

ZeddComm Inc.

- St. John's, Newfoundland ■ Emad Rizkalla, President and CEO
- Founded company at age 23 (1992) ■ Employees: 50 ■ Exporting since 1994
- Export sales: 55% ■ Export market: United States

Being young and from Newfoundland might seem like formidable challenges on top of the many already associated with growing an IT business. Not so for Emad Rizkalla, who, with two fellow engineering students, created ZeddComm Inc. before he was even out of university. In fact Rizkalla attributes his company's initial export success in the United States partly to his very youth and Newfoundland heritage. And there's no questioning that export success. Making PROFIT magazine's "Top 100" list of fastest-growing companies in Canada in 2002 and 2000, ZeddComm over the past five years has boasted 1,283% growth – half from its U.S. exports.

Student Project becomes Big Business

ZeddComm started as a university project that Rizkalla and two other engineering students intended to develop as a product and sell to a local company. "We wanted to move to Vancouver and get jobs." But six months into product

development, the three students realized they enjoyed what they were doing as entrepreneurs, and decided to keep going with ZeddComm – and stay in St. John's.

"We had no clue how to run a business," Rizkalla admits. "But we did know we had to eat, so

In fact, when he started his business, his youth and inexperience were, Rizkalla believes, two of his biggest advantages. "When you're young, you believe passionately in yourself and in your products. That sort of energy drives you; you don't feel there are any barriers. You don't know it might be considered presumptuous to call Baltimore's prestigious Johns Hopkins Hospital and ask them to be your first customer. But I'm glad I did. It worked!"

The Niche: Customized Service

Another key to ZeddComm's success in a market with no end of competitors has been its ability to target the right type of customer for its services. "Our edge is that we offer premium-quality service for projects under

ZeddComm is ... an award-winning IT consulting firm with headquarters atop St. John's' historic Signal Hill. ZeddComm specializes in the design, development and implementation of custom e-learning solutions and Web-based business applications for Fortune 500 corporations, educational institutions and vari-

"When you start a business in your basement and you need a source of income, it's not about a business plan; it's about doing whatever you can to survive while you nurture your vision."

ous governments. Its impressive portfolio of export clients includes Sony, Pfizer, Cisco Systems and Microsoft.



we raised money doing whatever we could – taking part-time jobs, selling computers, consulting."

Being from The Rock Gives Edge

Contrary to expectation, Rizkalla believes that being young and from Newfoundland has contributed to his company's edge in the U.S. market. "Our customers don't want a lot of jargon or spin. And that fits with Newfoundlanders' innate 'down-to-earth' perspective. We're unpretentious and straight-shooting. We're focused on delivering solutions that make a tangible difference to our clients. And," he adds, "Americans are much more willing to take risks. So it's a ripe, fertile place for young exporters, who by nature are risk-takers."

\$2 million. We spend a lot of time learning about our clients so that we can custom design our solutions for them. The multinational consultants struggle to provide that level of customized service, and the smaller competitors don't have the depth of experience or systems to do the right job. We have an excellent niche."

Tel.: (709) 739-9000
E-mail: contact@zeddcomm.com
Web site: www.zeddcomm.com

Tell Us About Us Inc.

- Winnipeg, Manitoba ■ Tyler Gompf, Founder and President

A bad experience with a stereo purchase, and the realization that a market existed for better company-customer communication mechanisms, was the impetus for the creation of Winnipeg-based Tell Us About Us Inc. Founder and president Tyler Gompf had something else crucial for turning a niche idea into a successful business: great partners. "Early on Tell Us About Us attracted quality people who believed in the product," says Gompf, who left previous employment to start Tell Us About Us in 1997, at age 24, with his brother Kirby, then 22.

Initially employing the most rudimentary method of collecting customer feedback – transcribing messages left on voice mail – Tell Us About Us has evolved into a technologically savvy award-winning company offering customers both proactive and reactive programs, using the latest innovations in Interactive Voice Response, Internet communication and computer telephony. Its Indicator Program allows companies to gauge real customer opinion, while its Assured Resolution Program lets customers have their say. "Our two main U.S. competitors offer one service

or the other, but not both," says Gompf. "We're a one-stop shop. Also," he adds frankly, "we offer better service."

The company's original vision was to be "the best Manitoba company servicing Manitoba companies." A Montana casino noticed Tell Us About Us through its Web site in 1999, and changed that vision. "We realized there was a much more lucrative market in the U.S.," says Gompf. Tell Us About Us now conducts 90% of its business south of the border, targeting industries with multi-unit locations such as restaurant chains.

Its export strategy? "We purchased databases on potential verticals and hired a couple of people to pursue those for us. We basically had a person living on an airplane, attending trade shows and client meetings and doing product demonstrations. We started creating brand awareness, attracted a few larger chains, and then used referrals." Tell Us About Us counts Popeyes Chicken & Biscuits, Dairy Queen International and Arby's in its U.S. customer base, which collectively covers more than 2,000 locations.

Toll-free: (877) 301-5469 E-mail: results@tellusaboutus.com Web site: www.tellusaboutus.com

Revolution Media Inc.

- Summerside, Prince Edward Island ■ Mike Critchley, Director of Innovation

In a country with an international reputation for customer service, one might argue that the friendliness of Prince Edward Islanders has just a little extra edge. Summerside-based Revolution Media Inc. is definitely capitalizing on the niche for niceness, which goes hand in hand with its relaxed, fun approach to the serious business of providing Web development and complete marketing services to 150 clients, many in the public domain. It's an approach that's obviously working. The young company made the ranks of the Top 25 Up & Coming Information Technology Firms in Canada in the 2001 edition of the *Branham 300*.

Created in November 2000, Revolution Media has a team of five smart, fun-loving computer and media specialists, all between the ages of 20 and 30. The company has just begun to tap into the U.S. market, getting its first clients through word of mouth, as well as through partnerships with other Canadian advertising firms. "The Canadian way is to focus on the client, to give more attention to the vision and the task at hand than

on the bottom line," says Director of Innovation Mike Critchley. "We're capitalizing on that reputation. Our U.S. clients are blown away by how pleasant we are to work with. They see us as nicer than our competitors, yet professional."

The company's export strategy, still in development, includes exhibiting at the major international IT trade show Softworld 2002, fortuitously held in Charlottetown in fall 2002, as well as getting on future Team Canada missions.



L to R: Ryan Hutchinson, Patrick Killorn, Steven Perry, Mike Critchley.

Tel.: (902) 436-5060 E-mail: think@revolution.ca Web site: www.revolution.ca