NOV. 24-30
2006

Volume 25
Number 40

215-238-1450

philadelphia
.bizjournals.com

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PHILADELPHIA
BUSINESS
JOURNAL


Madonna lights up an H&M store on New York's Fifth Avenue using CeeLite technology.

# CeeLite shines paper thin

PETER KEY
STAFF WRITER

BLUE BELL — Michael Binder was sitting in his office at Capital Manufacturing in Lansdale when Malcolm Hayward walked in with what appeared to be a graphic of a Coca-Cola bottle on a piece of paper.

Then the substance Binder thought was paper lit up.

"I went berserk," Binder said. "I'd never seen flat light before."

Binder was so impressed after that meeting in 2003 that he left his position as executive vice president of Capital Manufacturing, which makes unique metal structures, such as the giant Liberty Bell at Citizens Bank Park.

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CURT HUDSON

Michael Binder of CeeLite is wrapped in a large light-emitting capacitor panel.

The Red Hot Chili Peppers drum kit.

# CEELITE: Firm illuminates the future

FROM PAGE 1

CeeLite, the company he and Hayward founded in 2004, is brightening up some high-profile places these days, including the "CNN Headline News" set, the Red Hot Chili Peppers' drum kit, and an interactive window display featuring Madonna at Swedish clothing manufacturer Hennes & Mauritz AB's flagship store in New York.

CeeLite's light-emitting capacitor technology is derived from a phenomenon called electroluminescence, which occurs in certain substances when a current is passed through them. In nature, it's what makes fireflies light up.

A Frenchman named Georges Destriau discovered ways to artificially produce it while working in Marie Curie's laboratory in 1936. It turns out the array of applications are bigger than a bug.

Most of CeeLite's products are self-illuminating panels designed to take the place of back-lit advertisements both indoors and out. The company can also make self-illuminating sheets and smaller panels that can be wrapped around things, or made part of clothing.

But what really caught people's attention was when they were featured in Time magazine's Best Inventions 2006 issue. In the 11 days between when the magazine came out and when CEO Binder talked to the Philadelphia Business Journal, CeeLite's Web site received 1.5 million hits.

"We're getting calls from all over the world," Binder said.

Commercial applications of electroluminescence to date have been largely small scale, such as for background lighting on mobile phones and making the dials glow on car dashboards.

But that appears likely to change soon, thanks to companies like CeeLite and Lyttron Technology GmbH, a maker of electroluminescent films that was spun off from Bayer MaterialScience last spring.

David Stadler, president and CEO of BlueOcean Worldwide, which makes billboards, bus wraps and other out-of-home ads, said his experience with electroluminescence prior to CeeLite made him highly skeptical of the technology.

"When Mike Binder came into my office, he had all these bags of goodies and I just rolled my eyes," he recalled. "Three hours later, I was taking him out to dinner."

That was nine months ago. Today, BlueOcean plans to market CeeLite technology for use in out-of-home ads, retail displays and stadiums in the United States and in Europe.

The company, which is about to open its main production facility in Las Vegas, was responsible for the display in H&M's New York store. That has been taken down, but BlueOcean is about to put up another display there and in San Francisco. It also is testing CeeLite's technology on an ad on a double-decker bus in Las Vegas and in computer kiosks in Barnes & Noble stores.

"I have not seen response to a product in my sector like this in 10 years," Stadler said.

Hayward learned of CeeLite's technology through a partner in his former business, Quadritek Systems Inc., a Malvern-based developer of Internet Protocol name and address management software that was bought by Lucent Technologies Inc. for $50 million in 1998.

The partner, James Chen, is a native of Taiwan. While traveling through the Beijing airport, he ran into an MBA classmate he hadn't seen in 25 years and asked him what he was doing. The man, H.P. Huang, showed him the display that subsequently wound up wowing Binder and asked Chen if he knew anybody in the United States that could market it and similar products.

Chen sent the display to Hayward, who, after having coffee across the street from Capital Manufacturing in Lansdale, walked into the company and showed it to Binder. That was enough to convince Binder, who had worked for Capital Manufacturing for 30 years, to sell his stake in the company back to its founding family and start CeeLite with Hayward, who is vice president for business development.

Since then, it has been full-speed ahead. CeeLite has been working with the Osram Sylvania on the phosphors that make its lighting products glow and Eastman Chemical Co. on the packaging of the phosphors. It developed the inverters, which charge the phosphors, itself. They contain programmable computer chips that control how the panels light.

With money from Hayward, Binder and their family and friends, CeeLite bought the Taiwanese factory that makes its products and is getting ready to establish a factory in El Monte, Calif.

"The raw materials are actually made in the United States," said Binder.

CeeLite also is talking to possible investors, ranging from venture capitalists to strategic partners, about what Binder described as a significant funding. That, he said, would enable it to double or triple its staff size, which is 85, including 18 in Blue Bell.

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