

SMALL BUSINESS

He's been wired all his life

Web guru follows his dad's lead

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STAFF WRITER

LYNDHURST

As a kid, Jon Wolf fell asleep to the mechanical skipping of his father's dot-matrix printers. While a student at Teaneck High School, he wrote an attendance program in the BASIC computer language.

It was no surprise, then, when the adult Wolf wound up administering a computer network shared by more than 3,000 employees.

During those five years at First Investors Corp., Wolf's artistic side got little expression. Then, in 2004, a friend made a simple request that brought Wolf's right brain-left brain talents into alignment.

The friend, plumber JT O'Brien, asked if he would design his Web site. He did, and that got Wolf thinking about the business possibilities.

The company became Live Web Studios, with Wolf initially finding a niche in blue-collar businesses.

(Wolf's given last name is Cohen, but he prefers to use the translation of his Hebrew middle name professionally.)

Today his client list includes a lumber company, hair salon, architectural firm and recycling center.

The 41-year-old works out of his Lyndhurst home and often meets clients in coffee shops. (He keeps a mental list of the ones with free Internet access.)

"My whole company is literally in this case," he said, sliding his laptop



DON SMITH/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Jon Wolf, left, started his Web design business when friend JT O'Brien, right, asked Wolf to help with his plumbing company's site. "I left 98 percent of it to Jon," O'Brien said. "After all, I wouldn't want him to tell me how to put in his boiler."

bag across a diner table in Hackensack. "I think it's all about getting out and shaking hands, especially in the Web business."

In addition to competing with other small design shops, LiveWebStudios.com goes up against the likes of Amazon and Yahoo. Wolf says he does so by offering custom graphics and hosting packages at or below the larger companies' prices, along with free monthly updates of each site's content.

He also instructs business owners in what they need to do to remain high on search results pages.

Artistry of varying forms has long been a passion for Wolf, a pony-tailed, part-time musician who's played in country and disco bands in Atlantic City and on the cruise ship circuit. He's even toured the country with a band from Knoxville, Tenn.

He now plays piano and keyboard with a Doors tribute band called Crystal Ship and has designed Web sites

for nine other groups.

"If it's a wedding band, sometimes they'll find out I'm a piano player and ask me to do a cocktail hour," he said. "So it works both ways."

In creating his clients' sites, small, subtle details are a specialty. One site's graphics show birds flying in one corner toward the horizon. Another, for a cigar store, shows a faint wisp of smoke spiraling upward.

He does a fair number of site "redo's" because of the fast pace of tech-

Live Web Studios, Lyndhurst

Founded: 2004

Owner: Jon Wolf

Employees: Two, plus five freelancers

Web site: LiveWebStudios.com

Web sites designed: 80+

Advice: "If you do what you love and love what you do, it won't feel like you're getting up and going to work in the morning."

nological development.

"I always say the site's not finished until you say it's finished," he said.

Web design packages typically average \$1,500 to \$3,000, which includes two years of hosting along with the monthly updates. Wolf employs one part-time employee to help with sales calls to new customers and site updates. He also taps outside graphical artists and backup programmers for busy periods.

JT O'Brien Plumbing and Heating in Bergenfield – one of the county's largest plumbing companies – remains a loyal customer. In his site's latest look, O'Brien said he sought something eye-catching but easy to navigate.

"I left 98 percent of it to Jon," he said. "After all, I wouldn't want him to tell me how to put in his boiler."

Wolf's father, Steve Cohen, started working as a computer programmer in the '70s. He turns 66 today, and remains a valued consultant for his son.

"He's still doing a lot of programming," Wolf said, "and I'll admit he probably knows more about Google than I do."

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