



Package brings catalogs alive

Interactive sales materials debut

By Cynthia Lescalleet

EPIC Software Group put a salesman on a disk.

The Woodlands-based company develops electronically produced interactive catalogs, tapping computer intelligence to produce multisensory presentations.

"Anything printed can be converted to interactive format on a floppy disk and be used to demonstrate a product or service," explains company founder Vic Cherubini.

EPIC focuses on the industrial marketplace, says Cherubini. It's his professional background and other companies already are working the consumer market.

Consider the case of a company introducing a new industrial valve. The traditional route is to print a technical data sheet showing a photo of the valve and a line drawing of a cross-section of the valve.

EPIC's version creates a screen showing the valve and all its components. While viewing the image, the computer user can see the valve open, the fluid in the valve flow, and the sound of the fluid flowing through the opening.

Programming attempts to mimic the way an expert reasons, enabling the computer to ask the user several questions about the valve application. It makes a recommendation as to which size valve makes the most sense, then it prints out the data sheet on that valve.

"There's just no comparison between the impact of a computer-generated image, complete with sound and animation, to that of a static printed photo or line drawing," he says.

The format has its practical advantages in international markets. A printed catalog sent to, say, South America, takes three days to arrive and must clear customs. For the price of a long-distance call, the electronic catalog arrives via modem.

The interactive catalog isn't inexpensive. Lower-end conversions start at about \$20,000, which includes 1,000 copies of the disk. The disk cover carries a silk screen label displaying a logo or photo. EPIC considers the price "competitive" with a 16-page, four-color catalog.

And unlike the catalog, Cherubini adds, the disk can be updated easily, won't be pitched as quickly and enjoys novelty status.

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Cherubini considers EPIC one of the silver linings of the recession. "Adversity requires a new way of doing things," he says.

As a marketing officer at an industrial company, Cherubini turned to computerized catalogs to boost sales. "I saw the computer was not being used as a platform in sales and marketing."

A business degree and career later, he is putting that premise to the test, sinking his savings to finance it.

The three-month-old company landed its first contract two weeks ago, a trade-show-bound industrial client seeking a catchy way to introduce a new product. ■