

# The ENGINE That Could

LAKWOOD-BASED DESIGN FIRM IDEA ENGINE INC IS EQUIPPED WITH AN EAGER LEADER AND AN AGGRESSIVE GROWTH PLAN.

By Sara Lepro

**W**ithin a week after Christopher Peer quit his well-paying corporate job to start his own design firm, he found out his wife was pregnant with their first child.

"The added pressure of 'Boom, we've got to make this work,' was there," says Peer, managing director of Idea Engine Inc. "I was just so eager to do it."

Fortunately, Peer had already laid down a strong foundation for success. For more than a year before quitting his job, he had worked to establish the business — writing a thorough plan and nailing down processes, procedures and business strategies.

When he made the leap from employee to business owner in March 2004, he had his first client secured. Peer worked out of his attic office for awhile, and then in January of 2005, he moved into a small office space on Detroit Road in Lakewood. Four months later, Peer hired his first full-time employee.

Today, there are three full-time employees in addition to Peer, and he hopes to hire between eight and 12 more people in the next two years.

"We've got some pretty aggressive growth plans," Peer says. "I'd like to see Idea Engine double or triple in size between now and the end of '07."

To meet these aggressive goals, Idea Engine has refined its marketing strategy and is in the process of hiring a salesperson.

Though Idea Engine's revenue has not reached the \$1 million mark yet, Peer expects revenues to increase by more than 50 percent in 2006.

Idea Engine focuses on creating brand and marketing strategies, with about half of its projects centered on Web site development. But the firm has the ability to provide clients — which run the gamut from small local businesses to large corporations, such as Canon, one of the firm's biggest accounts — a full range of design services.

Ninety percent of the company's work is done within Northeast Ohio. In the coming years, Peer hopes to branch out and do more work on a national and international level.

The atmosphere of the small, close-knit firm is familial.

"Everybody's input is really critical and we make a lot of group decisions," Peer says. "It's not a hierarchical structure."



From left to right: Jennifer McArthur, Jennifer Seaman, Christopher Peer and Stacy Dabney of Idea Engine Inc.

Samples of the firm's work line the office walls. It's a quiet, but playful atmosphere, evidenced by a dartboard hanging in one corner of the conference area and a platter of small plush toys and stress-reliever gadgets sitting on the large wooden conference table (in between a bowl of mixed nuts and chocolate-covered pretzels).

Peer calls it "professional fun," which reflects his own style as well.

"I was one of the rare people in design school that had an interest in business, too," he says. 