Energy efficiency is an important issue, and it will only grow in importance as the world begins to feel the effects of inevitable widespread constraints on energy supplies. These constraints must be dealt with in a number of ways: increased use of renewable energy sources; technological advances; and increased efficiency measures. Most traditional lighting technologies are highly inefficient, so energy efficient lighting that users will actually adopt in wide numbers promises to provide significant energy savings. Lighting technologies like compact florescent lamps (CFLs) sacrifice the quality and warmth of light to increase efficiency, but have suffered from low adoption rates because of poor light quality. First generation LEDs also suffer from poor light quality and other problems, and so are at risk of failing to be adopted at rates that make a significant impact on global energy use. But UCSB startup Soraa is in the process of changing the way the world uses LEDs, and indeed, how we use lighting in general. Founded in 2008 and born out of UCSB’s continued innovation in the field of LEDs, Soraa pioneered the field of growing LED crystals on a gallium nitride substrate (Gan on Gan). The crystals that they grew were higher quality, and produced sharper, warmer light. Today Soraa is the world’s leading developer of solid state lighting built on pure gallium nitride substrates.

The company’s philosophy at its foundation was simple: Soraa believed that Gan on Gan LEDs were the future, despite the fact that other manufacturers considered them to be impossible to commercialize. Soraa was right- the Gan on Gan LEDs they developed emit more light per LED material than any other LED, handle more electric current per area than any other LED, and are up to a thousand times purer than any other LED crystal. This means smaller, more efficient bulbs with brighter, warmer light. To put it in Soraa’s words, “Simply Perfect Light.”

While Soraa’s technological foundation is superb, their growth as a company has been equally impressive. Soraa received over $100 million in funding from NEA, Khosla Ventures and NGEN, laying an impressive foundation of capital and resources. In 2010 they brought in Eric Kim, former chief marketing officer of Intel, to join their leadership team as President and CEO, and in February 2012 they launched their first product, the MR16 lamp. With headquarters in Goleta and Freemont, Soraa has created over 250 jobs in the state of California, and that number will only increase as the company grows.

The future looks bright for Soraa. With products already developed and distribution deals in place, they are a shining example of how a technology can go from the university lab to the real world in a short amount of time, create fundamental change in an entire industry, and have a positive impact on the environment all at once.

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