

WD: the sky's the limit

Ask yourself a simple question. What can *Web Designer* do for you? Be inspired by this success story from Marc Levy, and see what direction your life takes!



What do you get when you take a young businessman with two degrees and a love of art, a small start-up company on foreign soil in need of a website, a couple of hours in transit in London, and two copies of *Web Designer* magazine? Well, I got a new passion, a totally new direction for my start-up company and skills I'd never even imagined possible.

My name is Marc Levy and I am the owner and manager of iSpace, a Sydney-based graphic-solutions business, for which the seeds were planted by some reading I did on an aeroplane almost three years ago.

I'd always been an art-orientated person, but it was only when I emigrated from South Africa to Sydney, Australia in 2002, that I realised the extent to which websites determined success in a truly competitive marketplace.

I owned a signage and graphic design company, and so I was looking for someone to make me an impressive website that stood out as artistically beautiful, yet functional, without overkill in terms of Flash, as I'd always been wary of Flash.

I entered hours of meetings with local web companies to discuss my project requirements, but there was nothing

that really knocked my socks off. So I started researching web design on the internet, and documenting the best aspects of each site I discovered.

And then I spent that space of time on the streets of London, found and devoured my first two *Web Designer* mags and felt everything change.

Back in Sydney after my travels, I decided to buy a Dreamweaver video. It was exceptionally hard to understand at that stage, but despite the challenges, I decided to do everything it took to become a web designer, and complement my existing business.

I'd taught myself Photoshop after all, so how hard could web design be? Well, web design is like a fine wine – it gets better with time, age and experience. So for someone starting out, the backlog can be daunting!

It didn't take me long to realise that gaining an understanding of web design was going to be just as difficult as acquiring my degrees – and I'm not kidding when I say this.

Trying to catch up on what I missed out by not being in the industry, I saved up and began to import backdated issues of *Web Designer* in loads of five or six. Those trips to the post office made me feel like I was en route to cash in a winning lottery ticket – I was hooked!

Ten magazines later, I was starting to get to grips with certain things, but still felt like I was drowning, so I approached

a local web designer who was kind enough to give me three lessons. During this period, I managed to buy a Power Mac G5 – though I did go without other things (like food and sleep) to afford it. I've always believed in having the right tools to do the job.

THE INTERNET HAS CHANGED THE WORLD

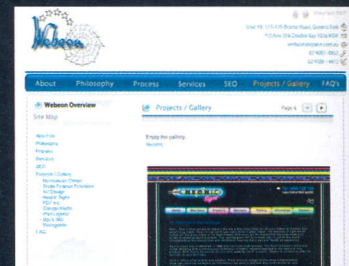
Information flows quickly and is easily accessible to the public. How it is presented on a computer screen is critical to success in business today.

I was dreaming of understanding thoroughly how to create information architecture, and present it online in the form of developing web pages. Almost 18 months later, that first site I dreamed of is complete. It needs a little fine-tuning, but it's almost exactly what I saw in my mind right at the start. What's more, that first site is just one of many I've created since then. Today, my business iSpace focuses on helping clients to improve the way they present themselves in business, whether on-screen or in the tangible sense. Take a look for yourselves at www.ispace.com.au.

I'm realistic enough to know that although I had an aptitude for visual creativity and digital expression, a good business website needs to be functional – it needs to relay information to a marketplace. It's not just a piece of art with no function, so understanding this point is critical if you plan to create websites for corporate communication purposes. Understanding that the front-end visual needs to look beautiful, but equally as important the back end needs to be a functional expandable piece of internet architecture with adaptability.

I make a point of encouraging other web design hopefuls to push on in developing a sound and real understanding of this dynamic and intoxicating industry.

My style and philosophy (based on the theory of photorealism I learned at school) is this: the detail in every



Webeon is the web design arm of iSpace and has already worked on numerous projects

tiny inch is what reflects superior skills and really separates the men from the boys in the industry. It's also about understanding how to fuse colour, create the ultimate harmonies and produce a visual masterpiece.

I realise that art is a very subjective thing, and that some people love certain things and others hate them, but I also believe that there is a definitive point at which you can start to satisfy a number of people at once.

In addition, I can't speak highly enough of the value inherent in creating relationships with other web designers and web developers. This is critical to surviving as a small boutique company or as a freelancer, because the truth is that you're never going to master every element of the web. I have crossed over the line of understanding the technical side. If you don't have a real desire to get this side under control, you may want to think about using an outsource business model to get a technical expert to take your design work and turn it into a functional website.

My final word of advice to other designers has to be this: once you have the skills, they're yours forever. So strive to understand the industry, put in the extra time and make sacrifices if necessary to further your knowledge.

Who knows? One day, you could land up taking your small or start-up company in a whole new exciting and lucrative direction, just because you spent ten minutes reading an article in a web design magazine. It worked for me.

iSpace is a graphic solutions company – offering innovative, cost-effective and timely graphic solutions as part of a turnkey signage service. We strive to be the preferred signage supplier for all sectors of the architectural, corporate, retail & commercial sectors.

Mark's business site at www.ispace.com.au spans many different design disciplines