

Electronic Hollywood / Jaime Levy Press From 1990 - 2000[Cartoons](#)[Games](#)[Websites](#)[Ad Campaigns](#)[Interfaces](#)[Presskit](#)**MACHINE AGE****BY AUSTIN BUNN****Star Search**

Tim Nye, CEO of Silicon Alley company Sunshine Digital, stars in a Microsoft TV spot. A Razorfish "implementation specialist" hawks footwear in a new Rockport ad. And in an industry built on the bedlam of tiny design companies competing for work, New York now has a handful of dueling digital talent agencies repping select clients and shaving 15 percent off the top.

If you've been looking west to Menlo Park to preview the next paradigm shift in the Alley, look a little farther south. Hollywood—and its constellation of agencies, celebrities and studios—has trumped Silicon Valley with a new model for shaping development in the city: a star system.

The surest evidence that the industry is remaking itself in the image of Tinseltown may be the ballooning success of the Alley's answer to CAA, United Digital Artists (uda.com). This week, UDA is showcasing local design auteurs Peter Girardi of Funny Garbage and Gong Szeto of i/o 360 at the Milia Conference, the World's Fair of digital design, in Cannes. Last year, UDA's business of matching corporations (such as American Express and Disney) with boutique firms leapt to over 100 deals from only a handful in 1995. "It's just grown and grown—we've got more business than we can deal with," says UDA head Stewart McBride.

While McBride is shy of pointing to specific deals, his clients are happy to extol UDA's virtues. Unlike a traditional talent agency, UDA doesn't demand exclusive contracts from Alley firms. Instead, the company acts like a "big brother," says Lucien Harriot, head of 3-D animation company Mechanism Digital, which has been a client of UDA's for over a year. "[UDA] talks big and with them, you don't have to worry so much [about negotiations] because you have somebody on your side."

The market is already crowding with courtiers, with the advent of rival Digital Talent Agency from San Francisco last fall and the growing multimedia divisions of William Morris and CAA. But the UDA is oldest specifically digital agency, with some of the strongest pull. For the Milia Conference, McBride has culled 15 designers from around the world for a blitzkrieg showcase called "Three For All" (each developer gets three minutes)—a roadshow of his cachet.

Many feel the "celebrity" culture in new media is an outgrowth of the diversity of the businesses. Omar Wasow, head of the Web shop New York Online (nyo.com) and a recognized pundit since he was featured in a Samsung ad in 1996, believes that personality and signature style are in large part what Alley companies actually sell. "There's a serious informational problem" about clients finding the right people for their

work, Wasow says, "There's such a saturation [of design firms] that you have to be able to distinguish yourself."

But once recognized, those singled out for fame can have trouble shifting the spotlight onto their work. "I don't want to be a Net star," says Jaime Levy, head of Electronic Hollywood (ehollywood.net), who was also pictured in the Samsung series. "I was the Kurt Cobain of the Internet [after] *Newsweek* ran this big picute of me and a skateboard."

The most apt link between the film industry and New York new media may be the mantra "Nobody knows anything." With the arrival of agents in multimedia, "you get these guys who take a \$200,000 project up to \$2 million and it just falls through the floor," Levy says. "There's a lack of knowledge and the technology is constantly changing." In this landscape, with no role models or even conventions, the industry understandably relies on a narcotic of "stars" and their success. *Silicon Alley Reporter* editor Jason Calacanis, who recently released a list of the Aleey's 100 most powerful players, believes such exposure is necessary. "This is a media industry and people are driving it," he says. "Those who are opposed to [the star system] are just jealous of not being one."