

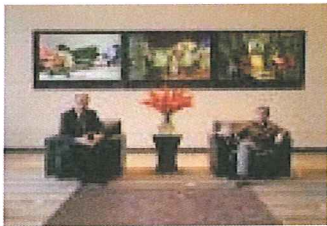
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## Creative genius

Corgan Associates finds the best way to keep Corgan Medialab is to let it go

Dallas Business Journal - by [Dave Moore](#) Staff Writer



*Bud Force*

*DRAWN TOGETHER: Bob Morris, left, managing principal at Corgan Associates, hangs out in the lobby with John Higgs, president of Corgan Medialab LLC, the architecture firm's interactive graphics offshoot.*

While Corgan Associates cranks out complicated architectural designs for the likes of Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport and other clients, there's a group of characters within the company that spends its days creating images of angst-ridden candy bars, industrious cupids and other computer animations.

Though some may consider that goofing off, those "characters" added \$1.5 million to Corgan's coffers last year. In 2008, the graphics and animation team expects to rake in \$2.3 million.

Its brisk business led to the Jan. 1 spin-off of Corgan Medialab LLC. Besides doing 3-D graphics of Corgan Associates' architectural projects, which comprises about 20% of its work, the group also creates animations and images for e-cards, commercials, videogames and films.

"Each project has been profitable," said John Higgs, president of Corgan Medialab.

The group got its start about 10 years ago, when Corgan employed two or three people to do 3-D modeling for architectural and design purposes. Within five years' time, the staff grew to seven. During the last three years, Corgan Medialab has grown to 23 people.

Its recent growth spike is mainly due to a burgeoning demand for interactive products, such as the e-greetings Corgan Medialab makes for Frisco-based HD Greetings.

One animated card features a piñata loaded up with candy paratroopers who leap from their papier-mâché home once children score direct hits with a stick. Another features a chef that loads up a birthday cake with so many candles it explodes.

Corgan also worked with HD Greetings to develop an e-greeting for Unilever's Country Crock brand. It lets users incorporate their own images into a video message from Christian pop singer Amy Grant, who also mentions Country Crock's campaign to fight hunger.

Other clients include Army/Air Force Exchange Service, Nokia and Chrysler.

The Medialab team travels the country, marketing their computer graphics work at events such as the South by Southwest music and film festival in Austin. Soon, the animators might see their own work on the silver screen -- or at least the television screen.

"We are very close to securing some commercial work with a big channel on cable, can't say which one yet," Higgs said.

Corgan Medialab's services don't come cheap. A typical 30-second animation costs \$20,000 to \$30,000; more sophisticated, high-definition images run \$30,000 to \$40,000.

**Nanda Kumar**, an associate professor of marketing at the **University of Texas at Dallas** campus, said there are benefits and risks associated with using interactive, "viral marketing" products.

"If I do viral marketing and people say positive things about my product, and they're opinion leaders, it adds credibility" to the product, because the message isn't coming directly from the company, Kumar said. But, on the other hand, companies can't control what users say.

To develop products and strategies for its clients, the 23 Medialab employees break into smaller groups of six to eight people. Each team includes a production manager and a producer, who duke it out in the ongoing battle over deadlines and creative control.

"This group puts in long hours," said Bob Morris, managing principal at Corgan Associates, adding that he'll drop by the office in the evenings and on weekends and find Medialab employees hard at work.

### **Supportive parent**

Unlike Dallas-based Greengrass Studios, which splintered from a conventional architecture firm to start its own animation/graphic-design shop, the workers at Corgan Medialab seem content to remain a part of Corgan Associates. They see the architecture firm as being more like a supportive parent than an overseer.

"It's like when you're going to college and you get to pick your own major," said Shana Valdez, a producer at Corgan Medialab.

To help give the design team its own sense of place, Corgan added an enclosed office within its headquarters in downtown Dallas, complete with a large-screen television and leather couches. It also built a hub of dedicated servers for the media lab, so neither group would experience slow-downs when design and architectural work is being done.

Besides creating a mechanism for bringing in more revenue, the spin-off also was a key retention move, Morris said.

"You keep talent by giving them work that they want to do," he said.

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