

BUSINESS & FINANCE

New Computer Technology, Developed by Local Firm, Makes Home-Buying Simple

by James M. Weil
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Buying a new home is now easier than ever, thanks to new computer software developed by SKM Technologies Inc., based in Valley Forge.

Called Home Voyager, the software utilizes state-of-the-art technology to enable prospective clients to walk through several houses without leaving the real estate office.

With Home Voyager, a client can request a home within a specified radius with any amenities he chooses--whether it be a house

with three bedrooms, two baths and a swimming pool.

Using a "mouse," a circle is drawn on a map around the location on a computer screen. At the touch of a button, a local map pops-up on the screen showing major landmarks in the neighborhood--such as schools, libraries, shopping centers and golf courses. Homes that meet the requested criteria show-up as red dots.

The user can then browse through color pictures of the homes. Another touch of a button reveals floor plans and the property's land-



Home VoyagerSM

SKM Technologies, Inc.
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scape.

If the client wants to see more, he can be taken on a color video tour of the house and the surrounding neighborhood. All this at the touch of a button.

"Now you don't have to go see those 20 or 30 houses," said Don

Schaefer, 35, SKM Technologies' president. "With Home Voyager, you can screen that many homes in one afternoon."

For Kurt Jaworski and his wife, Lisa, searching for a new home is time consuming and burdensome. Both work full-time and have little extra time to look at houses. "We spend most of our free time just driving around looking at homes," said Jaworski.

Jaworski said that a system like Home Voyager would be a perfect solution to his problems.

Schaefer said he came up with the idea for Home Voyager while working at General Electric's Military & Data Systems division, King of Prussia.

"We were designing computer maps and graphic interfaces for the military and government," said Schaefer. "At the time, I was look-

ing for a house. It took me a long time to find one, and when I finally did, I shot a video tape of it and sent it to my in-laws."

Schaefer said he combined the idea of computer graphics with video as a selling tool for the real estate market.

He took the idea to a co-worker, John Krick, 33, and the two worked together to put the idea in motion.

They approached Christine Miller, 38, an ex-real estate agent to refine their work further.

"We wanted to correlate what we were doing at GE with what Real Estate agencies needed. We brought Chris in because we needed a partner with a real estate background," said Schaefer.

The trio opened its doors for business in January 1991. Since then, 19 real estate companies have started using the software.

The software is free to the real estate companies; however, they must pay a fee based on the selling price of each home to have it included in their own database.

Software updates are made on a weekly basis, and a Realtor has only to fax an order to SKM to have another home added to their database. SKM has a staff of 12 people--including a video technician--to design the graphics for each home.

For those companies that can't afford a computer, a flip-book version of Home Voyager is available.

Home Voyager currently covers a 50-mile radius around King of Prussia; but, Schaefer says it won't be long before Home Voyager becomes a nationwide phenomenon, with production centers across the country networked together to handle the vast amount of information.

Although the software is currently designed to Macintosh computers, Schaefer says a version compatible with IBM computers will soon be available.

Commercial Voyager, a version of the software to market commercial real estate, is in the design stages.

For more information, call 992-9001.