

SMALL BUSINESS

Are you smart enough to use a BlackBerry?

Courses take mystery out of electronic devices

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CANWEST NEWS SERVICE
VANCOUVER

When Darci LaRocque sees someone using a BlackBerry, she can't help watching them tap away on it, then asking whether they would like to learn a better way to perform the same task.

Her suggestions are always gratefully accepted.

"People think they know how to use their BlackBerry, but they don't know how much there is to figure out," she said.

LaRocque has read all the manuals, and after a couple of years teaching executives at one Vancouver corporation how to use the addictive little machines, she has launched her own business offering training courses to companies and individuals who want to learn how to use their BlackBerrys more effectively.

"I live, eat and breathe BlackBerrys," said LaRocque, president of **Swirl Solutions**. "I love training and watching people's eyes light up when they figure out how to do things."

LaRocque's passion for BlackBerrys began three years ago when she was working in the IT department of a company that decided to give the wireless devices to 20 executives to see whether they were useful to people working away from the office. The pilot project was a huge success and the number of users in the company quickly rose to 400.

The executives got the BlackBerrys and LaRocque was responsible for helping them learn how to use them.

"They don't come with instructions any more, but you can go online and look up the 200-page manual," she said.

"Nobody reads the manual. Whenever I went in the office, executives would ask me about how to do things, so I decided to set up a training session on tips and tricks."

LaRocque expected perhaps two dozen people would be interested, but the day she sent the e-mail invitation, 200 signed up. And when she started talking to IT staff in other companies, she found that while many companies provided BlackBerrys to employees, they weren't teaching them how to use the devices.

It was the beginning of her new business. LaRocque started offering training sessions part-time while working at her IT job. As well as teaching people how to use the devices more effi-

Plugged-in nation

Canadians are plugging in to technology with increasing frequency, according to a Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission report published last year:

■ Nearly 75 per cent of households now have personal computers compared with 49 per cent in 1998;

■ A quarter of Canadians say they spend 25 hours a week on the Internet;

■ Sixty per cent used a cellphone in 2005;

■ Twelve per cent own an MP3 player;

■ Three per cent have a BlackBerry

Worldwide, BlackBerry says about eight million people subscribe to its mobile e-mail service and industry analysts forecast the number will more than double by 2009.

ciently, she also helps companies find cost-saving measures and set up policies for BlackBerry users.

This month, she has turned her part-time work into a full-time career.

"People seem to think BlackBerrys are just like a cellphone — some think it's just for e-mail — but there's a lot to learn. I teach time-saving, cost-saving ways to use them, and save time for the company help desk, too," LaRocque said.

Vancouver clinical nurse specialist Elaine Unsworth signed up for LaRocque's training after her employer issued her a BlackBerry.

"They just gave it to me. No instructions, just, 'Here you go,'" said Unsworth, a health consultant who is frequently away from the office. "I went online looking for instructions and found 200 and some pages — that's not going to happen."

She asked her company IT department for help setting it up, and when she heard about LaRocque's training sessions, she signed up.

"I thought I was doing fine, phoning and reading e-mails and updating my calendar, but in an hour I learned so many little things that made everything quicker."

"I love my BlackBerry — I don't know what I'd do without it. I'm not truly addicted. I can turn it off, but I have it with me all the time."



Gerry Kahrmann, CanWest News Service
Darci LaRocque started Swirl Solutions when she sensed opportunity in offering BlackBerry instruction.

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CORPORATE APPOINTMENTS

MILES SAFRANOVICH
» Vice President, Operations

North American Construction Group (NACG) is pleased to announce the appointment of Miles Safranovich to Vice President, Operations effective September 1, 2007.

Miles has over 20 years experience in the industrial and heavy construction industry. Prior to joining NACG, Mr. Safranovich held various positions with Voice Construction. Since joining NACG in 2004, Miles has been an integral member of our senior management team.

Miles has played a key role in the company's rapid expansion securing several key contracts and developing our acquisition capabilities. He has been instrumental in the company's transformation from private to public.

We are pleased that Miles will continue to be a valued member of our executive team.

BERNIE ROBERT
» Vice President, Business Development & Estimating

North American Construction Group (NACG) is pleased to announce the appointment of Bernie Robert to Vice President, Business Development and Estimating effective September 1, 2007.

Bernie brings a wealth of experience to the position with over nine years at NACG in various roles including Controller and most recently, Director, Business Development.

We are pleased to have Bernie join our executive team.

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