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MONDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2004

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## SMALL BUSINESS: Beyond billboards

### UA business school students hope digital signs lure advertisers

TEYA VITU  
Tucson Citizen



If anybody is well armed to start a business straight out of college, it's this trio of business school students.

Mohit Asnani, Chet Cave and Abhishek Dobhal are the team behind the VideoRhythm digital billboard near the entrance of the Loews Cineplex Theater at Foothills Mall.

By watching the advertising presentation on the 23-by-48-inch plasma screen, you may wonder how much they've learned at the University of Arizona's Eller College of Management. There's the ad, in German, for the Austrian Diving Academy, and another for Madison Avenue Pub, the pub of the year in Ontario, Canada.

"Those are just fillers," said Asnani, VideoRhythm's chief executive.

Asnani, Cave and Dobhal put up the digital sign Oct. 1. They and their marketing specialists, Veronica Gutierrez and Stacie McDaniel, are still hunting down local advertisers to buy 15-second spots.

"We're here to expose local businesses to this

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VideoRhythm's Chet Cave (from left), Abhishek Dobhal and Mohit Asnani with their Foothills Mall digital sign. The former fraternity brothers from the University of Arizona are selling ad time on the screen outside Loews Cineplex Theater.

technology," said Dobhal, VideoRhythm's director of development. "It's the next wave of advertising. It's been underexposed in the Southwest."

The VideoRhythm screen shows a five-minute loop of advertising 24 hours a day. The charge to run a 15-second ad for all of November and December is \$5,000,

which includes creating the advertisement. Changes the client wants to make during the run are free.

"We have 15,000 people that stand in line here every week. Plus the people walking in the mall," said Cave, the company's operations director.

VideoRhythm is a tenant at the Foothills Mall like other kiosks or carts, spokeswoman Regina Harmon said.

"They have been awesome to work with," Harmon said. "They are very cordial and show up on time for meetings. Anything they put on the screen, we have to approve. They can't use advertising that would compete with our tenants."

That strikes a lot of potential retail clients. They are looking at auto dealer, mortgage, insurance and real estate firms.

The three are roommates and former fraternity brothers, and all are in varying stages of completing management information systems degrees at Eller College. Dobhal finished his MIS degree in May 2003, Asnani will get his in December, and Cave expects to finish in May 2006.

"All of our students are expected to complete a wonderful group of classes in the entrepreneurship program, which is nationally ranked," said Bill Neumann, an Eller lecturer in management information systems, a program ranked No. 3 in the nation by U.S. News and World Report. "(MIS students) understand not only the technical matters but also all the fundamentals of business to make a successful enterprise."

It's no coincidence that the company was created by three students from Eller, where all classes are team-oriented, Asnani said.

"The skill of bringing everything together, that's what we learn at Eller," Dobhal said.

They got the digital sign idea in February while reading an article in Business 2.0. They saw the concept had potential in Tucson and in April incorporated as VideoRhythm ("Don't start a company unless you can get the domain name," Asnani said).

The trio started writing a business plan based on a standard design to house the plasma screen.

"What we learned from mall general managers we talked to is they didn't want a cookie cutter design," Cave said. "We changed our business plan to offer custom designed units. You're not going to see this (design at Foothills) replicated. We custom build them to suit the environment."

Family and friends invested \$25,000, which they intend to repay in three to six months. VideoRhythm is not stopping with one mall.

"We want to get into more and more locations," Asnani said.

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