Fortuity Research Report

In keeping with modern trends, Online Currents has outsourced its Net Notes concession to Fortuity Research Australia, a Sydney-based consultancy. We interviewed the CEO, Armando Fortuity, about their current research projects and plans for the future.

Online Currents: Tell us about Fortuity Research.

Armando Fortuity: Our parent company was founded by my great-great grandfather Lorenzo in 1911, when he was asked to look into the problems caused by hanging chads in the punched cards for the first automated United States Census. Ironically, "hung chad" actually means "Fortuity Research" in some dialects of Mandarin.

My grandfather Boris was an electrical engineer who moved to Australia looking for work in 1949 because of a misunderstanding; he heard a radio broadcast of Ben Chifley's *Light on the Hill* speech and assumed that this was a new national energy policy. He set up a branch of the family company in Sydney, and since the 1980s Fortuity Research has kept its finger on the pulse of technological development in the Antipodes.

OLC: What are you currently working on?

AF: One of our ongoing projects is to cook our way through all the recipes on the internet, and rate them for taste. The current leader is *Chicken a la Dave*, from http://www.recipes.gocurious.com.

OLC: And the lowest score?

AF: That would have to be *Kitty Litter Cake* from http://www.haphazardgourmet.blogspot.com. But there's strong competition.

OLC: Who does the testing?

AF: We save money by recruiting Linux developers as testers, and letting them work for food. They have such tremendous energy and enthusiasm that it's a shame to see it go to waste. Right now they're working on getting various versions of Linux to boot from a memory stick.

OLC: Why?

AF: It turns the memory stick into a portable computer. You can plug it in to any PC made within the last few years, turn it on, tweak the settings a little, and the memory stick boots into a fully operational Linux computer with all the applications you need. Any changes you make to documents or settings are stored on the stick. When you've finished you pull it out, and the next time the PC is switched on, it's back to Windows with no changes to the hard disk. They say it's like giving the PC a secret identity. I think they got the idea from a Spiderman film.

OLC: If our readers want to try it...

AF: They should use a memory stick with 4 gigabytes capacity or more, and download an image file for the latest Ubuntu distribution (http://www.ubuntu.com), which has a "Create USB stick" item on the System/Administration menu. The other versions haven't caught up to that yet. You don't even have to install Ubuntu to use it – just burn the image on to a CD and boot from that.

And once it's set up, they can clone the USB stick very quickly with a nifty little program called All Image (http://www.towodo.com/products). You can make a working copy of an entire operating system with all its applications, settings and documents, legally and for free, in about 15 minutes. Try doing that with Windows!

OLC: What else is happening?

AF: We're working on a new kind of MP3 player, for people who like to listen to podcasts, radio shows and audiobooks. Right now the whole MP3 player industry is aimed at music – short tracks with snappy titles shuffled into a random order. We're looking for hardware or software that can cope with longer tracks.

OLC: What does that entail?

AF: Long titles, for one thing. A typical podcast, for instance, might be called "Geekworld Mac 20081015 – Matt and Jasmine discuss whether Steve Jobs looks better with a beard.mp3". That's easy to read off a PC monitor, but try fitting it on to a four-centimetre screen. Why not have a player, say, which reads the title to you audibly at the beginning of the track?

And because these tracks can be half-an-hour long or more, we need fast scrolling and a skip option, like a DVD player, that can jump forwards or back, say, 30 seconds at a time. You get that on a few handheld PDAs [personal digital assistants] but not on portable MP3 players.

With music tracks people are usually happy to listen to them twice; but nobody wants to hear the same chapter of an audiobook over again. Modern players can store so many tracks that you can't always recognise from the title or the first few moments of the track whether you have heard it before. Why not add a flag to each track which records the number of times you've already heard it? You could even have an option to delete the track as soon as it was played through; then you wouldn't need to clear out your player manually before adding new tracks.

OLC: I hate it when I go to hold down the fast-forward button but my finger slips and I end up in the next track.

AF: That also needs to be sorted out. We're looking into other complaints too. If any of your readers has a problem with a particular MP3 player – or they have one they love and want to tell us about it – they should write to us at <u>fortuityresearch@gmail.com</u>.

OLC: What else is coming up?

AF: We're looking into the phenomenon of "RickRolling". A couple of years back a group of people decided it would be fun to put up a bunch of serious-looking web links which all actually brought up a YouTube video of British '80s rocker Rick Astley singing his hit, "Never Gonna Give You Up". It caught on and thousands of RickRollers have now rolled Astley into the Number One spot on the MTV Europe 2008 music awards, making him officially the Best Act Ever. Now RickRolling has its own Wikipedia entry.

Think of the revenue stream if you could harness that power for your clients! Imagine thousands of people voluntarily linking to a video of your CEO singing "If You Were the Only Girl in the World" at the Social Club Karaoke Party!

OLC: Would he have to have a daggy haircut like Rick?

AF: No, but a cardigan is mandatory.

OLC: Other projects?

AF: Google Chrome (<u>http://www.google.com/chrome</u>). Our Conspiracy Theory team is working with our ESP section, and they are trying to see into the minds of Google executives and work out why they thought it was a good idea to release an underpowered web browser. At the moment we're not sure whether it's an essential step on the road to world domination, or a random application that emerged by accident as a result of all those computers talking to each other. Our current theory is that someone just logged in and found it on their desktop one morning.

OLC: Doesn't it have anything going for it?

AF: It has an incognito mode in which it forgets where you've been, so that nosy parents, spouses or supervisors can't follow your tracks. And the default homepage shows pretty thumbnail images of the places you've been recently. But both of these are available as free optional extensions to Firefox (<u>http://www.mozilla.com/firefox</u>), which is the browser we use at Fortuity. Firefox extensions (<u>http://www.addons.mozilla.org</u>) are the second-best thing about it, after tabbed browsing. In fact

whenever we install Firefox on a new system we install ad blocking and Flash killing by default, to hide or freeze those annoying advertisements. You can't do that in Chrome. And Firefox also works under Linux, which keeps our developers happy.

OLC: What do you have for the next issue?

AF: From today our technicians are going home every night with red-rimmed eyes and palsied fingers. Next month Fortuity Research will report on game consoles.

OLC: Thank you, Armando Fortuity.

AF: My pleasure.

Jon Jermey