

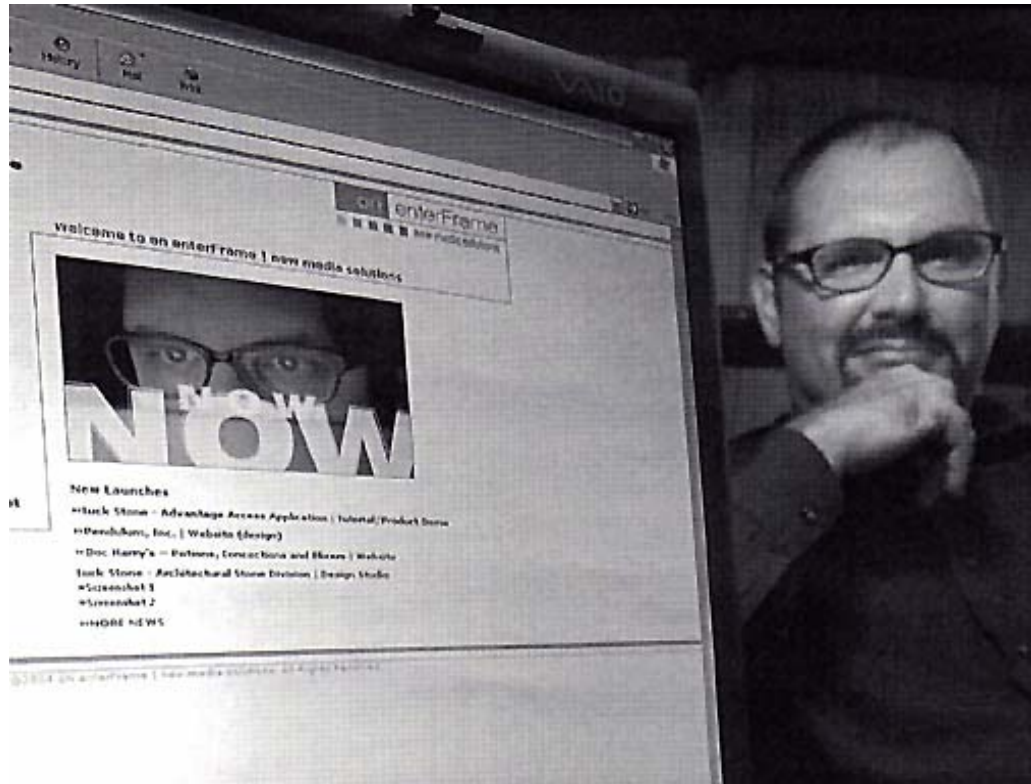
on enterFrame gives companies a face-lift

Bon Air-based entrepreneur builds his business around making others look good

BY ANDREW MOISAN

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Jim Dingus is in the appearances business.

Which may be why he grins brightly and offers sturdy handshakes when he manages to get out of his small home office to mingle.

Mingling is rare, though. Dingus can spend up to 50-hour weeks facing a laptop computer in his downstairs office, a rainbow of flashing lights from his multimedia design projects dancing on the lenses of his black-rimmed glasses.

There's no big neon business sign outside his three-bedroom home, but if there were, it would say "on enterFrame," the business he began about two years ago and has built on making other businesses look good. And their good looks look good to him.

"I've yet to be unimpressed," Dingus said, talking recently about the businesses he has worked with.

Putting fresh faces on products

The 43-year-old husband and father creates, among other things, motion graphics and Web sites for businesses of all sizes. His clients often are looking to expand or improve by, in part, putting fresh faces on their products.

On enterFrame's other business face-lifts can include such services as digital and print graphics design - used to make logos, business cards, posters, stationery and advertising - and audio recording and production, which can provide soundtracks, voice-overs, narratives and sound effects.

And if new-media design is a specialty and interest for him, then so is the way he chooses to cultivate clients. He keeps them close throughout design projects, asking them questions and offering explanations - something he says customers may remember as much or more than the actual service they receive.

He has developed relationships with nearly 30 clients, according to a list on his Web site - www.onenterframe.com. Dingus did one of his first jobs for Virginia Commonwealth University Health System.

"He has a definite process where you start with the concept and who your target audience is going to be," said Joseph Cirillo, director of the Web Center at VCU Health System.

The target audience in VCU's case was young nurses. So Dingus was asked to create a multimedia CD and Web site "that would really entice young nurses to come and work here," Cirillo said.

Revenue in unconventional ways

Cirillo said the bill for the project was about \$20,000, among the largest efforts by Dingus until then.

But Dingus isn't quick to chat about dollars when it comes to the size of his business. He says oeF - the initials he gives on enterFrame - nets revenue in unconventional ways that he says may lead to underestimations about the amount of work he gets.

In fact, the rate at which his business has been growing makes him think he will be looking for office space in the next year.

And he's thinking about hiring someone to help, but only if he can find the right person, he said. "That's the key."

Dingus began his new-media career in earnest while he worked at Cisco Systems Inc. from 1995 to 2000. Using his journalism degree to do technology writing for some time had offered a solid foundation of knowledge and, he said, kept a roof over his head.

But Dingus didn't really become animated until he was asked to piece together a Power Point presentation while at Cisco. He loved it, even if he's a bit modest now about his presentation.

"I wouldn't show it to anybody now, but it was a huge hit," he said.

From there, a future in new media seemed a realistic, flashing prospect.

"I started to see myself getting very deep into it," he said. "Just kind of honing my craft."

Starting own firm logical step

After he had worked with new media for so long, striking out on his own seemed the next obvious step. He has taken on big projects and smaller ones since he designed VCU Health System Web site and CD, getting more motivated with every new concept.

To hear his current clients tell it, his experience has paid off.

"Jim is elevating our Web presence by bringing us from the '90s to tomorrow's forefront of Web design," said David Farmer, corporate communications manager for Trilegiant Loyalty Solutions, one of Dingus' largest clients. "Integrated Flash mini-movies will replace large chunks of monotonous text."

But for all the new-media success secrets Dingus has unlocked, perhaps most curious is the name under which he chose to do it all.

On enterFrame, he explained, is a Macromedia Flash coding term. Authoring, producing or using various types of media involves looking at and thinking in terms of "frames."

"When using [or] viewing most media, you're looking into a frame, whether it be a business card, an e-Learning tutorial, a Web site, Flash movie, product demo, etc.," he said.

And though it may not be such a surprise, Dingus has weaved a philosophy out of all the nuts and bolts of the technology and media he works with. That idea illuminates the services he offers and the name of his business.

"I really liked the idea of users 'entering the frame' and being in the moment of a particular piece," he said.

Startup Spotlight highlights Richmond-area businesses less than two years old. Any ideas? Staff writer Andrew Moisan can be reached at (804) 649-6495 or amoisan@timesdispatch.com