

Networks start on the Internet, but seek capital to get cable deals

BY ED DUGGAN

The dream of media convergence may be here.

Two different entrepreneurial groups, one in Aventura and another in Lake Worth, have developed Internet networks that they hope to eventually roll out into television.

Only a few million dollars stand in their way.

The networks made presentations at the September meeting of the Gold Coast Venture Capital Association in Boca Raton as part of their capital-raising programs.

"It's impressive to see them in South Florida, where we continue to develop as a hub of Internet interactive activity," association President David Bates said. "They are turning must-watch TV into must-be-involved with TV."

"It's clear that the money and human capital are available in South Florida for sound ideas and smart execution," said Bates, chairman of Gunster Yoakley & Stewart's Technology & Emerging Companies Practice Group in West Palm Beach.

Lake Worth-based Visual Arts Network bills itself "where creativity finds a home."

Lynne Pittard, CEO and co-founder with her husband, Bill, have been up and running for a year on the Internet - "and as a trial on a 50,000-member religious TV network".

The Pittards raised \$500,000 from friends and family to prove their concept, acquire content, and get it up and running. The burn rate is about \$45,000 a month. Now, they are seeking \$10 million to become a full-time cable network specializing in all facets of the visual arts.

Pittard was a 34-year-old housewife who



President and CEO Georgianne Brown, with Charlie, runs PetStyle, an online destination and social spot for pet lovers.

watched a painting class on PBS and said - like a million others - "I can do that." Unlike the other 999,999, she could - and did. Three years later, the now-accomplished artist was teaching "Painting With Pittard" on the same network - and did so for 25

more years, developing a sizeable media library.

She owns the rights to her 25 years of painting classes, and that library became one of the content bricks in the Visual Arts Network's foundation.

WOOFING FOR SUCCESS

At PetStyle, dogs and cats get pride of place on the Internet-based news, features and social network.

It's doggie Facebook meets kitty MySpace.

"We're the premier online destination and social spot for pet lovers," said Georgianne Brown, president and CEO of the Aventura-based firm. "Long term, we plan to transition into a full-blown media company - from Internet to TV."

She expects to get a syndicated TV program during 2009, but is concentrating on building out the content library, which now approaches 450 webisodes, 3,000 articles and a growing, robust community of pet lovers.

Each webisode runs three to eight minutes, close to Internet users' attention spans.

"We will use the half-hour TV show to drive traffic to our Web and social site," Brown said.

She and CFO John Studdard were instru-

PETSTYLE LLC

President and CEO: Georgianne Brown

Web site: www.petstyle.com

Address: 2875 N.E. 191st St., Suite 400, Aventura 33180

Phone: (954) 294-2569

E-mail: georgianne.brown@petstyle.com

VISUAL ARTS NETWORK

President: Lynne Pittard

Web site: www.visualartsnetwork.tv

Address: 1411 Lake Victoria Drive, Lake Worth 33461

Phone: (561) 586-6702

E-mail: lynnepittardart@aol.com



Epstein

PetStyle financing comes from Mark J. Gordon and David Epstein of Presidential Capital Partners. Gordon and Epstein co-founded Precision Response Corp. (now PRC), where they were chairman and president, respectively, before selling the company to USA Networks. "We've funded PetStyle about \$7 million to date, and are looking for a capital addition of \$3 million to \$5 million," Epstein said. "It's not an absolute necessity, but we would welcome an outside investment that also brought us some strategic value relating to digital media."

eduggan@bizjournals.com | (561) 949-7512