Putting you online for learning

Computime enters new MicroAge

Despite the staggering pace of technological developments over the past decade, local computer retailer Computime has managed not only to ride the wave but also to grow and prosper.

One measure of its quick growth is that Computime kept running out of space. It grew out of several locations since being founded in 1984, before settling in its current landmark building on 2nd Avenue.

So what is the secret to Computime's success? Keeping abreast of new developments and anticipating customers' needs says co-owner Mike Tataryn.

The most recent change to the business has been joining the international MicroAge franchise, an event that occurred a mere six months ago.

"We can't necessarily compete on price point alone, but what we can offer is a level of service other stores don't offer," says Mike.

"For example, we sell over 20,000 different products, and while our salespeople and technicians know a lot, they just can't know everything. By being a part of MicroAge, we have access to a whole range of experts. What we don't know we can find out very easily by calling on a product manager at MicroAge for help. That is something the customer can't do on their own."

MicroAge/ Computime also offers a whole range of services aimed at businesses – from assistance in purchasing to installing networks and troubleshooting. Computime has always done this, but now can offer more and better service by being part of MicroAge.

"When a customer buys a network from us, the entire system is set and configured at our Configuration Centre in Montreal," says Mike.

"This means that when a new system arrives in your office there's less time delay. The system is fully functional and ready to go when it arrives. We should be able to come in after hours, set up the network and be out before the customer opens the next day."
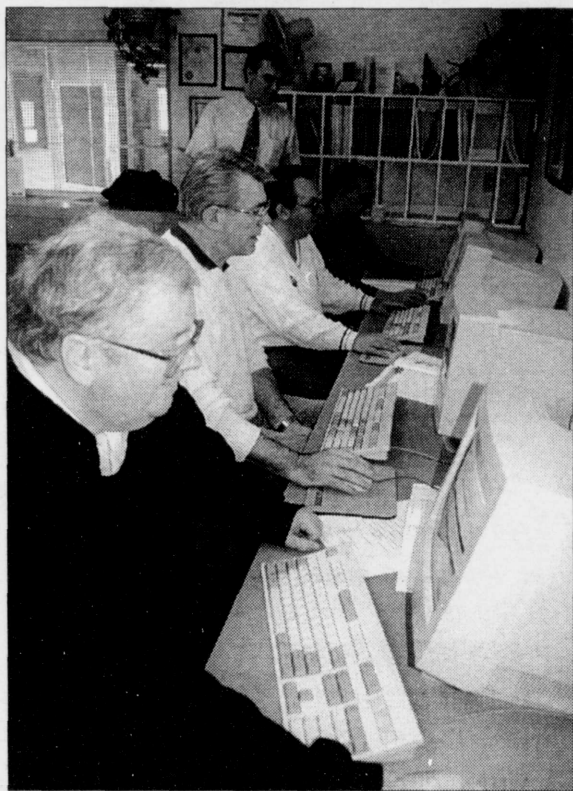
Students get hands-on online experience in MicroAge/Computimes classroom. John McKenzie/Free Press

By LUISA LAZZAROTTO

For The Free Press

Want to learn a new computer skill but don't have the time or energy to go back to school? Now you can sign up for an online course through MicroAge/ Computime, the computer retailer that's been in Prince George since 1984. Just go to Computime's website (at www.computime.com) and you can sign up, pay for, take and graduate from a number of online courses. Want to get a sense of what a course might be like before you pay? You can try a sample lesson at their website as well.

The cost of each course varies according to the length of time you sign up for. You can take a course for a week, a month or longer.

"I think there's a big future in this," says MicroAge/Computime co-owner Mike Tataryn. "It's ideal for people who can't take two or three days off work to take a course but who may want some training."

Also, he suggests businesses can use the courses to train people while they're working.

"The business could buy into it for, say, six months and when their employees need help with a particular area they can log on and work through the lessons that will help

them", he explains.

Mike says online courses have been offered for the past year and so far have attracted about 50 learners. One problem people may have is that to successfully complete a course, they must be quite self-disciplined. Taking a course on-line from home or work thus may not work for everyone. Mike plans to set up a classroom in MicroAge/ Computime's training area exclusively for on-line learners.

"That will give them a quiet place where they can come and work on their course for a couple of hours."

The courses are developed by the same company that develops MicroAge/ Computime's other courses.

And if you run into difficulties that can't be solved online, MicroAge/ Computime staff is just a phone call away.

"We haven't really run into any problems like this because the courses are so well-designed," says Mike. "But if a person needs help they can call us. If we can't get them back on track with just a phone call, we can arrange a time so they can come in and get extra help."

Sample it online, or hands-on at the upcoming business and technology show November 19 and 20 at the Prince George Civic Centre.

If you've got the idea, Innovation Resource Centre has the tools to bring it to fruition

By NICOLE ROSS

For The Free Press

We all dream of creating the next velcro, or discovering a valuable, miracle product.

The Innovation Resource Centre encourages the development of such ideas by providing the training and support necessary to achieve innovative success. If you've got the idea, the IRC will provide the information and tools to back it up.

Training begins with programs aimed at young innovators with big ideas. Tracey Meszaro, a project coordinator with the IRC, has created "Venture Out", a five month program which teaches young inventors marketing, sales,

and the legal issues involved in creating a business.

The program's success is evident in Tracey's 48 students, who have created 26 full time jobs in the Prince George community.

"We teach the students the whole realm of business, taking them through the steps of success," says Tracy.

Northern British Columbia's public schools are learning about science through hands on experience. Working in partnership with Science World of Vancouver, the IRC brings scientists into local classrooms. This program gives kids an idea as to what's out there, encouraging Northern students to become interested in science related careers.

Post secondary students benefit

from the IRC through Science and Technology Job Shadows. Students from both the University of Northern B.C. and the College of New Caledonia are partnered with local industry workers for one-day job shadows.

Tim Thomas, head of the IRC, promotes this community service as a benefit to all those involved.

"Going out to spend a day in the field allows students to get to know the industry and create links with local companies. This is also a tremendous opportunity for employers, as local workers tend to be long term employees."

Tracey and Tim will continue to promote the Innovation Resource Centre's programs through their booth at Tech '99. As well, Tim will introduce his upcoming workshop,

"Business of Ideas", which is geared towards inventors hoping to develop more ideas to expand their innovative business. Tracey's follow up workshop, "What's an Idea Worth?" will discuss idea protection and promotion.

The Innovation Resource Centre plans to unveil their "Inventor's Kit" at the show. This informative workbook is designed to give inventors a comprehensive guide to working with their ideas, by describing programs available to innovators, and limited government funding options. Also included in the kit is an "Inventor's Book" which gives detailed advice for tracking the progress of each idea, and a selection of community contacts to assist in the process.

Through their various programs