

INTERACTIVE content

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ENTRY STRATEGIES FOR MAINSTREAM MEDIA

Online Services

Interactive TV

Consumer CD-ROM

Electronic Newspapers

Personal Television

Interface Design

Electronic Retailing

Digital Mapping

Interactive Gaming

News On Demand

Electronic Yellow Pages

Full Services Networks

Copyright & Licensing

JUPITER
COMMUNICATIONS
COMPANY

Optigon Builds Online SimCity

Former Maxis affiliates at Optigon Interactive will be launching a multi-player version of the popular computer game, SimCity. Optigon has been involved with Maxis for several years as an outside contractor, translating the Sim series of games from Mac to PC format. According to Daniel Goldman, a 28-year old entrepreneur and Optigon's president and proprietor, the company has been planning for "an online service like this for more than eight years," and is only now delving into the early stages of realizing his dream.

(page 21)



Optigon Interactive set to launch "TEN" service (see cover story).

ONLINE GAMES

SimCity Comes to Optigon (from cover)

The new online network, called Total Entertainment Network (or TEN), is currently in Alpha testing mode of its online service, which will include SimCity, in the San Francisco Bay Area. Full launch of the service is scheduled for late fall. TEN will be a direct competitor to ImagiNation Network and GENie.

Welcome To The Machine...

With a deficit of serious competitors in the interactive gaming niche of the online industry, TEN aims to interject a different approach to online entertainment. Goldman said in the announcement that Optigon wanted "to do for the online world what MTV and FOX have done for the television world: cater to the audience's specific interests."

Optigon will translate the popular SimCity environment into an online community building upon a community of fans that exists already. However, unlike other players in the industry, Goldman does not see Optigon broadening its scope in the near term. "To some extent I see branching out to other markets, but for the meantime we would like to concentrate on the gaming service to control the growth until we get everything hammered out."

Niche Start-Up Made Big

But Optigon is likely to see expanded growth in the near term as its network goes national. The online gaming industry although it has shown only mild growth in the past year could easily grow from a \$20 million dollar industry to a \$450 million dollar industry within 5 years. Early entrants like Optigon could easily have a hand in this growth and reap the profits. In many ways Optigon could serve as a model in what could prove to be a plethora of niche oriented services on the online market. Goldman himself coordinated the efforts to translate SimCity to the

PC platform, from his Optigon offices. Both of Optigon's chief operators are longtime gaming content developers and "saw a need in the industry for an online gaming service with a little character."

The Service Specifics

The SimCity Online game will likely differ from the off-line version which puts the player in the mayor's office of the city. In Optigon's version, each online player will be a developer in a portion of a given city. There will be several groups of cities. As with the Optigon SimCity, other TEN games will include "scripted objects" or objects on the screen that can be built by the user and incorporated into multi-player role-playing and fantasy games.

Goldman explained that a subscriber to the service, tentatively set to pay \$10.95 for five hours and \$3-4 for additional hours per month, will likely sign up for usage blocks or time frames. So in order to keep the development of a given city and usage regular, as a virtual community builds around a city, subscribers will sign up for a certain number of nights. Goldman also stated that Optigon was considering a pre-pay plan of \$20.95 for ten hours per month. The back end is comprised of distributed 486 and 586 microprocessors running a mixture of UNIX and proprietary-based languages.

—Michael Rinzel

