

# WASHINGTON BUSINESS JOURNAL

July 7-13, 2006 [washington.bizjournals.com](http://washington.bizjournals.com) \$2.25

## TECHNOLOGY

# Va. startup gives voice to online magazines

By Ben Hammer  
Staff Reporter

A local company is about to change the way information junkies get their online news.

Fairfax-based Newsworthy offers an audio technology that The Washington Post Co. is using to enable readers of online editions of several Post magazines to listen to articles by clicking on a link. The service is tentatively set to launch July 17 for Govern-

ment Computer News and soon after that for Washington Technology, Defense Systems and Government Leader.

Users download audio versions of articles to a computer, iPod or other audio-file player. Newsworthy already makes podcasts of top stories from The Associated Press and United Press International available for download through iTunes.

Newsworthy's software translates text into speech, relying on preset rules to add inflection and emphasis, set the pace and ignore

some characters such as quotation marks or stock ticker symbols. The voice sounds more human than robotic, a Post executive says.

Partnering with Newsworthy was an easy call for PostNewsweek Tech Media, which publishes the Post magazines and holds the annual FOSE trade show to exhibit technology being marketed to government agencies.

"We're normally sold out for the fourth quarter heavy government-buying season, so any channel where we're able to add inventory gives me a chance to increase my business," says Alec Dann, senior vice president of Internet publishing for PostNewsweek.

PostNewsweek is giving free advertising on the Newsworthy audio files to technology reseller CDW-G, whose national sales office is in Herndon. Dann says he also is in talks with a technology reseller — he won't identify the company — to pay for ads on the Newsworthy downloads from August through December.

Newsworthy founder Marcus Heth says he wants to add a major publishing partner every month and has agreements with several other media companies, although he wouldn't provide details.

Eventually, he plans to charge \$10 a month for customized audio feeds from dozens of publications based on the subscriber's interests and preferences.

The proliferation of iPods creates fertile ground for Newsworthy, says analyst Vamsi Sistla of ABI, a market research firm that estimates there are about 12 million to 15 million iPod owners.

"This could just be an amazing application," Sistla says. "I could just see so many different ways to monetize this." He believes large companies also might want to use Newsworthy's technology to convert companywide memos and training materials into downloadable audio files, especially if Newsworthy could translate such documents into multiple dialects for users in India and China.

Heth says he's staying focused on the consumer market for now. "What we're doing is providing commuters with a way to make that commute a more productive, entertaining experience," says Heth, who conceived Newsworthy during a long Virginia commute from Locust Grove to Culpeper.

He plans to raise a \$2 million to \$3 million first round of venture capital in about six months. Newsworthy isn't Heth's first company. In 1981, he co-founded Fairfax software firm Versatility, which sold to Oracle for \$16 million in August 1998 amid a Securities and Exchange Commission investigation and after a March 1998 announcement it would restate earnings.



JOANNE S. LAWTON

**SOUNDS LIKE:** Marcus Heth, founder of Fairfax-based Newsworthy, plans to raise as much as \$3 million to finance the firm that sells audio technology to publishers of online magazines.