

# Business Profile, September 9, 2005

## Sliding into the Digital Age

by Rachel Leigh



Imagine a home-based business that not only combines the complementary skills and interests of a wife-husband team, yet also allows them leisure to travel and pursue their love of nature. Rita Wege and Larry Prosser—who operate Kootenay Digital Media—embody that fine balance so many Nelsonites dream of achieving: a mix of cosy home-time and outdoor pursuits, work and play, heritage and technology.

“It was Larry’s idea,” Wege begins, as she pours cups of vanilla hazelnut tea and prepares to share their story. In direct contrast to its old-fashioned style, the living room of their spacious heritage home is wired with technological devices. His laptop hums softly in a corner; the MP3 player rests by the sofa, ready to play their entire musical collection; her tablet computer sits on a coffee table next to the LCD projector, which they use for watching movies on DVD and for digital slide shows.

It all started with their slide collection. Like a lot of people, Wege and Prosser had a big box of slides fading in the basement. Prosser, an amateur photographer, was getting into digital photography, and he knew digital files are easy to store, work with, and maintain. So, in the interest of preserving and sharing their memories, he began to search out the best way to achieve that goal.

“I started researching and found we could get a dedicated slide scanner or a flatbed scanner. We wanted to digitise our slides, and to capture the best

and truest to the original, you really need a dedicated scanner that creates quite a large file.”

Prosser is a quiet, understated man, but his eyes gleam with a true gadget-lover’s delight as he talks about the tools of his trade.

“I get so thoroughly involved in it. That’s one of the reasons I wanted to do this, because I wanted to buy all this cool equipment!”

His wife continues. “So we decided to do it. We did our collection, and then we started doing family collections, and then we decided it would be a good service to offer the area.”

Says Prosser, “I was sure that there was a huge potential market, because everyone I’ve talked to has a box of slides in the basement. And these slides are getting older.”

That was two years ago. In the interim, they’ve scanned thousands of slides onto compact, easy-to-store, simple-to-copy discs—for families, for photographers who still shoot slide film, for graphic designers, for artists whose portfolios are stored

on slides. Wege uses photos—clients' and her own—to create art cards. They create digital slide shows and set them to music; they transfer home movies from video to DVD. They also do audio conversion: transferring cassette tapes to CD or MP3 and CDs to MP3.

“A lot of people don't realise DVD players will play MP3s,” explains Wege. “I mean, for us, we can't imagine it any other way. I had all this music I never listened to before now: all my records. It's all in here (she gestures towards their pocket-sized Creative Zen MP3 player). About 80 records, and hundreds of CDs. I don't know how many cassettes. Last year, we had a digital garage sale, where we sold our turntable, CD player, tape deck, all our CDs, all our cassettes, all our records. It was a lot of fun!”



Wege confesses that she was nervous at the thought of dealing with the public, but things have gone really well. She enjoys meeting people and finding out a little bit about them. If there's a problem, it usually has to do with a client's level of computer literacy—and that's made her realise that teaching and listening is an important part of the job.

“We want to be able to offer people a service where we also take the time to educate them on the choices, about why they would need either a JPEG or a TIFF (different types of image files). And a lot of people may not have the latest, faster, greatest computer. I want to make sure someone goes away knowing that they can use what we have given them. I always say, ‘If it doesn't work, call us.’ I don't want them to sit there at home thinking, ‘What do I do with it?’”

Prosser and Wege need to keep themselves educated as well. He finds their equipment has to be really up-to-date, and he spends a lot of time researching and improving their capabilities. She's taken courses in Adobe Illustrator and web design so she could design their logo and build their webpage, and a course in Adobe Photoshop to learn the technicalities of digital imagery—and those cool digital tricks like restoring and enhancing photos.

“We do a lot of that for people as well. Some people have an old photograph that has cracks and tears, and it's faded, and I restore it. Others have a photo of themselves, and they don't like the background, so I put a different background in. Like Idaho Peak! It's endless, what you could do. It depends on what the clients want. Once I removed a satellite dish from the back of a log home. I can remove things that detract from what you're trying to say with the picture.”

There seem to be very few things that detract this duo from their work. Wege likes her flexible hours and working from home; Prosser enjoys his part-time job as a computer technician for the School District—and they keep in touch by cellphone in case of technical problems (he can also remotely access the computer online).

Says Wege, “I think working together, we complement each other; the things he knows and does are different from the things I know and do. I take care of the bookkeeping and advertising and designing, dealing with the clients; he's more of a background and hardware person. And we never fight over the computer, because we each have our own!”

They're so much at ease that it feels like they've been together forever, but in fact, they met just over six years ago—via the online dating service Matchmaker.com. That only seems appropriate, given their technological familiarity.

“We do everything online,” Wege laughs. “We buy our vehicles online. We do our research online. We book our travel online.”

They quickly discovered a common love of travel and nature, and two months after their online introduction, they were engaged. Prosser moved from Calgary and his oil-company job to Nelson. A month later, he found work with the School District; he also picked up his partner's passion for watching birds. Wege became an avid birdwatcher 30 years ago, during the first year of her Environmental Science degree, and her excitement about things avian matches Prosser's delight when he talks about technological gizmos.

She can't imagine anything else she'd rather do with her time, and she is grateful for the flexibility their business and his job have provided.

"I guess for both of us, that's why Kootenay Digital Media has worked; it's not the sort of business that has to be open every day or every week. We go away for two or three or four weeks at a time. We like to hike, too, but we usually pick our destinations based on the birding that could happen. We went to Texas for Christmas because they have the highest number of species for Christmas bird count all over North America, and we love birds. We go to different parts of the country that are going to have new birds we haven't seen before."

In the years to come, Larry Prosser and Rita Wege want to travel even more. And their final words on business?

"I like to do things that I find interesting," he says. "I'm very into learning, and keeping up with the newest technology—cameras, computers, digital. I would like to expand more as a web-based business, uploading photos, taking orders and payment online."

"I like to be able to help people. I want to provide a valuable service at a reasonable cost that allows people to protect and also to share their history with their family, and archive it. Whether it's a picture or a movie, it's their memories, and I think it's so important to preserve it for future generations," she concludes.