

Furby Co-Creator Ugobe Joins Forces With Former Lucasfilm Exec

by Jeanette Borzo - 1/30/2006

1/30/2006

Toy inventor Caleb Chung -- co-creator of the runaway hit Furby -- is joining forces with a former Lucasfilm Ltd. executive in an effort to bring "revolutionary" new toys to market.

Chung's toy-technology start-up, Ugobe Inc., today plans to announce the appointment of former Lucasfilm President Gordon Radley to its board of directors.

Ugobe, which will be announcing product news at the Demo conference next week in Phoenix, sees Radley as a strategic addition to its board of directors. Based in Emeryville, Calif., Ugobe is promising to deliver "robotic technology that transforms inanimate objects into lifelike creatures exhibiting stunning, organic movements and behaviors."

Radley was president at Lucasfilm for more than a decade, but previously held other positions at the movie firm since joining forces with filmmaker George Lucas in 1985. He was both general counsel and chief financial officer at the firm in his nearly twenty years at the home of "Star Wars." Today, Radley counsels entertainment and new media companies.

"Companies like to talk about 'disruptive' technological breakthroughs and paradigm shifts," said Radley in an e-mail interview. "Ugobe may be leading us all down such a path and the possibilities are exciting as well as endless."

"Through the life forms that Ugobe intends to create, it has set itself on a course that could cause us to rethink how we would experience and interact with non-organic creatures," Radley added.

Ugobe also told VentureWire that Chauncey Shey, president of Softbank China Holdings, is participating in a private capacity in Ugobe's \$2.5 million Series A round. Much of the round is already raised, said Chief Executive Officer, chairman and co-founder Bob Christopher. Expected to close in March, the \$2.5 million will go to fuel research and development as well as staffing needs.

In the second quarter, Ugobe plans to raise \$5 million in a Series B, he added, for research and development and marketing needs.

Chung co-founded Ugobe with Christopher. More than 40 million of Chung's owlish, gremlin-like Furbies have sold since the robotic toy's launch in 1998, making billions for toy company Hasbro Inc.

Now, with Chung as its chief toy maker, Ugobe is developing a new line of high-tech robotic creatures "that exhibit life-like personalities, sound and responses." According to the company, these new products will blur the distinction between toy, robot and pet. And of course the start-up is hoping for another billion-dollar success.

Christopher said that Radley's appointments won't necessarily lead to Darth Vader or Luke Skywalker robot-toys anytime soon. But Christopher did say that having Radley on the board bodes well for the venture-backed start-up.

"There's a strong value to his being there," Christopher said. "We're not in official discussions with Lucas right now, but that could potentially happen."

Ugobe today also released the names of some of its advisory team, from a mix of gaming, technology and retail backgrounds: Steve Mayer, a co-founder of Atari Inc. and Activision Inc.; Curtis Sasaki, a vice president at Sun Microsystems Inc. and Phil Schlein, a chief executive and

president of Macy's California for 11 years and current venture partner at US Venture Partners in Menlo Park, Calif.

<http://www.ugobe.com>