The World Wide World:
IT Ain't Just the Web Anymore!

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EVDB: Seed in his head sprouts

BY CHRISTINA KOUKKOS

"Helping people find things online has permeated my last 15 or so years," says Brian Dear, founder and CEO of EVDB. It all started long before the Web in 1987, when Dear founded Coconut Computing, a company that built client/server tools for building rich multimedia online services, including movie listings. After selling Coconut in 1995, Dear shopped around a business plan for a service that would provide alerts via e-mail about any upcoming events a subscriber might specify. He didn't find anyone willing to fund the idea at the time, but the seed stayed in his head.

"In 2001 I started making a list of all the events here in San Diego that I would have gone to had I known about them," he continues. "It's hard to keep track of all the different things happening in a metro area. Small meetings or lectures at a local university are generally off the radar of major media." That led Dear to dust off his old business plan in 2003 and update it for the Web. While many websites cover events for particular niches or geographic areas, and others aggregate those listings, says Dear, "the Web is still a complete and utter mess when it comes to events and calendaring. There's no search engine and there are no simple standards for representing and sharing rich event data. Calendaring applications tend to be difficult to scale and navigate and read. Yet it is the primary way people try to represent events. RSS, XML, Web services and the enormous explosion of blogs. . .all these factors could be harnessed for an event service on the Web." Enter EVDB.

Like IMDB, the Internet movie database, and CDDB, the CD database (SEE **RELEASE 1.0**, SEPTEMBER 2003), Dear hopes, EVDB could become the de-facto database of event listings. Like any such service, EVDB will solicit listings from the small guys, and it will take the trouble to collect them itself from the big guys who don't need it as much (yet) as it needs them. When EVDB rolls out its early beta at PC Forum, the events in the system will be gathered by crawling the Web and from partnerships with listings services. The company has already partnered with Meetup and is in discussions with a number of other sources.

Wherever possible and logical, event listings will include contact, ticketing and other useful information including full agendas for conferences.

"Traditionally event organizers publish listings of their events using unstructured text in a calendar format, and users have no tools to find them easily or sync them to their desktop or handheld calendar apps," says Dear. "Our argument is that calendars are the wrong metaphor for publishing event listings on the Web. They don't scale well and they're not very readable. People want to know about *events*, some of which they'll put in their own *personal* calendars. As an analogy, take Apple. They didn't create the iTunes Music Store to sell *playlists* of music. Apple created it so that users could find and buy *songs* and then use iTunes to collect those songs into arbitrary groups, or playlists, that make sense to them. We're pursuing events and calendars in the same way."

In addition to making ad-hoc searches for events, users can subscribe to RSS feeds for particular areas of interest, for particular tags (SEE **RELEASE 1.0**, FEBRUARY 2005) or for the results of continuous searches based on specific criteria – much like the "perching" option offered by RSS feed aggregator Pluck (SEE **RELEASE 1.0**, DECEMBER 2004). For ease of use, EVDB will decompose larger events into their constituent parts – e.g. a conference will be broken down into individual agenda items – so that users can choose which specific sessions they wish to attend and flag the speakers or topics that interest them. EVBD will offer tools for users to pull events directly into their Outlook or iCal calendars.

Initially EVDB will display ads using Google's AdSense, but Dear plans to roll out a more sophisticated and targeted ad-serving system later in the year, he says. "We want to enable advertisers to target regions down to the street corner, or to particular time frames or topic."

The company also plans to publish a Web services API which will allow free access to the database for noncommercial use or a commercial license for any organization – such as a local newspaper – to

pull all or part of EVDB data into its website. Other large-scale users could include travel planners, event organizers and hospitality providers of all kinds.

EVDB does not plan to offer its own ticketing or event planning services, but will partner with companies in those spaces, says Dear. "We are simply trying to help people find out about events, first and foremost. That's a big enough challenge," he says.