

# Talking Technology School library software firm climbs high-tech trail

By Steve Burns, Capital News contributor

It's amazing when you think of it—a software company in Kelowna that dominates the K-12 library automation marketplace.

Today I will take you inside Kelowna Software Ltd. in a Q &A session with company president Braden Messenger.

What is the your vision for the company?

Kelowna Software Ltd. has been developing library automation software since 1985.

The company has evolved from a one-man operation in a home office to the largest developer of school library automation software in Canada.

Our vision for the company is to become the leading provider of Web-based library automation services to K-12 schools.

Our L4U product is used daily by teachers, administrators and librarians in over 1,200 schools representing 25,000 classrooms.

We have grown significantly in each of the last five years. I believe that we are well positioned to capture a significant share of the estimated \$50 billion in K-12 educational technology spending in North America over the next three years.

I got involved in this business while working for my dad as a teenager.

At that time, we owned Kelowna Computers, which we later sold to Northern Computer.

In response to a customer's need, we developed a library software solution and ended up launching a company with the product.

With increased focus we managed to build the company from the ground up.



Braden Messenger, president of Kelowna Software Ltd.  
Photo Gordon Bazzana

In terms of becoming a technology entrepreneur, Messenger was involved from the very beginning. Why?

I am not sure that I ever made the conscious choice to become a technology entrepreneur—it just happened to be that our business evolved and demanded an understanding of the ever evolving world of technology.

Having said that, I love the technology field and, in particular, the library market. Although libraries may sound boring to some, they are far from it.

We have customers around the world relying on our software to help children learn.

That is where I get my greatest thrill, knowing that we have played a part in educating the next generation.

What are your thoughts about being located in Kelowna?

All our staff work extremely hard and we wish to recognize that through various activities and events.

Kelowna offers a beautiful and versatile playground to take advantage of. We do our best to promote a work to live attitude and Kelowna is the perfect location to attract and retain good employees.

How do you help children learn?

Our solution is designed to not only help the child find the resource that they are searching for but learn while doing it.

For example, if they are not sure how to spell a particular word, we have a phonetic search option.

Our 'sounds like' feature will look for a number of book titles or subjects that sound like what they have entered.

This increases the likelihood of the child finding the resource that they are after and helps them to understand the correct spelling of what they have entered.

When we automate a library, we inevitably find that the school is happier because their resources are managed more efficiently and effectively.

The students are happier because they have increased access to the available resources with a minimal search effort.

The teachers are happier because not only do they have increased selection and availability but our product provides them with a resource to match the learning objectives of the student to the resources available.

The parents are happier because the learning experience for their child has been significantly enhanced.

We are always challenged with making sure that our product is the best available in the marketplace.

We are constantly improving the program to achieve better outcomes with librarians, students, teachers and parents.

We have been working on a number of exciting products, which will be released in 2003.

These products will help enhance our existing product line as well as launch us

What advice would you give to technology entrepreneurs?

1) Stick to what you know best.

I would say to stay focused on the vertical market that you know best. If you stray too much, from what has made you successful, you will lose focus and hurt your company.

2) Focus on your customer groups.

Realize that with any software product, you have multiple customer groups to serve.

In our case, we serve students, teachers, librarians and principals.

If we lose sight of any one of these important customer groups, we will have missed the opportunity to better meet their needs.

3) Manage sales cycles.

Be careful to keep your eye on the sales cycle in your marketplace.

In our case, the sales cycle can be quite long, so we have a plan and strategy for dealing with how decisions are made.

If you understand the decision making process inside out, your chances of success will be that much higher.

So, the next time you read a book to your children or pass a group of kids walking to school with a load of library books—think of Kelowna Software.

They are behind the scenes helping to make your child's learning resources available when they need them most.

Next Week: Inside MicroSurvey Software.

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