

Focus on Leadership

A SPECIAL SERIES ON CALGARY'S BUSINESS VISIONARIES

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Axia's approach to SuperNet creates big opportunities

You may not have heard of Axia NetMedia Corp., but you've probably heard of the Alberta SuperNet, which provides broadband connectivity to 429 communities across Alberta.

"We see things happening in Alberta that would be unthinkable in places that don't have this critical infrastructure in place," says Murray Sigler, executive vice-president of Axia. "It really allows Albertans to lead the way in areas such as learning, health, industry and arts and culture."

Axia was founded in 1995 by Art Price, who is still the firm's chairman and CEO.

In addition to the SuperNet, the company also operates broadband networks in France and Singapore, and is exploring opportunities in other jurisdictions such as New Zealand. Its 123 employees are based mostly in Calgary, with a few working internationally.

Axia's next generation networks (NGNs) bring more than mere high-speed Internet to rural areas, as the SuperNet is like a highway, allowing traffic to travel directly to its destination at high speeds.

"The Internet is a vehicle on

that road. But there are other vehicles that can use the road. Because of this, the term "connectivity" is starting to change for Albertans," Sigler says.

"We're starting to see connectivity mean things such as access to e-learning, video conferencing and e-government services, opportunities in digital media and broadband support for technology innovation."

Axia's NGN solution separates network services from applications, which allows service providers of all sizes to tap into the SuperNet, and offers connectivity and services to rural residents and businesses at very competitive prices.

"It's good news for Calgary businesses, too, because it opens the rural market up to them, and it means their rural operations can access the same support, shared applications and things such as video conferencing," Sigler says.

"This is really blowing the market wide open in rural Alberta. We use Alberta as the example of how broadband networks are creating a diversified economy and sustainability for current and future generations throughout the world."

Axia's participation in Action



Photos by Wil Andruschak

Alberta is the breeding ground for leading-edge communication infrastructure, says Murray Sigler, executive vice-president of Axia NetMedia Corp.

Calgary is connected mostly to the Creative Hub initiative, which is aimed at supporting the city's vibrant and growing digital media industry.

"Having the backbone for a lot of these high-intensity bandwidth applications and digital content will ensure the support for the innovation

that's already taking place. I think the partnership makes sense for Axia, for Calgary Economic Development and for Calgary as a whole."

Graphic design firm founded on passion, balance

Squeeze Creative is not your typical graphic design firm.

It's deliberately small, and it's focused on quality of life as well as quality of work.

The company, which specializes in corporate communications and branding, was founded by Wilson Wong and Brienne Hamilton in June 2006.

"After working many years in a smaller agency in town, it was time for us to venture off on our own, and we started Squeeze as a way to channel that entrepreneurial spirit," Wong says.

"We both shared the same passion for design and creativity and wanted a more personal approach to our business and how we connect with our clients.

"We sought a better balance in work and life and greater

fulfilment in our jobs."

They chose the name Squeeze to suit the fun, friendly, approachable atmosphere they wanted their company to exemplify.

"It communicates us wanting to 'squeeze' everything out of life, and squeeze the creative juices out," Hamilton says.

While Squeeze is intentionally small, Hamilton and Wong don't pretend to have all the expertise necessary to deliver first-class service in-house.

"We're big collaborators and are fortunate to be connected to the incredibly talent-rich network of specialized experts in Calgary," Hamilton says.

"We handle the big picture and focus on understanding our clients' needs and goals and engage the broader talent pool as needed to make creative solutions and ideas come

to life."

Squeeze doesn't focus on landing the next big client or winning awards, but on helping clients tell their stories as authentically as possible, and having some fun along the way.

"Creativity, no matter how corporate, is ultimately about engaging a piece of something intangible and unquantifiable. How can it not be fun?" says Hamilton.

Squeeze has earned a reputation as a little shop that does big things. "Our corporate approach has evolved over the years to better contemplate the bigger picture for us and our clients," says Wong. "We have faith in the fact that there are solutions for our clients beyond what's been imagined to date — we just have to uncover them. Our process is all about that discovery."



Founded by Brienne Hamilton and Wilson Wong, Squeeze Creative focuses on the personal approach to the graphic design business, opting to keep the company small and fun, while seeking a balance between work and life.

Newcomer website takes pressure off employers

There's a lot to consider when contemplating moving to a new city: job opportunities, recreation, schools and health care facilities, to name a few.

But wouldn't it be great if you could get reliable information about all of these topics by visiting just one website?

"Yes," says Calgary Economic Development (CED). That's why the agency launched liveincalgary.com in February.

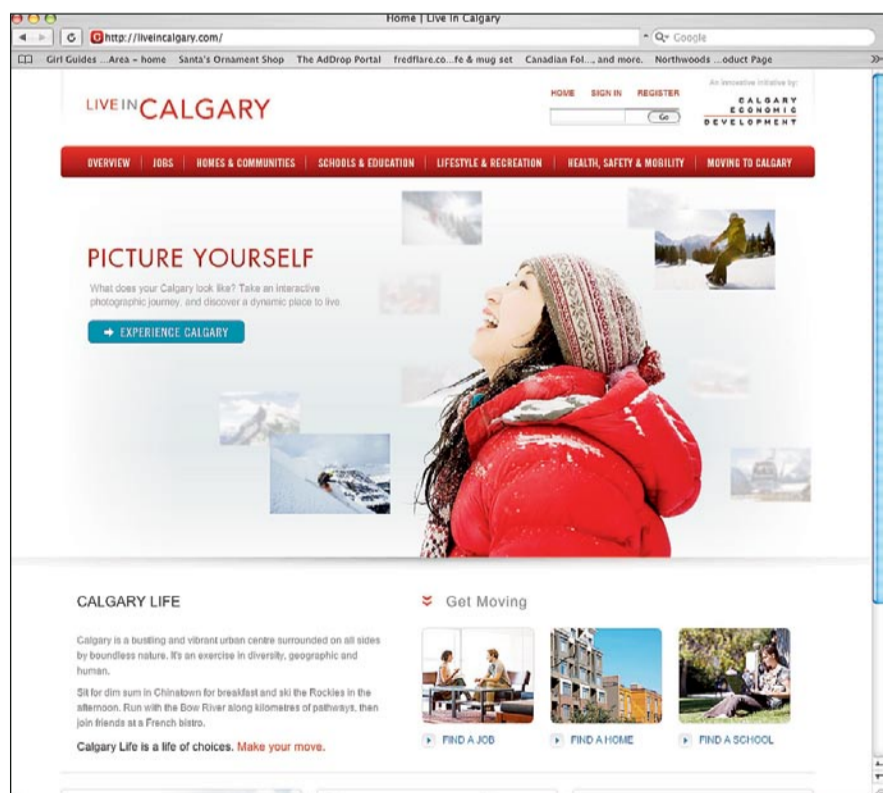
"Calgary needs unique and specialized talent," says Bruce Graham, president and CEO of the agency.

"In the coming years and decades, the competition is going to be for human capital. This is a tool to help employers position themselves as well as possible."

CED developed liveincalgary.com with the help of the city's employers, immigrant service agencies and other community groups that have a good idea of what questions potential residents have about the city.

The result is a good fit for employers' needs, says Chris Thomas, labour strategies manager for Tim Hortons franchisor the TDL Group.

"I think this website is invaluable. It gives you that



nice overview, all in one place," he says. "There was a lot of pressure from employers to have something like this put in place. People were coming and maybe not getting the full message before they got here. This really addresses that — it gives them that information."

While much of the information in the website already existed on the Net, it was peppered in random nooks and crannies of a host of web pages, message boards and blogs.

A user would have trouble finding all the information, and could understandably have misgivings about its reliability.

"We focused on creating an authoritative, single point of information for people who are looking at the city as a place to move to for work and to set up their lives and families," says Elsbeth Mehrer, manager of workforce development for CED. Mehrer says liveincalgary.com is getting a warm reception from other employers, but that doesn't mean CED's work on the site is finished.

"Getting it launched is akin to having a baby; the harder, more important part is raising it — keeping it up to date and adding new content as circumstances dictate," Mehrer says. "We recognize that, and we're committed to doing that."

Creating an all-encompassing, up-to-date online resource for potential new residents is not only new territory for Calgary, it's cutting-edge in Canada as a whole, adds Mehrer.

"Some communities have sections of their general websites about moving — and we had that before, too. But this is really a leap forward."



CHRIS THOMAS

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