

for busy business people

BY MONICA ANDREEFF
BUSINESS IN CALGARY

You need tickets to a sold-out concert for out-of-town clients, it's your wife's birthday, and the computer network just crashed. Add to that it's month-end; you have to book a flight for a conference next weekend, and the car needs an oil change.

But before you crawl under the desk with your favourite blankie and begin to whimper, consider how many of those tasks can be farmed out.

“*The system is so streamlined and efficient we're able to serve a client base of over 50,000 with a relatively small staff***”**

Robin MacLean

“I am extremely busy, I work full time and I have a two-year-old at home,” says Lara Barnett, a mutual funds sales representative at Mackenzie Financial who works with two senior vice-presidents. Although her work week often tips the 50-hour mark, Barnett has an ace in her busy back pocket, Eservus On-line Concierge Services. Because her company is a tenant in Banker's Hall, Barnett has complimentary access to Eservus at her fingertips. Barnett regularly books movie passes as a thank-you for her clients, brokers and financial planners. For herself, she has booked spa services, folk festival tickets and a weekend getaway for two.

“You get great service, they do all the legwork for you, you pay less money and the tickets show up on your desk a few days after you ordered them.”

Some of the largest property management companies in Canada are in the Eservus portfolio, including Bentall, Brookfield Properties, Cadillac Fairview, Dundee Realty, GWL Realty Advisors, O&Y Enterprise and Realex. In Calgary that translates into 30 downtown buildings and tens of thousands of clients. It's that bulk buying power that gives Eservus the inside edge, says Robin MacLean, regional managing director.

“We've taken that buying power and used it to negotiate preferred pricing for our clients,” she says. “Everyone wants a deal whether you're the CEO or the receptionist. It saves time and it saves money.”

A privately held company based in Toronto, the company is experiencing phenomenal growth, with plans to open offices in Ottawa in June, Edmonton before the end of summer and Vancouver by October. Until then, Calgary's five employees will do double duties.

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Nothing, it seems, is beyond its reach, including tickets to Cirque du Soleil, ski lift passes, gift baskets and golf getaways as low as \$99 for Canmore's Silver Tip course, where green fees are \$120.

The growth of small to medium sized business in Calgary has generated a service niche uniquely dedicated to its needs. There are accountants and bookkeepers that will come directly to your office and car dealerships that will service your fleet while providing a loaner vehicle.

But few are as flashy as the bright yellow Volkswagen beetles that are zipping through Calgary traffic to rescue that data base that just vanished off the computer hard drive.

From left to right, Robin MacLean, Duc Chau, Jodi Reid, Jordan McCormick and Devon Mercure. They are the Eservus concierge team in Calgary, a service which tenants of Banker's Hall, or other large business buildings, can access for free.

Photo courtesy of Eservus

"Yellow is a happy cheerful colour that also stands out," says John Leishman, self-dubbed "chief executive geek" at The Geek Patrol. A former general manager

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lecting a name that was memorable, showed humour and was less intimidating to the

for a business-only Internet service provider, it was in the eastern U.S. that Leishman first encountered the concept of a cost-effective professional computer service for small to medium sized businesses and residential clients. Just over one year ago, he launched The Geek Patrol in Calgary, se-

technology-phobic than, say, a suit from a large corporation.

"Everyone feels that if it's a geek, they're going to know what they're doing," he says with a laugh. "It's the self-deprecating aspect of it and it's less threatening to people."

All Geek technicians are Microsoft-certified and boast between five and 10 years experience troubleshooting computer problems, a definite edge over a recent computer school graduate, he says. Large computer solutions companies often charge between \$120 and \$180 an hour, with a two-hour minimum, he adds. But it will only cost \$85 to order a Geek to your office (minimum one-hour charge), you'll have an estimate of the problem and cost within 20 minutes, and billing is done by the half hour after that. Business is growing "like crazy," according to

Leishman, who is fielding between 20 and 30 inbound calls per day for computer services.

It often becomes cost-prohibitive for small companies with five or six PCs to contract the services of a well-branded corporation like IBM, and that's where the golf shirt-clad Geeks come in. If you call in the morning, someone will usually be there by afternoon, and technicians have brought seemingly lost data back from the dead many times. Among the many Geek clients are a few large companies, including Nortel, Canadian Tire, and busy downtown restaurants.

"We guarantee we'll fix the problem," says Leishman.

Instead of biting your nails to the nub worrying about the state of your cracked cuticles, business owners and executives who have image concerns can dial up My Beauty Break, a mobile aesthetic service which broke new ground in Calgary a few years ago.



John Leishman, founder of the Geek Patrol, prefers the title CEG, for Chief Executive Geek, with former employee Steve Robinson.

Courtesy Geek Patrol

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