

Webnames.ca



“We are who we are because of everything we’ve done, both right and wrong. I see every challenge as a learning opportunity rather than a

mistake.”

When Cybele Negris and her partners started an online business in the middle of the dot-com crash, they raised a few eyebrows from skeptical friends and family. Nine years later, that business – webnames.ca – is a thriving company that manages domain registrations and other online services for more than 40,000 clients, including many Fortune 500 companies. So why did webnames.ca boom when so many others went bust?

Back in the early 2000s, many Internet businesses were dying because they had inflated stock prices and no real profit model. Webnames.ca, on the other hand, was a small start-up with a market just waiting to be served: They were one of the first official registrars for .ca domain names.

John Demco, one of Cybele’s partners, had managed all

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.ca applications on a voluntary basis before the Canadian Internet Registration Agency was created in 2000. When CIRA took over, access to .ca names was opened way up – they removed many of the restrictions that had made .ca names impossible to secure for anyone who didn't have multiple offices in different provinces.

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That opening up meant a huge flood of new applications was coming – and John, Cybele, and their partners Stephen Smith and Matthew Lane knew that they understood .ca better than anyone. With a focus on high levels of service for customers with multiple domains, they brought in \$2.5 million in revenues in their first year.

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That level of growth in a fledgling industry brought with it some pretty major challenges – including constant hiring, struggling to set up infrastructure and policy, and total lack of sleep.

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“I think I slept 2-3 hours a night, seven days a week for the first year and a half,” Cybele says. “We had staff sleeping in sleeping bags in the office just to keep up with demand.”

As they found their footing, the partners focused on building structure by templating everything. Every response to a customer that might be used again was added to online help, their FAQ, and turned into a canned e-mail response.

“That was the key for growing and scaling,” Cybele says.

It allowed them to streamline operations and achieve consistent growth every year, even through recessions. It also means that while the founding partners still work typical entrepreneur hours, they now have time for more than just business.

“I have two kids, and I never took mat leave,” Cybele says. “On weekends I carry my BlackBerry around, I confess. But evenings and weekends are for my children now. The key day-to-day issues can be resolved without me getting

involved.”

Looking back on nine years of business growth that have made for a pretty wild ride, Cybele offers the following tips:

1. Network, network, network.
2. Never be afraid to ask questions of people who have been there before – there is always someone more successful than you, and people are often willing to help. Or, consider a formal mentorship program.
3. Focus. Entrepreneurs have no problem coming up with new ideas – the hard part is to focus on accomplishing what you set out to do.
4. Plan and set goals. If you write something down, you’re much more likely to accomplish it.
5. Set out your core values and your core purpose at the outset. Without them, you won’t know what you’re trying to accomplish or how you’re going to do it. Every action and behaviour needs to fit within the image of the company you set out.

One final reality check from this entrepreneur who’s built a hugely successful business in a new industry, figuring things out with her partners as they grew:

“We are who we are because of everything we’ve done, both right and wrong. I see every challenge as a learning opportunity rather than a mistake.”

You can access webnames.ca’s services online, and learn more about the company at webnames.ca.

Written by [Christina Newberry](#) for [Small Business BC](#).