

“We’re in the business of inventing the future.”

With sale to VeriSign, LightSurf founders dive into life sciences

BY MIKE DANO

As the dust settles around VeriSign Inc.’s \$270 million acquisition of picture-messaging company LightSurf Technologies Inc., wireless entrepreneurs and LightSurf founders Philippe Kahn and Sonia Lee are already gearing up to launch their next venture: Fullpower Technologies Inc.

And if Kahn’s and Lee’s track record offers any indication, Fullpower should be a multi-million-dollar success.

The Silicon Valley pioneers have been a driving force behind three major software companies, each of which has been valued in the nine-figure range. In 1982, Kahn founded software vendor Borland, and over the course of his 12-year stint with the company, he managed to take Borland public and challenge the giants of the computer software world. In 1994, Kahn and his wife, Lee, founded synchronization company Starfish Software, which sold technology that allowed users to share information between a phone and a computer. The couple sold the company in 1998 to Motorola Inc. for \$200 million. That same year they founded LightSurf.

Now, just a month after VeriSign announced plans to acquire LightSurf, Kahn and Lee again are casting their eyes to the horizon with Fullpower.

However, there is little information available about Fullpower’s business. The company has a Web site that promises a public launch Feb. 15, 2007. Kahn remained tight-lipped on the venture.

“The company is focused on the conver-



Kahn

gence of life-sciences and wireless,” he wrote in response to questions from RCR Wireless News. “That’s a bit of science fiction and a lot of science. That’s a future that Fullpower is inventing.

“In 1997, when we showed the first prototype of the camera phone, some people were skeptical. Now camera phones are everywhere around the world. We have a pretty good idea of what happens next, but unfortunately because of competitive reasons, we can’t discuss it publicly yet. We’re in the business of inventing the future.”

In an essay dated 2004 posted on the company’s Web site, Kahn hinted that Fullpower could be involved in areas outside the commercial wireless mass market. He described the communications of the future as pervasive.

“‘Pervasive communications’ is global and universal and focused on simplifying our daily lives,” Kahn wrote. “Pervasive communications will not only change our daily lives but will revolutionize medicine, biotechnology, healthcare and science in more ways than we can imagine today. A very good thing!”

Whatever the company’s goals, Fullpower likely will target a nascent but potentially explosive area of the wireless industry. Although Borland is mainly a computer soft-

ware vendor, both Starfish and LightSurf are focused on developing areas of the wireless industry. Starfish’s synchronization technology was an acknowledgement of the convergence of mobile phones and computers, and LightSurf was founded on the idea that camera phones would take the industry by storm. Indeed, the massive success of the camera-phone business has taken even camera-phone proponent Kahn somewhat by surprise. Interestingly, Kahn initially shared his vision on the camera-phone market with Motorola just as the company was acquiring Starfish. Motorola at the time was working on a prototype camera phone. Motorola eventually scrapped its camera-phone project—thus missing the first wave of the camera-phone revolution—but the company did invest in Kahn’s startup LightSurf.

In response to RCR Wireless News questions, Kahn offered little in the way of insight in the industry, mainly citing competitive concerns. He did say that the industry remains overly focused on technology rather than consumer services, and that the ubiquity of the mobile phone offers a staggering array of opportunities for the entrepreneur.

“The future for the mobile phone is much more than a mobile phone!” Kahn wrote. “It is becoming a ‘universal visual communicator.’ Everyone on the planet will eventually get one, which is amazing!”

Aside from their work on the frontiers of the wireless industry, Kahn and Lee also operate a philanthropic organization. The Lee-Kahn Foundation supports educational, artistic and environmental efforts. The couple and their four children also enjoy sailing, classical and Jazz music, as well as surfing and snowboarding, Nordic freestyle skiing and yoga. **RCR**

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