

For Intel, he's a one-man think tank

He's also plugged into Hollywood

By Julie Schmit
USA TODAY

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Avram Miller never went to college, yet he held professorships at universities in Rotterdam and Tel Aviv.

He never got an engineering degree, yet he ran an engineering department at Digital Equipment Corp.

He never studied finance, yet he operates like a venture capitalist to find and bankroll small companies.

Impressed? Consider this. His basic job at Intel — one of the world's most successful companies — is to think.

As director of business development for Intel, which makes chips that run 85% of the world's personal computers, Miller's charge is to envision the future and find ways to make PCs so intricate that no one can afford not to have one. Simply put: "I shape and seed the future," Miller says.

Big job. Fun, too. Miller scours Hollywood to persuade creative minds to develop content for PCs — not just for movie studios and TV networks. He talks and talks to cable, telephone and satellite companies about providing faster connections between home PCs and the Internet. He finds entrepreneurs who are developing cutting-edge multimedia content or software. Then he persuades the suits at Intel to invest millions of dollars, equipment or technical expertise in those ventures.

When Miller is not working, which is rare, he plays the piano and dreams of someday having enough time to design women's clothing.

"Avram is the one who gets up every day and tries to look over the horizon," says Jeffrey Katzenberg, co-founder of movie studio DreamWorks SKG and former chief of Walt Disney studio. When Miller spots a good idea, he uses Intel's clout to



By John Makely, AP

Miller: Intel's director of business development wants everyone to own a PC. He strives to do just that: "I shape and seed the future."

make it happen. Says Carl Bressler, president of Hollywood talent agency Montana Artists: "Avram is an enzyme."

As an enzyme, Miller is speeding the transformation of the PC from a work tool to a life tool. The PC, he says, is a new medium that will change life as much as the TV and the automobile did before it. Someday soon, he says, the PC will be the window through which the masses watch movies, study, visit long-distance with friends, meet people from around the world and explore new places.

Not everybody buys that PC-centric view, of course. A growing number of technology executives, including IBM's Lou Gerstner and Oracle's Larry Ellison, see the reign of PCs coming to an end as the computing world shifts focus from the stand-alone PC to the Inter-

net. Undaunted, Intel keeps nudging the PC industry to move faster and faster to make PCs do more and more.

That's where Miller weighs in. Not everything he has evangelized has worked out. Intel's ProShare product to enable video conferencing via PCs has been slow to take off. Intel also pushed to put all kinds of PC technology into TV set-top boxes that never materialized. But overall, Miller's vision has served Intel well. "His track record is sterling," says Dan Mapes, founder of Synergy Labs, which has a strategic partnership with Intel to develop Internet-based technologies.

In 1992, Intel CEO Andy Grove told Intel executives that the home market was not something to worry about and that little effort should be put in it. He gave Miller the task of developing the possibilities. To-

day, almost half of Intel's Pentium-based PCs find their way into homes, one-third of U.S. homes have PCs and the home market is an official part of Intel's mantra.

Years ago, Miller identified cable companies as key players in connecting home PCs to the Internet — and therefore connecting people to each other. At his urging, Intel forged early development of cable modems, which allow PCs to send and receive information much faster than standard telephone modems. The first cable modems are expected to hit the market later this year. "He deserves much of the credit for their development," says Brian Roberts, president of cable company Comcast.

Even though Miller has spent more than 20 years working with technology, he considers himself more of an artist

than a technical guru. He is an accomplished jazz pianist and likes to reminisce about the jazz scene in San Francisco in the '60s. He lets his salt-and-pepper hair go long. Miller, a sharp dresser, shuns the conservative suit and tie. And his colleagues joke that some of them ought to go shopping with Miller. Those talents enable him to maneuver easily around Intel's newest frontier: Hollywood.

Two years ago, Miller started talking about the need for Intel to mine Hollywood, the home of the creative minds he believes will develop the content that will make the masses want to buy PCs. Even Intel insiders scoffed at that one. "People thought that was a dumb idea," he remembers.

Now, Intel is investing tens of millions of dollars in dozens of small Hollywood ventures. It

has also forged relationships with big Hollywood names, including DreamWorks. It is advising the studio on how to use the Intel architecture to develop content.

In January, Intel announced a partnership with Creative Artists Agency, one of the most powerful Hollywood talent agencies. They plan to build a media lab to show actors, directors and writers what PCs can do to help create stardom for script or actor. The multi-million-dollar lab will open this summer and CAA and Intel have committed to a 50-50 partnership to run it. This week alone, Miller will meet with four media companies.

Says Sandy Climan, executive vice president of MCA: "Avram and Intel are taking computers into parts of our lives that five years ago would have been unimaginable."

About Miller

Age: 51.

Title: Intel corporate vice president and director of business development.

Born: San Francisco

Education: High school.

Family: Divorced; three grown children.

Former jobs: Merchant seaman. Technology researcher for medical centers in California and the Netherlands. Founded medical electronics company in Israel. Group manager of Digital Equipment. President of Franklin Computer.

Hobbies: Plays jazz piano and is fashion buff.

Languages: English, Dutch.

Resides: Palo Alto, Calif.

Boards: Chairman of Plugged-In, a nonprofit organization that supplies computer and multimedia training to low-income people. Serves on the boards of OpCode, a music software company, and Maxis, a game and software company.