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Start-up's new chips to boost data flow

OPTICHRON PRODUCTS TO REDUCE DISTORTION

By Dean Takahashi

Mercury News

A Fremont chip start-up expects to announce today a series of chips that can reduce distortion in electronic products.

Optichron says its Turbolinear chips will be able to diminish distortion in high-speed chips that convert data from analog or real-world signals such as sound into digital form. These chips can help improve the performance of a wide range of products, from chip-testing equipment to medical imaging devices.

The product is the brainchild of Optichron Chief Executive Roy Batruni, who founded the company in 2003. Batruni said he first pondered the problem of signal distortion in college. A chip-industry veteran, Batruni spent 14 years at National Semiconductor.

He and Optichron's other founders met at Avio Digital, a home networking chip start-up. The company was sold to Centillium Communications in 2000. Batruni left amid the communications downturn in 2002 and returned to his idea of solving ``non-linear distortion."''

This kind of distortion has no easily perceptible source or pattern, so filtering it out of an electrical signal isn't easy. As a result, distortion makes it hard to use electrical signals to transmit large amounts of data at a high speed. By removing as much as 90 percent of the distortion through complicated math equations, Optichron's chips make it possible to ship data through the signal at higher speeds.

Morry Marshall, an analyst at Phoenix market researcher Semico Research, said Optichron's solution was ingenious and it solves a problem that has been the bane of engineers for years.

Batruni said Optichron's technology could be used to solve distortion problems in a wide variety of products. But he chose to focus on removing distortion from high-speed data converters, which is about an \$850 million-a-year market. These converters are used in everything from cellular phone antenna stations to medical imaging scanners.

The company has raised \$26 million from venture investors, including US Venture Partners, TL Ventures, Venture Tech Alliance and Battery Ventures. The company expects to produce chips by the end of the year.

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