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## **Addicted.com born of three Fresnans**

Entrepreneurs thought up, set up Web site to connect people to help.

By Sanford Nax / The Fresno Bee  
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Sensing a business niche, three entrepreneurs from Fresno have created a Web site devoted to helping people fight addictions of all kinds.

Addicted.com is the brainchild of businessman John Shegerian and brothers Christopher and Eric Rawn, all of Fresno. Shegerian is president of Electronic Recyclers International, a Fresno company; Eric Rawn heads BCT Consulting, an Internet Technology firm; and Christopher Rawn is vice president of operations at BCT.

The trio spent the last year and a half and hundreds of thousands of dollars quietly building a Web site that allows people with addictions to interact free of charge with treatment professionals, find articles and news on programs, participate in forums, share videos and testimony, take virtual tours of treatment centers and even determine if they have a problem with an addiction.

"Our motto is, 'Hope is here,' " said Shegerian, adding that viewers can remain anonymous.

Other sites, including Sober.com, compete with Addicted.com for access to the millions of people hooked on drugs, alcohol, sex, shopping, pornography, food, gambling and other vices.

But Shegerian said the resources are not reaching nearly enough people. "There is a huge void in the marketplace for information," he said, adding that the Internet itself is helping fuel some addictions, such as pornography and gambling.

They've been promoting the new Web site through various search engines. Addicted.com is attracting about 300,000 people per month and growing, but the three men believe it can draw many more.

Shegerian said the increasing awareness of addictions among the public and celebrities helped provide the catalyst for starting the site. Well publicized incidents involving Mel Gibson, Britney Spears and the "Hollywoodization" of addictions and treatment will drive more people to get help, he said.

"The volume of people who have addictions is staggering," said Shegerian. "One in three people is affected at least minimally."

Shegerian is a veteran entrepreneur who has helped start several businesses, including Electronic Recyclers, which is the largest processor of electronic waste in the country, and FinancialAid.com, which was sold in 2004 in a deal valued at about \$15 million.

Eric Rawn started BCT consulting 11 years ago when he was 20, and has seen it grow to 17 employees. Rawn is the technical ace behind Addicted.com.

"I can take an idea and integrate it into a cost-effective, streamlined solution," he said.

Shegerian said the idea intrigued him because it provides a socially valuable service, but also can generate a profit through advertising. Pharmaceutical companies and treatment centers are among the businesses that advertise on the site.

"It is unbelievable how many treatment centers there are in the U.S.," said Christopher Rawn, who is chief marketing officer. "There are 500 alone in Malibu, Los Angeles and Newport Beach."

Canterbury Institute, which has centers in New Jersey and Florida, is among those that advertise on Addicted.com. President Stephen Reiter said he likes the breadth of the site, and the fact that it is independent.

"It is really well done and a professional site, which is not easy to find in this industry. You can go on and find a lot of sites that lead to different addiction facilities, but most are owned by one company or the treatment centers," he said.

Marty Brenner is a treatment specialist who is profiled on the site and responds to questions and concerns of viewers. He says Addicted.com is a way for addicts to get help without spending much money. None of the professionals receive compensation for their services.

"I'm there to help people who can't afford help," he said. "This is another avenue for people."

The principals of Addicted.com are not yet taking salaries from the business, and Craig Scharton, chief executive officer of the Central Valley Business Incubator, said making money from online ventures "can be a tricky equation."

Said Scharton: "Just relying on advertising has been very difficult, although [Addicted.com] may have discovered a niche market with a high demand for services."

Eric Rawn said making money off the Internet isn't hard if businesses have the right team, the right goals and the right product.

"Addicted.com is very similar to other online Web sites such as eBay, Google or even Expedia," he said. "Google provides ads of businesses to potential buyers, and Expedia markets airline and hotel services and products to business travelers. None of them actually sell a product or carry inventory. We provide the gateway for an addict to find help in an anonymous 24/7 environment."

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