

Seattle Business

INSPIRE • INNOVATE • CREATE

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THE ENTREPRENEURS AND
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THE REGION'S FUTURE



founded in June 2005. Smartsheet gives small businesses a fast and easy way to collaborate on projects and to share files, even if employees are in different offices or in different countries.

Facing stiff competition from similar products developed by Google and Microsoft, Smartsheet, with its 13 employees, is focusing its products on the underserved small- to medium-sized company niche that the bigger players have so far overlooked.

Frei acknowledges that workplace productivity is not a new problem. He just thinks that he and his team have built a better mousetrap.

"We're placing a big bet," Frei says, "that we can go into an old market, where everyone has tried, but not succeeded, and build the killer app." —J.M.

VENTURE CAPITAL

⇒ Cyberspace Visionary

Vanessa Fox (*Entrepreneur-in-Residence, Ignition Partners*)

VANESSA FOX seems too busy for one single human being. The prolific blogger, writer, lecturer and consultant somehow finds time to also be the "entrepreneur-in-residence" for the Bellevue-based venture firm Ignition Partners.

That laundry list of jobs is the price one pays for being among the hottest visionaries around (continued on page 34)



⇒ After five years of toil, O Ecotextiles CEO Patty Grossman is all smiles as her ecologically friendly fabric company gains plenty of publicity as well as interest from the entertainment industry.

[retail]

Fabrics for Life

PATTY GROSSMAN & LEIGH ANNE VAN DUSEN

Founders, O Ecotextiles

SISTERS PATTY GROSSMAN and Leigh Anne Van Dusen first entered the organic fabrics business four years ago because they wanted to produce beautiful materials that had little or no impact on the environment.

The result was Seattle-based O Ecotextiles, a company that produces fabrics in the most environmentally benign manner possible. The two founders have a collection of textiles made of bamboo, organic cotton, hemp, linen and silk that is being used by star interior designers such as London-based Emily Todhunter, who is well known in Britain for her designs in fashionable clubs and restaurants.

"The textile industry is a gigantic industry and gigantically polluting," says the 55-year-old Grossman. "The industry uses some of the most toxic chemicals known to process fabrics. Chemicals that include chlorine, chromium, copper, mercury, fluorocarbons and lead."

The five-employee fabric company uses natural substances—such as aloe vera, beeswax and vitamin E—to soften its fabrics, and low-impact, fiber-reactive chemicals as dyes, says Van Dusen, 59.

With today's hyper-focus on environmental issues, one would think

it would be easy to find such fabrics. But Grossman and Van Dusen say that wasn't the case.

"It's taken us five years to learn how to produce gorgeous fabrics without all those chemicals," Grossman says. "I was a tepid environmentalist when we started this, but now I'm a rabid one. We've been reading scientific studies for five years and it's alarming what we found."

One of their primary goals was to locate manufacturing partners that were truly interested in creating fabrics that had a low impact on the environment, Grossman says. The two women didn't find any interior designers or textile manufacturers that seemed dedicated to creating and using such fabrics until 2007.

Today, O Ecotextiles has a line of 17 different fabrics with Pacific Northwest-inspired names, such as Chinook, Tacoma, Tonasket, Ross Lake and Lopez. The startup's future looks bright. Its unique push for natural fabrics and processes has brought considerable media recognition and a number of industry awards, including the "Best Merchandise" award at Decorex 2007, one of the interior design industry's biggest trade shows. The company also won the 2008 Zino Society Green Investment Fund award of \$50,000 earlier this year.

In addition, Grossman and Van Dusen recently caught the attention of the perfect audience: the entertainment industry. Furniture sporting their company's fabrics was used in retreat spaces at the Grammy Awards and the Sundance Film Festival in Utah, a gathering of Hollywood's elite independent filmmakers and actors. —J.M.