

MediaSpark IT Solutions Inc.

■ Sydney and Halifax, Nova Scotia ■ Mathew Georghiou, CEO and Founder

What do you get when you cross the concept of flight simulation with the fun of computer games and the latest in e-learning technology? You get GoVenture®, MediaSpark IT Solutions Inc.'s award-winning series of simulation-based learning products. Started by Mathew Georghiou in 1994 when he was 26, the Halifax-based software development and new media productions company is now recognized as an international leader in simulation-based learning.

When it comes to target marketing, MediaSpark is flying in the face of conventional business wisdom. "We're targeting everyone – schools, universities, business service centres, corporations." But it's precisely that broad market that gives MediaSpark its niche. "Our product is unique in that it succeeds in all those markets. We have no direct competitors, so we're able to build our brand very quickly internationally. If you're only focusing on one market, you're not going to be the simulation learning company."

MediaSpark is, however, targeting one market segment at a time, beginning with education. And tapping into provincial and federal assistance and programs – Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), Program for Export Market Development (PEMD), leads from the Canadian consulates in the U.S., to name a few – has eased the way into exports. Forty percent of company revenues currently come from exports – largely to the United States, through both direct sales and partnerships with educational publishers such as Boston's Houghton Mifflin. Japan, the United Kingdom and South Africa are also export destinations.

As someone whose company may well have the future of e-learning in its hands, Georghiou has wise exporting advice: "Be prepared – not just in understanding your market but in being financially ready. We know our product has great potential overseas, but we don't want to open the door until we can afford it. We also want to make sure we have a strong partner in each area." When that day comes, as it's bound to, MediaSpark expects its export revenues to soar.

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Narli Clothing Ltd.

■ Calgary, Alberta ■ Narda Simpson, Lisette Allan, Co-owners

Narda Simpson and Lisette Allan have good reason to sleep well – and they would if they weren't so busy. The co-owners of Calgary-based Narli Clothing Ltd., who still hold down part-time jobs elsewhere, have developed a special type of baby sleepwear proven to reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). And the Snugbag™ is becoming so popular that the company, incorporated in spring 2001 and already generating 10% of revenues from exports, has had to switch from home-sewers to a Calgary manufacturer to keep up with demand.

"We blew our business plan out of the water by the second month – we're manufacturing 10 times what we projected," says Allan. She modelled the Snugbag™ after the trappelzak, a traditional Dutch baby sleeping bag her family sent over from Holland for her own children. Unable to supply the Dutch product to interested friends, Allan began making her own. And a business was conceived.



Allan and Simpson, just 29 and 27 when they started out, were as cautious with the new business as any parent with a new baby. "We weren't willing to incorporate until we found out if there was a market for our product. So we looked into why trappelzakken are so popular in Holland; we discovered a team of Dutch physicians who had shown that they reduce the incidence of SIDS. Then we did a lot of research into our target market, North America. Only then did we go ahead."

Narli targets American and Canadian parents and caregivers through advertisements in family publications, as well as through its Web site; word of mouth takes over from there. And from California to New York, and even Moscow, babies snuggled in Snugbags™ are sleeping safely.

Toll-free: 1-866-768-4224 E-mail: snugbag@snugbag.com Web site: www.snugbag.com

Cyberteks Design

- London, Ontario ■ Keith Peiris, President, CEO and Chief Creative Director
- Founded company at age 11 (1999) ■ Employees: 10 (plus Canadian and U.S. sales force)
- Exporting since 1999 ■ Export sales: 40-50% ■ Export markets: United States, China

On paper, Keith Peiris sounds like a fairly typical export success. One of Canada's leading Web designers, his company Cyberteks Design established a solid market presence in the United States and then set its sights on China. In February 2001, Peiris joined the Team Canada Mission to Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong, and from contacts made during the mission is about to set up an office in China. But one thing sets Peiris apart, even in the category of "young exporter": he began his business venture when he was just 11 years old.



Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and Keith Peiris

Cyberteks Design is ...

an internationally recognized interactive design studio, e-commerce, on-line marketing and hosting company, with headquarters in London, Ontario, and sales offices in Montréal, Toronto, New York, Washington D.C., Maryland, Virginia, Texas, Florida and Michigan. Since

that San Francisco Web development company itself, which showcases Cyberteks' work on its Web site. From that display came Cyberteks' first and second export contracts, respectively

hasn't exploded yet, but we expect it to do so in a few years, and we want to be there before it does erupt."

The mission was highly successful for Cyberteks, which signed a letter of intent with China's largest IT company to open a production office in China in the near future. While on the mission, Peiris also made a presentation at an IT venture financing seminar, and as a result is working with a Chinese investor who attended.

Mentors: Parental and Governmental

Understandably unfamiliar with the ins and outs of business when he started out, Peiris turned to his father for help.

"My biggest challenge was to build the reputation for the company so people wouldn't be scared to put their Web presence at the mercy of an 11-year-old kid."

launching his firm, Peiris has caught the eye of an array of corporate clients, won a ton of awards, and boosted Cyberteks' revenues to six figures, and counting. All this and he continues to go to school!

Capitalizing on Talent

Peiris was in grade 5, designing Web sites as a hobby, when he got the idea to start a business. "I was told I excelled in this field, so I decided not to waste the talent I had. I knew there was a large market in Web design."

Starting in the family's basement, the business grew slowly. "We didn't have a reputation, people hadn't seen our work, and they didn't trust an 11-year-old kid. We built our reputation by getting small clients and demonstrating the kind of work we could do."

Cyberteks, which uses Macromedia software extensively, got a big opportunity to show its stuff from

with Florida company Double D Trucking, and Interep, the largest radio advertising agency in the United States.

Age becomes Advant-Age

Although he had to prove himself as a very young entrepreneur, Peiris watched his age become an asset as the media attention started to come in for the grade-5 student's remarkable business achievements – attention that led to further business.

Peiris also came to the attention of his local Member of Parliament and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for International Trade, Pat O'Brien. And that's how he got invited on the Team Canada Mission to China. "We thought it would be good for us to go into a technologically developing nation that would need our type of product in the future. The Chinese IT market

When it came to the Chinese market, another kind of mentor was ready to assist. "We talked to various commercial officers at the Canadian Consulate in Guangzhou and the Embassy in Beijing to find out how to do business and to make sure we didn't make any mistakes. They were all very helpful."

As for the future, Peiris intends to stay with the company as long as he sees potential for growth. He also intends to keep on with his education, which he says will help him run the business more successfully. And for this CEO, there's always time for peewee hockey.

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