

PORTFOLIO

Award-winning Web designer multi-tasks

Three jobs keeps Van Wicklin busy but not overwhelmed

By ERIN EDGEMON
Business Editor

Jim Van Wicklin likes to keep busy. The father of three doesn't have just one or even two full-time jobs. He has three.

By day, Van Wicklin works at MTSU as a fund-raiser but by the evening he is building Web sites for a growing list of clients or teaching martial arts classes along with his wife, Paula, who is a stay-at-home mom and regional Tae Kwon Do champion.

But how does the owner of VW Web Design and Full Armor Martial Arts do it all?

"It is just setting a schedule," Van Wicklin said. "I couldn't live without my Treo (a phone equipped with e-mail and an organizer). There is no question about that.

"I couldn't do it without my wife," he added. "She manages the kids and she manages the school."

And you are not likely to catch Van Wicklin relaxing and watching television. He is always multi-tasking.

"To me it is wasted time for me to not be making money when I am watching TV," Van Wicklin said. "I can do Web design anywhere."

Van Wicklin is an award-winning Web page designer. He started his Web design company about a decade ago while attending MTSU just to make some extra money.

Van Wicklin's Twilight Zone Tower of Terror – Service Elevator Web site recently won the 2006 Web Site of the Year Award from the American Association of Webmasters. The Web site at www.serviceelevator.com was designed as a tribute to a Disney theme park ride. It was chosen for Web site of the year out of 16,000 applications the organization received during the year.

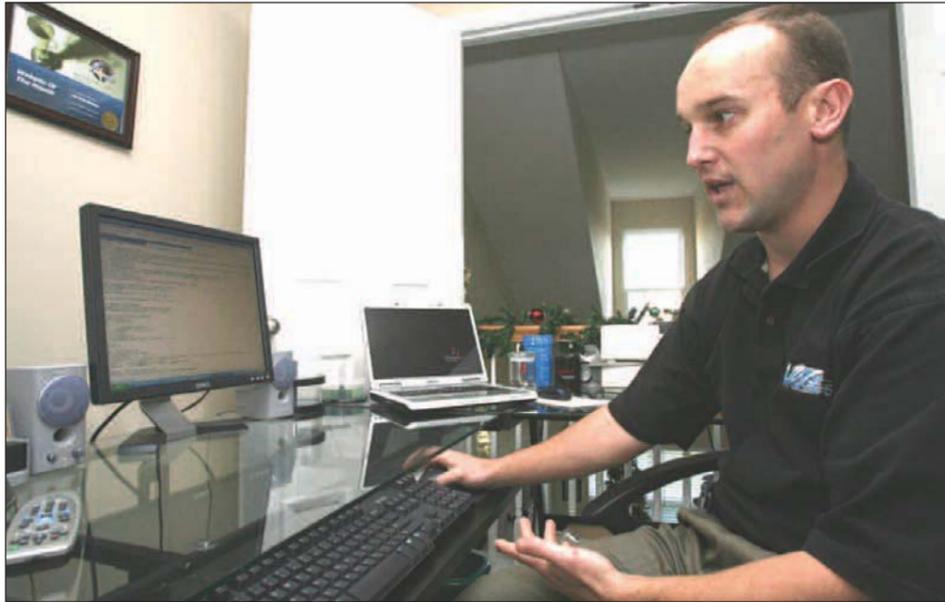
According to the association, the Service Elevator Web site won for its form and functionality, intuitive navigation, ease of use and its stunning look.

Since launched in October, the Web site has received over 1 million hits and has had more than 500 photos submitted from visitors.

VW Web Design has won over 40 AAWM Gold Design awards and two Web-site-of-the-month awards.

Business owners and others have realized that Web sites have become a necessity rather than a luxury. Consumers are going to the Internet to learn about a company or organization rather than calling or stopping in.

VW Web Design has grown significantly in the last few years primarily by word of mouth and winning awards.



Jim Van Wicklin explains his daily work routine at his home office.

TMP photo by
Laura Leigh Smith

"I did two things different than most," he said. "I set a flat price, and I did a good job."

None of his clients have been dissatisfied or discontinued their service.

"They are getting business from them," he said. "They are winning awards from them."

Joi Sherrill, a local Realtor with Prudential Realty, contracted VW Web Design to build her a new Web site at www.joisherrill.com recently.

The Web site won the AAWM Gold Design Award in early December.

"Jim did a fabulous job creating my Web site," Sherrill said. "He was very patient and I am really hard to please."

She said Van Wicklin created the site on a small budget and made it exactly the way she wanted it.

"He also does a very good job maintaining it," Sherrill said, "and asking for a change each month to improve the site."

Van Wicklin said he enjoys "taking someone's vision and putting it into action."

Van Wicklin and the two full-time employees that work for him have 50 Murfreesboro clients and have built over 100 Web sites.

"It is just fun," he said of why he operates VW Web Design. "When you are good at something you just want to do it."

Currently, much of VW Web Design's focus is search engine optimization. Clients come to him with existing Web sites, and he tries to figure out why it doesn't place high on a search engine.

New technologies and shortcuts are being created all of the time that allows him to build better and more interactive Web sites in less time. When he first started building Web sites, he had to input all of the HTML code by hand.

Van Wicklin said it would be financially feasible for him to quit his MTSU job and operate VW Web Design full time. But he is not willing to give up that job, which he also loves.

Van Wicklin has created a scholarship at MTSU on behalf of VW Web Design in the College of Mass Communications that awards \$500 a semester to a student with Web designing skills.

"I guess when you are a fund-raiser it seems silly not to give back," he said of why he started the scholarship. "I know what it is like to not have help."

Van Wicklin said he manages to balance his jobs while also spending time with his family by taking advantage of every moment and only getting about six hours of sleep a night.

He likes to use his lunch break at his day job to call clients or work on Web sites. Van Wicklin also finds he stays up to midnight or later working on Web sites and talking to clients on the West Coast.

"I have yet to freak out and get stressed," Van Wicklin said. "I grew up being an ADD (attention deficit disorder) kid."

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For more information on VW Web Design, visit www.vwebdesign.com.

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