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Microsoft buys Bristol native's firm; deal reportedly worth \$800M to \$1 billion



Internet entrepreneur Angus Davis, 29.

BRISTOL - A Bristol native has parlayed a good idea, a little luck and years of sweat equity into a huge payoff. Internet entrepreneur Angus Davis, 29, recently sold Tellme Networks, a company he helped found in 1999, to computer giant Microsoft. Though he won't say how much the sale is worth, he noted that analysts have estimated the deal is worth between \$800 million and \$1 billion.

"It sounds corny, but what's really rewarding to me isn't the large check I'm going to get from Microsoft, but the affirmation we're from Microsoft," he said this week. "It's an enormous validation of the idea that (co-founder Mike

McCue) and I had back in 1999."

What's Tellme?

Tellme Networks allows users to take advantage of the Internet from any telephone. Its voice recognition software provides users with an interface to the Internet, allowing them to search for anything from phone numbers, weather reports, stock information and driving directions to product tracking information. The company's services are used about 480 million times per year.

The acquisition will be Microsoft's largest-ever purchase of a privately owned company.

"They're essentially saying they're going to make the biggest gamble they've ever made on our company," Mr. Davis said.

Mr. Davis, who turned 29 last Friday, said approximately 75 percent of the company is owned by its 320 employees, with the remaining 25 percent owned by venture capitalists. The employees who have been with the company the longest will profit the most from the deal, he said.

On-the-job education

Besides his technological innovation, Mr. Davis shares something else with technology industry intellectual giants Bill Gates, who founded Microsoft, and Steve Jobs, who founded Apple: He never earned a college degree. Mr. Gates and Mr. Jobs attended very little college, and Mr. Davis never attended at all.

Instead, he landed an internship at Netscape Communications Corp. the summer after graduating from high school. Though he had been accepted to Emory University in Atlanta, he decided to stay with Netscape after the summer, when officials offered him employment. He met Mr. McCue there and, three years later, the two left to found Tellme Networks.

Though he lived in California's Silicon Valley for much of the ensuing decade, Mr. Angus has since moved back to Rhode Island and lives on Providence's East Side.

Getting Tellme off the ground was no easy task, and it certainly wasn't a 9-to-5 job.

"Back in 1999, I basically slept in my office three days a week," Mr. Davis said. "While my buddies were having fraternity parties, I was working. I didn't seem to have much of a life."

What next?

Mr. Davis has no plans to leave Tellme Networks, and plans to help run the company under Microsoft's ownership. Away from the job, he has branched into philanthropy, and intends to advocate for school choice and, in particular, charter schools.

"It's annoying that there aren't more choices for parents," he said.

Though he lived in California for the greater part of a decade, Mr. Davis always come home to Bristol for the Fourth of July, his favorite holiday. He plans to keep that tradition going indefinitely.

"As a kid who grew up in Bristol, Fourth of July has always been my favorite holiday, even more than Christmas," he said. "You can't grow up on the parade route without loving the Fourth of July."

Seeds of Tellme?

Angus Davis may be one of the creative forces behind Tellme Networks, but technological capabilities haven't always served him well. While he was a high school student at Phillips Andover Academy, he hacked into the school's phone system and enabled hundreds of students to make free long distance phone calls. He was suspended for the remainder of the year after school officials discovered the infraction. "That was the last of a long list of infractions," joked Mr. Davis, who eventually graduated from Portsmouth Abbey School.

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