

## **Nomad Enterprise or Location Independent Professional Technical Skills**

The concept and practice of being a nomadic entrepreneur has been around for decades under one name or another, making use of whatever communication tools were available at the time. Granted, the type of careers that a nomadic entrepreneur could develop even a few years ago was limited by the variety, flexibility and robustness of the available communications technologies.

In the 1990's, during the time when the Internet was just beginning to be adopted by consumers, the two typical careers that made for excellent location independent careers were writing and computer programming. Writers of all kinds; business, fiction, non-fiction, copywriters, grant writers etc., could (and still do) write from anywhere in the world and access editors, publishers and clients by phone and fax.

Computer coders and programmers were in high demand and short supply so could often request unusual working conditions. I was living in New Zealand during the 1990's and heard of a computer programmer who worked for one of the Government departments. He decided he wanted to become location independent so arranged a contract with the Government department that allowed him to continue his job while traveling through Europe. So with his computer, his software, and an Internet connection, he was free to travel and work.

As the range of technologies grew and the Internet improved, the number of potential careers and businesses that could be nomadic exploded. Today, in our modern "Information Society", there are relatively few businesses or careers that couldn't be mostly, if not completely, location independent.

The great thing is about this new world of work is that not every business or career that can be a nomadic enterprise, needs to be heavily dependent on sophisticated and complicated technologies. The type of technical skills and the depth of technical literacy you need to be a successful nomad entrepreneur or location independent professional (LIP) depends on the type of business you want to run, the type of clients you want to attract, the services/products you plan to offer, and your technical comfort zone.

There are still any number of professions that can be run very profitably using telephone, fax, email, and maybe the occasional face-to-face. And there are many other enterprises where the level of technical wizardry you use runs the gambit from minimally technical to highly technical, depending on how technically literate you want to get.

A friend of mine works for an economic consulting company that has clients from across Canada. The consulting firm's offices are located above a horse stable in the rolling hillsides of southern Ontario's beautiful and very rural horse country. High-speed Internet only arrived in the area a year ago. They have a website, but it is only used as an access portal for some of the client's materials (in a password protected space). There is no marketing on the website. New clients come through referrals, by reputation, and by word of mouth.

The technologies these consultants use are phone, fax and email. Last year one of the employees did set up a wiki for some collaborative work, but that is as technologically elaborate as they get. Their 'literacies' are with the software (there is not much most of the employees there don't know about Excel and SPSS), their specialized knowledge, and their experience. These literacies create a rather unique skill set that is in demand.

For the average location independent enterprise, basic technical skills needed would involve such things as:

- ☞ setting up a 'showcase' website/blog that can be used for marketing and sales;
- ☞ an online payment system, like PayPal;
- ☞ other business management tools for invoicing and scheduling;
- ☞ online banking;
- ☞ an Internet-based phone, like Skype;
- ☞ other communications technologies, for faxing and accessing the Internet;
- ☞ social media technologies, like Twitter and LinkedIn for marketing and PR; and
- ☞ technologies that can automate your business.

Most of these technologies offer a variety of options that can be used (for example, Skype offers either just audio, or audio and video, and can even let you record your conversation so could be used to record interviews, seminars, etc.), are generally free or low cost, and relatively easy to use (at least at the basic level).

Along with these basic online technology skills, LIPs should also be fairly software and hardware literate. By this I mean that LIPs should be comfortable using and troubleshooting both the software and the hardware they need to use in order to run their business - including updating the programs, fixing any glitches that arise in using the programs, correcting any problems that might develop with the hardware, etc.

Being a LIP doesn't always provide you with access to the support systems that are sometimes needed to correct technological problems. Try telling someone in a language you don't speak a word of that you can no longer access your memory, or at least your computer's memory.

Every LIP, tele-worker, remote worker, etc, should also develop the technological skill that provides them with the ability to preserve the safety and security of their business information, and of their client's project information.

The more you run your business from your computer, the more vulnerable you are to devastating losses should your computer crash or get stolen. There are online sites that you can use to generate and maintain backups of you business that will also allow you to do file sharing of large files. Mozy and Dropbox are two online sites that provide these services. These and other sites are well worth exploring.

Of course, this doesn't protect you if your computer gets stolen with all of your client's project information and your business information on it. A system that protects the contents of your computer, without limiting or restricting your access to it, is worth developing right from the very start.

Remember to include at least the following in any backup system you create:

- a backup of invoices sent, paid and outstanding;
- business contacts;
- projects that have been completed, that are currently being worked on, and projects that are waiting to be started;
- income and other tax information;
- travel information;
- marketing materials;
- any contracts you have signed, and
- any other material that is crucial to recreating your business, should a disaster happen etc.,

Other technologies that might be worth becoming familiar with or at least consider expanding into at some point in the future, include:

- collaborative technologies, like Wiki, that allow professionals to work together on specific projects,
- community-building technologies, like Ning.com, so that you can create a community of clients, supporters, potential virtual employees,
- multimedia technologies, so you can tap into the growing preference for accessing information through audio recordings, photos, videos, podcasts, etc.,
- virtual reality technologies, like Second Life. Universities and other large institutions are beginning to experiment with virtual reality communities and environments.

Information and communications technologies, the technological backbone or structure of all location independent and nomadic enterprises, are constantly changing. Old technologies are continually being updated. New technologies are continually entering the market. Keeping up with these developments is one of the necessary tasks of nomadic and location independent entrepreneurs.