

SMALL BUSINESS

Directory firm picks SkySong

SCOTTSDALE

While some mourned last week's announcement that Google Inc. will close its much-heralded Tempe office, an international recruit to the Valley tech scene celebrated its growth at SkySong.



JANE LARSON

Locallife Ltd. moved its U.S. headquarters into its 5,000-square-foot offices on the fourth floor of the first building at SkySong, the ASU Scottsdale Innovation Center. Company chairman Tony Martin scheduled one of his frequent trips from the United Kingdom headquarters to participate in the open house celebrating the move.

Locallife builds Internet directories designed to help consumers find shops, restaurants, services and organizations in their communities. Businesses and organizations get free basic listings on their community's Web site, and advertising is limited to one business in each category. The moneymaker for Locallife is getting small businesses to enhance their listings with advertising and to let Locallife design their Web sites using any of its more than 1,000 templates.

Directories are a competitive industry, as any consumer who has found yet another Yellow Pages-type book on the driveway can attest. And Locallife knows it runs up against the almighty Google when the Web-savvy go searching.

But Martin says small businesses, even those with Web sites, still have to worry about getting the word out about their presence on the Web. What sets Locallife apart, he says, is that consumers turn to its narrow, community directories for listings and information, and the directories in turn promote the local businesses' Web sites.

Locallife announced in March that it would base its U.S. headquarters at SkySong. From there, it planned to start selling franchises across the United States, giving franchisees the chance to build directories and sell advertising and Web sites in their own communities.

The Scottsdale headquarters would support the U.S. network with technical help, Web design, administration and sales.

Plans have changed somewhat since spring, Martin said. Locallife is developing more company-owned locations to provide positive data for



Tony Martin (left), chairman of Locallife, chats with visitors at the company's grand opening last week at SkySong.

JANE LARSON/THE REPUBLIC

its Uniform Franchise Offering Circular. UFOCs, required by the Federal Trade Commission, disclose franchise performance and other statistics to prospective franchisees.

Locallife's four Scottsdale sales reps have been pounding the pavement, building the pilot Web site for Scottsdale and what will be "a typical implementation" for the rest of the United States. The reps are supported by four staffers who book appointments, and by administrators and Web designers, for a total of 26 Scottsdale employees.

"We've generally been blown away by the reaction of business owners here," Martin said, adding that his U.K. sales trainers have been amazed at the amount of time business owners here give his salespeople.

The company has 400 paying business customers in Scottsdale so far. Average sales have been higher than those in the United Kingdom, he said, and traffic to www.local-life.com/scottsdale is rising.

"Sales performance in Scottsdale is absolutely on target," Martin said.

Locallife rolls out next in San Diego, where it has hired 50 employees to take 16 directories live, Martin said. It will then return to Maricopa County and add directories for 14 more Valley communities, he said. Locallife expects to have 300 employees in both regions by then.

It will expand into other communities next year, awarding 30 franchise units. Regional offices would follow, and expanding into other countries is Martin's goal.

Martin said the company still plans to tap brainpower at Arizona State University, one of the advantages the university offers to prospective SkySong tenants. Projects would be both in technology, exploring ways to scrape data from the Internet, and in marketing, brainstorming how to make university students aware of Locallife.

The company also is working with Scottsdale-based investment bank Columbia West Capital LLC to attract a U.S. investor and accelerate its rollout.

The Greater Phoenix Economic Council, which helped Locallife pick Scottsdale over Silicon Valley and Miami, Fla., said its presence shows the economic-development group's efforts to attract foreign investment.

"We're pleased you're going to help our economy grow," GPEC executive vice president Scarlett Spring told the open-house crowd. "International businesses are going to continue to be important to us."

Send news about small businesses and Scottsdale Airpark businesses to jane.larson@arizonarepublic.com or call 602-444-6868.

