

## [U.S. expansion lets Westbank business reach potential](#)

By Steve Burns, Capital News contributor

What is one of the most popular television program today? Crime Scene Investigation or CSI has been an unexpected hit. Everyone seems to be attracted to the intrigue of solving crimes using innovative forensic tools.

The next time you are watching CSI Las Vegas or CSI Miami, watch closely—you could see MicroSurvey's Crime Scene Mapping software being used to solve a crime.

MicroSurvey Software, Inc., located in Westbank, was formed in 1992. The company specializes in providing software and data collection solutions for accident and crime scene reconstruction specialists, land surveyors and civil engineers.

MicroSurvey's MapScenes product provides a unique 3D software product capable of fully automating scene measurement.

In my years of experience in the high technology industry, I have found software entrepreneurs to have a real passion for what they do. MicroSurvey president and CEO Darcy Detlor shares this passion. "I wouldn't want to be doing anything else. I enjoy building this business with my team and with our customers. There is something thrilling about creating an innovative product that your customers love."

The firm has received a number of awards for business excellence as well as product excellence. The company has made the prestigious Profit 100 Fastest Growing Companies in Canada list again this year and was recently nominated for a B.C. Exporters Award.

With five year sales growth of 1,952 per cent, MicroSurvey Software, Inc. rose in the annual Profit Magazine Top 100 Fastest Growing Companies in Canada to 40th position in 2001 from 69th spot in 2000. MicroSurvey ranked sixth out of B.C.-based companies in the list.

MicroSurvey introduced several products in 2001, which increased sales. A new accident reconstruction data collection system was purchased by many U.S. states and federal agencies, including the bomb division of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. MicroSurvey's products were used by the ATF at the Salt Lake City Olympics for mapping sensitive high security areas.

A new line of surveying data collection software was released in 2001 called MicroSurvey FieldGenius. This advanced mapping system fits in the palm of your hand, but is capable of creating diagrams accurate to the nearest millimeter. Combining FieldGenius with MicroSurvey's desktop solutions created a world class system that is taking on all competition in the U.S. More than 50 per cent of MicroSurvey's 2001 revenues were generated south of the border and the management expects that to continue.

MicroSurvey also has a line of data collection tools for crime scene professionals, named the Evidence Recorder.

You might be surprised to know that MicroSurvey's products are being used in some very high profile crimes. Detlor commented: "Two police forces in Washington, DC, responsible for investigating the snipers, were using our software. Also, our software was used in the Chandra Levy crime scene investigation."

It's intriguing to know what drives the technology entrepreneur to success. "I find our business very interesting. Our market moves very fast and we need to stay on top of the changing market conditions to be several steps ahead of our competition."

It may seem odd that one of Canada's fastest growing companies would chose Westbank as its location but Detlor has a different viewpoint. "I see no reason why someone can't create the company that they want and live exactly where they want. My wife Julie and I love the freedom that the Okanagan brings us."

Differentiating MicroSurvey Software in a very competitive marketplace continues to be one of the more challenging aspects of running the company. "I think that our innovative software solutions coupled with our outstanding technical support continues to differentiate us in the marketplace."

On the technical support side, Detlor is very proud of his team's accomplishments "Being a smaller company we are able to be more responsive to our customers. Our technical support is outstanding. We have been recognized by a leading industry magazine, POB, where we have placed first in the customer service category for the past two years running."

Detlor's long term vision is for MicroSurvey to become the No. 1 data collection and software company for surveying and forensic mapping.

Challenging would be the word to describe the past year. "We have needed to adapt our market approach to the changes in consumer confidence taking place in the U.S., which is our major market. During the last six months, things have slowed down, as consumer confidence in the U.S. has been at its lowest since 1991. Things are starting to pick up again. Although consumer confidence has no impact on the forensic market, after Sept. 11, money was channeled into terrorist protection. They have only recently started to put money back into forensics."

Detlor is excited about its new global positioning satellite project. He is working on integration of windows CE handheld devices with high end GPS systems. "We see a great market opportunity here that will be targeted to surveyors and police."

As Detlor looks back over the growth of his business, he thinks that the decisions to diversify his company has made all of the difference, "Diversifying into the forensic market was absolutely a great decision. It enabled us to take our core product and leverage this into a new market—without a lot of extra work. Also, diversifying into the data collection market on the CE platform with our purchased of a company in the U.S., has enabled us to be ahead of our competition. Last month, our data collection products made up 50 per cent of our revenues."

Detlor has two pieces of advice for entrepreneurs.

Keep a narrow focus initially: "What you create needs to be focused. Learn everything about your niche. Create deep expertise in the area and then expand into similar areas. We were able to diversify because it was only 10 per cent more work to create a completely new product. We really were not straying very far from our area of expertise."

Recognize what you are not good at: "You can't possibly do everything. You need to find specialists who can help you and be willing to learn from them."

It is amazing to think that a little software company in Westbank created the product that is used by forensic professionals around the world to solve real crimes. That is one thing Profit 100 just can't measure.

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