

VUM Group takes participation in Real Software daughter Hotrate.com

*Commercial and strategical partnership with biggest Belgian media company assures
strong position of Hotrate.com in home market*

Antwerp, 20th of January 2000. The VUM Group (The Flemish publishing-company) takes through her multimedia division Sydes NV a participation of 5% in Hotrate.com NV, daughter of the Real Software Group. Hotrate.com exploits among other things the Internet search engine hotrate.com and B2B Application Service Provider hottrade.com. Beside the minority participation, a number of far-reaching commercial collaboration agreements have been made. On the one hand, Sydes will add site reviews to the search engine through Clickx, its weekly Internet magazine. Clickx will also act as a publishing direction for Hotrate.com on the Belgian market. On the other hand, Sydes takes a license on the second-generation search engine hotrate.com, with the objective to integrate it in its web sites. This strategical and commercial partnership with Belgium's biggest media company will assure a strong position on the home market, which will help Hotrate.com to reach the objective of an international breakthrough.

Hotrate.com NV : advanced e-Business service with hottrade.com and hotrate.com

Hotrate.com: second-generation Internet search engine

Hotrate.com is a second-generation Internet search engine that gets better results than traditional search engines, which explains its slogan "Search made relevant". By using complex algorithms and self-learning technology, the 20 most relevant search results are always shown on top of the list of search results, which allows users to find information more quickly.

Hotrate.com is managed by a worldwide team of editors and reviewers, who add sites, assign reviews and ratings to sites, etc. After only 6 weeks, almost 5000 editors and reviewers have registered worldwide in the program. In a short term Hotrate.com wants to become the most visited Belgian Internet site, using advanced marketing techniques like a "referral system" in which editors attract other editors, as well as an "affiliate program" – in which the search engine is integrated in portal sites. Hotrate.com is a marketing instrument to gain quick notoriety and to refer visitors to the e-Commerce initiatives of the company.

Hottrade.com: "Application Service Provider" for the B2B market

Hottrade.com is an Application Service Provider (ASP) that develops advanced e-Commerce services for the B2B and the B2C market. In the spring, a first "buyer-driven" service will be launched, through which companies can place online orders by a quotation system. Other services will surely follow. The objective of hottrade.com is to become a network of vertical B2B portals that are active in a specific sector, and that offer, beside content, e-Commerce services based on the hottrade.com technology. Revenues are generated by the sale of licenses, usage fees and advertising, as well as the development of complex e-Commerce projects and engineering advice to companies.

The vast network of industrial customers of the Real Software Group in Europe and the USA, and the profound knowledge of business operations processes is a strategical advantage for hottrade.com to quickly acquire a strong position in the ASP-market. Real Software strongly

believes in the concept of vertical B2B portals and is negotiating with a number of strategical partners to set up such specialized markets.

Strategical and commercial partnership assures strong position on Belgian market

Through her multimedia daughter Sydes, which invests in new media companies, the VUM Group takes by a capital raise a 5 % participation in Hotrate.com NV. The VUM Group engages itself to promote hotrate.com.

Beside this strategical participation, a number of commercial agreements have been reached. In the first place, Sydes will act as a publishing direction for Hotrate.com on the Belgian market through her daughter N.U.M., which also publishes the successful internet magazine Clickx. They will assure the sale of paid search results, in which companies and webmasters can pay to appear on top in the list of search results. These paid search results are clearly distinguished from the "neutral" search results. They offer excellent targeting possibilities and very high click-through rates – which means an extremely high efficiency.

To attract international publicity, a strategical partner is being searched.

In the second place, Sydes takes a non-exclusive license on the hotrate.com search engine, with the objective to integrate it in her websites. Finally, Clickx will add its own 'content' and 'reviews' of sites to hotrate.com.

Strong win-win assured

Through his partnership with Belgium's biggest media company, hotrate.com assures itself of a strong position on the Belgian home market, which has to be the basis for an international breakthrough. Thanks to the integration of one of the Web's most relevant search engines, the Sydes websites have a supplementary asset to attract visitors. For the Real Software Group, this agreement is a supplementary asset to gain further worldwide exposure through hotrate.com, which has to support the international promotion of her products and services, and strengthen the image of one of Europe's most progressive e-Business partners.

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Real Software was founded in 1986. In 1998, the company recorded a consolidated turnover of BEF 5.2 bn (EUR 129 m) and net profits of BEF 366 m (EUR 9.1 m). For the first six months of 1999, the consolidated turnover was BEF 5058 million (EUR 125.4 million), and the operating profit (EBIT) climbed by 241 % to BEF 786 million (EUR 19.5 million). The group currently employs more than 2600 people.

Real Software offers a comprehensive range of software services, ranging from the development and implementation of its own products, as well as customized projects and outsourcing through to consultancy (including implementation and sale) relating to third-party products. The company exports Belgian technology to countries such as The Netherlands, France, Germany, Ireland, Switzerland, the United States and to the Asia-Pacific region. Real Software customers include companies such as Du Pont de Nemours, GIB, Océ, Johnson & Johnson, Merck Sharp & Dohme, Biogen, Rhône-Poulenc Rorer, Renault, the Paris Metro, TFI, EDF – Electricité de France, SNCF, the Dutch PTT, Nedcar, Philips, Shopi, Goodyear, KBC Bank and Fortis Bank.