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NEWSLETTER

## MUSIC



### immersion's Plan To Create "Real" Interactive Video (Finally)

"If you want to know how unique our technology is," says Joseph Matheny, "go out on the Internet and try to find a company that does what we do. My personal history always been to be on the leading edge of technology and here again I find myself on the frontier." The founder and president of immersion New Media (dig the all-lowercase style) is clearly not in a modest mood when touting the assets of the corporation he founded in January to develop interactive DVD-ROM.

If Matheny is right about his product - which combines enhanced web and video so that they work synchronously - then he might not be straying too far out on a limb when he says that he has created the first truly interactive video. This potential breakthrough is the result of Matheny's search for ways to connect two lifelong passions - digital video and the Web. A career spent designing web-development tools for the likes of Netscape and Adobe, while at the same time making videos for MTV and VH1, gave him the skills to attempt the task. But it was the introduction of DVD that made the current synthesis possible.

"When DVD first appeared, the video was broadcast quality, and it could handle a lot of random accessibility," he says. "So now you also have this bunch of digital files that will accept and send out commands. You could pretty much tie it into anything and I figured you can squirt the bird with that." So squirt he did, and designed a hybrid disc that both works as a CD (for ease of access and music play) and a DVD (for enhanced video and interactive capabilities). "You have to remember," the self-proclaimed "avatar" of the new format says, "that DVD is two things. There is the DVD disc

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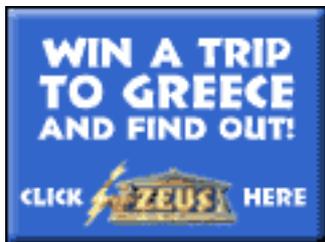
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specification, which allows it to hold far more information than a CD and then, independent of that, there's the DVD interactive video specification [which is a file-type that can be put onto any kind of media]. So if you make a DVD video that will fit on a CD-ROM, [you can play it on] any type of software player. It is portable and a universal cross-platform format. This is a stepping stone towards the ultimate blending of the machines that some people are calling the teleputer." So why are you reading about this in a music column? Because this technology could also be extremely useful to musicians and their fans, two groups who are already wholeheartedly embraced the Net. The techno heads at Earthdance ([www.earthdance.org](http://www.earthdance.org)) certainly saw the light when Matheny offered to donate his new mutant format as a part of the Tibetan charity's current effort.

On October 14, the annual "dance party for peace" will hold its fourth event in over 80 cities across the globe. Starting at 12 noon PST, [www.levelred.com](http://www.levelred.com) will stream the festivities for the next 12 hours. To raise further cash for the cause, Earthdance will release its third CD compilation, "Earthdance 2000 (Higher Octave)," which features remixes by artists such as Orbital, Moby, and Coldcut. A bonus CD/DVD-ROM courtesy of immersion New Media that documents the history of event and includes footage of last year's spectacle is also included in the package. At anytime during the hour-long video, the consumer can pause and link directly to the web site of the artist or subject featured in the segment. According to Earthdance founder, Chris Deckker (who performs under the monicker Medicine Drum), this capability makes the new technology "living media," and through upgrades to the video and web site, as well as access to more information and news, will help create the foundations for an Earthdance cybercommunity. "What we have created is not a 'buy it, stick it in, and then put it away for six months' type of experience," says Matheny. "This is an updateable and ongoing project."

Despite Matheny's hubris, the question remains whether immersion's new format will prove a silver bullet for a music industry caught in the throes of the great paradigm shift. History tells us not to be overly optimistic. After all, the CD-ROM did not exactly revolutionize the industry's revenue stream. That does not, however, seem to concern Matheny, who seems to think that he has hit on an idea whose time has come. "Until six months ago," Matheny says, "there was this brainwashing going on and everybody bought into this overused and misused concept of broadband. And because they didn't understand the infrastructure of the Web they were told a crock. But now that broadband is really out here and people see what it is, they understand that it is just a faster modem. It is good for sending web pages, data, and small-stream video. It is not some 'Star Trek' thing." In other words, it's no substitute for the quality of video you get on a DVD. And Matheny is optimistic that the record industry is beginning to look at bonus CD/DVD-ROMs as a means to keep CD sales constant in the midst of an onslaught of free and pirated music. In any event, the cocky entrepreneur is aware that he is no danger of being overtaken by events on the Web. "It will take at least five years if not longer to replace the current infrastructure," he says. "Especially, now that you can take this web stuff and make it talk to this video stuff."

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