

TECH TALES

Clever ideas hatch and grow

Four tenants at Canterbury's technology incubator describe their hi-tech projects to Will Harvie.



Indy Chang Liu: His software for animation hobbyists is available now.

THINKING CACTUS

INDY CHANG LIU
voovees.com

Thinking Cactus makes "easy animation software for non-geeks to make their own animated stories", says managing director Indy Chang Liu.

If Weta Workshop is the pinnacle of global animation and Microsoft's Paint software the bottom, then Indy's Voovees Director sits in the middle.

The software allows "animation hobbyists to quickly capture their vision", says Indy, with pre-made characters, props and motion commands. Film-makers can change things really quickly, he says.

Thinking Cactus joined the incubator four years with plans for USB robots, but switched gears about three years ago. A demo version of Voovees is free and a US\$29.99 (NZ\$42.32) advanced version was launched on May 17. Indy says he hasn't done much to promote the advanced version and few have downloaded the software so far. However, he expects to push the product to his existing users and other marketing efforts to start in coming weeks.



Seth Wagoner: Makes add-on programs for web browsers Firefox and Chrome.

INTERCLUE

SETH WAGONER
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Interclue makes add-on programs for browsers Firefox and Chrome. Hover the mouse over a link on a web page and Interclue opens a window with a summary of the linked page, covering content, a snapshot, sizes and dates of linked files, stats and meta data. It tells you whether it's worth clicking on the link, says Wagoner.

Interclue has been downloaded more than 2.5 million times. A higher-power version is due out this year. Wagoner and lead developer Karl Dearden also make Lazarus, which backs up data entered into web forms. "Ever had one of those oh \$*#@ moments when you've finally finished filling out a long form, and hit submit only to see an error message," asks lazarus.interclue.com. "And when you hit the back button, the form was blank? Using Lazarus, you can recover lost forms with a single click." The Firefox version has been downloaded more than 600,000 times. The Chrome version is available, but "very young in its development".



Adam Hutchinson: Turning the cellphone into a feedback and loyalty device.

TEXSYS

ADAM HUTCHINSON
texsys.co.nz

Texsys gives businesses "real-time feedback" from customers' text messages.

Suppose restaurant customers are unhappy about a meal. They text a complaint to the restaurant's computer and management can immediately address the problems, explains Texsys managing director Adam Hutchinson.

Studies show many people find direct feedback too confrontational. Texts make it easier, says Hutchinson. North Island restaurants that have Texsys software installed reduced formal complaints by 27 per cent in the first month after installation and 50 per cent in the second, Hutchinson says. District health boards have significantly lowered the cost of formal complaints, he says. Small and medium-sized businesses pay \$65 a month for Texsys full service. A trial version is available. Once companies have customers' cellphone numbers, the next step is a loyalty program. Hutchinson expects to launch this in coming months.



Ian Johnson: Making staff leave simpler for companies.

Photos: DAVID HALLETT

TIME FILER

IAN JOHNSON
timefiler.com

Time Filer is an online system for managing employee time, especially leave requests, says Enfinit Software chief executive Ian Johnson.

Employees fill in a web-based form, which is submitted to a manager. The leave request is approved or denied and email notification sent to the employee.

Managing leave is complicated and costly for employers, says Johnson, a former PayGlobal employee.

Simplifying that process using software that sits on Enfinit computers and complements other human resources systems has won the company clients such as Solid Energy, St John and Colmar Brunton, he says. The next goal is breaking into the Australian market.

The company has moved its five employees out of the Canterbury incubator and into premises on Cashel St.

Johnson says the company breaks even.

There is no upfront cost to clients and Time Filer collects revenue over time.

Leg up for tech ventures

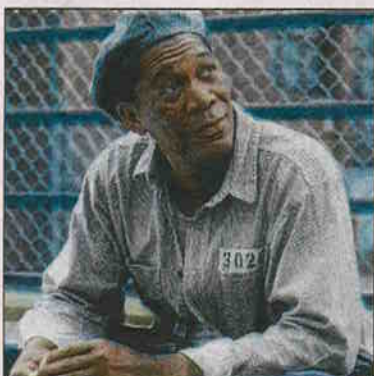
PowerHouse Ventures, once known as the Canterbury Innovation Incubator, "combines the functions of company incubation and venture capital in one organisation".

It nurtures hi-tech entrepreneurs with expertise on technology commercialisation, capital and other needs.

Tenants get an office, a phone, a gig (of broadband a month) and as much advice and support as they crave. Mainly located on Armagh St, Christchurch, it has branch offices at the University of Canterbury and Lincoln University.

More info: cii.co.nz

Red Redding, you're a phenomenal jerk



Pros and cons: Morgan Freeman plays Red in *The Shawshank Redemption*.

Stephen Dalley investigates misunderstood characters in popular films.

The Shawshank Redemption, starring Tim Robbins, has been called the best prison film of all time.

Nobody forgets the strong bond formed between Robbins' character Andy Dufresne and "Red" Redding, played by the world's greatest narrator, Morgan Freeman. Yet nobody seems to remember the insidious evil that lurks at the heart of this relationship.

When we first hear from Red he's bragging about his status at Shawshank.

"There must be a con like me in every prison in America. I'm the guy who can get it for ya."

He talks a good game. But his inaction over Andy's constant beatings and rape bellows volumes.

Red is capable of organising the flow of narcotics, cushy work duties and other sundry privileges. Would it have been so hard to deliver extra smokes to some of the heavier inmates for a little corrective shanking of Andy's tormentors?

The prison fixer simply sits back

and does nothing, blathering on about Andy's bruises, "we all knew [who did it]" and "those first two years were the worst".

Imagine that over a game of draughts Andy opens up. "Um Red, about this constantly-getting-raped thing." He'd have to repeat himself probably, unaware his callous friend was once more lost in narration.

Sure, you're thinking, it's look-out-for-No 1. What did Andy do for the others? How about procuring beers on the prison roof that, in

Red's words, made them feel "we were the lords of all creation". Yes, Andy was a good friend.

After Andy's near-death Red finally takes the initiative, proclaiming Andy deserves "a nice welcome back" from the infirmary. "I figure we owe him that much for the beer," says grim reaper sidekick Heywood. Red, you jerk, you owe him much, much more.

□ Stephen Dalley edits satirical website weeklycoitus.co.nz.