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Systems Architect, ecommerce - Jarrod McGrath

The Art of IT

At the age of 32, Jarrod McGrath has established an enviable lifestyle. He has built an online business that will continue to grow and generate income practically by itself, allowing him to focus on selective consulting projects he finds interesting and stimulating. And it all happened because of a chance meeting with a relative at a BBQ.

Jarrod, how did you start your career in IT?

I always had a passion for computers, and started programming as a teenager. I used to fund my expensive pastime by working a mobile disco around Bathurst. I completed a BSc (Honours), Industrial Mathematics and Computing at Charles Sturt University, and during this time developed a particular interest in the web.

My first job out of uni was working for Swedish ERP specialist Intenia. I then spent another six years working on SAP implementations in large corporate environments as both a permanent employee and independent consultant. It was a great experience, and I worked in a number of industries -- fashion, fast moving consumer goods and hi-tech -- implementing functional ERP solutions for these businesses.

So how did you move into ecommerce?

I always had a particular interest in the web, and in late 1998 I met up with a cousin at a BBQ. We talked about selling art on the web and from these discussions an on-line gallery www.artvirtual.com was established.

A while later I met an art dealer and he provided the essential ingredient I needed -- the industry process knowledge behind the traditional art auction business. Within a few months, the online art auction site, www.artsell.com was born. It was my first entry into the world of web-based auctioning. In the three years since its inception, we've auctioned over 2500 works of art from 900 Australian and international artists including Pro Hart, David Boyd, Norman Lindsay, Albert Namatjira and Henry Moore.

You say your first entry into web-based auctioning. Have there been others since?

Yes, that was just the beginning. I have since established www.fosmin.com, an online auction site that presents fossils, minerals and jewellery for auction. www.fosmin.com currently carries items such as dinosaur eggs, trilobites, amethyst crystal and gold nuggets.



What do you think has been the main reason for the success of both auction sites?

I think understanding the idiosyncrasies of the market and the buyers has been critical. I took a lot of advice from people in the industry and I have a business partner who has worked in the traditional auction industry for 20 years.

It seems you've had quite a change from your earlier corporate career.

Not really. You see, www.artsell.com and www.fosmin.com are really just an extension of the ecommerce and business process skills I acquired in my corporate career phase.

So where to from here?

With the two web sites bedded down and growing, I'm planning to set my skills back to the corporate world. I now have a grab-bag of ecommerce and web development skills which are in great demand. I think we've come out of a phase where there was a tendency for corporations to use the major consulting firms for their ecommerce solutions. Now, many companies are looking to individuals and smaller boutique agencies who can work more closely with their permanent staff.

You'll no doubt need an extended network to move back into consulting. How have you managed to maintain your contacts?

Three years ago I joined the Australian Computer Society to develop professional networks and keep tabs on the industry. It doesn't matter how much you read, the important stuff comes from face-to-face contact and small companies like mine are dependent on word-of-mouth business.

What are your five tips for success?

1. Don't be afraid
2. Self-education is incredibly important - you will learn as much by 'doing' as you will learn from structured education. There is nothing you can't find out, so look!
3. There is no such thing as bad advice - listen to what everyone has to say
4. Keep a close eye on the industry - it can change rapidly
5. The business MUST drive I.T.

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