

Cybernauts

Nova Scotia's netizens are a new breed of global entrepreneurs, consultants, and Web site designers

by CAROL JOHNSTONE, KRISTIN ANDREWS and MICHAEL GURSTEIN

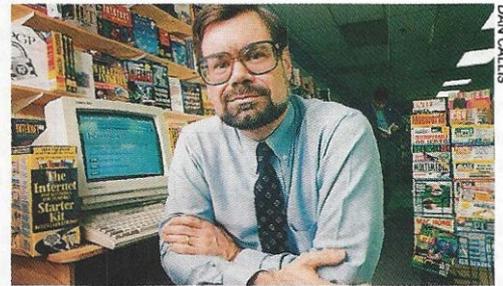
Modern folklore says you can work on the "Net" and live where you want and make your fortune with just with a few keystrokes. Some Nova Scotian IT entrepreneurs are living this dream.

Roswell James is an Internet pioneer — one of the first retailers on the Internet, and possibly the very first on-line bookstore. He was recently invited to Singapore to give a talk on doing business over the World Wide Web and has been featured in the *Economist*.

Sitting over coffee at Roswell Computer Bookstore at the foot of historic Citadel Hill in downtown Halifax, James says that only about 5% of his business comes directly from sales made on the Net. "It's not really a direct sales tool. It is an information tool," he says.

However, his investment has paid off in indirect benefits. "The year we went on the Internet we doubled our sales every month for 12 consecutive months. I've never seen an increase of that magnitude before," he says.

Selling computer books has turned out to be an ideal career for James. "I was a programmer originally. I found that sitting around the computer screen was boring. Challenging, but it wasn't fun. The day I start-



DAN CALLIS

Roswell James: "We doubled our sales every month."

ed selling computer books to the general public, I enjoyed going to work every day." He regularly ships to places as far away as Brazil, Switzerland, and New Zealand, although most of his sales are in Atlantic Canada.

GRACEFUL COLLISION

Cape Breton Island is several hours drive and a causeway away from Roswell Computer Books, but perhaps the more important link these days is the "pipe." Strung along the edge of the causeway, this is the Island's Internet link to the world, and the key to a growing number of small businesses.

Sydney's Chatsubo Design is one young Cape Breton company carving a place in the New Economy. This three-person operation develops sites on the World Wide Web for clients both down the street and across the country.

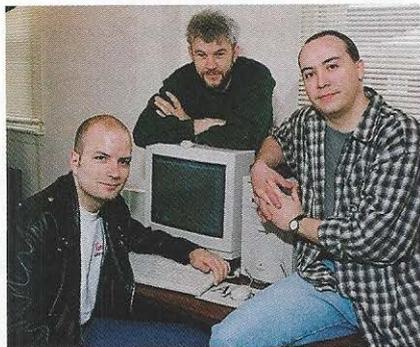


Chatsubo is located on the second floor of a rambling, mustard-coloured house in the historic North End of Sydney. The office window looks out on buildings dating from the late 18th century, including two stone churches flanked by boxy white and grey cottages in the leafy shade of massive oaks and maples. Chatsubo's choice of office space demonstrates, as much as their Web sites, the graceful collision of history with the future.

Cape Breton has managed to preserve a lot of what was great about the old world: the music, the culture, the language, the architecture. At the same time, it is using modern technology to reach far beyond historic views, across the world, and into the New Economy.

"It really doesn't matter where our clients are," says John Hussey, Chatsubo founder and president. Using their computer, they can see the site as it comes together." So developing a Web site for a Calgary, Alberta-based environmental umbrella organization wasn't any more difficult than producing Web pages for the local musicians.

Hussey, a 26-year-old philosophy major who spent his post-university years designing sets and lights for theatre, sees the promotion of Cape Breton's cultural industries as one of the



John Hussey (left) and his Chatsubo team: promoting local culture.

OWEN FITZGERALD



DAN CALLIS

Cultivating apples and clients: Cindy Trudel helps companies implement leading-edge technology.

great possibilities for the new information technologies. The team launched a Web site for an on-line Gaelic newspaper *Am Bràighe*, published out of Mabou, a village on the west coast of the Island known mostly for raucous weekly square dances and the grace of yellow hills at harvest time rolling down to Mabou Harbour.

The *Am Bràighe* Web site generates revenue for local businesses specializing in traditional music and crafts by including both the text of the paper and an online store where visitors can purchase books and tapes in the Gaelic language which, until now, were only available in Cape Breton.

"I think Cape Breton has a lot to offer a global market," Hussey says. "Our music and culture is world-famous, and the Internet is the best way there is of increasing its profile."

GROWING APPLES & COMPANIES

Cindy Trudel lives on 13 acres of forested land, five acres of which is a working apple orchard cultivated by a local farmer. Outside Trudel's window and across the Gaspereau Valley about 10

miles away, whitecaps chum past the red cliffs of Cape Blomidon into the Bay of Fundy. It's an inspiring view, but like John Hussey, Cindy Trudel's reach goes far beyond the horizon. Her modern and spacious three-story home is the base of operations for an international consulting business.

Trudel now has more than 20 clients locally and internationally based from Manchester, England, to Brisbane, Australia. She met one client on the Internet through an ISO (International Standards Organization) discussion group. She targets small to medium-sized companies that can't afford to have computer staff around full-time, but need to implement leading edge technology to maintain their competitive advantage.

As she sits scratching behind the ears of Baby Louise, one of her three miniature, long-haired dachshunds, Trudel says, "Having been an employee and a contractor, I much prefer being a contractor. How many other people get to sit at home with a puppy on their lap, a cup of tea beside them, and do what they want to do?" ■