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## Interview: Mike Paolucci, the founder of space-viewing service, Slooh

by **John Biggs** on October 9, 2009

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In honor of the [LCROSS impact](#) we talked to [Slooh.com](#) founder Mike Paolucci about his telescope system and his mission to bring astronomical content to a wider audience. [Slooh](#) streamed the LCROSS impact live this morning.

### Tell me about Slooh.

There was a time when the only option for star gazing was paying around \$2000 for a backyard telescope. But, [Slooh](#) is offering an innovative way for space enthusiasts to control multi-million dollar telescopes for about 10 cents a minute.

Slooh provides consumers of all ages an unparalleled opportunity to explore space live by taking control of mountaintop telescopes situated throughout the world with their Mac or PC. The Web-based program offers live viewings of outer space, 24-hours a day through powerful telescopes located in Europe, Chile and Australia. The Slooh concept is changing the way we think about space discoveries, as anyone now has the capability to discover a comet! Slooh's patented technology makes celestial images appear like Polaroids during 5 minute "missions." These images can be saved, altered and shared in a person's mission log.

Slooh Kids organizes themed mission packs, which present an experience in a broader context and provides a storytelling component with a beginning, middle and end.

Slooh has been operating since 2004 and sells online and at retail stores (activity books which include time on the telescopes), as of this year at ToysRus, Barnes & Noble, and many others.

### Tell me about yourself.

I'm Mike Paolucci founder of Slooh. Since 1993, I've founded and raised financing for startups in the New York area, including Interactive Imaginations, Inc, and 24/7 Real Media, Inc (TFSM), which was sold to WPP Group for \$650 million in 2007. During that time, I pioneered the interstitial ad and the first demographically targeted internet ad format. In 2002, I founded Slooh.com, a worldwide community of people peering into space together. I hold patent US 7,194,146 B2, a method for computer image processing of telescope-received camera images of celestial objects.

In 2007 I founded StartupExchange, where founders of venture-backed startups can pool equity to diversify their equity holdings. I am currently the CEO of Solvate, a venture backed micro-staffing company based in New York City that makes it easy to delegate busy work to professionals across the country.

Our President is Rick Lamb. Rick has held executive and P/L responsibilities in five technology ventures since 1994, including 24/7 Media and Prism Communications Services. He led raises of \$8.5M in private equity financing and delivered 300+% annual sales growth for diverse businesses in the media, technology and telecom sectors. He has 24 years of senior management effectiveness in Strategic Planning, Operations and IT/Communications management at News Corp and Harper Collins, among others. At News Corp., he was responsible for media technology applications and was instrumental in key acquisitions and product development at Etak, Delphi Internet Services and News Electronic Data. He is a graduate of Mercy College with a degree in Industrial Psychology. Corinne Lamb, Rick and Darien's elder daughter, earned her doctorate in Physics & Astronomy at Johns Hopkins, and has always been a key source of passion for the beauty of space and the night sky in his family.

### What is the goal with Slooh?

Slooh's goal is to give people their own personal "Hubble experience" and build on the passion for space that has been ignited by the Hubble Space Telescope. The company wants to capture people's imagination, and in the process, enhance their appreciation of the environment and space. Through the use of Slooh's technology, we hope to educate and entertain with content that is enriching to a large, varied and appreciative audience.

### Who is your audience?

We have a few targets. They include:

- Every child that goes through a space phase
- Amateur astronomers who can point a high-quality telescope at the coordinates of his choice
- The astro-photographer can produce original work
- The educator who can captivate his students
- The parent who can put new horizons before their children

#### **What can be done to improve our understanding of astronomy?**

Astronomy needs to be made easy. It is intimidating, akin to rocket science. We need to educate consumers that while buying a telescope is a noble endeavor, it is for the most part limited to seeing the moon and a few planets, and otherwise constrained by light pollution, frequent cloud cover and a steep learning curve to see anything more. Beyond that, it is hard to appreciate what you are seeing, unless you have an expert on hand to bring out the wonder and awe of it all.

Using narrative techniques, editorial and user-generated content, Slooh begins to peel away the layers of complexity, physics, chemistry and distance, to make the subject fun as well as interesting. To continue to refine our systems and the resultant experience, such that "live" astronomy becomes a hobby and a joy to our customers, and feeds their interest whereupon they are willing to invest the time to get value out of their own telescope.

#### **It must have been hard to get these feeds. What did you have to do?**

It took over 2 years to get approval for our first installation in the Canary Islands and required the approval of the Spanish government. Through Slooh, we provide access to a caliber of astronomical observatory previously only reachable by professional astronomers. We've traveled the world—to Hawaii, Chile, Australia, in search of the best sites to provided constant coverage of the night sky.

We constructed our own robotic telescope control systems, applied software and hardware technologies to allow for unmanned operations and leveraged the power of the Internet to bring these images to your computer. Live astronomy is indeed hard to execute, and Slooh's commitment puts it at the forefront of the market.

#### **Did you go to the distant telescopes?**

Slooh's founders constructed the first Slooh Observatory as a prototype in the garage before taking it apart and shipping it to Tenerife, for installation on Mt. Teide. We make periodic visits to each observatory, performing maintenance and upgrades, and we are always on the lookout for new situations and locations. We have a man in the Canary Islands as this is being written!

#### **If you could be by any star cluster or planet right now, which one would it be? Which is the prettiest place you've spotted?**

M51, the Whirlpool Galaxy, tens of millions of light years away, breathtaking because of its similarity to our own Milky Way. I'd like to visit a planet there and strike up a conversation.

Co founder Rick likes Eta Carinae – once an "imposter supernova" (in 1843), that is, a supernova that never quite finished – I like that unique and recent impactful history of Eta Carinae. This binary star system varies in luminosity – and that's a point too – the night sky, and all of its galaxies and stellar objects is ever changing – the Universe is ever-expanding – Andromeda and the Milky Way are approaching each other at 100 to 140 kilometers per second and will collide in approx. 2.5 Bn years – look up and see it (actually, Andromeda is occasionally visible with the naked eye, but a Slooh image is better!)

#### **What's your star sign?**

Gemini

#### **Slooh probably isn't useful for astrology, is it?**

To the extent that people may wish to appreciate the position and the nature of objects and constellations, and the seasonal, indeed, the perpetual, motion of the night sky, those who enjoy Astrology might find themselves quite delighted using Slooh's systems, to search and explore the objects that make up the basis for Astrology. Heck, you can even look at a star you may have named after yourself.

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