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Videos, weddings created a match made in heaven**Ben Anderson went to college to study entrepreneurship, but he didn't wait around for a degree to get started.**

By Dick Youngblood

Staff Writer

Ben Anderson graduated from the University of St. Thomas with a degree in entrepreneurial studies - and a thriving business that showed he'd been paying attention.

In fact, he was on his way to grossing nearly \$80,000 from the sale of the wedding videos he was shooting when he wasn't in class. Considering that he was working 50 hours a week on top of his classroom and homework assignments, you have to wonder how the kid stayed in school, much less managed to graduate.

The answer is simple, according to Alec Johnson, assistant professor of entrepreneurship at St. Thomas: "He's a problem-solver, and he doesn't take no for an answer."

In short, we're talking determination, which explains a lot - including why Anderson won the Minnesota and Great Lakes regional collegiate entrepreneur awards this spring in competitions sponsored by St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud-based Anderson Entrepreneurial Center and Freeze.com. He's competing now for the Global Student Entrepreneur prize to be awarded in November by Mercedes-Benz Financial.

Anderson, 25, has been playing the entrepreneurial game since he was in high school. By the time he enrolled at St. Thomas in 2001, he owned 10 computers used in his business as a software trainer operating out of rented space at a local electronics retail store.

Alas, the business was time-consuming and yielded only about \$10,000 to \$12,000 a year, with little upside that he could see. Which is why the new video editing software Anderson stumbled across early in his freshman year at St. Thomas caught his attention.

"It not only simplified the editing process, but it cost only \$10,000, about a tenth the cost of an analog system that did the same thing, only with lower quality," Anderson said.

So he sold his 10 computers, put the money into the software and aimed the video camera he used to record family events at the niche market for wedding videos, a business that grew to \$79,000 in 2005.

Welcome to Cinemotion Studios, a St. Paul video production company that will gross upwards of \$85,000 from the wedding business this year, Anderson's first full-time year since he completed his St. Thomas studies in 2005. (He received the diploma this spring after completing a public service commitment.)

The wedding business hasn't grown very fast in 2006 because Anderson's attention, not to mention

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a significant chunk of his bankroll, has been diverted in the past year by three diversification efforts, including one that he said "failed miserably."

The failure involved a partnership with a local wedding directory to offer its advertisers promotional videos that would detail their products and services for directory subscribers. The editors agreed with him that it sounded like a smashing success - but "smashing" turned out to be the operative word.

The concept, in which Anderson invested \$3,000, crashed without a sale, in large part because the \$1,500 price tag was too high for the mom-and-pop businesses that dominated the potential market.

Undeterred, he invested about \$4,000 to develop a division he dubbed AutoMotion, involving video reviews of new automobiles, to be used as promotional tools on auto dealers' websites and, more important, as informational sources by the hundreds of online auto research sites.

His strategy: Aware that auto dealers resist promotional schemes that lack proven benefits, Anderson cut a deal with Merit Chevrolet in Maplewood to produce free of charge a series of "virtual test-drive" videos for its website describing each vehicle in the Chevy line. In return, Merit is collecting feedback on consumer response that Anderson can use to promote the concept.

While the deal, which went into effect last month, clearly is a no-lose proposition for Merit, sales manager Chris Rinkel said he agreed to participate in part because Anderson is "an impressive young man ... with a great concept." And once that concept is proved, he fully expects to become a paying AutoMotion client, Rinkel said.

Although the AutoMotion concept is still in development, Anderson has made more progress on another, as-yet-unnamed expansion involving virtual tours of real estate properties. The notion occurred to him as he hunted for an apartment after college and was struck by the lack of visual information online.

So he invested another \$2,000 to develop the idea, which involves 30- to 40-second videos that provide all the information usually provided by text and still photos.

Thus far, he has sold eight videos to a St. Paul property management company for a total of \$5,000. That's a promotional price, said Anderson, who figured it costs about \$1,500 to produce a video.

Where's the investment capital coming from? Meager profits from the wedding business, Anderson said, and the \$5,000 he has won so far in the student entrepreneur competitions.

All of which comes as no surprise to Johnson, the St. Thomas entrepreneurship teacher: Anderson "shows a willingness to reinvent himself," Johnson said, "and that's an impressive quality to have at this stage of his career."

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CINEMOTION STUDIOS

Business: A video production company that focuses on wedding videos but is taking aim at the auto and real estate markets as well.

Founded: 2001

Headquarters: St. Paul

Website: www.cinemotionstudios.com

Executive: Founder Ben Anderson, a recent graduate of the University of St. Thomas who started

the business as a college freshman.

Employees: Two full time, two part time

2005 revenue: \$79,000

Awards: Anderson won the Minnesota and Great Lakes regional collegiate entrepreneur awards this spring and is competing for the Global Student Entrepreneur prize to be awarded in November.

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