

# FreeRun gaining momentum

## Huge new space, new sites and portals for Napa Internet Company

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NAPA -- A potent blend of technical knowledge, graphical talent, and marketing savvy is giving FreeRun Technologies Inc. an Internet presence comparable to Napa Valley's presence in the world of wine. The Internet solutions provider and parent company of the WineCountry.com network has become a global destination for 2 million visitors a year, and the company as a whole is experiencing an average annual growth rate of 25%.

In October, the 30-employee company will move into new 15,000sf quarters in Napa Valley Gateway Business Park, tripling its current space. As research and development speed FreeRun's entry into the high-tech and financial services industries, the staff could grow to 60 within two years, according to co-founder and vice president of marketing Heidi Paul.

That's pretty impressive growth for a two-employee Website design and hosting service launched in 1993, with the site NapaValley.com as a showcase. Founders Frank Forbes and Ms. Paul were able to attract some big names: Robert Mondavi, Beringer Vineyards, Sterling Vineyards, Sutter Home, and St. Supery were early clients. Now, FreeRun has over 600 clients in its portal division.

And NapaValley.com, with its sister site Sonoma.com, have become the anchor sites for the WineCountry.com network, leading potential visitors to seven major wine growing regions in California and offering all the information they need to plan a detailed wine country trip of any duration, including lodging, dining, wineries, attractions, and special events. Naturally enough, FreeRun is eyeing grape growing areas in Washington, Oregon, and New York.

"We gauge an area on how interested the local wine and tourist industry is in reaching a wider audience," says Ms. Paul. "Sometimes a local business community is more concerned with spending money locally to promote itself, on a local portal perhaps. But local portals are hard for travelers to find without a specific name. WineCountry.com is especially advantageous to small regions, because it guides knowledgeable wine country travelers to lesser-known locales, where the whole business community gains. We don't try to compete with local portals, but to complement them."

And if it seems advantageous to all concerned, FreeRun will acquire a local Website, as it did with NapaValleyOnline.com last month.

### Growing fast -- and faster

FreeRun has added a subscriber-based online publication called WineCountry.com Lifestyle, a popular advertising vehicle. And the



FreeRun co-founders Frank Forbes and Heidi Paul

company is working on a new site to feature wineries without tasting rooms, bringing them to the attention of the 30% of site visitors who are more interested in wine than travel.

While FreeRun's portal division grows, the division in charge of site design and hosting and technology is growing even faster. Revenues, now split 50/50 between the two divisions, will shift to 40/60 in the future, Ms. Paul believes.

"We know what works by trial and error on our own sites, and we're taking that knowledge into new enterprise markets," she says. "We can evaluate a corporate infrastructure and know what it will support in the way of an Internet presence, and we understand the back-end technology. FreeRun has developed effective evaluation tools that we encourage our clients to use. If they can't see for themselves that FreeRun is driving traffic to their sites, they'll drop us."

The company's retention rate of WineCountry.com network clients is an enviable 85%-90%, according to Ms. Paul, even after September 11 caused a wide drop-off in tourism marketing and expenditures.

FreeRun has developed its own set of content management tools, messaging and e-mail campaign applications, and e-commerce capabilities. Its R&D staff is currently working on the next phase of these solutions to be focused on high tech, wineries, consumer product manufacturing, information companies, and financial services. Agilent Technologies and eONE Global are new clients, and FreeRun is looking for more.

"We don't compete with freelance Web designers. Our expertise is much more strategic, and we've had close to 10 years of experience," says Ms. Paul.

"We've always put our profits into hiring the best people possible, and that's paid off. It's exciting to be able to move them out of cramped quarters and into a new space that will reflect their artistic talent."

FreeRun's new address is 570 Gateway Drive, a Basin Street Properties building in Napa Valley Gateway Business Park. Leasing agents were Matt Bracco, Chris Neeb, and Glenn Dowling of Cushman and Wakefield. For more information, visit [www.freerun.com](http://www.freerun.com) or [www.winecountry.com](http://www.winecountry.com).