

Talking Technology

How to diversify your high technology business

By Steve Burns, Capital News contributor

This week we go inside Expiry Corporation (www.expiry.com) for a closer look at how they have successfully diversified their business.

Rob Roy, CEO and founder of Expiry Corporation, is an energetic leader.



Believe it or not, Roy spent the first 20 years of his business career owning and operating successful construction and development companies.

So how does anyone make a 360 degree career shift into the technology industry?

"I absolutely love this business. I saw an opportunity in the marketplace a few years ago to offer domain registration services at a low cost and I seized the opportunity," Roy said.

"The way I see it, success in any business is really based on how well you treat your customers and team members.

"The basic principles are the same no matter what business you are in."

The company's core business is to offer domain registration services.

You can register your domain name, including .com and .ca, through them.

What I like about their site was that the cost of their services is upfront, the site is easy to use and the registration fees are generally lower than other providers.

The business has grown to over 10,000 customers, 95 per cent of which are based in the U.S., through the creation of an innovative software program.

This software program took a database of four million businesses, translated a company's name into a domain name, verified the name against the central domain registry and, if it was available, mailed a letter to the business letting them know that they could protect the domain name for their company.

"We received a very positive response to our targeted approach," Roy said.

“Although the domain registration business had been deregulated, most entrepreneurs still did not realize that they could register their domain name with us.

“By offering our customers to register their domain name at \$13.50 US per year versus the \$35 US from our competitors, we were able to grow our market share.”

One of the noticeable differences between Expiry and their competitors is that while their competitors have no live customer interaction, Expiry encourages its customers to contact them by phone.

“We shifted our focus to ensure that we put the personal touch back into our business, which has resulted in a significant increase in sales,” Roy said.

“If we had followed the advice of all of the Internet experts out there to streamline our business to the point of eliminating customer interaction, we would have missed the boat.”

Expiry Corporation is always coming up with new ideas and services to enhance a customer’s online experience.

They are diversifying into other areas, including Web hosting, search engine optimization, ranking and maintenance and packaged Web sites.

For instance, for \$29.95 US a year, you can create your own one page Web site using their StepSites Webbuilder—see for yourself at: [www.expiry.com/sub/design/design.stepsites .shtml](http://www.expiry.com/sub/design/design.stepsites.shtml).

Success in this business doesn’t come easy.

It takes a lot of hard work and patience.

“We have chosen to not seek outside investment but to grow our company slowly and profitably,” Roy said.

“While many of our competitors took outside investment, grew too quickly and failed, not seeking outside investment has allowed us to stay focused on our goals.

“We have kept our services simple and valuable. I have used the business principles that I have learned in the construction industry to ensure that our business model is both sustainable and profitable.

“For instance, before we launch a new product or service, we do a lot of test marketing.

“Typically this will mean that we use about 1,000 of our existing customers to test the idea. Based upon their response, we will adjust our approach.”

“We have a number of significant challenges ahead us, including differentiating ourselves from our competitors through superb, personal touch service and reaching the global marketplace with our marketing message.

“With competition increasing, our customers are asking us to do more for them, such as Web site development, which we are now doing.”

“Kelowna has been an awesome location for us. Not only is the city getting better recognized as a technology hub, everyone wants to live here.

“In fact, our two partner companies in Atlanta and San Francisco have commented how fortunate we are to live in such a unique location.

“If I could provide one suggestion to a young technology company, it would be to run their business as a service company first.

“While the technology that you offer is critical, even more critical is to connect with your customers.

“Provide personalized, awesome service and customers will keep coming back.”

Sage advice to all of us from an experienced entrepreneur.

Steve Burns, CA, CMC, CFP, is the president and CEO of the Burns Innovation Group Inc. If you would like your company profiled in the column, contact Steve at 763-4716 or e-mail:

steve@burnsinnovation.com.