



# THE PLAIN DEALER

## TECHNOLOGY

### Cleveland-based group links colleges online

Thursday, October 13, 2005

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**Plain Dealer Reporter**

Case Western Reserve University students can use their laptops for more than instant messaging and term papers.

Thanks to a high-tech firm based in Cleveland, Case students also can watch television programs produced by students at other campuses around the world, via the Open Student Television Network.

They might catch "The Ivory Tower," a long-running soap opera produced at Harvard University, or click on "Think Talk," a student-produced talk show from universities in Washington, D.C. Case, Ohio State University and the University of Akron are among approximately 40 colleges and universities that are part of OSTN, said Shane Walker, vice president of OSTN Studios. The student-run television station at Case, "Ignite," has contributed an MTV parody show to OSTN, which launched in February, he said.

Colleges are where Hollywood gets its up-and-coming actors and writers, Walker said. OSTN gives future professionals in film and theater a worldwide audience while they are still studying their craft.

"We're taking out [the process of] paying your dues," Walker said.

OSTN is run by the CampusEAI Consortium, a Cleveland-based, nonprofit organization developing software and digital content. EAI stands for enterprise, application and integration.

The consortium uses the Internet2, a national high-speed network that is faster than the average broadband connection, to deliver OSTN and personalized Web pages to member universities. Institutions pay a fee to join the consortium.

Prashant Chopra, chief architect of the CampusEAI Consortium, said while the Internet2 exists only in the United States, it is linked to similar networks around the globe. This allows CampusEAI to have members in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, he said.

Student gets information without leaving the dorm After logging on to a personalized Web page, any student on a member campus can read email and access a personal calendar, class schedule and grades without going to another Internet site or budging from his or her dorm room, Chopra said.

CampusEAI provides Case students with one digital place for work, study and play, said Lev Gonick, vice president for information technology services and chief information officer for Case. It eliminates stacks of paperwork and helps Case stay on the cutting edge among universities, he said.

"The portal has become an umbilical cord for students at the university," said Gonick, whose team at Case helped develop CampusEAI. "It's a huge efficiency saver." While the consortium circles the globe, its nerve

center is Cleveland.

In 2003, Case was among the 14 founding members of CampusEAI, which has offices in downtown Cleveland. Gonick is chairman of the executive advisory board for CampusEAI.

"It's a sign of what potential is here," Chopra said. The company combines technical infrastructure and talent to create a world-class operation, he said.

"I don't have to be in Silicon Valley or New York City or Boston, Austin or Chicago," he said. "If we can deliver OSTN out of Cleveland, there isn't much that we can't do."

Consortium draws visionaries to Cleveland CampusEAI has attracted visionaries from various backgrounds to make their homes here. Chopra, 28, was commuting between New Jersey and California before moving here. Walker, 39, lived in Orlando, London and Los Angeles before buying his first house in Bay Village.

Walker's background includes designing clothes and producing feature films. A few years ago, he was taking directing classes at Ball State University in Indianapolis when he thought about all the film students across the country cranking out short films. Few would be widely seen.

It would be cool if there were a television channel for student-produced programs, Walker thought. He founded The U Network in 2003, to package student-produced programs from across the country for university television stations, he said.

The company was chugging along when he saw an article about OSTN. He realized U Network and OSTN were direct competitors.

"When these guys launched, my days were numbered," Walker said.

Chopra offered him a job with OSTN. Walker shut down his company and moved here this year with his wife and daughter. "I'd never even been to Cleveland," he said. "We love it. There's something to do every weekend."

Chopra, 28, was born in New Delhi, India, and moved to New York with his family as a child. He majored in theology at Columbia University, and took time to start a short-lived clothing firm.

When he returned to Columbia in the mid-1990s, the technical revolution was in its infancy. Low-tech traditions made college life inefficient. Important offices were housed in different buildings, so students had to hike across campus to accomplish simple tasks.

"It was a problem statement waiting for an answer," Chopra said, employing his characteristic business-speak.

After leaving Columbia in 1999, he worked at a New York tech firm, Student Online, that developed software that allowed students to access college records and information online.

That firm folded in 2000.

Chopra moved on to consulting work with Gonick, then chief technology officer at California State University-Monterey Bay in Seaside, Calif. Gonick left California for Case in 2001, and later asked Prashant to join him as a consultant for various projects.

While Gonick envisioned what CampusEAI could become, Chopra had the technical, Internet and financial expertise. Chopra and Gonick's team at Case worked to develop the software that eventually would power CampusEAI and OSTN, Chopra said.

Chopra, whose parents have also moved here, has found Cleveland to be a fertile territory for ideas. Things that start here can have a giant impact, he said.

"Putting Cleveland in the center of the map - that's my secret personal agenda," he said. "This is why I've become a permanent resident of Cleveland."

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