AT&T Opens R&D Lab in Cambridge, England

Business Wire

February 10, 1999, Wednesday

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Length: 997 words

Dateline: BASKING RIDGE, N.J.

Body

Feb. 10, 1999--A building in England's Silicon Fen, set among 12th century architecture but housing a 21st century laboratory, is home to AT&T's first major research and development center outside the U.S.

The facility, the former Olivetti & Oracle Research Lab, was acquired earlier this month and renamed AT&T Laboratories - Cambridge. It is co-located with one of the world's pre-eminent research universities and houses 50 fulltime researchers, working on networking, multimedia and mobile communications systems.

Their goal and forte are consistent with the newly streamlined, customer-focused AT&T Labs: to make technology truly easy to use, then quickly move ideas from the lab and into the marketplace.

"There was a time when we believed that all good ideas originated within our New Jersey office complex," said David Nagel, AT&T's chief technology officer and president of AT&T Labs. "Today, AT&T Labs is branching out, first 2,600 miles to the west to Silicon Valley, with facilities focused on IP development, then to a new Internet research lab at the University of California at Berkeley, and now 3,600 miles northeast to the English countryside."

AT&T has identified the delivery of broadband communications - anytime, anywhere, any distance - as the goal all its organizations, including AT&T Labs, are focusing on to quickly deliver the most useful services employing the most advanced technologies.

"What better way to bring new products and solutions to market than by putting networking to work in our labs, linking together the people with the ideas and the expertise to make things happen, wherever they happen to be," Nagel said.

AT&T Laboratories - Cambridge, founded in 1986, has a strong track record in bringing new technology to market. Its founder, Andy Hopper, will continue to head the facility as Managing Director, and the researchers will continue their work, including a commitment to help set up the new Laboratory of Communications Engineering (LCE) at Cambridge University's Engineering Department, providing on-going support and funding.

"Our core activities center around networking and communications, multimedia, mobility, and distributed systems," Hopper said. "Typically, we develop prototype hardware, systems and applications for each research topic we explore, and focus on building large scale working systems, which we deploy widely both within our laboratory and within the University."

The facility has launched several successful businesses over its 12-year history, including TeleMedia Systems Ltd., producing multimedia ATM peripherals commercially; Virata Ltd., developing ATM commercially and delivering it to desktops; and Adaptive Broadband Ltd., developing broadband wireless solutions for the worldwide communications market.

Among the projects under way today:

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-- VNC (Virtual Network Computing), a remote display system which allows users to view their computing 'desktop' environment not only on the machine where it is running, but from anywhere on the Internet. This means you can leave your desk, go to another machine, whether next door or several hundred miles away, reconnect to your desktop from there and finish the sentence you were typing. Even the cursor will be in the same place;

-- Active Bat - an Ultrasonic Location System that would make possible context-aware computer systems that automatically configure themselves based on what's happening in the environment around them. An example might be a videophone system with many cameras placed around a room, which would continuously select a camera view in which the user could be seen, allowing that user to wander freely during the videophone conversation;

-- DART, bringing together speech recognition, image analysis, video parsing, information retrieval and human-computer interaction to enable users to index, annotate, and browse through personal collections of pictures, audio recordings, and home movies, such as you might obtain from digital still cameras, photo-CDs, and digital video cameras; and

-- piconet, an experiment into low powered, low range, ubiquitous wireless networking.

Some of the products the lab has already brought to market would be familiar to Trekkies - things like the Active Badge, a small device that, when worn, transmits a unique infrared signal every ten seconds. Each office within a building is equipped with one or more networked sensors, which detect these transmissions. The location of the badge (and, therefore, its wearer) can be easily determined based on the information transmitted by these sensors, enabling users to do such things as receive phone calls, made to their home, office, or cellphones, from whatever phone they're near.

Over 1500 badges and 2000 sensors are already in use in several European universities including the University of Kent, Imperial College (London), Lancaster University, the University of Twente (the Netherlands) and, of course, Cambridge.

And before starting the labs in Cambridge, Hopper and colleagues founded Acorn, a computer company that created the ARM (Advanced RISC Machine) (chip, used in Apple's Newton products.

For more information about AT&T Laboratories - Cambridge, visit the website at *http://www.uk.research.att.com*.

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