

Cross-Canada writing journey leads to online travel guide

Brian Morton

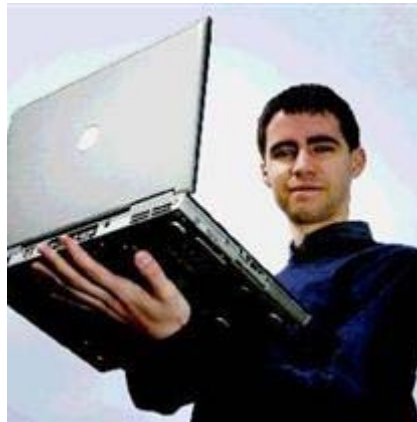
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Six years ago, James Shearer visited Canada from the U.K. and spent five months travelling the country writing a personal travel blog.

That cross-Canada journey changed his life significantly: he met his Canadian wife and emigrated to Canada; and he turned his blog into what he says is the largest online travel guide in Canada.

Today, his home-based Peragro Media (www.peragro.com) operates three individual websites: Trail Canada, Canada Events and Canada Travel Guide. The primary site, Trail Canada [www.trailcanada.com], boasted more than 2.1 million visitors last year, with 15,000 registered members and 10,000 newsletter subscribers.



CREDIT: Stuart Davis, Vancouver Sun

James Shearer, founder and owner of Peragro Media, has produced three travel websites, including Trail Canada, which has more than 8,000 pages of content. Shearer won a Small Business BC start-up award in February.

In February, the 27-year-old Shearer won first place in Small Business BC's business start-up awards for his comprehensive guide.

"The [Trail Canada] site has over 8,000 pages of content," said Shearer in an interview. "We're supported by the Canadian Tourism Commission, every province and territory, and 30 to 40 municipalities."

Shearer, who grew up in his mother's hotel in the Scottish Highlands, started up an online provider for hotels in the U.K. before selling it in 2002 and embarking on his coast-to-coast journey in Canada.

"I travelled across the country and wrote about my travels," the North Vancouver resident recalled. "One thing led to another and now [trailcanada.com] has over 400 destinations and you can book hotels, flights, cars. It's similar to a travel guide, but it's a lot more."

Shearer said Trail Canada, which started up in February 2007, is different from other travel guides because it's entirely online. He said the online editions of printed travel guides are usually smaller because they want people to buy their printed editions.

He said 65 per cent of his market is Canadian, 25 per cent American, and the rest mainly from the U.K., Australia, Mexico, Japan and China. Last month, he said, visitors from 90 countries visited the Trail Canada website. "There were 192,000 individual visitors."

Shearer, who is now working on a new section focusing on eco-tourism, is also developing a plan that will enable small accommodation providers such as B&Bs,

RV sites and campgrounds to advertise on his site for a nominal fee.

Shearer said that he had virtually no start-up costs and now averages between \$8,000 and \$11,000 a month in revenues, mainly through advertising, hotel booking commissions and sponsorships.

He expects revenues will rise to about \$25,000 a month by the end of 2008.

Shearer said there are special challenges for newcomers to Canada starting up a small business.

"The initial challenge was learning a different business system, like tax law and incorporation," he said. "And coming here, I knew no one."

Shearer also took what he called a unique approach.

Instead of trying to outpace the competition, he partnered with provincial and federal tourism boards to publicize areas they were trying to promote.

Shearer's advice?

"Small Business BC is an excellent resource. They hold seminars where you can meet other people.

"And get an accountant who you can rely on."

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PERAGRO MEDIA

Average revenues per month: \$8,000 to \$11,000

Projected monthly revenues for the end of 2008: \$25,000

Number of visitors to Trail Canada website last year: 2.1 million

Number of visitors to Trail Canada website per month: about 190,000

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