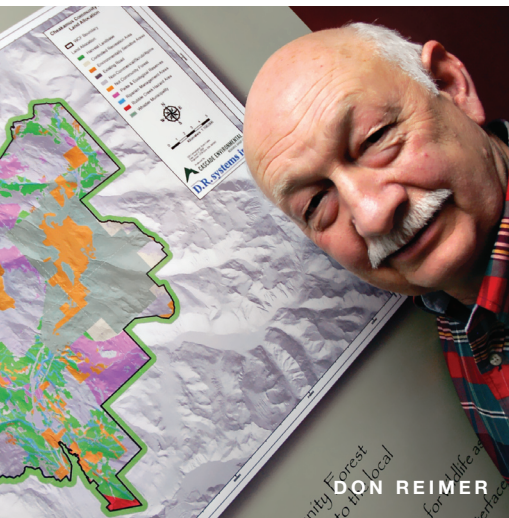


Computer Geeks In The Rugged Outdoors



“On two different instances, **Community Futures** loaned us significant sums, which enabled us to develop our current class of primary software products. That has led to our considerable success over the last 10-plus years.”

Those who know what Don Reimer does but haven't actually met him may wonder, based on his business expertise, whether to expect a computer geek or rugged outdoorsman.

A practising forester who now develops land-management software, Reimer says he fits neither stereotype, but is living proof that the worlds of high-tech and back woods are not mutually exclusive – in fact, they complement each other well.

Truth is, much of Reimer's success is a study in apparently conflicting interests – profit increase through environmentally sustainable practices; cutting-edge computer technology to manage millennia-old ecosystems and land-bases; international operations based on home-grown values and intent.

It all started with the mandate of using new technology to solve age-old, complex problems - how to manage a land-base such that you can use it; build on it; draw from it; harvest it ...but doing so without denuding the land or causing its habitats and ecosystems irreparable harm.

Land management is, for most of us, a daunting prospect with hugely complicated, interrelated data to assess – riparian and wildlife habitats, vegetation and water tables, visitor traffic flow or perhaps required annual resource yield, not to mention cost/profit dynamics – all must be considered to evaluate a land mass and its optimal use in ever-changing, dynamic circumstances.

Seen in that light, Reimer says, computers are the obvious choice for containing all that data, processing it, and coming up with a three-dimensional assessments of the land base today – and tracking progress as the landowner's objectives move forward.

Sounds great, doesn't it?

But sounding great isn't enough – even after 26 years in business, Reimer still says every day is a proving ground, especially when it comes to expansion.

“The thing I still find surprising is how much networking factors in – it's who knows who; and who trusts who; and who used to work for who rather than

who has the best skill set,” he says. “So in every new market, we really have to push to get that first pilot project that allows us to prove ourselves and show what we can do.”

A key to winning them over, he says, is tightly defining your market niche.

“Your advantage is in how you distinguish yourself from other, similar markets,” he said. “Then you have to be willing to work and invest to sustain that advantage, or competitors will copy you and take over your market.”

The D.R. systems inc. market certainly seems safe, if the numbers are any indication.

“To date we have conducted similar analyses on over 500 million acres (over 200 million hectares) worldwide with most projects showing either a gain in achievement of objectives of 30 per cent or more, or alternatively achievement of a given objective with a savings in costs of 20 per cent or more.”

Reimer expects his company to enjoy 500-per-cent growth over the next five years ...but it wasn't always boom time for D.R. systems inc. Reimer says it's costly business to develop software – and helping the forest often meant betting the farm. When the company needed financial support, Community Futures BC stepped in with two significant loans to help them develop their current class of software; sharing the vision and allowing the evolution of a technology that's both profitable and helps build a more sustainable future for governments, companies and non-profits alike.

Nor was this the only challenge – Reimer says it's tough to sell high-tech methodology to conservative resource-extraction companies that are both physically and, often, technologically isolated.

On top of that, there's a shifting set of rules and regulations governing everything from forestry to resource extraction to government lands that requires a constant, dynamic approach to management no required in many other industries.

Instead of a single software product, D.R. systems inc. had to develop a library of adaptive products to hold off much larger technology companies and protect its markets and product base.

With a concept that creates synergy between best business practice and environmental sustainability, forging ahead just made sense.

“Best of all, we get to teach people how to improve their company or agency performance while at the same time they are doing a better job of sustainably managing their landbases and the environment,” Reimer says. “Gotta love that!”

And for all the complexity of D.R. systems inc. work, Reimer's vision remains, at its foundation, as simple as can be.

“Above all else, do what's right,” he says.

“Your advantage is in how you distinguish yourself from other, similar markets. Then you have to be willing to work and invest to sustain that advantage, or competitors will copy you and take over your market.”

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