

## SMASH CLIMATE CHANGE

**DESIGN** | Local firm's website earns kudos by encouraging others to work sustainably

BY BRIAN MORTON  
VANCOUVER SUN

An online green initiative has helped Vancouver-based interactive design firm smashLAB gain the type of international exposure many companies can only dream of.

"There's not a lot of work so far because of it," said company co-founder Eric Karjaluoto in an interview about his company's recognition by *Time* magazine in its Design 100 edition — the magazine's annual roster of people and ideas behind today's most influential design. "But it will help us close deals. It's like a stamp of approval."

smashLAB is an interactive design firm that specializes in online communication and the best ways to use digital media. Interactive design and Web development are specialties of the company.

Karjaluoto, who was in Boston at a design conference this week, said design is probably the single most important attribute of any company. "It's the spot that makes people passionate about a product."

What caught *Time's* attention is a website smashLAB came up with called [www.designcanchange.org](http://www.designcanchange.org) which is aimed at encouraging the world's graphic designers to use their influence and buying power to combat climate change by changing their professional and personal practices.

In its first year, over 1,500 designers pledged to embrace more sustainable professional practices like cutting back on printing annual reports. The site has received hundreds of thousands of visits.

Karjaluoto and business partner Eric Shelkie — both in their mid-30s — are from Prince George, where they launched the agency in 2000 before moving to Vancouver in 2003.

Karjaluoto, the company's creative designer, was a painter who studied at the Emily Carr Institute before focusing



RICHARD LAM/VANCOUVER SUN

**Eric Shelkie, co-founder of smashLAB, projects his company will double its revenue in 2008.**

on design. Shelkie, the technical director, oversees the planning, implementation and operation of server environments and website hosting.

Clients include CN Rail, the University of Northern B.C., Tax and Estate Planning Group, the City of Prince George, BC Hydro and Thompson Okanagan Tourism.

Like many entrepreneurs, Karjaluoto and Shelkie had no background in business.

"Our first project we made \$400, about \$2 an hour," said Karjaluoto. "And we took the hardest path, in Prince George, during a recession and after the dot-com bubble had burst."

Karjaluoto said long hours are the norm. "Last week, I worked 89 hours. There's slow winds, but you just have to

keep working at it."

He said diversification is also very important. "We're not overly fixed on one particular industry, so we're not so vulnerable."

Shelkie agreed in an interview that perseverance is key to building a company. "Also, it's good to have a good partner. If it was either of us on our own, we would have given up."

Shelkie said smashLAB had \$350,000 in revenue in 2006 and has projected revenues of \$750,000 for 2008.

He said sales were way down in 2007, because they made changes and pulled back to develop new self-directed concepts and website ideas, including [designcanchange](http://designcanchange.com) and [Makefive.com](http://Makefive.com), a website that allows people to voice opinions on topics.

### smashLAB

**Year launched:** 2000

**Number of employees:** six (including founders Eric Karjaluoto and Eric Shelkie)

**Total revenues in 2006:** \$350,000

**Projected revenues in 2008:** \$750,000

**Total money made on first project:** \$400

Shelkie said [designcanchange](http://designcanchange.com) wasn't meant to be a moneymaker. "That was our biggest money-losing venture we've ever taken on. But it was a cause dear to our hearts."

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### EVENTS

**Seminars, workshops and brown-bag sessions being hosted by local businesses and governments.**

Visit Small Business BC's education centre for details and registration at: [www.smallbusinessbc.ca](http://www.smallbusinessbc.ca)

■ **Today**

'Getting Your Business Online'

This seminar is designed for the complete beginner. Learn the basic costs and steps necessary to register your domain, find a hosting company, and have your website developed. Review of the different types of websites, and options on finding a web designer/developer.

■ **Today**

'Start Smart! Level 2'

Designed for the "launching a business" client who is possibly working on a business plan and conducting market research. Includes a demonstration of Small Business BC's Information Product System databases for conducting business research, as well as a presentation by the organization's statistician on its Customized Statistical and Market Research service. Also a presentation by eBusiness Connection for entrepreneurs considering e-commerce, or just how to promote their business on the Internet.

■ **Thursday, May 22**

'Intellectual Property'

Worried about someone "stealing your idea" or "copying your logo?" Learn how to protect your brand and ideas through trademark and patent registration, and other forms of intellectual property protection. This seminar will discuss what trademark and patents are, the benefits, and process of registration. It will also look at steps to take when you believe someone is infringing your intellectual property.

■ **Monday, May 26**

'Selling a Business'

Selling your business could be the single most important decision you make, so it's important to be prepared. You will learn the keys to successfully preparing your business for sale, possible options other than selling, the nuts and bolts of selling a business, who your key advisers should be, as well as what to expect during the due diligence stage, at the offer stage, and at closing.

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the human network.

