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Your interests, in 3-D

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Students tired of 2-D social networking now have another option — and another dimension.

The founders of Things Are Common LLC, four Yale graduates, said they aim to revolutionize online social advertising and networking. The company, which received Connecticut Technology Council's Economic Development Corporation of New Haven Recognition Award last month, gave a limited release of The Cubiverse, a site that offers users a Flash-based 3-D Cube that they can cover with their interests, such as furniture, clothing and television shows.

The Cubiverse is largely based on the idea of social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace. But it differs from competitors in that its format is graphics-based, rather than text-based.

“When you build your ‘cube’ on the site you put graphical images inside of it,” cofounder Jason Parks GRD '04 said. “We think users are going to use this because people go to social networking sites in order to express themselves, and what better way to express yourself than through graphics and images?”

The cofounders said they aim to change online advertising by making their content be the advertising.

“When someone goes to the Internet and types in ‘Gap Capri Jeans,’ they are looking for Gap Capri Jeans,” Parks said. “But people only want to be advertised to about certain things. I might fit the demographic of someone who wants jeans, but I’m not there to look for them ... so what our site does is make the content be advertising.”

Parks explained that Facebook is currently making roughly \$1 per user on advertising, because Facebook users don't look to Facebook to fulfill their advertising needs. But since The Cubiverse contains all of its information in one screen shot, Parks said it is different from Facebook, which Parks said is more like a “white pages.”

The idea for the Cubiverse came to cofounders Alex McBurney '04 and Chris Bartley GRD MED '04 about two years ago.

“We were working on an online poker site in Flash and realized it had a lot of advantages over standard html sites,” Bartley said.

In addition to launching a demo of its beta system next Friday, the company is also working on additional features that it has yet to see on other social networking Web sites.

“With our link-sync video system, you can import any video into your cube, and just invite friends into your cube, all while you are chatting with friends,” Parks said. “You can be watching the same video at

the same exact time, and be chatting about it, which is something you can't do at other sites."

According to Bartley, the company is hoping to launch its Web site at Yale in January, but preparation for the event is time intensive for the founders.

"It's difficult," Parks said. "I would say probably we work 10 hours a week per person, but we envision this probably going up to 20 or 30 hours a week."

Connecticut Technology Council — a nonprofit organization that works with more than 300 companies to increase technology in the state — granted the Connecticut Pipeline Innovation awards on Sept. 16. Things Are Common's award was one of the 16 Pipeline Innovation awards given this year.

"Last year we realized that there were a number of companies that we were working with and that we wanted the spotlight on them," said Mark Nemerson, the president of Connecticut Technology Council.

Parks said the novelty of the Web site probably helped them to win this award.

"I think we won this award because it's a really new way of looking at social advertising online," he said. "When you go and get stuff, you do it because you see it on your friends. Peer-to-peer advertising doesn't exist online, or really anywhere yet," Parks said.

The site's other co-founder is Jon Sela '04.