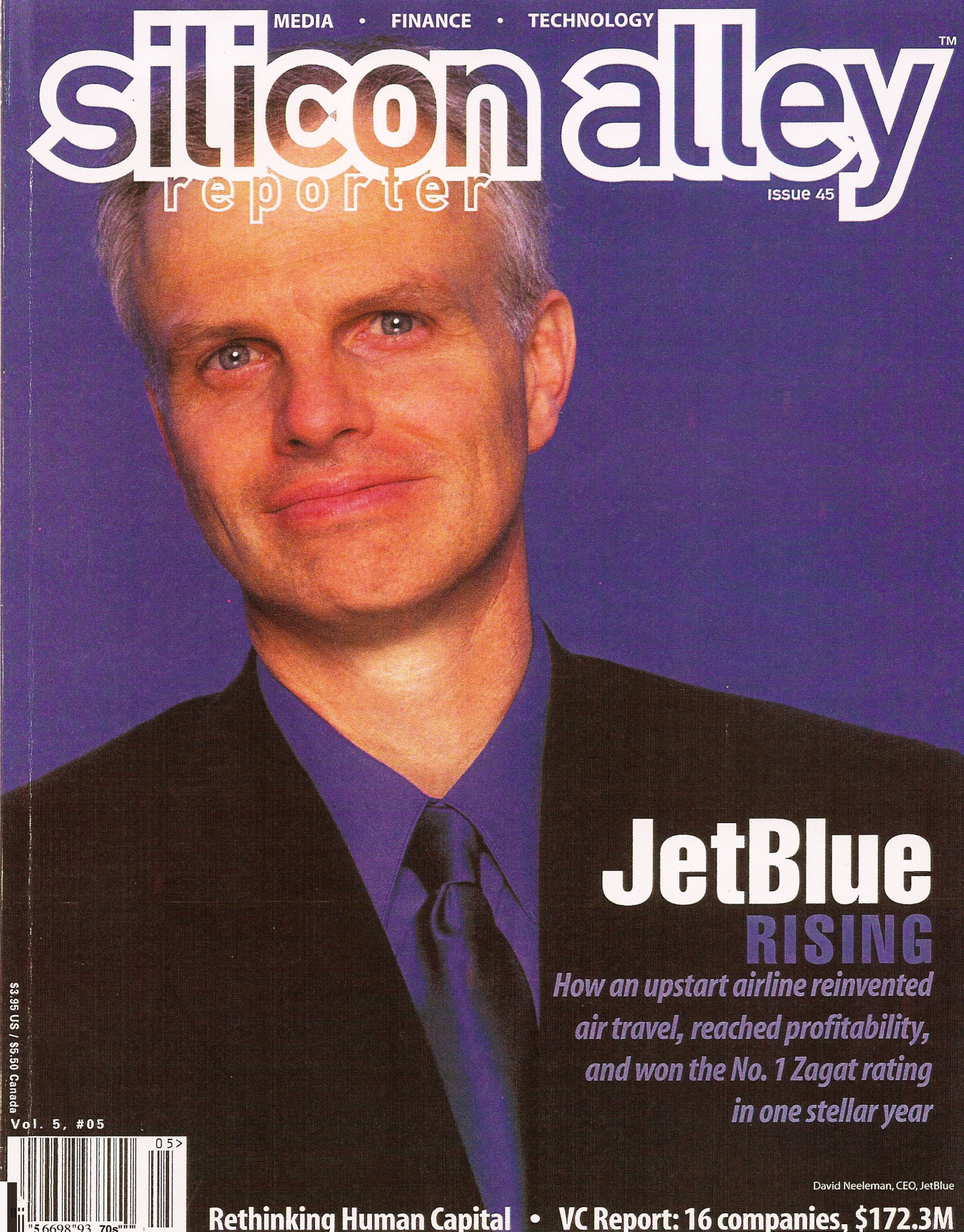


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Issue 45



## JetBlue RISING

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## The Music Will Set You Free

**W**e've all had our rock-star fantasies, selling out Wembley with Bono or shaking booties with Britney on *Saturday Night Live*. Well, inventor, author, and forward-thinker Raymond Kurzweil is bringing us one step closer to a giant airbrushed tour bus. Introducing: Kurzweil's rocking virtual-reality alter ego, Ramona.

The fetching real-time hostess of KurzweilAI.net, who made her stage debut at this year's 11th-annual Technology, Entertainment and Design conference, Ramona is a photorealistic projection that can recreate speech and motions in real time. If Kurzweil sings an off-key version of "White Rabbit" and shakes his hips, for instance, you instantly hear him in Ramona's voice and watch her own leather-clad haunches sway back and forth.

To make their svelte songstress, Ramona's creators took a laser scan of a model's body, and then worked to develop her facial expressions. Wireless magnetic sensors track Kurzweil's movements and recreate them in real-time, while a computer bends his

vocals, rendering them female.

This realism makes for an amusing toy, but Kurzweil sees a huge practical future for virtual reality, even if the buzz it generated in the past few years has ebbed. "In the 21st century, we're going to spend the bulk of our time in virtual reality," Kurzweil says. By the decade's end, he predicts we'll see full-immersion VR, with technology woven into clothing and images written directly to retinas. And by 2029, expect blood-cell-size robots traveling through human brains, communicating wirelessly with neurons.

First, though, VR will revolutionize showbiz. And as Kurzweil's proven with Ramona, people will use it to project different aspects of themselves. "You can be whomever you want," he says. "You've all got these personalities inside of you that don't really fit with your real body and real reality." What that says about Kurzweil's choice to transform himself into a sexed-up, self-proclaimed "chick singer" is anybody's guess. —Wendy Mitchell

**AIN'T NOTHING LIKE THE VIRTUAL THING, BABY:** Rockin' Ramona

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