's a challenge for any startup company that's service-oriented."

Martin and people familiar with his company think that if they can thrive in Pittsburgh -- with its aging, less tech-savvy population -- they can successfully take the company nationwide.

The company is making money, Martin said, and although he wouldn't disclose any financial information, he said that profit has steadily increased from month-to-month.

The Idea Foundry, a nonprofit in Oakland that invests in area tech startups, put \$100,000 into DeepLocal in January. It's the only investment capital DeepLocal has accepted or pursued. Martin said that's because they want to firmly establish and define the company first.

"We're looking forward to them really settling on what their model is going to be and what business sector they're going after," said Jeryl Schreiner, the Idea Foundry's co-founder and chief program officer.

"I look at so many of the companies using the Web that are struggling for different means to really find a way to get target information and target advertising to people," she said. "I think DeepLocal has a unique way to do it because it's all geospatial information. It's a really good concept."

Idea Foundry expects DeepLocal to expand from its staff of six full- and part-time employees to 30 in the next five years.

Martin said it's a very ambitious goal that he feels they could reach -- if they can attract enough computer programmers.

"It's hard to find good people in Pittsburgh because computer programmers leave, and we have to find people who are creative and can solve problems quickly," he said. "The biggest thing that scares me about building a staff of 30 is how I would ever find 20 really good programmers in Pittsburgh who would want to work in the style we work."

"But I think there will be a day in Pittsburgh when that happens."

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