

Small Business Spotlight:

Will Cadell | Owner

Sparkgeo. Est. 2010

Life Story

Will Cadell studied engineering and subsequently remote sensing in his native Scotland. He began working in a land-use research institute as a spatial modeller. He only had access to basic software, so he wrote his own programs. Eventually, he and his wife decided to go on a big adventure, and moved to Canada, settling in Prince George where he worked for a forestry consultancy.

What motivated you to start your own business?

When you see a gap, you can decide to ignore it, or you can decide not to. I always ask myself the question, “am I going to regret not doing something?” I am typically a little more risk oriented and I like to do interesting things. I started thinking about starting my own organization during the economic crisis of 2009 and thought, “if I don’t start my own business now, then I will definitely regret it.”

How has your business been impacted by, and adapted to, COVID-19?

Our staff did an amazing job dealing with the shift to work from home. We don’t have a central office, and people work from offices around the globe. We weren’t thinking about pandemics when we decided to start working remotely, it was just that the first person I hired lived in a different city. That decision has positioned us well to weather the pandemic. We typically do some company meetups and we have just had to do a better job of culture on the web.

What are some of the challenges of operating a business in a rural part of the province and how did you overcome them?

If we weren’t remote, I would have a talent pool of 70,000 to draw from. Instead, now I have 36 million to draw from. The largest competition in our sector is with talent acquisition. We can pay a good salary, be super flexible and 100% remote. There is no endless commuting to a “Dickensian workhouse”. There are few greater gifts than giving somebody two hours of their day back every day.

I really like what Prince George offers and I like living in a small-medium sized town. We have everything we could want here, ski hills, trails, running, biking and so much more. It is an hour flight for me to Vancouver, and from there I can get just about anywhere. Sometimes my wife and I wonder if we could live anywhere in the world where would we choose? We always come back to Prince George and we wouldn’t change it.

How has networking or community played a role in the growth of your business?

I’m involved in the Innovation Central Society which supports tech entrepreneurs in the Prince George region through the Hubspace facility. When I was on my own, networking was absolutely critical. It gets lonely as an entrepreneur. Networking isn’t just about the clients, but also the comradery. If you have a legal or accounting question you can get referred to somebody with those skills. Having people who have been in the trenches and have the experience is very valuable.

What would be your advice for other entrepreneurs with a desire to work with international clients?

Being in a rural community almost helps you get over the barrier of working with international clients. Going international is not that different than doing business in the next town along the way. We are always working with people who are somewhere else. The first contract that we ever had was in the US, and once we got that figured out everything was pretty simple.

My advice would be to build your local network and utilize the technology to build global communities of practice. It has never been easier to do than it is now.

The Bottom Line:

- Sparkgeo has 50 employees.
- In the next couple of years, Sparkgeo will grow their UK operations significantly.
- Sparkgeo is applying their tools and technology to support communities and companies in the measurement and monitoring of climate and related landscape changes.