

Press Release

Angel funding for Musemantik Ltd. from Silicon Valley

Initial round of angel funding to match Scottish Enterprise SMART Award heralds development of innovative emotion-aware entertainment technology.

Edinburgh, UK 23 August 2010: New emotional tools for making big-budget, blockbuster computer and video games.

Musemantik is building unique, versatile middleware that infers emotion from games during game design and runtime. Fear, excitement and curiosity are used to control game aspects like music, lighting and camera viewpoint to increase emotional engagement and cohesiveness.

A Silicon Valley investor with experience in high tech computing and communication startups has realized the potential of Musemantik's game-changing emotion-aware technology and invested to match the SMART innovation grant of £70,000 awarded by Scottish Enterprise.

Games developers are aware that emotional engagement is critical to user retention in the computer and video games mass market. At present, developers rely on realistic graphics and cinematic sequences combined with film-like storylines to achieve engagement. What is absent is a structured way to convey the desired emotions. Dr. Maciej Zurawski, an entrepreneur and self-taught composer holding a doctorate in Artificial Intelligence from the University of Edinburgh, and a keen video game enthusiast, was always intrigued with the possibility of putting emotion into games in the way it is done in Hollywood movies. Passionate about its immense potential, he convinced Diwakar Thakore, an entrepreneur with more than a decade of international experience in managing startups and early-stage companies, and a zealous believer in the 'experience economy', to join him in giving birth to a new business concept: emotion-aware middleware technology.

The SMART grant from Scottish Enterprise and matching funding from Silicon Valley together with generous support from the University of Edinburgh School of Informatics commercialisation team will take Musemantik to a point where the company can fully demonstrate the capabilities of the technology and create the first version of the product, to be released in May 2011. "We have already garnered immense interest from developers that make big-budget games and invest substantially to achieve realistic emotional immersiveness in their blockbusters", says Managing Director Dr. Maciej Zurawski. Explaining their desired route to market Diwakar Thakore, cofounder and Head of Business Development, adds "Significantly, we have also been engaging with prominent game middleware providers like Emergent, to establish seamless integration with their game engines and seek to become their preferred partner for emotion-aware middleware to establish market reach and penetration."

The first version of Musemantik's middleware will be two software applications. Emrzz Sense is used for modelling and inferring emotions from games. Emrzz Arrange creates an adaptive and intelligent arrangement of musical flow to convey the desired emotions within the gameplay. Explaining the reasoning behind Emrzz Arrange, Maciej Zurawski says: "Music background to the game is often the last element to be considered, and might consist of a few repeating elements which all too frequently have little to do with the on-screen action, despite the well-known fact that around half of the emotion is generally conveyed through music (as per Steven Spielberg, the famous filmmaker). Musemantik middleware will come with a Music Engine that matches emotions with appropriate stretches of music to communicate the desired feeling, and thus demonstrate the effectiveness of the emotion-aware technology."

Commenting on the fundraising Diwakar Thakore said "We are delighted to have attracted this investment, particularly from Silicon Valley and in such a challenging economic climate. This investment with the SMART award grant and support from the University of Edinburgh School of Informatics will allow us to focus on building the Emrzs suite quickly and put us on course for the scheduled market launch in the summer of next year. We will be seeking additional funding to speed up our product development and subsequent market launch. This angel investment is a very decisive step towards the future and has put us on the right track to realise our dreams." Game developers and players can now keenly look forward to a more immersive game experience. All aspects of gameplay like music, light, camera or sound would be more emotionally relevant and cohesive making games increasingly engaging, immersive and, of-course, fun.

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