

House of Talent

- Vancouver, British Columbia ■ Tina House, President ■ Founded company at age 24 (1997)
- Employees: 3 ■ Exporting since 1998 ■ Export Sales: 50% ■ Export market: United States.

One day Métis talent agent and videographer Tina House is hosting a workshop in a remote community in the Northwest Territories, showing young Aboriginals how to perform an audition and helping them create a portfolio to add to her talent database. The next day she's on a plane to the United States or overseas to network, network, network at an international film festival or conference. The pay-off for this dizzying schedule of activities? A thriving talent agency and film consulting firm, **House of Talent**, which is giving Aboriginal youth and others an unprecedented opportunity to break into the multi-billion-dollar U.S. film and TV industry – and House the opportunity to produce her own films

House of Talent is ... a Vancouver-based talent agency, digital video production and promotions company specializing in, but not exclusive to, develop-

ing and promoting Aboriginal talent. Since its inception, the company has represented between 5,000 and 8,000 actors, extras, stunt performers and musicians. Among its 200 U.S. contracts are the casting of entire scenes of talent for the television series *X-Files*, *Outer Limits* and *North of 60*, as well as for numerous feature films, TV commercials, public service announcements and documentaries. The company also provides keynote speaking and acting workshops.

"Exporting isn't daunting when you have the chance to establish world networks at international events. With that type of exposure, it's the next natural step for a young entrepreneur to take on the world."

by word of mouth. A year later, the director called again to return the favour. "She needed 500 extras the next day – for the Walt Disney feature film *Air Bud*

and speaking at international events. There's no training facility in the world that can offer these types of contacts and experiences; you just have to go out there and make it happen. The contacts I make often lead to solid business opportunities."

Government Lends a Hand

The Government has helped fund House's way to some of the many events that increase her

Establishing her reputation at the previous agency, and then promoting herself on her own, were key to breaking into the tight-knit Hollywood casting circle. A year of hard work paid off – and so did doing a small job for free. In 1997 House provided extras *gratis* for a U.S. casting director who had heard about her

ll: The Golden Receiver. *That was our first big U.S. contract."*

More than a Talent Agency
House of Talent does more than just represent its talent – it actually trains and recruits that talent through workshops hosted in local Canadian and U.S. communities. "We're the only company in Canada doing these kinds of programs for Aboriginal people within the entertainment industry. It's a hands-on approach. We teach acting skills right there, and show them how to audition. We also put together a portfolio – photos and a bio – for them, and I add it to my talent database."

The Strategy: Network, Network, Network

House estimates that about 50% of the company's export strategy is networking. "It's important for me to keep a high profile by attending international film festivals

network of contacts and opportunities. Aboriginal Business Canada (ABC) and the Métis Provincial Council jointly sponsored her attendance at the Sundance Film Festival in Utah in 2000 – where she was inspired to make her first film, *Inspiration*. The film, which premiered at the 26th Annual American Indian Film Festival in San Francisco in 2001, is now being distributed by House at film festivals. Its first U.S. sale was to the University of Michigan for its video library.

ABC also sponsored House's attendance – as one of three Canadian delegates – at the 8th World Summit of Young Entrepreneurs in Brussels, Belgium, in 2001.

Tel.: (604) 736-3321
E-mail: houseoftalent@hotmail.com
Web site: www.houseoftalent.ca

Interactive Tracking Systems Inc. (Itracks)

- Saskatoon, Saskatchewan ■ Daniel Weber, President and CEO
- Founded company at age 25 (1996) ■ Employees: 46 ■ Exporting since 1997
- Export sales: 92% ■ Export markets: United States, Europe, Asia

Take one young husband and wife team with no background in either business or computer programming. Mix in a pioneering idea for putting traditional market research methodologies on-line. Pour in the ingenuity to move to the target market to research prospective clientele. Add generous amounts of interest from the world's largest market research companies. Sprinkle in a few strategic partnering agreements and some government assistance. *Voilà: you have the recipe for the astounding export success of Itracks, a small IT company with headquarters in the heart of the prairies.*

His wife Garnette, whose salary had been supporting them, later joined the growing company as Vice-President and Executive Vice-President of Finance.

No Experience Necessary

When they started out, the Webers had neither computer nor business experience, but it didn't hold them back. "At first we relied on outside people to do the programming. Our first employee was a computer programmer. And when there's no one to do your books, you learn to do them!"

local firms Weber had anticipated, but large market research firms in the U.S., led to a third innovation: researching that market by actually moving to it. After spending eight months in Fairfield, Connecticut, a major U.S. hub of market research, the Webers came back to Saskatoon to commit themselves to the business.

A Little Government Help

When it came to hiring a couple of its employees, Itracks got a little help from Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD), through its First Jobs in Science and Technology and International Trade Personnel programs. "It's difficult to afford hiring employees when you're a young

Itracks is ... a professional Internet market research software and on-line data collection services company. Itracks developed a qualitative on-line research tool – on-line focus group testing – in which group members and moderator participate from their own computers

and the client receives real-time feedback. Boasting 200% annual growth in its first few years, the multi-award-winning company counts among its clients some of the world's largest market research companies, including ACNielsen, Harris Interactive and NFO Research.

"The competitors came along soon enough. But being early to market has helped us keep our niche; it's harder to get people to switch from a product they know."

Apartment Beginnings
The idea for Itracks came while Daniel Weber was supposed to be putting his environmental science degree to work for a management consulting firm. Employed on the company's market research side, Weber foresaw the day when the Internet, then still in its early days, would replace the telephone as the main tool for data collection. In fact, he quit his job to make that prediction a reality. Finding few other competitors, Weber spent two years developing the idea from his apartment.

Innovation upon Innovation

The "I" in Itracks could easily stand for "Innovation." It starts, first and foremost, with the company's on-line qualitative data collection system. Then there is the fact that Itracks employed its own system to research its own market. The discovery that its target market was not the small

company. These two financial assistance programs were very beneficial."

The Consulate General of Canada in New York helped facilitate several new client relationships for Itracks in 2001.

Marketing Advice from a Marketing Expert

"Americans want different things and expect different services than Canadians do. So if you decide the U.S. is where you want to sell your product, then develop and refine your product for that market."



Tel.: (306) 665-5026
Toll-free: 1-888-525-5026
E-mail: dweber@itracks.com
Web site: www.itracks.com