

Designing a future 🚗

Nicholas MacLeod, 19, of Charlottetown earns student entrepreneur award for his work with the information technology services company he started when he was just 13

BY MARY MACKAY

The Guardian / February 22, 2010

When it comes to entrepreneurial effort, Nicholas MacLeod has it aced.

Advancing Canada Entrepreneurship (A.C.E.) and CIBC have just named this Charlottetown go-getter the Student Entrepreneur Prince Edward Island Champion for 2010.

He has owned and operated Future Web Design, a company that provides information technology (IT) services with a keen focus on customer care, for the past six years.

And he is only 19.

Fortunately for MacLeod, webpage design is one of the few entrepreneurial enterprises where his age didn't really matter.

"It's one of the things (where they think) the younger generation is more into the computer age and things like that. I think they kind of embraced the fact that I was so young and able to do it . . .," he says, smiling.

MacLeod was just six when his uncle, who is also in the IT business, bought him his first computer.

"I was very interested in computers and loved to play around with them and things like that. As I got older that followed me and I was into a little bit application development in junior high (at Queen Charlotte in Charlottetown). They had the IT courses and things like that so I was doing a little bit of programming," he says.

And so when other kids his age were doing odd jobs like shoveling driveways, raking leaves or babysitting to make a bit of extra cash, Nicholas was headlong into the intricacies of webpage design.

He scored his first client, an off-Island Irish wolfhound breeder who is a family friend, when he was just 13.

She liked his web work so much she spread the word within the dog breeder community which resulted in more clients.

So he formed his company, Future Wed Design, and opened for online business.

He now has more than 30 clients, ranging from non-profit groups, businesses of all types and commercial e-commerce websites, which he hosts on designated server space.

"Everybody needs to have a website these days. It comes back to being always open," MacLeod says.

"(People) can get information about your company without (you) having to be right there to answer the phone. They can go (online) at their leisure. It's kind of a one-way (connection). You're not necessarily marketing (to) them. You're not pushing them like telemarketers or things like that. They're taking the initiative and going and looking around and I think it gives people more confidence."

On top of having a business to which he devotes about 40 hours weekly, MacLeod is also in his second year of business administration at UPEI, with a minor in business information technology.

"The business is now my sole source of income so it's my full-time job. So far through my two years in the (School of Business) program I've been able to cover all my tuition and expenses, so no student loans. It would be good to be able to graduate without any student debt," he says.

Although MacLeod can work virtually from anywhere in the world with an Internet connection, he does have an office on campus in the School of Business.

This is due to an Innovation P.E.I. initiative called the UPEI Launch Pad which provides a fully functional and operational business location for actively enrolled UPEI students.

"I still love it today," he says of his website work.

"Nothing makes me happier than sitting down and making a website. It's fun to be able to create something, so it appeals to the creative side, and to see the end product when they're really happy and getting visitors and people are commenting on their website."

Now that he has been recognized on a provincial level, MacLeod moves on to the 2010 A.C.E. Regional Exposition in Halifax, N.S., on Feb. 26.

The final round of competition is the 2010 A.C.E. National Exposition in Calgary, Alta., on May 12.

"(The best thing about owning your own business is) the reward of being able to see something you've started at the very beginning. You've created that, and you can see it right to the very end," MacLeod says.

"You're very much involved with every single person who comes through the door. I have a personal relationship with most clients. They call up and say, 'Oh how are you? What's new?' Things like that. It's interesting to be able to make that connection and not just the person being another number."

At a glance

Fast facts

Advancing Canada Entrepreneurship (A.C.E.) is a national charitable organization that is teaching and igniting young Canadians to create brighter futures for themselves and their communities.

Working in partnership with business and higher education, A.C.E. delivers experience-based programming that allows university and college students to move beyond the traditional path of post-secondary education. These students are challenged to address economic, social and environmental issues in their own entrepreneurial ventures and in their communities.

A.C.E. currently delivers two programs on over 50 university and college campuses across Canada with the involvement of over 1,700 student leaders and student entrepreneurs.

(Source:www.acecanada.ca)