

Commitment to online business key to growth says Peragro CEO

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James Shearer founded Peragro Media almost by accident. It all started with an online diary of his travel experiences across Canada, where he was travelling for six months.

"Throughout the whole process I had a personal website, and I kept an online travel diary. Kind of like a blog before there was really such a thing," says Shearer, whose company is based in North Vancouver.

He kept writing about his experiences, and soon found he had hundreds of pages of content -- and hence, TrailCanada.com was born. The site catering to travelers in Canada is one of three under the Peragro umbrella, in addition to Canada Events and Canada Travel Guide.



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James Shearer of Peragro Media, recent winner of Small Business B.C.'s annual Business Plan Contest, offers tips on building a business online.

Shearer was recently recognized for his intuitive business sense with a first-place award in the startup category in Small Business B.C.'s annual Business Plan Contest.

- What are the challenges of launching a web-based business?

"Initially when it was getting started, a lot of the challenges were dealing with things like Google," says Shearer. Just a simple system update at the search engine giant could mean a drastic drop in hits, resulting in the constant Google monitoring sometimes called the "Google dance."

"My site never got affected particularly, but it was always a concern," he says. Thankfully, these days the site is popular enough that the search engine cold shoulder isn't much of a concern.

Another challenge was getting revenue, which is still a challenge. The site's graphic ads are provided by a partner company in Ontario who represents the website to various advertising agencies -- but being a seasonal business, sometimes ad sales slump.

"You never really know where the next cheque's going to come from," says Shearer.

- What advice would you have for people getting started in their own online business?

"You mean other than 'don't'?" says Shearer with a laugh.

His isn't the kind of business that makes for a get-rich-quick investment, he says, and most investors prefer to put their money in higher stakes and higher rewards ventures, which makes it tough to get going.

So don't expect an immediate windfall or big initial investments -- but if you do choose to get into the business, stick to it.

"If you're really sure on something, commit to it," says Shearer. He's seen plenty of sites that have been put together and maintained in someone's spare time, and never succeed in getting off the ground.

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