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Fortune
1996 25 Cool Technology Companies

By Janice Maloney



NetObjects
Web publishing software

REDWOOD CITY, CA
Founded 1995
Revenues: none
Employees: 50
Private
www.netobjects.com

Before this startup even had a product, it found its first customer, photojournalist and multimedia artist Rick Smolan. Best known as the creator of the Day in the Life series of photo books in the early Eighties, Smolan had decided to take his act to the Internet with an ambitious online happening in February called 24 Hours in Cyberspace. In photos, graphs, and texts, it chronicled one day's events as they occurred and were recorded by a volunteer army of 1,000 photographers and 80 journalists across the globe. Smolan and his volunteers used NetObjects software to stitch it all together.

The company's mission is simple: to develop the premier design tool for the World Wide Web — software powerful enough for the most savvy Web artist, yet so easy to use that a Web novice can master it. According to Smolan, the stuff did the job: "NetObjects was the only tool that would enable a team of the world's top picture editors and writers to become instant Web page designers. It let them do what they do best —edit and write— and automatically generated finished, sophisticated Web pages that millions of people were able to see only minutes after they were designed." Three million people clicked onto the 24 Hours site; the blaze of publicity surrounding the event helped NetObjects raise \$5.4 million in venture capital.

Today the scene at NetObjects' office is hardly less frenetic. Everyone is under the gun to perfect a commercial version, which is due to go on sale this fall. The atmosphere is nerdy and then some. Banter amid the overcrowded cubicles is loud and constant. Employees often take a morning break to play Ping-Pong; sometimes they caper in elaborate balloon hats

while Doug Menuetz, a world-class photographer whom CEO Samir Arora has hired to document the company's birth, takes pictures. (Every new hire receives a crown of balloons on his or her first day.) Lunch and dinner are served so employees don't need to go out.

Facing competition from the likes of Microsoft, Adobe, and Netscape, not to mention a horde of other hungry startups, NetObjects needs all the camaraderie it can muster. To survive what Internet watchers say is an inevitable shakeout, NetObjects is focusing on a product strategy it calls Mok in Box, after Clement Mok, chief creative officer. A world-famous designer of both online and real-world products and a pioneer in information design, Mok is crafting the software "so that it looks the way designers think"; he and his team have created a series of templates, or ready-to-use Web pages, for Web builders who prefer not to start from scratch. The new software is code-named T2, after the Arnold Schwarzenegger character in the movie Terminator 2. Why? Because, says head marketer David Kleinberg, "we are going to squash the competition."