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### On Firmage's UFO Theories

From: Stig Agermose <[stig.agermose@get2net.dk](mailto:stig.agermose@get2net.dk)>  
Date: Wed, 23 Jun 1999 06:57:16  
Fwd Date: Wed, 23 Jun 1999 23:01:26 -0400  
Subject: On Firmage's UFO Theories

Source: Red Herring,

<http://www.herring.com:80/insider/1999/0622/cip-firmage.html>

Stig

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Big Fish: is Joe Firmage an Internet genius?

By Paul Kapustka  
Redherring.com  
June 22, 1999

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In case you haven't noticed, Joe Firmage is in the news again. Written off for his outlandish views on UFOs (among other topics), Mr. Firmage last week resurrected his business persona by unveiling a "venture construction firm" called Intend Change, which he will lead as a founding partner.

So is Joe still a nut, or is he once again a business genius? Is he neither, or a little of both? Will his new company become a market success in the startup-development space, in the way that his last company, USWeb/CKS (Nasdaq: USWB), became a leader in the Web-design field? Will Joe flake out again as he advances his scientific theories and social agendas? For now, Mr. Firmage's reëmergence raises many questions -- which you might want answered before doing business with him.

With the launch of Intend Change, Mr. Firmage has reinvented himself as a venture catalyst, a self-proclaimed Internet expert whose new firm will turbocharge your nascent business plan, outfit you with a seasoned management team and some shiny venture dollars, and otherwise grease the skids for a successful IPO or big-buck acquisition. All that for a modest 10 percent stake in your company. Sound good? But wait, there's more.

CHECK THOSE BAGS

And it's stuff you may not want. Though he went through great pains to distance his scientific theories from Intend Change's business at last week's press event, Mr. Firmage firmly intends to imbue Intend Change with his personal zeal. That means both a commitment from Intend Change's founders to contribute half their equity to nonprofit, charitable activities and a no-excuses continuation by Mr. Firmage of his extracurricular extraterrestrial activities. Is the business opportunity worth

the baggage? Those close to Mr. Firmage seem to think so.

The prevailing sentiment among Mr. Firmage's friends and coworkers is that he is something of a genius, who sees things in a way mere mortals cannot. Some people who know him well won't even discount Mr. Firmage's outlandish UFO theories, even in private conversation.

"If it were anyone else, I'd say they were crazy," says one business associate of Mr. Firmage's, when asked for an opinion on the UFO matters. "But I've learned not to question Joe, because more often than not, he is correct."

Without question, Mr. Firmage is in possession of a serious intellect. Those choosing to match wits with him would be well advised to do their homework, because (as shown by the depth of his writings and speeches) Mr. Firmage will most certainly have done his. Armed with an extensive vocabulary, technical smarts, and pure marketer's charm, Mr. Firmage has certainly convinced those close to him that he is no wacko.

(SOME) MEN ARE FROM MARS

Some of his closest compatriots, including his partner Toby Corey, seem to regard Mr. Firmage with a sort of reverence, an emotion they are not at all ashamed to show in public. Other business partners at least seem willing to overlook Mr. Firmage's shortcomings. Robert Shaw, the current CEO of USWeb/CKS, tried to convince us that he's "never had a client ask me" about Mr. Firmage's radical scientific views. Please. Where have the clients been for the past few months -- on Mars?

OK, that's a cheap shot. But genius is a big title, and one we're not sure Mr. Firmage lives up to yet. Certainly, his business track record is a successful one. First, he started up and sold a company (Serius, a software tools firm) to Novell (Nasdaq: NOVL) for \$24 million before he could legally rent a car; then, he and Mr. Corey (along with another ex-Novell executive, Sheldon Laube) launched USWeb in 1995, taking it to a public-market offering that made them millionaires. Not bad for someone who's still waiting to celebrate his 30th birthday.

But USWeb's success story is more one of elbow grease and good timing than of Internet genius. Certainly, the market has not given USWeb/CKS the valuation of a landscape-changing force like Amazon.com (Nasdaq: AMZN) or eBay (Nasdaq: EBAY). Perhaps Mr. Firmage has worthy connections and some good business lessons to teach. But in a market saturated with advice and investment dollars, are his smarts worth the baggage they come with? And are they worth 10 percent of your company?

It's a question for entrepreneurs to answer. Mr. Firmage, open for business again, awaits your call.

Related links:

- \*Intend Change's partners stand behind Mr. Firmage.
- \*The May 1999 Red Herring reviewed Mr. Firmage's tome, "The Truth."
- \*Mr. Firmage had a lot to say about our review.

- \*Intend Change
- \*USWeb/CKS

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