

# Determination and dedication fuel Winnipeg entrepreneur

BY BRENDA FEHR

For Prime Times

**A**s founder, president and CEO of PCM Interactive, Winnipeg entrepreneur Elizabeth Gage has seen her company grow from a one-person business offering creative design for customers using Yellow Pages display ads to a company that uses the latest technology and online mobile search media to help regional and national customers build their brands and businesses.

In the early days, Gage operated her business (then known as Prairie Choice Marketing) out of her home and car, travelling with her trusty laptop, which she would plug into her car's cigarette lighter while on the road visiting clients. That early dedication and determination helped Gage grow PCM Interactive into the company it is today.

Her achievement hasn't gone unnoticed; accolades include a 2008 Woman Entrepreneur of the Year Award from the Women Business Owners of Manitoba.

Gage, who is in her 40s, maintains a busy schedule with work and family. She and husband Gord, who is PCM Interactive's vice-president of business development, have two children, including a teenage daughter and an eight-year-old son. Gage is also involved with the community and is part of Entrepreneurs Organization (EO), an organization with chapters around the world that brings entrepreneurs together.

Gage says she looks at success as more of a journey than a destination, and notes that the book *Three Big Questions that Everyone Asks Sooner or Later* by Dave Phillips is one that helped her discover her true purpose, mission and vision in life.

Prime Times recently asked Gage about her personal and professional journey in building PCM Interactive.

**Prime Times** : What do you enjoy most/what are the best things about your work?

**Elizabeth Gage** : The greatest challenge I have had is in transitioning PCM from the old has-been Yellow Pages business into today's PCM Interactive. Our clients have helped us in the transition to a national leader in the online and mobile search marketing space. Understanding the market need, embracing a mission for change and cultivating our innovative DNA has been the key to success as we continue our evolution. As a leader, I have had to demonstrate the courage to innovate and transform ideas into powerful impact. This involves testing ideas through radically different perspectives and asking: Why? Why not? What if? At the end of the day, though, it is about our customer and driving quality business leads to their door.

**PT**: Where were you born? Where did you grow up



Elizabeth Gage, founder, president and CEO of PCM Interactive Photo by Walter Janzen

and go to school?

**EG**: I was born in Winnipeg, grew up in Crescentwood and attended Balmoral Hall School. I was accepted at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, where I obtained an Honours degree in English prior to studying entrepreneurship at MIT Sloan School of Management. I have studied advanced Internet technology and analytics, and have always been fascinated by technology as it relates to marketing and deeper customer engagement.

**PT**: Please talk a little about what it was like in the early days of starting your company. What inspired you to start the company and what kept you going during that time (e.g. determination, belief in yourself)?

**EG**: You know, in 1995 I started designing Yellow Pages ads from the back seat of my car in rural Saskatchewan. It was winter and terribly cold. The ads brought new business for my customers and a slew of

referrals for me which fueled the early company growth. Growth was not planned, it was organic. The next leap came when, as a nursing mother, I discovered that sleep was important. I was doing \$3 million in sales out of my house, working 80 hours a week, and something had to give. It was not going to be my new baby! That is when I hired my first employee (a much better designer than I) and the business grew to 12 people from there.

**PT**: Did you grow up in an entrepreneurial family? Where do you think your entrepreneurial spirit comes from?

**EG**: My paternal grandfather, whom I never knew, apparently was an entrepreneur. He rented railway cars and brought in rugs from Persia. He also invested in real estate here in Winnipeg in the Dirty '30s. This was a very astute thing to do. My favourite story about my grandfather was one my father told about how one Friday when he visited my grandfather's office for his allowance and discovered a lineup of people outside the office. When he asked my grandfather who all these people were, my grandfather said, "friends of mine." They were actually people who needed food for their family and my grandfather shared his collected apartment rents with these people. It was the Depression.

**PT**: What do you credit for the success of your company?

**EG**: Success is all about having the right team. Profit is delivered by people working together on the same mission with clearly defined goals and benchmarks. Defining your culture around your people sets you apart from the 9-to-5 work environments.

**PT**: When you aren't busy at work, what do you like to do in your spare time?

**EG**: I enjoy a good cup of coffee, and a 10 km run 3 days a week. I find I am able to problem solve and see the future when I run. This helps me be more centred and focused. I enjoy my down time with my family at Lake of the Woods.

**PT**: What important things do you think you have learned about yourself and business through starting and building your own company?

**EG**: I have learned that the most important thing in business is not to be afraid to be who you are. There will always be naysayers. These people come in all shapes and sizes, and when you least expect them. You need to be able to recognize them and release them from your life. Belief in the power of the universe to take care of you is so important.