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## Local startup speeds up slow-loading Web pages

SolidSpeed helps clients' Web sites pop up faster.



David Coates / The Detroit News **SolidSpeed Inc.** is an Ann Arbor-based company that helps small businesses offer speedier access to their Web sites. SolidSpeed's corporate officers include Neil Dueweke, left, Jon Zeeff and Dean Massab.

By Tom Henderson

**ANN ARBOR** -- Funded by a powerhouse roster of national high-tech heavyweights, a local startup called SolidSpeed Inc. promises to dramatically speed up the Internet for small- and medium-size businesses.

A recent study of 12,000 online shoppers by the Boston Consulting Group showed that slow-loading Web pages was the biggest reason they were turned off from e-shopping. Fully 48 percent of respondents said this was their No. 1 complaint when browsing for retailers online.

The problem isn't the modem speed of the user's PC, it's Net congestion. Typically, a company's Web site is accommodated on a single server in one location. Large companies may use several servers, but typically they are in the same location, too. In both cases, large call volumes slow the information highway to the pace of Detroit-area freeways during construction season.

SolidSpeed's technology -- and contracts it is signing with companies that operate servers nationwide -- allows it to store (or cache, in Net lingo) copies of Web sites in hundreds, and eventually thousands, of servers nationwide. Calls are then routed to provide maximum speed to all site

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visitors. When webmasters at the various companies update their sites, the changes occur automatically in all the copies.

"We're going after the mass market of small- and medium-sized businesses," says SolidSpeed CEO Neil Dueweke.

SolidSpeed was founded late last year by Jon Zeff, an Internet pioneer in Ann Arbor who founded Branch Information Services in 1993. It provided dedicated access lines to the Internet and helped pioneer the concept of hosting Web sites for small businesses. Branch was sold to Verio, a national Internet service provider.

Zeff approached an Ann Arbor venture capital firm, Arbor Partners, in December to seek funding for SolidSpeed. Arbor's technology expert, Peter Gray, tested SolidSpeed on his company's own Web site. The result, say Arbor officials, was so impressive that they decided to become the lead investor in what was to become a first-round financing of \$2 million.

The money was used to recruit a management team in March that includes Dueweke and Dean Massab, vice-president of sales and marketing, to open up an office in early April in downtown Ann Arbor, and to ramp up hiring.

*Tom Henderson is a Metro Detroit free-lance writer.*

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