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NEWS-ON-THE-GO EMERGING AS A NEW MEDIA CATEGORY

By Ted Pincus

It crept up on us before we knew it. You might call it “ubiquinews” – an entire new information and marketing medium.

In an era dominated by online marvels, here’s a non-cyber, relatively low tech concept of news-on-the-go that’s rapidly popping up all around us. It’s called place-based media and it has spawned all those myriad flat-panel displays you see now in elevators, office lobbies and other public venues.

It’s not surprising that the leading provider of this novel service to the office worker world was born and headquartered here in Chicago, funded mainly by local investors and headed by the highly motivated son of Highland Park’s Tom Harris, co-founder of the Golin-Harris public relations agency.

Jim Harris, 46, isn’t merely hawking a new start-up company. He’s a missionary trying to change how real-estate companies think about their properties and how advertisers think about media. “We’re asking them: How do you improve the tenant experience? Improve communications? Arrest attention where it didn’t even exist before? Improve safety by broadscale alerts?” he says.

He’s trying to answer those issues with a company called Office Media Network, founded just two years ago by Chicago private equity firm Lake Capital in partnership with Dow Jones & Co. Together with Harris, a Kellogg MBA and veteran of Sam Zell’s Equity Office Properties, Miller Brewing and DDB Needham advertising, the group created The Wall St Journal Office Network . That service now broadcasts up to the minute world news, market indexes and local weather on Office Media Network digital LCD screens in the lobbies and elevators of over 650 top office buildings in 14 U.S. markets. These include Chicago, NYC, LA, Boston and Washington D.C.

In Chicago, Harris says the network is visible throughout the Chicago Board of Trade, all the Golub properties like 401 N. and 500 N. Michigan, as well as major

towers like 200 N. LaSalle, 300 S. Wacker, 120 S. Riverside and many more. In NYC it's seen in all the Mack-Cali Realty office properties among others, and in Dallas all of the many Younon buildings.

The panel messages come at you as fast as you can blink, cramming news into very short strokes, scrolling down a bright screen. There are 15-second Journal Briefs from all four sections of the WSJ, What's News, Marketplace, Money and Investing, plus Personal. These segments rotate through the day from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m., updated every five minutes. Included are building management alerts, world news headlines and market indexes.

But beyond its attention-grabbers and a growing list of locations, the network's real value as a new ad medium, Harris says, can be best understood in the exclusivity of its audience. Its estimated reach over 1.5 million business professionals per month, he says, is comparable to the circulation and demographics of Forbes, Business Week or Fortune. That fact has not been lost on advertisers who have signed up like Microsoft, Cadillac, Verizon, Hilton, UBS, and Oracle. While a Boston company named Captivate competes in this same medium, Harris says, OMN is the only service covering both elevators and lobbies.

The lobby visibility offers the chance to provide true integrated marketing efforts, Harris says, which was a concept his father helped to pioneer. For instance, recently Samsung introduced its Blackjack II cell phone and PDA series at demo events in building lobbies in Chicago, NYC and elsewhere, coordinated with OMN panels.

With that momentum plus the added plum of spotlighting the landlord's own brand on every panel display, the OMN concept is gaining new adherents at a faster pace this year. Harris tells me this week that OMN should be in more than 700 buildings by yearend, including 64 in Chicago and 124 in NYC, and should grow another 50 percent in 09. Meanwhile, the young industry he's helping to propagate has already topped \$1 billion in ad revenues.

But what about capturing elevator and corridor audiences in big residential and mixed use buildings? And airports, train stations, hospitals and post offices? All those venues are future possibilities, says Harris, but for now he has barely scratched the surface of the nation's office towers. When it comes to his ubiquitous news display panels, business is definitely looking up.