

Norman company enhancing online search engine indexing

BY BRIAN BRUS
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OKLAHOMA CITY – For a company that helps retailers grow their sales through enhanced online search engine presence, it's ironic that Merchant Metrix Inc. has been selling itself by word of mouth.

That may change soon if Chief Executive Lee Roberts finds the venture capital he's seeking.

Norman-based Merchant Metrix software allows online search engines to index every single page of a company's Web site, dramatically increasing the likelihood of a match against keywords and phrases entered by consumers.

A typical medium-size retailer can easily have thousands of distinct pages of information, each linked to one another with bits of information about products and services.

Without proactive help from a company such as Merchant Metrix, those retailers are likely to have only a few access points visited and indexed by Google and other search engines.

And that means the difference between an immediate sales opportunity when a user clicks the "Google Search" button on the computer screen or not showing up in a consumer's periphery until he scrolls through a few hundred competitors.

"What we offer is the opportunity for a business owner to compete with the Amazon.coms of the world, at a lower cost of entry," he said.

Merchant Metrix has also expanded on a service offered by similar software firms. Normally retailer clients are offered several Internet page templates or designs that help consumers shop and easily check out with their purchases. But whereas most software firms provide a few hundred options, Roberts' company offers 54,000 shopping design variations free with its "shopping cart" suite of software services.

In other words, a client needn't fear the cookie-cutter problem – "It's possible now that now two retail sites will look the same," he said.

Merchant Metrix was founded on private capital about 12 years ago and Roberts has avoided external funding throughout the company's growth. But by the end of this month, his stake will drop to 97 percent with his first investor, who has already committed about \$50,000.



PHOTO BY MAIKE SABOLICH

Merchant Metrix Chief Executive Officer Lee Roberts stands in the company's Norman offices Monday.

He's seeking \$250,000 more, which will allow the company to expand its sales efforts and presence in the market.

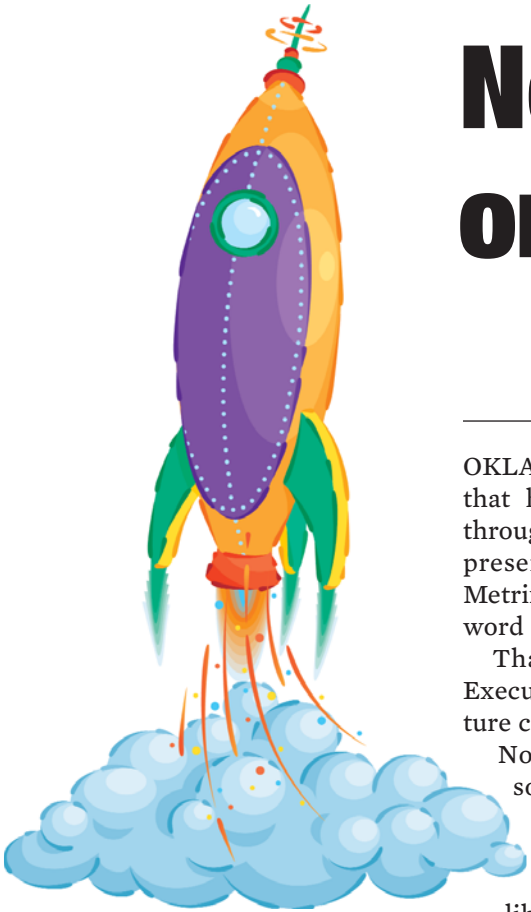
"This is the first time we've sought financial assistance. ... It's all been word of mouth so far," he said.

"We've just hired a national sales director for the first time, and now we're building our sales team. We do have a crew in Brazil for our clients there, so we do have an international

presence."

Merchant Metrix is a client of i2E, a nonprofit state-funded corporation that mentors technology-based startup companies.

Roberts is one of the scheduled speakers Wednesday at the monthly Oklahoma Venture Forum luncheon at the Presbyterian Health Foundation Research Park Conference Center.



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