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Joe Matheny on convergent technologies:
"We are taking on a model that has been here since Gutenberg."

Matheny

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Joe Matheny on convergent technologies

By Joey Leslie

New media Renaissance man Joe Matheny has pursued multimedia interactive experiences for a decade. And in his extremely current eMatter, Convergence 2000: Broadband, DVD, Web, and other Hybrid Media in the Near Future, he pursues them further.

"Emergent experience" -- that produced as a result of the combination of experiences and greater than any individual one -- is not new to Matheny.

After graduating from college with cinematography and philosophy majors, he came up with a new creation: a book with an accompanying videotape and audiotape designed to be used together to produce a so-called emergent experience.

"I have always been interested in the telecommunication matrix covering the planet," Matheny said.

"I think of it metaphorically as the planetary mind, a way to pull it all together." Matheny experimented with early bulletin board systems like The Well to create "additive fiction," stories that enticed others to add chapters in an "interactive story." The best known of these, The Incunabula Papers, is still alive and well here at MightyWords.

After experimenting with several early Internet technologies, Matheny landed at Adobe Systems and headed up the Adobe Acrobat Reader program. He got bored. More precisely, he saw technologies on the horizon that would help him realize his vision of the "emergent experience."

"DVD allows for broadcast quality video on a disc," said Matheny. "It's digital. You can't do this with VHS. You can't do this with a CD-Rom or a video codex. DVD is anamorphic. It works on a PC and on a set-top system. It allows interactivity and a Web connection." Matheny believes that DVD is the "true broadband."

"Here's the thing," argued Matheny, "We are hearing a lot of hoo-ha about broadband because it's an investment topic. What's being sold to investors is not a reality. Broadband means DSL, cable modem. It means sending current data across a wire faster, with more immediacy. It cannot send anything approaching broadcast quality video."

Matheny says that DVD will change the definition of "broadcast."

"Currently, broadcast means one thing to many. There is no interaction with the information. Information is homogenized to appeal to as many people as possible."

Matheny predicts that DVD and other emerging technologies will dramatically change this.

"As a viewer, I am no longer passive. This changes the way you perceive the world in a fundamental way."

It will be an uphill battle, he says. "We are taking on a model that has been here since Gutenberg."

Matheny believes that television has become the modern cultural equivalent of sitting around the fire, telling stories. Using convergent technologies, Matheny hopes to change the habits of the average American.

"By forcing the receiver and sender of information to do things in a fundamentally

different way, the entrenched media culture is changed. Couch potato culture is changed. Water cooler culture is changed."

The revolution has already started with printed media.

"MightyWords took a chance. They were the first to realize that information regarding emerging markets changes quickly. There is an exponential growth of information. The format allows people to make command decisions correctly and with current information."

And, he added, "It's also cool to be on the same page with Arthur C. Clarke."

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