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He'll give you the dirt on how to prepare site

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Moving dirt costs big money, and a Charlotte tech startup aims to help developers, builders, retailers and others slash spending for readying building sites.

BLUERIDGE Analytics, started in 2003, applies the complex formulas of artificial intelligence in its SITEOPS software. Within hours, the Web-based program can consider literally billions of ways to prepare and lay out a site — far more options than a human engineer could produce and much faster.

Laying out a site, grading and planning for infrastructure such as roads and stormwater drainage is a costly and time-consuming first step in construction. The software, rolled out last spring, will provide the best options, with costs. SITEOPS also can evaluate different sites and check for design flaws. Mike Detwiler, chief executive and one of three founders, said a retailer saved \$600,000 in paving costs after the program found an error.

The concept grew from the frustration of a co-founder, a developer, who had a project run way over budget due to unexpected grading costs.

A potential added savings: Detwiler says the program can shave three to four months off engineering development time. For an example of what that could mean, consider Lowe's stores average nearly \$100,000 a day in sales, based on store count and sales a year ago. Opening a couple weeks earlier translates to big dollars. The home-improvement retailer has signed with BLUERIDGE to do 30 projects this year.

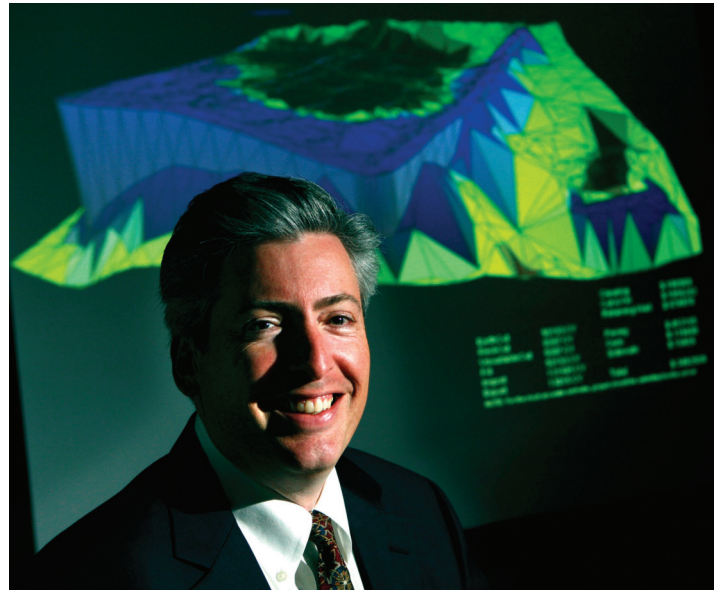
MoneyWise caught up with a very busy Detwiler, who is 49.

Q. You've worked for big companies, Boeing and Bell Labs, came to Charlotte to set up your consulting firm in 1998 and ran a smaller company. What attracted you to BLUERIDGE?

A CEO friend of mine called me one night and told me about this opportunity. I got together (with the other two founders). They started telling me about the idea. I did due diligence of my own. This had never been done before. They needed someone to pull a business plan together, do an investor presentation.

Q. If I'm a business, ready to build, the software could help me select among different sites based on the cost to prepare for building?

Exactly. Right up front, you're trying to figure out 'Can I put the store on this site, with 400 parking spaces, a truck drive in the back for deliveries?' The software can do a lot of what-if. What if I try to put a bigger building on the site? Should I



buy an outparcel? It takes us about six hours to look at 10 billion different possibilities of how you can develop the site and come back with three or four of the best ideas, with a budget and CAD drawing.

Q. How has the economic downturn affected demand?

I think the business is recession proof. People want to save money in any economy.

Q. Your current software handles a single building. Projects include stores and some schools. You are about to roll out a product for multiple buildings, such as shopping centers and apartment complexes. What customers will future versions serve?

We have a pending meeting with the (N.C. Department of Transportation). The basics of the product today ... are the same things we need to do highway design. We're looking at a version for green building.

Q. How do you deal with the stress factor of a startup environment?

This is the most exciting thing I've ever done, and I've had great opportunities. I'm like a kid at Christmas. I've just given up on sleep. It has been perfect for my background, in technology and business. It's all positive stress.

