

# IDAHO FALLS *inBusiness*

River City Weekly's monthly business section

## Home business: Working the Web in Idaho

BY SARAH DROEGEMUELLER  
River City Weekly

Kevin Keefe remembers answering the phone in Idaho Falls late one night, and on the other end was a voice with a unique accent. "Hi, I'm calling from Liverpool, and I want to buy a ski hat." That's just one of the stories he has to tell after retailing his custom-made ski hats since 2001 on the Internet from his Web site [www.getAKLU.com](http://www.getAKLU.com).

Keefe's business, KLU Mountain Outerwear, is just one of many locally owned businesses that have taken advantage of the Internet. Some are custom-designed, some are variations of a ready-made site, but all bring customers easy access to their information and products.

Keefe and his wife sew the hats after customers place their orders online with their own head measurements and choices of colors and patterns. It only takes about a day to sew it up before they ship them out to all parts of the world.

"We don't do any advertising," said Keefe. "It's all about search engines. The person who figures out how to get number one in search engines makes a million bucks." Keefe for sev-

eral years had a Web site that simply told about their products but didn't have a way to order. He did a redesign of his site in 2001, then started taking credit cards as a form of payment and put in metatags so that his site was the first one found if someone searched for the key words "ski hats."

"Our business went up five-fold," he said. Last year was their best year ever, grossing about \$12,000 in sales. In December he took two weeks off of his day job at the site; KLU mountain outerwear took 176 orders that month and each Monday shipped out about 32 orders.

"That's our busy season. We don't take vacations or visit family in the winter. By about March it slows down, and we have summers off, which is what we want," Keefe said. "I thought about adding a summer line, but I'd rather go rock climbing and kayaking."



Internet shopping appeals to a certain shopper — the person who wants to shop anonymously and find exactly what they want any time of the day or night. A store shopper wants to interact with real people and walk out immediately with the item they buy.



The Internet again brought reason for smiles in the KLU Mountain Outerwear sewing room last week. Sheila and Kevin Keefe work together to produce unique cold weather gear; they just received a sizeable Web order from a customer in Greece.

PHOTOS BY CHUCK HOOKER

Aaron Atkinson realized these shopping preferences when he started his Christian bookstore online at [www.mylocalbookstore.com](http://www.mylocalbookstore.com). Eventually, he said, he'd like to add a brick-and-mortar store.

Starting on the Internet is "a way to fill this niche, without having a lot of capital to put into it," Atkinson said. His Web site is part of a franchise, offering low overhead and no stock to carry. Yet he offers two unique local draws: He carries material from local



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A friend who designs Web sites talked Kent Frecker into trying the Internet as a new way to sell saddles. It's working, but most of his business is still from word-of-mouth referral.



**PEOPLE InBUSINESS**

**Gugelman wins photography awards**

Photographer Travis Gugelman of Rexburg won several awards at the Professional Photographers of Idaho annual convention.

Gugelman won Idaho's photographer of the year; best of Idaho; Fuji's elite masterpiece award; first place wedding album; first place portrait (child); second place portrait



(man); second place for finished product; photographers' choice; and Idaho's court of honor.

He also recently received the bronze photographer of the year award from the Professional Photographers of America.

Gugelman opened his studio on Main Street in Rexburg almost five years ago. He has since been hired to work and speak all over the United States on portrait and wedding photography.

**Working the Web in Idaho**

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authors and artists and gives five percent of each purchase back to a local charity, church or school. "People can choose what organization they want their five percent to go to. They feel that making their purchase is going to make a difference in their community," he said.

Atkinson remains mindful of the power the Internet provides. "When it's on the Web, it's accessible to the world. Generally, you have the biggest success when you market to the world," he said.

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Kent Frecker never really advertised his custom saddle-making business in its 18-year span. But when Frecker Saddlery went online ([www.freckersaddlery.com](http://www.freckersaddlery.com)), he doubled his business and hired two more employees.

"We did it for convenience," Frecker said. "Our goal wasn't to expand any; it's easier to refer people to that Web site than keep making copies of pictures or try to make a catalog. Then we got bombarded with phone calls and more people wanting saddles. Now and then we'd put extra saddles on the Web

site, and they would sell. Then those customers would come back and have orders lined up. It kind of surprised us. Now we get phone calls from all across the country."

The Web site is essentially Frecker's store, which allows added flexibility. "We don't have a storefront per se. The shop is here at my house and we don't keep business hours. If I want to go for a horse ride today I can close the shop, let the answering machine answer the phone or let the emails come in. It gives us a lot of freedom," he said.

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Convenience was the main reason for Melissa and Jim Barnard of Rigby to put Landmark Development and Silver Creek Construction online ([www.landmarkdevelopment.org](http://www.landmarkdevelopment.org) and [www.silvercreekconstruction.com](http://www.silvercreekconstruction.com)). It's easy to list lots for sale and house plan descriptions online.

"It's convenient for customers. They go to the site at their leisure and don't feel sales pressure. It's technology that everybody uses. It's a way to find us and for the Web site the more information the better," Melissa said. "We have protective covenants listed and any plots or house amenities. If I had to send out a mass mailing it would be very expensive, and I'd probably miss my market. Online it's specific. They're the customer you want because they're looking."

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Christina Tweedie has experience running two Web-based businesses, and they are "as easy as they get," she said. Her Web site [www.localtravelsavers.com](http://www.localtravelsavers.com) is part of a network marketing company. She registers the URL and pays a monthly fee, and the company does the customer-service work.

"It's so hands-off, but what I do have to do is advertise it locally," Tweedie said. She knows who has visited her site only after customers shop and book their travel.

Her husband works for a mortgage company, and the company's Web site [www.mortgageonline.com](http://www.mortgageonline.com) is maintained by a service specific to mortgage companies.

"They pay a registration fee and a maintenance fee each month to host and maintain the applications on the site," Tweedie said. "When they get an email, they hop on it." The Web site is another avenue to provide convenience to customers, so that they can find information and even fill out applications without leaving their home or office.



**GETTING YOUR WEB SITE UP AND RUNNING**

Adam Hayes started his Web design business in 2002. He does everything from the initial concept, design and branding to the coding, back-end administration and search engine optimization.

With several local and national clients, including Keefe, Frecker and Barnard, he has a few tips for those thinking of starting out on the Web.

**"You can be as big or small as you want to be," Hayes said. "Everyone is on a level playing field."**

He has helped individuals develop a small side business and helped large companies get noticed online.

"The most important thing that anyone can do when starting a Web-based business is understand their customer. You've got seven seconds when they find your site for them to decide this is where they want to be. Otherwise they'll click 'back' and never come back to your site. You have to know what they want so they can say 'yes, I finally found where I want to be,'" Hayes said.

Hayes' clients come mostly from referrals. He was recommended to Keefe by his father-in-law and was recommended to Barnard by a satisfied client. You can find his site at [www.ahfx.net](http://www.ahfx.net).

Other ways to get a Web site up and running include the path that Tweedie and Atkinson took - using a company or service that sells "cookie-cutter" Web sites. Your site is basically the same as all the others, but you provide the domain name and customize the colors, photos and look of the site.

This option is less expensive but restricted to what that company has to offer.



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