

Detroit Free Press

Video systems firm Immersion Graphics projects expansion

BY BRENT SNAVELY • FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER • APRIL 12, 2009

Since Pat Hernandez founded Immersion Graphics 10 years ago, his company has installed ultra-high-end video systems with the likes of Toyota Motor Corp., Ford Motor Co. and the U.S. military.

Today, Immersion Graphics stands at the forefront of the next generation of video projection, called 4K, and is among a select group of about a dozen companies authorized by Sony Corp. to install that company's high-end projectors.

The projectors are called 4K because the images are four times as clear as high-definition televisions -- even on 60-foot-wide screens.

Many companies in the industry don't survive Sony's review process, but Immersion Graphics was an early fit for the technology, said Andre Floyd, Sony's marketing manager.

"We are quite particular about it because it's not the same as your typical conference room business projector," Floyd said. "They have a strong background in technology in general, and large, high-resolution display systems in particular."

Immersion Graphics designs and builds projection systems capable of digesting reams of data from engineering design programs and projecting them onto large screens.

"We have literally done business with every single car company with a design presence in North America," Hernandez said.

It wasn't always like this. Back in 1998, it took several months for Hernandez to land his first project and the purchase order was for a meager \$300. But shortly after that, Hernandez landed a \$997,000 project for Toyota's research and development center in Ann Arbor.

Since then, Immersion Graphics has grown steadily and has done work for automakers as well as suppliers such as Tower Automotive and Collins & Aikman and health care companies.

"Back in the day, these companies would buy the software from a software company, they would buy computers from a computer company and the display device from another company and try to integrate it all themselves," Hernandez said. "I started Immersion Graphics to do all of that."

Examples of Immersion Graphics' projects include:

- A 120-foot screen for ITC Holdings Corp.'s control room that displays the electrical power grid that the company manages.
- A system that can project three full-size cars for Ford Motor Co. at the automaker's product development center.

Long ago, Hernandez said he decided to manage the company's growth carefully so that it didn't grow too fast.

"One of the core philosophies I've always had in business has always been to focus on the customers that you have ... and don't get greedy," Hernandez said.



ANDRE J. JACKSON/Detroit Free Press

Pat Hernandez, owner and founder of Immersion Graphics in Commerce Township, looks over a high-resolution Sony video projector that will be packed and ready to ship to Las Vegas.

IMMERSION GRAPHICS INC.

Location: Commerce Township

President: Pat Hernandez, 44

Founded: 1998

2008 total sales: \$6 million

Total employees: 19

This year, with the nation's economy in a recession and corporations cutting back, that strategy is paying off.

This year's total sales will likely decline because many projects are approved, but are on hold. However, because of frugal management, Immersion Graphics has a large cash reserve and remains profitable, Hernandez said.

The company also is targeting a new industry niche -- movie studios and production companies. Hernandez acknowledges that it's a small niche, but said that's OK.

"We don't need big. We are a small company," Hernandez said. "If we can capture a good portion of that smaller market and be known for that, then that helps us dramatically."

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