Like wild fire

Two alumni started Wildwires, a Harrisonburg datacom and telecom company, while they were still students

Peter Denbigh ('02) and Saunders Roesser ('02) became friends because of a mutual interest in mountain biking. After learning that they both also enjoyed computers, the JMU duo created their own company, Wildwires, from the ground up. Now, Wildwires' services are spreading like wild fire.

Wildwires' services are twofold: datacom and telecom wiring backed up by computer technical support. "It all started with our hobbies," says Roesser, a computer science major who enjoys building computer networks and fixing computers.

The duo established the company during their senior year at JMU. Denbigh, an integrated science and technology major, says, "We started from the bare bones basics - opened a small business bank account, got a business license, created a Web site and funded the company from our own pockets with money from other jobs. We both worked very hard and didn't mind starting off small. We used my personal truck and worked out of my apartment. We had a two-month plan at the most, and we were really just testing the waters. We found that we had a chance, so we just kept growing one step at a time, careful to never get ahead of ourselves, while at the same time not stunting our growth."

Wildwires' technology services include the installation of telecom and datacom wiring, which includes telephone, video system and computer wiring. Denbigh and Roesser work with clients like Gary Beatty and Bill Riner, owners of several Harrisonburg-area housing and apartment developments. The Wildwires duo installs television, telephone and high-speed Internet in every room, which is a helpful convenience for tenants including JMU students. Denbigh and Roesser then back up their wiring services with tech support for computers and networks. They fix computers on-site providing their own technicians as well as those contracted from outside businesses. "That way we have a technician on-call at all times," says Roesser.

The Wildwires staff, including six part-time employees, also helps customers with computer purchasing decisions. "The initial couple of students we hired were friends of ours who we knew to be good workers and who could understand the principles of Wildwires," says Roesser.

"A young team is more open to taking risks, trying new ideas and expending energy," adds Denbigh. "A large portion of our target market is students, so it only makes since that if we have students as employees, we can relate better to our customers. Our team is second to none, which makes it possible for Saunders and I to do what we have to do and not have to worry about every detail. But I feel that it is very important to not lose touch with what the company is built on. We both enjoy getting out and getting our hands dirty. We still do a lot of on-site work."

In addition to owning Wildwires and putting in more than 60 hours a week, Denbigh is working to complete his MBA in 2004, and Roesser earned his master's degree in computer science in May.

The two entrepreneurs are considering opening additional Wildwires offices where demand is high, but both plan on staying in the Harrisonburg area after completing post-graduate work.

"Everyday it seems like there is new opportunity for Wildwires to grow," says Rosser, "and every day is seems as though the possibilities are unlimited."

Learn more about the JMU high-tech duo at www.wildwires.com.

Allison Mall ('04)