X2ENGINE MANAGES TO PUT SC ON THE MAP

Software entrepreneur John Roberts taps UCSC talent for startup
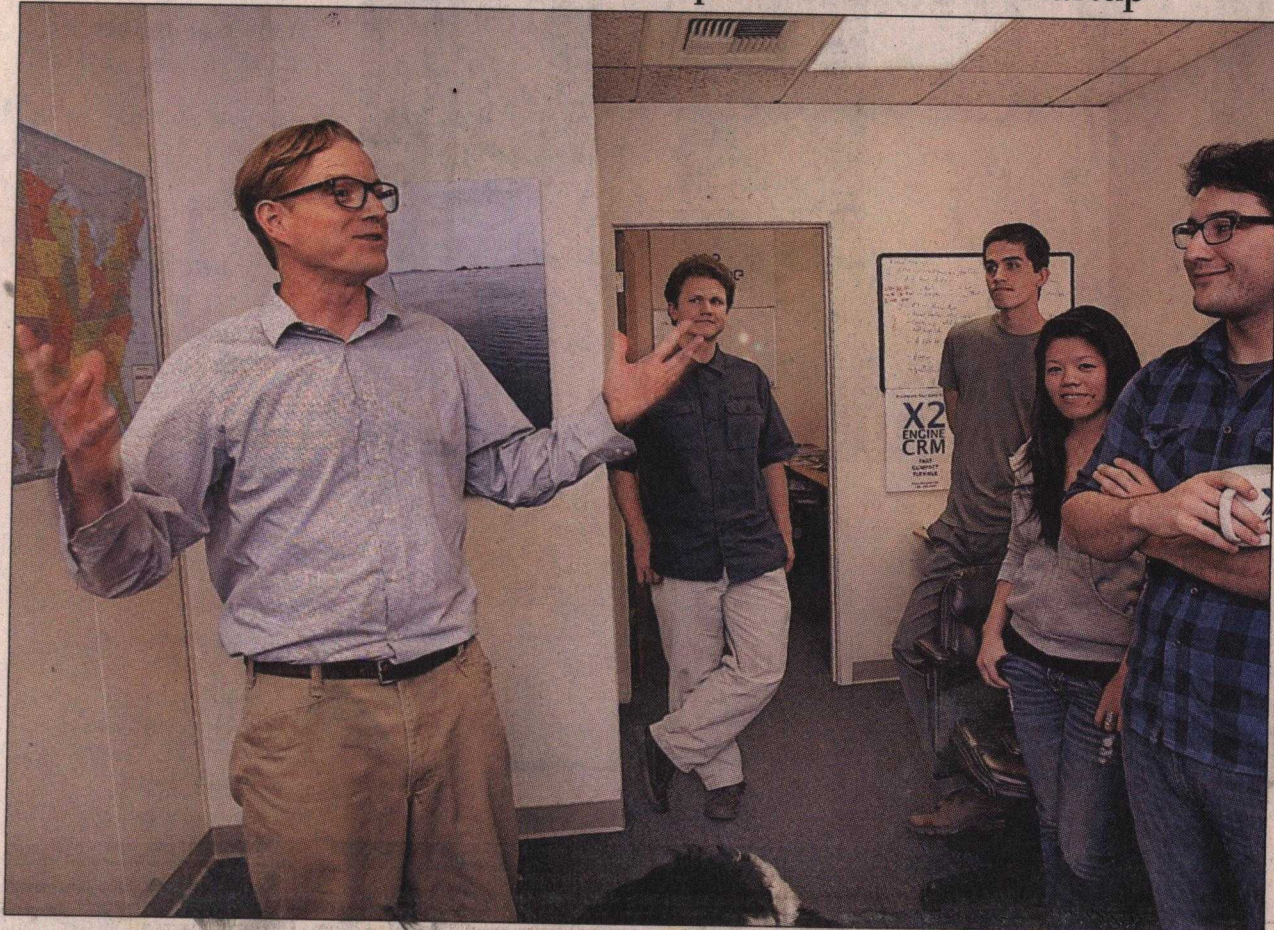
John Roberts, at left, started his company — X2Engine — at Cruzio 3 ½ years ago, and now has six employees working on his customer management software that has more than 9,000 installations in 160 countries. From right to left his employees include Tony Zavala, Sandra Tam, Derek Mueller and Demitria Morgan.

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By Jondi Gumz
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SANTA CRUZ » At his office on Mission Street, John Roberts points to locations on a map where customer management software developed by his startup, X2Engine, is in use: 85 paying clients in 18 countries and 21 states and 9,000-plus installations in 160 countries.

"It's exciting to see it go from Santa Cruz to all over the world," said Roberts, who started X2Engine in 2011 at Cruzio Works downtown and now has six employees, plus faithful mascot Reo, an Australian shepherd.

Roberts, 48, a specialist in customer management software, co-founded

X2ENGINE MEETUP

What: Meetup hosted by X2Engine.com, Santa Cruz software company, with demo of new 4.0 version for customer relations management, Q&A to follow.

When: 6:30 p.m. Wednesday.

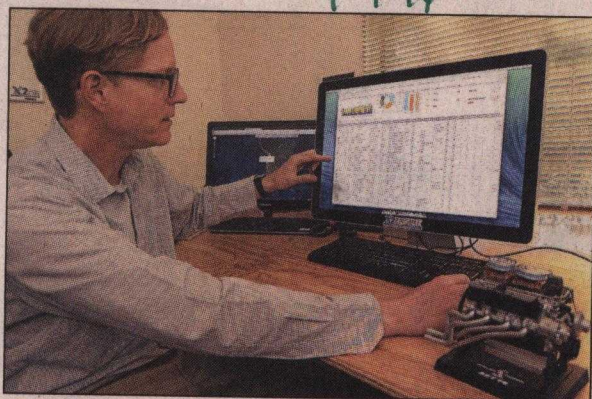**Where:** Cruzio, 877 Cedar St. downtown Santa Cruz.

Cost: Free.

Details: 831-222-5333 or www.meetup.com/X2CRM-User-Group/events/172461722/

SugarCRM in 2004 and ran it for five years. He funded his new venture himself and expects to be "cash-flow positive in a couple months."

He and his team will host a meetup at 6:30 p.m.

John Roberts offers two levels of his X2Engine customer management software. The lower level is free for all to download while the commercial level is $12 per month.

> ## "It's exciting to see it go from Santa Cruz to all over the world."
>
> — *John Roberts, who started X2Engine in 2011*

➕ **On the Net:** To view a video at X2Engine, visit santacruzsentinel.com and click on this story.

X2Engine

today at Cruzio, 877 Cedar St., demonstrating the new 4.0 version of the software to locals.

Comcourse, a Santa Cruz company started in 1994 to help universities take their programs online, beta-tested X2Engine in 2011, switching from Salesforce.com, then became a paying client.

"We were fortunate to be in the same building as X2Engine," said Ben Hoehn of Comcourse, located at 1101 Pacific Ave.

He said Comcourse was "using 10 percent of the Salesforce engine" and looking at licensing fees of $30,000 to $50,000 a year plus another $5,000 to hire an app developer to customize it.

The Comcourse admissions staff, with 12 to 15 local employees plus five working remotely, gave X2Engine good reviews.

Now it's used by the entire Comcourse staff dealing with "upward of 90,000 records," Hoehn said.

There are 60 to 80 employees, working in tech support, course development, student support, school program administration, financial aid and marketing.

Hoehn appreciates being able to customize the flow for each department, crediting Roberts with doing "a good job of making it flexible."

That flexibility has brought X2Engine customers in insurance, car dealers, commercial real estate, financial services and construction, to name a few.

The price: $12 per month per user.

The platinum version, designed for developers, includes consultation and costs $20 per month per user.

Thousands around the world are using the free "open source" version suitable for individuals or small businesses.

The newest user is in Santiago, Chile, product manager Tony Zavala said Tuesday.

"We wear a lot of hats here," said Zavala, a 2013 UC Santa Cruz linguistics major, noting the online community "gives us feedback."

UCSC is a common thread for the small staff.

Dimitri Morgan, working in tech support, is a UCSC engineering grad. Jake Houser, one of Roberts' first hires, is working on an advanced degree at bioinformatics at UCSC.

Roberts compared running a startup to his experience as racing sailboats in Santa Cruz.

"It's not about spending money, it's about paying attention," he said.

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