

FOUNDED: 2003

FOUNDERS:

Bryan Calkins, CEO; and
Dr. Lenny Kontsevich, chief
science officer

FUNDING STATUS:

Angel-funded

MARKET CATEGORY:

Digital media

COMPETITORS: Google

Images, Pixsy, Riya,
Picsearch, Picscout, and
PicFindr

BASICS:

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S U M M A R Y

Xcavator, a product from Cognisign, Inc., is a visual search technology that finds images based on an original starter image. Unlike most image searches today based on tags and color screening, Xcavator, using Cognisign's Intelligent Image Recognition Technology, mimics the capabilities of the human eye, looking for similarities based on shape, composition, and object proximity. Users can drag any photo to the designated space on the site and instantly retrieve images that are similar in color, composition, and theme.

Xcavator initially launched in the stock photo space with 300,000 images. After a recent partnership announcement with iStockphoto – purchased by Getty Images in 2006 – its inventory is now at 1.8 million. Rather than trawling the Web for images, Xcavator relies on live inventory feeds from stock photo companies, accompanied by associated keywords and other metadata. The company's online portal is aimed at consumers but the Xcavator technology is also scalable and distributable for other application uses, such as image and video asset databases and security and defense surveillance.

Cognisign plans to monetize the Xcavator portal with ads and stock footage referrals, as well as license the technology for white-label use.

G U I D E W I R E V I E W

As we've mentioned before, image search is a booming sector. Cognisign CEO Bryan Calkins nails the market when he labels it "a bit of an arms race." Each company wants to offer as large an image selection as possible in an environment that is both easy and fun to work with.

Xcavator sets itself apart from the pack with its Intelligent Image Recognition Technology. Though the company has launched a consumer portal of its own, its innovative technology should be viewed by competitors as a potential partner. Calkins posited, for instance, that Pixsy, featured in the July 16, 2007, Guidewire Report, could add the Xcavator visual search engine to its current offering, enhancing its original site. This would not only widen Xcavator's revenue path but also give the company a greater chance of surviving in a highly competitive sector. There are plans to add video search in 2008, and the same capabilities are being discussed with companies in the security industry to provide better cataloging and search capabilities.

When we initially contacted Xcavator, we assumed it would simply be another technology to add to the growing image search pool. Even the lengthy list at left only scratches the surface; this market is jam-packed with competitors. What we found instead was a company that has developed an innovative and logical approach to image search – one that could benefit, rather than take away from, the rest of the sector. - *Carla Thompson*