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Interview with Bob Nunn, Fulcrum's CEO

By Benjamin F. Kuo
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Bob Nunn is the CEO of Calabasas Hills-based Fulcrum Microsystems. Fulcrum recently announced a round of funding for its clockless semiconductor technology.

BK: Tell me a bit about Fulcrum Microsystems -- what are your products, and how is your technology different from what is currently available?

RRN: Fulcrum has developed a proprietary clockless chip technology that provides high performance devices at very low power levels. Our product plans have not yet been disclosed, but we will be offering a series of standards-based products that will seamlessly integrate with traditional clocked devices.

BK: What kind of applications do your clockless semiconductors benefit most?

RRN: Our clockless technology provides the benefit of high performance at low power levels, in particular for applications that need to minimize power over an extended period of time. An ideal application example is a battery-powered handheld device like a cell phone or organizer. Because these markets are extremely difficult for a start-up to break into, our initial products will focus on applications that primarily capitalize on the performance aspect of the technology (high bandwidth and low latency) where power is important, but the critical factor. With a track record of success in these initial applications, we will be better positioned to crack potential handheld opportunities.

BK: Who are your current investors?

RRN: New Enterprise Associates (NEA), Worldview Technology Partners, Infinity Capital and Palomar Ventures. All four VC's participated in our most recent financing round completed in June.

BK: How long did it take you to raise this round, and how difficult was it?

RRN: We spent approximately six months raising money starting in January. The sharp decline in the stock market during the first quarter, combined with the country going to war in April, made for a very difficult fundraising environment. We were pleased to have multiple VC's vie to lead our round, but this came only after months of presentations and due diligence.

BK: What's the history of your company, and how was it founded?

RRN: Fulcrum was founded in January 2000 by two PhD candidates at Caltech, Andrew Lines and Uri Cummings. Their work in clockless design methodology led to the key patents that enable us to develop products with unique speed/power characteristics. The original seed capital for the company came from friends, family and a venture fund associated with Caltech (The Athenaeum Fund).



BK: How far is your company to product and availability?

RRN: We started the development of our first product about 9 months ago and plan to have first samples available in October of this year. The specific product has not been announced yet.

BK: What's your go to market strategy for your technology?

RRN: Fulcrum has chosen to use our unique design approach to make chips, using the fabless semiconductor model, that offer superior performance characteristics versus traditional clocked chips. We plan to offer a series of devices focused on enterprise computing and networking applications using traditional manufacturing representative and distribution sales channels. In addition, the company has developed key partnerships with industry leaders in the semiconductor, EDA design tools and end-system markets targeted at enabling the eventual industry-wide adoption of the company's patented technology.

BK: Finally, what is your company's biggest challenge over the next year?

RRN: Beginning the sales process. We have spent three years in technology and product development and now is the time to start selling! We have modest revenue goals for '03 and '04, but plan to start ramping the company aggressively in '05-'07.

BK: Thanks!

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