

Chief Executive Officer, Stephen Smith
Webnames.ca



Webnames.ca Inc. is Canada's original and most experienced domain registrar.

HQ Region: Vancouver, Canada
Industry: Internet
Type: Privately Held
Status: Operating
Company Size: 25 employees
Founded: 1987
Website: <http://www.webnames.ca>
Twitter: [@webnames](https://twitter.com/webnames)



“I have always been passionate about systems, how good systems can create economies of scale and – with the internet – how systems provide reach and community.”

Stephen Smith, CEO, Webnames.ca

A spin-off from the Internet pioneers who founded the .CA domain in 1987, Webnames.ca is 100 per cent Canadian owned and operated. In addition to domain registration and corporate domain name management, Webnames.ca offers a growing list of Internet services. Webnames.ca's reliability is complemented by state-of-the-art systems and online tools which help customers get the most from their Internet presence.

Q: Where can you exert a competitive advantage with today's web 2.0 social media technologies?

SS: Businesses with a web presence need to really rethink the paradigm that says that good design, dynamic content, some links, some SEO and PPC is enough to succeed online. Today it is essential to think through and understand how your site is performing and where it isn't converting, how email marketing factors into your overall strategy, where and how your tweets

and blogs and YouTube videos are factoring into your overall online performance. What social media is doing for traffic today is probably enough of a reason to invest without trying to definitely prove other 'primary benefits'.

Q: What are some of the strategies that you employ to stay on the leading edge of business?

SS: We blog and tweet regularly, follow others and stay in touch with LinkedIn and Facebook. We also experiment and

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try things – such as our Hornet applications for the .tel domain. (see www.hornethub.com)

Q: How do you feel about social media in terms of your own personal preference? Useful or a waste of time?

SS: Here is what I believe in:

- That loose connections make today's world go around
- The wisdom of crowds
- The disruptive power (and the dynamic potential) of the long tail and how it is shaking up everything from the way we produce and consume culture to who we put in political office. If every special interest group was fully engaged and connected through social media it would be much easier to mobilize and get things done. This is probably coming, and when it happens, it will likely be an accelerator for culture and policy change. As for now, I think we are still mostly getting organized and experimenting and figuring out where the real utility is and what the right buttons are to press.

What I don't have much interest in:

- Being part of an online popularity contest
- Pretending that I have anything terribly profound to say
- Having to think about publishing – either in 140 character form or in a blog on any regular basis in order to somehow stay in the game.

Q: What are three things that you are passionate about?

SS: I have always been passionate about systems and how good systems can create great economies of scale and – with the internet – how systems provide reach and community.

From a business perspective I (and Webnames.ca) are passionate about:

- Our customers and doing whatever we can to provide them with the exceptional experience and value.
- Improvement – towards excellence. It is that constant pursuit of quality that makes us critical of what we do and working to make things better.
- Making a positive difference. In running a business we are measured with our financial success but ultimately we are part of a bigger ecosystem. We are all very active in the community; we volunteer an enormous amount of our time to a variety of good causes and do our best to help others succeed.

Q: What is social media not doing for us?

SS: Social media can be a huge distraction. Better filters will help us to distinguish the noise from the quality and I think that there will be a much bigger impact from social media when we develop better filters.

Best practices haven't really emerged yet in putting it to work for businesses so there is still a ton of experimentation going, and with that, there will also be lots of dead ends.

It isn't yet serving our ability to accelerate social change on a broad level but I think this is coming.

Q: How does a CEO integrate social media into his/her strategy?

SS: First think about objectives, desired outcomes and metrics and then find the right tools for getting there. To engage in social media just because it is social media, and that not doing it may be perceived as falling behind, is folly. If an organization is looking for better measures from an advertising budget, wanting to generate better and or more traffic to a website or looking for more input from customers about products and service; then implementing a blog, some video, and a corporate tweet is probably a good move. Tactics and tools should follow strategy and desired outcomes.



Q: How does social media create value for companies?

SS: Social media helps companies to keep their pulse on what their customers want – which is important – and that is a much more powerful and directed way of doing awareness type advertising (and spreading a message about the personality of your organization). And I also think that how much you do and how you execute on social media depends on your business. To the extent that your customers want to follow you or want to be part of a community associated with your brand really factors

into how effective an investment in social media will be for your business.

Q: How do you view social media in the work place?

SS: Most of our staff are involved in tweeting and blogging about the things that are part of our work. At Webnames we set guidelines for editorial tone and then implement a process for editorial review. If staff were excessively involved in their personal social media at work that can obviously become a problem.

Q: Do you feel that social media makes companies more efficient, by giving more conduits to work directly with the right people, to generate the right results?

SS: That would be nice. I don't think we are at mass customization utopia yet. I think that at least for the next while for most businesses social media is probably better described as a more interesting, more measurable and more effective way of doing (mostly) brand based advertising. The suitability for purpose tests needs to be applied carefully. One social media prescription certainly won't ease everyone's pain. What tools get employed at to what extent really depends on what type of business you are and what types of problems you are trying to solve.

Q: Should all companies be involved in some form of social media? Everyone else is doing it.

SS: Social media tools (like any other tool) should be employed in terms of their ability to deliver utility or tangible results to what you do and how much you do should follow your needs.

As I said earlier there is no one size fits all strategy with social media for businesses. Some factors that I think impact the suitability of a social media strategy for a business are:

- How important is brand to your business?
- Could your customers be characterized as fans, or followers?
- How many customers does your business service and how addressable are they?

Brand based businesses with a strong customer following, which have lots of dispersed customers, will do better with existing social media tools. Social media as a form of advertising gets to more targeted markets, gets them more engaged and delivers detailed, real time and accurate data.

In time I think that social media tools will likely play in and probably even overtake the effectiveness of specific product based advertising – but will obviously do it in a very different way. There is probably a good argument to be made that a good business would do its best to treat its customers like clients and to distinguish its product or service as being as distinct as possible, but some businesses just have more of these characteristics than others.



Q: What do you hope people take away from your speaking engagement on Dec 9th?

SS: As a take away, I hope we can bring some of the social media activities down to earth for the attendees. There are obviously a number of interesting arenas that are unfolding in this space right now but I hope to separate the tactics and utility for business from other interesting but separate issues such as personal reputation management, social capital and personal entertainment.

About Webnames.ca

Webnames.ca is Canada's original domain registrar and a one-stop convenience for the online needs of individuals, small businesses, nonprofit organizations and corporations. Canadian owned and operated since 2000, Webnames.ca began as a spin-off from the Internet pioneers who founded the .CA country code in 1987. We have registered hundreds of thousands of domain names, host thousands of websites and manage domain portfolios for many of Canada's Fortune 500 through our Corporate Services division, including Air Canada, CanWest Global, Pharmasave, BMW and many others.

Our mission is to connect Canadians with the tools they require to create, build and promote their online presence. Our bilingual customer support team is the heart of our company and the foundation of our relationship with you. In addition to being the best and the brightest, our team is passionate about customer service.

In an industry geared for self-serve, Webnames.ca takes a very different approach. Our telephone response times average under 30 seconds to talk to a live person. If you don't understand something, we will explain it. If there is a problem, we will resolve it. We strive to be more than a great service provider, but "an ally on the Web" to all our customers. Our difference is that we support our customers above and beyond their use of our products. We are committed to helping our customers achieve their online goals by providing information, recommendations and resources about all things Internet.

Our high-touch service is complemented by advanced domain management tools and leading-edge systems. Every domain includes unlimited toll free technical support and free services such as domain forwarding, parking, email channeling and metatag tools to drive traffic and help you get found online.

We realize that excellence is not measured by business success alone. Webnames.ca strives to make a positive impact in the community by supporting local organizations and charitable initiatives. We mentor, sponsor and participate on the boards of numerous nonprofit technology, small business and entrepreneurial organizations. We are furthermore committed to reducing waste and energy consumption in our daily activities.

So whether you are an individual registering your first domain name, a small business launching a new website or an international organization with thousands of domains to manage, you can trust Webnames.ca to do it right.

For more information about Webnames.ca, go to: www.webnames.ca



About the International Internet Marketing Association

The International Internet Marketing Association started in 1998 to bring marketers, agencies and professionals together to discuss the capabilities and potential of Internet marketing. With over ten years of experience since our first event and our association remains focused on its original mandate – education. Each year, IIMA delivers a series of networking and speaking events hosted by subject matter experts, thought leaders, experts and panels of marketing practitioners. Each event has the same objectives:

- to provide insight into current and emerging practices in online marketing
- to deliver practical insights that are immediately relevant to your business
- to challenge participants to achieve greater levels of awareness of digital marketing
- to assist in the integration of digital marketing into your big picture marketing strategy

To engage you in the community of marketing and business practitioners passionate about the future of internet marketing. The meet-ups provide a theatre for the discussion of the trends, tools and technology shaping how marketing practitioners who are using the digital space to greater involvement with their publics. By providing a series of networking and educational events, IIMA creates an environment in which the trends, tools, opportunities and risks that are shaping how people interact with the online market place.

For more information about IIMA, go to: www.iimaonline.org

Contributors to this interview



James Laitinen, Director of IIMA – James is an entrepreneur at heart with a flair for technology and marketing. Burning the midnight oil turning ideas into reality, he often attempts intimidation tactics during games of Scrabble. Connect with James online via [@jlate](https://twitter.com/jlate)



Charity Robertson, Director of Communications IIMA - Charity is a marketing, advertising and human relations professional. While not creating marketing strategies or studying, Charity can be found chasing the sun to the nearest beach. She is currently residing in Yucca Valley, California. Connect with Charity online via [@charityswab](https://twitter.com/charityswab)



Ean Jackson, Director of Events IIMA- When not running a marathon or snow Shoeing in gorgeous powder conditions, Ean helps us connect with professional speakers and industry experts to present to our membership. For speaking opportunities and events contact Ean online via [@eanjackson](https://twitter.com/eanjackson)



A special thank you to [@webnames](https://twitter.com/webnames) for his expertise and contribution to this interview.