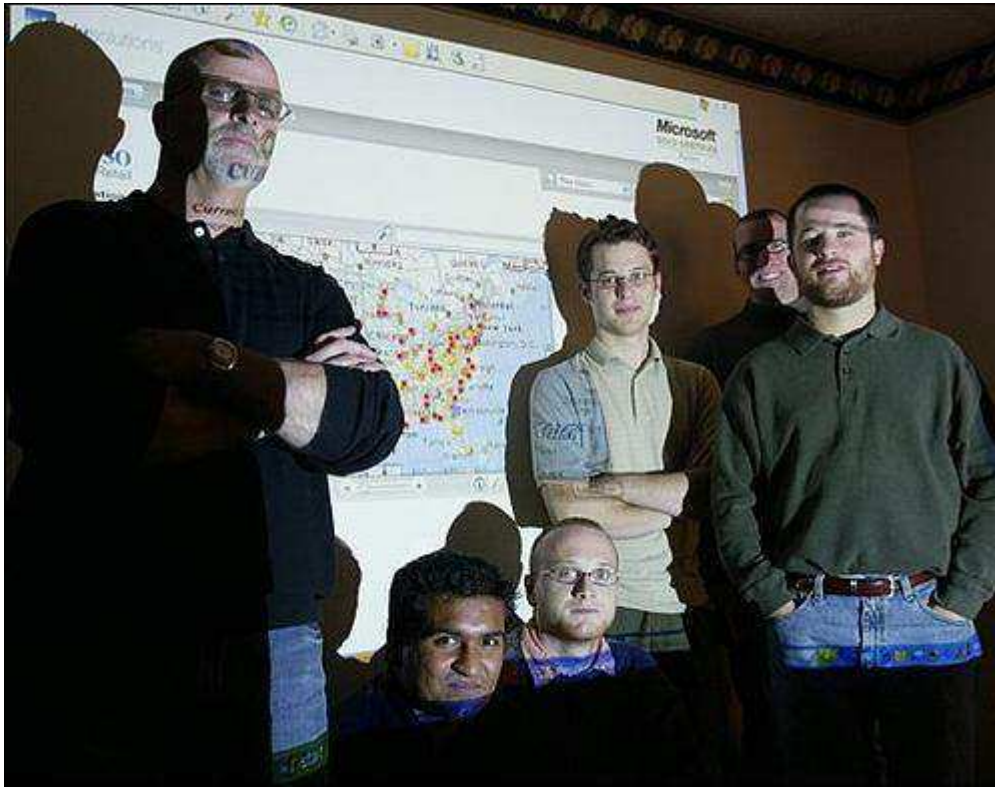


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IDV Solutions CEO Mark Morrison, far left, and CTO

Al Goldis / Associated Press

Technology companies springing up in Michigan's new economy

By Kathy Barks Hoffman / Associated Press

GRAND LEDGE, Mich. - Mark Morrison grew up near the birth place of Oldsmobile, but computers and the Internet are where he sees the future.

Along with "map geek" Ian Clemens, Morrison has created IDV Solutions, a business intelligence enterprise that helps corporations, universities, governments and anyone else with large sets of data put it into easily visible maps, charts and graphs.

Morrison and the others at his 15-person office in the small town of Grand Ledge just west of Lansing are part of the wave of high-tech firms the state hopes to encourage and attract as manufacturing jobs are lost and those that stay are less likely to pay \$60,000 to \$80,000 a year.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm this week signed legislation that will create a \$1 billion investment fund aimed at encouraging the growth of high-tech businesses and life sciences companies over the next 10 years.

"Technology is it," says Morrison, who envisions his company growing in the next two to three years to 150 employees, most making \$40,000 to \$50,000 a year.

Clemens, 34, is a Massachusetts Institute of Technology applied mathematics graduate who saw the possibility of combining computerized maps and databases in entirely new ways.

He estimates that 80 percent to 90 percent of all data can be referenced to a map. In one example, he demonstrated maps showing all the federal prisons in the United States.

By clicking the mouse, viewers could see a prison's layout, its population capacity, the number of inmates housed there, a breakdown of the crimes they'd been convicted of and demographic data on who was serving time for each type of crime. Satellite images showed what the prison looked like from overhead and street maps showed how to find it.

"Ian's dream was to take geography ... (and) make it available to everyone," says Morrison, 47, of Grand Ledge. The company's goal is to eventually have its software on every computer desktop.

But the company is doing much more than mapping. It's helping one major banking company figure out where to route checks so they are quickly cashed and there's fewer "float" days. The information could save millions of dollars annually.

IDV also is working with Michigan State University on a pilot project to match testing data to schools so parents can quickly see which schools do best teaching subjects such as math and science.

And it's helping companies look at land parcels, railroads, highways and customer location data to figure out where the best place would be to put a factory or an office.

Although IDV has workers from India, Pakistan, China, Iran and Ireland, Morrison said he has had no trouble finding enough recruits within Michigan.

"There's a lot of gifted, talented, smart people in this community who want to stay in Michigan," says Morrison, who graduated from Lansing's Waverly High School before getting a liberal studies degree from Western Michigan University.

IDV has hired students graduating from Michigan State and Central Michigan universities, including the winner of the National Geographic Student Cartography Award.

While it's hiring locally, IDV is seeking clients globally. Its biggest customer is British oil giant BP PLC. It also works with Pulte Homes and has worked with AMC Theatres.

Earlier this year, it created a computer application in conjunction with Microsoft Corp. for the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency that overlaid street maps with satellite images of areas hit by Hurricane Katrina and subsequent hurricanes so residents could see on the Internet if their homes survived the storms.

Morrison declined to give annual revenues for the company, but says it's profitable and hasn't needed any outside capital so far.

He's excited about the possibilities for growth.

"Our opportunity is enormous," Morrison says. "Being embraced by some of the largest corporations and government, when they're excited about what we're doing, is a wonderful position to be in for a new business."

On the Net:

IDV Solutions: <http://www.idvsolutions.com>

Katrina images: <http://www.katrinaimagery.org/>