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Daily Business Review | December 2, 2011

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Hob Knob, a Plantation-based social networking applications developer, is suing Zynga, Facebook's most prominent provider of games, for allegedly stealing its trade secrets.

Zynga, best known for its FarmVille, CityVille and Mafia Wars games, has not been served with the lawsuit, and the San Francisco-based company's spokesman Adam Isserlis said it would have no comment.

The lawsuit comes at a pivotal time for Zynga, which has 232 million active users on Facebook.

The game maker hopes to capitalize on the popularity of social networks and virtual goods in an initial public offering to be priced Dec. 15. Sources told Bloomberg News that the company is seeking a valuation of as high as \$10 billion and plans to raise about \$900 million by selling 10 percent or fewer of its outstanding shares at about \$8 to \$10 apiece.

Zynga has had a contentious relationship with Facebook and signed a five-year agreement last year that lets Facebook capture 30 percent of its revenue.

In search of an alternative method to reach its users, Zynga talked with Hob Knob, which developed a software application that helps Facebook users have face-time experience through Wi-Fi hotspots. Hob Knob software lets users know when others using its app are in the same place.

Before Hob Knob would lay out its strategy, Zynga was required to sign a nondisclosure agreement, said attorney Mark Stein of Higer Lichter & Givner in Aventura, who filed the lawsuit in federal court in Fort Lauderdale. Talks proceeded for about two months, but Zynga ultimately told Hob Knob it was not interested.

On Oct. 11, Zynga made a splash in the gaming world by announcing it would soon launch Project Z, also known as Zynga Direct.

"We have not seen it, but Zynga's own description and all the media descriptions sound virtually identical to the Hob Knob model," Stein said.

Hob Knob immediately contacted Zynga by letter and tried to resolve its concerns.

"There were three letters exchanged over about a two-month period. We weren't able to get to any kind of resolution. They did provide written responses. But all requested that Hob Knob provide additional information," Stein said.

Jason M. Black, Hob Knob's president and chief technical officer, said, "We regret that an industry leader such as Zynga chose to misuse the information that we shared in good faith, and we hope that justice will prevail and we can bring to light Hob Knob's contribution."

The lawsuit filed Nov. 23 was assigned to U.S. District Judge William Dimitrouleas. Hob Knob claims breach of the nondisclosure agreement, misappropriation of trade secrets and fraudulent inducement.

The lawsuit said Hob Knob CEO Gary Elzweig and Black met with Terence Fung, Zynga's takeover specialist as head of corporate development, and Paul Mohme, senior director of corporate development at Zynga, in January and February about "integrating Hob Knob's local-based social networking technology with Zynga's social gaming."

After Zynga signed the nondisclosure agreement in February, Hob Knob provided "extensive and detailed confidential and proprietary technical information about the Hob Knob application, including its business plan, technical documentation and user interface details," the complaint said.

Hob Knob's goal was a joint venture or technology sale, but Zynga decided it wasn't interested.

Hob Knob believes Zynga Direct was developed using its confidential information and is the same as or based on Hob Knob's proprietary material.

The lawsuit seeks compensatory and punitive damages but does not specify any amounts.

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