

Local online publisher provides unusual service

By DAVID NOWITZKY

It is hard to classify what ArcaMax Publishing is, exactly.

Even the company's president and CEO, Scott Wolf, had trouble putting it into words.

"We are basically a newspaper without the front page and breaking news," Wolf said, "and then some."

Though difficult to define, the company is one that shows, and in many ways expands, how far online media has come, and how far it can go.

Established in July 2004, ArcaMax Publishing is a spinoff of 10-year-old ArcaMax Inc., a Newport News e-commerce company. In 1999, the company launched an online newsletter to advertise products. ArcaMax Inc. soon realized that there was money to be made in online publishing, but also that it would be too difficult to run two separate businesses in one building.

Wolf decided to move the online publishing side of the business to another building. In July 2004, ArcaMax, the online publishing company, started on its own, a separate entity from ArcaMax Inc., which continues to operate as an e-commerce company. A Web site, arcamax.com, was launched for the publishing side, featuring games, quizzes and puzzles that could be sent to subscribers' e-mail every day, or every week.

Thanks to the Gutenberg Project Web site, dedicated to saving classic works of literature for the public domain, ArcaMax can also send a copy of, say, *War of the Worlds* to subscribers' e-mail free of charge. Subscribers can customize their accounts to receive a multitude of options, from Garfield to Hemingway, from Sudoku to gardening tips. Daily jokes are published, as is "Dear Abby" along with many other

columnists.

"We are giving people the media they want in their e-mail," said Wolf. "We have an ability to reach people who have totally different reasons for being online, whether it is career-, spiritual- or entertainment-oriented."

If someone has never read a classic novel, perhaps *War and Peace*, ArcaMax can send the novel to a subscriber, one chapter at a time, over the course of a year. Instead of carrying the heavy book, the reader can finish it by browsing through e-mail every morning.

By utilizing the plethora of available advertisers online, the company is able to create revenues without charging subscribers, and the response has been huge. Wolf said that ArcaMax has 2 million subscribers to its newsletters, which are offered in categories such as home and family, entertainment, and business and shopping.

A key element in the success of this "ezine" service is the amount of regulation that the company exercises regarding content.

"We don't run advertising that would offend our families," said Wolf, a father of three. "Our tag line is 'Family-friendly news & fun.' The company is growing as aggressively as we can do it, but built on sound principles. Ultimately, blogs will need to be there, but the challenge is to regulate inappropriate content. We would have to be prepared to monitor it and manage it. Right now, the photos we run build a community feeling [among the subscribers]."

In addition to Wolf, 10 people work for ArcaMax Publishing, in sales, programming, Web design, editorial and more.

A 1983 graduate of the College of William and Mary, Wolf was a principal

in a company that helped radio stations find alternate revenue programs. Today he spends his hours looking for new entertainment sources for, in his words, "Mr. and Mrs. America."

"We have two new comics, *Baby Blues* and *Zits*, and I feel like they are about my life," said Wolf. "That is what we do, give people a little chuckle while they are reading their e-mail."



Scott Wolf is president of ArcaMax, a Newport News-based online publishing company with 2 million subscribers, who receive all sorts of information, including whole books, for free via e-mail, thanks to revenue the company earns through advertising.

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