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## Chips & Drivers: Carving a niche into CDs, one company gets ahead

3/26/2001

By **[Matthew French](#)**

The rather unglamorous world of digital storage, combined with the equally unglamorous world of CD burning, might yield a pretty glamorous deal for a small Brighton company.

CD\Works burns CDs en masse for its clients. Until recently, it had operated through a series of contracts and deals with companies and colleges around the area.

Last week, the company announced it had inked a deal with MySpace.com, an online data storage company claiming 6 million users. Through the deal, MySpace users can transmit their data — any data — to CD\Works, who will burn it to a CD for a fee of about \$10.

While there is nothing particularly unusual about this alliance, it does expose CD\Works to millions of users it otherwise may never have seen.

“I started in 1993, right when CD-ROMS were really taking off,” said CD\Works founder and president Jeff Starfield. “I knew then that they weren’t going to go anywhere for a long time, so we started as a service bureau in 1993.”

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At its beginning, the company not only copied the CDs, but also had to ensure that the correct data was installed in the correct order to produce the desired result. The company's first customer was Harvard Business School.

As CD burners became less expensive and more commonplace in the workplace and the home, Starfield said his company switched its focus to change with the times.

Starfield said he knew his company could never survive competing with the large CD-producing warehouses, but neither could it handle the production of original content. Instead, CD\Works found its niche in the middle, running off small and mid-sized runs of CD duplication.

"The larger warehouses run off copies in the range of several tens of thousands to millions of CDs," Starfield said. "If you have an order where you want to run off 100 or even 1,000 copies, that's a pretty small job for a warehouse to do. We, however, fall perfectly into that range."

And suddenly the thought occurred to me: This is how I can preserve my ill-gotten goods from Napster. Well, maybe not so ill-gotten, but certainly my morally tainted version of the Counting Crows and Matchbox 20 singing "Mamas, Don't Let your Babies Grow Up to be Cowboys." I can sign up for up to 300 MB of storage space on MySpace.com, transfer all of my MP3s, and have CD\Works burn me a CD for \$10.

Starfield admits that this is a possibility and he has his multitude of CD burners at the ready, should that scenario occur.

But, he added, his company isn't in the music business.

"Music was something that just never really found its way through our doors," he said. "I don't even see this deal with MySpace making music any significant part of our business. People nowadays generally have their own CD recorders, and PCs are coming equipped with them as a standard now."

One problem with using CD\Works in this way is that CD\Works is basically a Kinkos or a Copy Cop for CDs. They will take a compact disc and record the information on it, but that's it. The company will not convert MP3s into audio files that can be read by an ordinary stereo, but instead will transfer those files onto a CD, as is.

"We are probably going to stay away from music, because there are some really big players out there just for that — like MP3.com or CDNow," Starfield said. "We are going to stick with the business that has done so well for us — on-demand CDs. We really are like a Kinkos or Copy Cop. Even though every business — and many homes — have a copy machine, there is still a need for a place like Kinkos or Copy Cop and we serve the same need."

Starfield said he was happy to have signed the deal with MySpace. His company had inked a very similar deal with HotOffice.com in September... just before HotOffice went under.

“This deal (with MySpace) just took a long time to get going,” said Starfield. “We took a much closer look at them after we got burned late last year.”

But with CD\Works’ services at the fingertips of MySpace’s 6 million users, Starfield should get those burners ready to roll. And don’t be too surprised if a former Napster user or two takes advantage of Starfield’s good fortune.

Or, perhaps more likely given the current state of business, MySpace users may want to have their resumés updated and digitally stored, just in case.

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