

## **Company Profile 002 – Pixelera.com Inc.**

Brothers Stephen and Michael Foley were awarded the 2000 Business Development Bank of Canada's Young Entrepreneur of the Year award for the Eastern and Northern Ontario region in recognition of the innovative Web-based data management work done by their company, Ottawa-based Pixelera.com Inc.

What brought Stephen, President and CEO, and Michael, Vice President and Creative Director, to this achievement is their determination, dedication to being their own bosses, and commitment to doing jobs well.

### **The company**

Pixelera.com Inc. is an Internet-based software and services company. The name was carefully chosen because 'pixels' on the screen are part of everything the company does and the word 'era' reflects the current revolution in Web-based communication the entrepreneurial brothers feel high tech businesses face. "We wanted a name that really identified us and showed our creativity," says Michael.

### **The software**

Pixelera has developed a software suite called "OntheFly". The software enables organizations to collect data, create reports and publish information through a Web browser. OntheFly technology improves business processes including human resources, membership administration, content management, procurement, sales and collaboration.

The OntheFly system is accessible through an individual's Web browser accessible from anywhere. Users simply type in a URL address and log on. Once the appropriate forms are filled out, the Web site features various options that allow clients to manage their data easily and efficiently. The main goal of OntheFly is to assist clients properly manage their data -- to move, store and be able to quickly access it from a Web browser. Pixelera tools simplify the work involved in making effective use of Web sites and let clients get on with running their businesses.

### **Making it as entrepreneurs**

"We were always entrepreneurs at heart," explains Michael. Their first joint venture, trading sports cards during the sports card boom in the late 1980s and early '90s helped put them both through school. The entrepreneurial spirit runs at least three generations deep in the Foley family. Their father, David, still runs a general store in the Miramichi region of New Brunswick. Their paternal grandfather, Hollis Foley, ran a successful meat packing business during the 1960s and '70s.

Stephen Foley began his career in 1996 as an Ottawa-based Internet consultant to clients in both the public and private sectors after graduating from Dalhousie University in Halifax with a degree in commerce.

Michael Foley worked for a number of firms in New Brunswick after graduating from Loyalist College in Belleville with an advertising diploma. After working for a print company, an advertising agency and a catalogue shop, he started a position with pulp and paper giant International Paper in Maine to participate in a Web-based training program. He helped to set up systems and illustrate online manuals in various locations across Canada and the United States.

Stephen was the one to suggest in 1997 that by combining their business savvy and creative and technical talent they could create a successful entrepreneurial venture in Silicon Valley North by developing technology to improve and streamline new and existing business processes.

Until January 2000 the Foley brothers ran Gateway Media Productions Inc., the precursor of Pixelera. In 1998, they began developing a New Media arm, through which they create brand loyalty online by supporting and supplementing clients' television programs and driving traffic from the television to the Web. In May 1999, Sound Venture Productions, an Ottawa-based broadcast developer and producer involved with both television and Web site production became a partner of New Media partner. One of their major New Media projects is Jewel on the Hill, a history of the parliament buildings in Ottawa.

### **How they split up the running of the company:**

Stephen manages the business affairs of the company, business development. Pixelera functions on a contract basis. Stephen meets with clients to define their requirements. and then writes proposals for work that will meet those requirements Write proposals to win contracts. I provide leadership and guidance to the technical team.

### **What do you like best about your work?**

Both brothers enjoy the independence they gain by being their own bosses. Stephen also enjoys meeting interesting people and travelling. "I am directly responsible for making sure our company survives," adds Michael, "I enjoy the creative freedom that my job allows me. I also enjoy the feeling of a job well done."

### **What is difficult about your work?**

The job juggling involved in running a small company presents some challenges to Stephen finds, that "I often multi-task and sometimes certain elements of my day-to-day activity may fall behind." Michael is more concerned with the difficulties of "managing people and their little nuances. Managing my workload can sometimes be difficult because I am responsible for people having work to do."

### **How long have you been using computers and software?**

Both Michael and Stephen first discovered computers through video games they played as children and both taught themselves much of what they know about computers. Although Michael learned basic programming in high school, developing computer skills was less a matter of conscious drive, more just a part of day-to-day life.

### **What advice would you give someone who is considering entering your field?**

#### **As an Entrepreneur?**

"Desire and patience" recommends Michael, "becoming an entrepreneur involves stress, long hours, hard work, and risk but the rewards can be immeasurable. While there are a lucky few who become very successful overnight, most businesses take years to become established." Stephen agrees, "Be patient and persistent. Chase your dream until it becomes a reality. Don't get to stressed out when things don't seem to be falling into place."

#### **As an Internet Programmer?**

Much the same goes for being a programmer. "Patience is probably the best quality you can have in the IT world," says Michael. "Most people don't have the patience to stick to a game(career) plan and that can be reflected in the jumping from job-to-job you see on most resumes. I like to hire people who're committed to their job. The other great quality is initiative. Be sure to look for opportunities to improve or add value to the job you're doing. Don't just do the minimum. Take initiative and become invaluable. Stephen adds "Continue updating your skills. The marketplace is tight and you must be able to differentiate yourself from the others."

### **What should aspiring entrepreneurs know about the job and what it takes to get there?**

Stephen suggests that "Being an entrepreneur requires you to dedicate yourself to your job, to be passionate and not mind the long hours and low pay! To build a business, you need a solid reputation and you need to network as much as possible."

### **The future**

Both Stephen and Michael look forward to creating another new business, perhaps several, over the next few years, with all the challenges and skills that entails.

Asked about future developments in software and information technology, Stephen envisions a breakthrough in Internet speed. "Speed will allow us to offer so many more services via the Web. Speed will ultimately allow us to communicate globally - in real time."

Michael on the other hand expects "to see computers drastically change over the next 10 years. While most advances have centered on the speed and efficiency of the computer, not much has been done to improve how we use them. With wireless technology the following will probably happen:

- the monitor will become a wearable device.
- the keyboard and mouse will become obsolete with artificial intelligence and Voice recognition software
- the box will be no bigger than a cassette tape case making the computer easier to use, transport and network.

### **How will new developments impact your work? Your lifestyle?**

Both Stephen and Michael foresee a future of more possibilities. Stephen speaks of the greater innovation made possible by greater speed and Michael looks forward to the flexibility of having smaller computers, which "will allow us to work virtually anywhere and allow us to spend more time doing the things we want to concentrate on."