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'Innovative' approach helps upstart Eezy make its mark

By DON SERGENT dsergent@bgdailynews.com Jan 11, 2019

Shawn Rubel, who started the online graphics and photo business Eezy as a sideline, has grown it into a company with 30 employees and an international reach.

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From the cornhole boards in the front entrance to the large colorful mural behind the reception area, there are plenty of indicators that Bowling Green's Eezy is no old-school business.

In fact, in a region where the economy has long been driven by traditional manufacturing, there may be no clearer departure from that tradition than Eezy, which doesn't count any widget-makers among its staff of 30.

The big-screen display of real-time website analytics in the company's headquarters is a sure sign this is a "new economy" venture. The numbers – which are Eezy's lifeblood – are normally ticking up, meaning the vital signs for this upstart provider of stock graphics and photos are good.

“We create content that Google likes, and they send traffic to us,” Eezy founder and CEO Shawn Rubel said. “As long as we keep the users happy, Google is happy.”

Eezy, winner last year of a Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce Business Innovation Award, has been making Google happy since its launch by Rubel three years ago in a tiny office in the Western Kentucky University Small Business Accelerator. The company has grown to occupy 3,000 square feet of the accelerator’s home in the WKU Center for Research and Development on Nashville Road.

Started as Brusheezy, a website providing brushes and patterns for users of the Adobe Photoshop software, the company has expanded into stock photos, graphics and videos, and is fast making a name for itself in the world of content creation.

Rubel, a native Canadian who came to Bowling Green 15 years ago for a website development job, recalled how Eezy grew out of a side gig he started while working at Camping World.

“I started Brusheezy as a simple website for Photoshop users,” said Rubel, 37. “That kinda took off, then I duplicated that and created a website for vector graphics (Vecteezy). It got to the point where I could see the opportunity ahead of me.”

Rubel purchased the Eezy.com website domain name and launched a network of websites that provide stock graphics, website themes and video clips.

Altogether, those websites attract some 5 million visitors per month these days. They are mostly marketing managers and other creative professionals searching for stock images for use on websites and in publications.

And they come from all corners of the planet. Rubel said 80 percent of the traffic on the company’s websites is from outside the United States.

Likewise, Eezy itself knows no boundaries. Rubel estimates that half his employees work remotely.

“We have employees in Florida, Canada and Europe,” he said. “We do a lot of Google hangouts and teleconferences.”

It’s a business model that Small Business Accelerator Director Jeff Hook is learning to appreciate.

“They seem to be innovative in their approach to all aspects of the business,” Hook said.

“They have a high level of passion and energy, and they really seem to focus on incorporating innovation into everything they do. They’re sort of a cutting-edge operation. They strike me as what a lot of businesses are going to look like going forward.”

Going forward is very much a focus of Rubel’s these days. The number of customers subscribing to Eezy’s services or buying advertising on its sites has grown, and now the CEO is aiming to ensure the upward trend continues.

Rubel’s staff now includes SEO (Search Engine Optimization) professionals and computer programmers who are fine-tuning websites that are being translated into various languages in an effort to reach more customers.

“There’s a broad swath of people who need graphics and images,” Rubel said. “It’s massive. Our business is a never-ending game of adding more and more content.

“We’re still building our library of graphics and trying to make it easier to download. Our traffic has grown by 30 percent per year for the last couple of years. We’re shooting for 50 to 100 percent growth over the next couple of years by developing more content.”

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