

It was a very good year for local technology and innovation

BY ED DUGGAN

For the South Florida technology industry, 2007 was a banner year with growth in investment, employment and optimism.

Innovations from existing firms and startups alike were back with a vengeance.

A novel technology breakthrough was developed by Fort Lauderdale-based Zimmerman Advertising. Pick-N-Click, a virtual ad agency based on the Internet, promises to create a revolution in the way clients prepare and initiate advertising and campaigns.

Customer Acquisition Network is wasting no time in its goal of becoming the go-to company for pay-for-performance, multi-channel marketing. The Fort Lauderdale-based firm has plans to build a comprehensive online advertising platform where advertisers can utilize search, social networks, instant messaging, mobile, video, and voice communications from a single source.

Since June, it has raised more than \$7 million in private capital, merged into a public shell and acquired InterClick, the nation's 11th-largest and fastest-growing Internet ad network.

A Boynton Beach partnership, Creative Rays, has developed a new dimension in photography: the third dimension. Inventor Yevgeny Nemirovsky and marketing consultant John Eckersley envision their 3-D will be used in high-end portraiture, architectural, political and trade-show uses, as well as advertising point-of-sale material.

2007 YEAR IN REVIEW TECHNOLOGY

A different kind of dimensional wind blew into Miramar from Guelph, Ontario, home of engineering firm Rowan Williams Davies & Irwin. It unveiled Miami Wind,

the area's first commercial wind tunnel.

The current tunnel speed of about 45 mph covers 95 percent of the typical needs for hurricane and wind engineering studies with scale models, according to professor Antonio Nanni, chairman of the Department of Civil, Architectural and Environmental Engineering at the University of Miami.

The university has secured an agreement to utilize the wind tunnel in research projects during the off hours.

FINANCING WINDFALL

It was also a great year for financing.

"The first three quarters of the year were spectacular for sales and acquisitions," said West Palm Beach attorney David Bates, co-chairman of Gunster Yoakley & Stewart's Emerging Company Practice Group and Technology Practice Group. "It was a good year for raising money, selling a part or all of a company and for filling senior management slots."

Credit the housing crunch with easing some of the hiring pinch.

"The inability to sell their homes has kept many techs from leaving the area," Bates said. "It has also allowed the out-of-state recruitment of some talented executives now that executive housing has become more affordable."

Deborah Vazquez, CEO of Fort Lauderdale-based placement firm



MARK FREEKES

University of Miami's Antonio Nanni.



Vazquez

Protech, saw a major swing in hiring early in the year, as tech worker shortages caused companies to do a major shift to contract workers from direct hires.

The big plus for contract workers is a 45 percent to 60 percent premium on what a

direct hire gets, according to Vazquez.

"Employees earning \$70,000 a year are being tempted away with contract offers of \$110,000 to \$115,000 or more," she said. "Clients are coming to the realization of what it is costing them not to complete their projects."

The downside is that the job only lasts until the project is completed.

One temporary assignment is bringing a lot of prestige to the area.



Wu

Dr. Jie Wu, a Florida Atlantic University distinguished research professor in computer science and engineering, was named the National Science Foundation's program director for its Networking Technology and Systems Program, responsible for a \$10 million annual budget.

Some breakthroughs start with the simple idea of basic training.

Dana Haynes, owner of Paragon, an Apple consulting business in Fort Lauderdale, has developed Accularian, an online video tutorial that offers a 70-lesson basic training course for Macintosh users.

The first six lessons are free; the next 64 are \$75 for all. Haynes has found a lot of takers as Apple caught its second breath and picked up a whole new generation of users.

Haynes would like to say he saw a need and filled it, but it wasn't exactly his idea: His 86-year-old mother was the inspiration, he said.