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CANADA WIDE MEDIA LTD.  
canada wide media ltd.

Peter Legge

"You become what you think about most of the time."

Interview conducted on November 15, 2006  
by Richard Goossen

CANADA WIDE MEDIA  
canada wide media

For more than 40 years, Peter Legge has embodied the gutsy spirit of the entrepreneur. A savvy businessman with an uncanny ability to identify opportunities, Peter successfully developed what began as a small-circulation television listings magazine called *TV Week* into the foundation of a top Canadian enterprise.

As President and CEO of Canada Wide Media, Peter leads the largest independently owned publishing company in Western Canada, which produces 42 titles, with annual revenues in excess of \$25 million.

(from website: [www.peterlegge.com](http://www.peterlegge.com))

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION  
biographical information

### Peter Legge

**Position:** President & CEO

**Company:** Canada Wide Media Limited

**Website:** [www.canadawide.com](http://www.canadawide.com), [www.peterlegge.com](http://www.peterlegge.com)

**Location:** Burnaby, BC

**Type of Business:** Magazine Publishing

**Number of Employees:** 125

**Status:** Private

**Years in Operation:** 1976—present

**Approx. Annual Revenue:** \$25 million +

GENERAL QUESTIONS  
general questions

**1. When did you start your first entrepreneurial venture, and what was it?**

My first entrepreneurial venture was actually a hotdog stand at the Pacific National Exhibition<sup>1</sup> (PNE) about 35 years ago. The stand was called Bunny's, and I bought it because I wanted to know what it was like to run my own business. Also, my wife needed a car, and the hotdog stand seemed like a promising way to make some money to offset that cost.

I thought, '14 days; no big deal.' Anyway, it rained every day during that two-week period, so attendance at the PNE was down from the historical average. In the end, though, my wife and I made a few dollars and bought a new car.

**2. What motivated you to become an entrepreneur?**

About 32 years ago I was fired from a radio station in Langley, BC (a city in the east area of Greater Vancouver). My employer and I had ongoing philosophical differences, and it was difficult for us to see eye to eye on many issues, so he dismissed me. After that experience, I didn't want to get fired again and I didn't like the feeling of not being appreciated as an employee. That's what motivated me to have my own business.

God had a larger plan, though, because my unemployment led to the formation of my present company, Canada Wide Media Limited ("Canada Wide"). I started by purchasing a little magazine called *TV Week*, which had a gross revenue of about \$100,000 a year. I was a good sales guy—with lots of vitality and creativity—and I thought I could make something more out of it. I had no idea the company would grow so much over these past decades.

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<sup>1</sup> The PNE is a longstanding fair and exhibition held in Vancouver for two weeks in late August and early September. It attracts approximately 1 million visitors annually.

**3. Was anyone a model of inspiration for you, and if so, how?**

My dad was always an impeccably dressed person, and he had a vibrant personality that attracted people to him. As well, he was completely honest and committed. Many people in New Westminster (a suburb of Vancouver) loved and respected him. In fact, every organization he was involved with has named something after him. There's even a local theatre in New Westminster named after him.

In June of this year, I received a letter about my father from someone whom I had never met. The young woman wrote, "Hello Peter, I am writing to tell you a story that your father Bernie, or 'Mr. Vagabond,' told me one day while we were preparing for a production at the Vagabond Playhouse in New Westminster, which is now called the Bernie Legge Theatre."

She went on, "Bernie said he was determined that his son's dream of owning a popular magazine was going to come true. So he committed to getting every grocery store, every drug store, every magazine and smoke shop, everywhere there was a magazine rack, to display his son's publication, *TV Week*. But it was not enough that these outlets agreed to have *TV Week* in their stores. Bernie knew it would take more to make his son's magazine a household name, so he committed to ensuring that the racks were never empty, that no one ever had to call and request a refill, that no store owner or manager was ever annoyed by an empty *TV Week* slot. He made a special effort to befriend cashiers, store clerks, store owners, and managers so that they would associate friendliness with his son's magazine.

"I once saw him in a grocery store wearing his red plaid jacket, doing his labor of love, filling racks with *TV Week*. He was proud of you and what you were doing. He would be proud of you today. I never forgot this story because it spoke to me of a father's unconditional love for his son, and his conviction to ensure his son's success. Your father believed in people, and there was no one he believed in more than you."

I believe my dad is in heaven looking down and saying, "I put in all those racks, son." Isn't that a great story?

So my dad was my inspiration—for his integrity, dedication, and commitment. He was Mr. *TV Week*, Mr. New Westminster, Mr. Vagabond Playhouse, and Mr.

whatever he got involved with. He was unbelievable. He taught me a lot about what to do and how to know what to do.

**4. Was your educational experience (to whatever extent) helpful?**

I have a Masters in Communications from Lethbridge University in England. It helped, but I think everything helps—every piece of education, every degree. You become like your mentors; you become like the people you admire.

**5. How many different business ventures have you started in the course of your entrepreneurial career?**

I've started two: the hotdog stand and Canada Wide Media. The hotdog stand was only for a couple of weeks, though.

**6. How many of these business ventures were financially successful?**

Both the hotdog stand and Canada Wide Media were successful.

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS  
questions about your business

**7. How did you identify the opportunity that preceded setting up your business?**

I was looking for a job. I knew very little about the magazine business, but I knew about sales and the media. When the door opened to purchase *TV Week*, I walked through.

Al Davidson, a local high-profile sportscaster at the time, was the former owner of *TV Week*. He had made an arrangement with his printing company,

Craftsman Printers in New Westminster, that if he couldn't make the printing payments, they would own the title to the magazine. In the end, Davidson turned out to be a better sportscaster than businessman. So Craftsman Printers ended up with the magazine, but they didn't want to publish it—they had just wanted to be the printer.

I found out about the magazine through the owner of Craftsman Printers, and I bought it for the bad debt amount, which was \$76,000. That was over 30 years ago, and \$76,000 was a lot of money then.

**8. What were the critical elements you assessed before you decided to pursue the opportunity?**

Nothing. I basically went with it. My gut said, "You can do this."

**9. How much time elapsed between the day you saw the opportunity and your first day of business?**

I heard about the magazine in April of 1976, and I took over by July 1st of that year.

**10. Did you have business partners? If so, who were they, and how did you find them?**

At the outset, three people from Craftsman Printers owned half of it and I owned the other half. I later bought two of them out, and then a man named Neil Soper bought the third guy out, so I owned 75% of the company and Neil owned 25%.

**11. Did you have a written business plan of any kind?**

No. I wish I'd had a 30-year business plan, but that was not the case. It wasn't really until the 10th year of our operation that we made a long-term plan and turned the corner from an organizational standpoint.

We made money every year, but it still takes a long time to be viewed seriously in the media business. I waited 10 years to get a reasonable annual return on my investment.

To me it was never really about money, though. The real issues for me were as follows: "How do we move from success to significance? How do we become a serious player in the marketplace? And, how do we earn the respect and admiration of advertising agencies, clients, and customers?"

In terms of developing a financial model, I learned a very effective method of monitoring income and expenses in my first year of publishing *TV Week*. I went to a magazine conference in New York called Folio, and while I was there I attended a session about finance for magazines.

The speaker had a financial statement on the screen—he had simply written 'income,' 'expenses,' and a number at the bottom. Then he asked what the number at the bottom was, and people said, "The bottom line." He said, "That's right: the profit, for the shareholder." He said, "I want to tell you something else. That is what's left."

I thought, "Well, where is he going with this?" And then he said, "What I want you to do is take the bottom number and put it up on top. Then work backwards."

So I did, and I have been doing that for 30 years (and with 41 more magazines beyond *TV Week*). For every single magazine, I work backwards: I take the magazine and say, "If we can make \$10,000 on this magazine, then we know the income and expenses required for that profit." I think the concept works in just about any business.

A lot of entrepreneurs think financial problems will solve themselves over time, which is not necessarily true. If your finances don't match up today, then you will have to compensate for that loss in the future.

## 12. What type of financing did you have?

I paid for *TV Week* out of the future profits of the business, based on a deal that I engineered. Once the seller and I had negotiated a price, I said, "I will give that money to you out of the first profits, over the course of five years." He asked, "I am going to get my money?" I said, "Absolutely," so he agreed to the deal.

A lot of entrepreneurs don't realize that you can cut any deal you want; you don't have to go to a book and find a blueprint for one. An important success

factor in business is that you build a positive reputation by following through with the deals you make. Integrity is critical.

## 13. How much capital did your business require?

\$76,000

## 14. How long did it take for your business to reach a positive cash-flow position?

We reached a positive cash-flow position by the end of the first year. Moreover, in 30 years of operation, we have never lost money.

## 15. If you did not have enough money at the start, or at low points in the business cycle, what did you do to stretch your capital?

I always put together a pre-publication budget. For example, let's assume we are closing the February edition of *BC Business* today. I know exactly what our financial targets are. So I would know today at the mid point whether or not we are going to reach our targets. If we aren't, then I ask how we can bring in an extra \$10,000 or \$15,000. If we can't, then we make adjustments somewhere else.

Because we were careful during the beginning stages of our company, and have built a solid financial foundation, we can now afford to take greater risks. We have enough money to do whatever we need to do. We don't owe money to people, and we don't have any loans. Now that's biblical; Proverbs 22:7 says "the borrower is a slave to the lender."

## 16. What were the strengths of your venture?

The strength of Canada Wide is people: management and staff. People are the key. We treat them well, and we pay them well. They are loved, respected, and admired for what they do.

We also create a positive and pleasant work environment. I try to lead by example.

One employee came to me about a month after being hired and asked, "Is there a rule here that nobody swears?" I said no, and he said, "Well, nobody does."

Why is that?"

And I said, "Because I don't." I don't tell people they can't swear, but they just know that's part of the company culture, and people like it. I get the odd "hell" or "damn," but nothing else, and even that is very infrequent.

#### 17. What were the weaknesses of your venture?

The weakness today is that many of the senior people have been here 20 years plus, so we will need to cope with an inevitable transition process. I have to address that issue next year, because some of my employees are about to retire. In addition, of course, I have been involved in the company for a long time. I don't have an adequate succession plan for myself at the moment.

#### 18. What was your most triumphant moment?

From a personal standpoint, my most triumphant moment, other than becoming a Christian, was marrying my wife and having my three girls; and, on August 14th, having my first grandson. Nothing compares to that, absolutely nothing.

From a business standpoint, there are four magical moments that come to mind. The first one would be buying the company. I had a borrowed desk in the back of a printer's office, with a borrowed phone—that's how we started. I found out later that the local manager of *TV Guide*, our major competitor in BC, did not think we would stay in business for more than six months. Thirty years later they are gone and I am still here.

The next big moment was Canada Wide's 10th anniversary. We needed to upgrade our identity, so we decided to make a big splash in the market. We blew 95% of our profit from the year to reposition ourselves in the marketplace. After that, people really wanted to do business with us.

The third triumphant moment was when we bought *BC Business*. That was an important strategic move for our company since we didn't have any business magazines up to that point—and if you are going to be in the magazine business, you need a business magazine.

Lastly, we have just completed a deal with our leading competitor: in the

fall of 2006, *TV Guide* announced in Toronto that it was ceasing publication of its printed edition and moving to a digital magazine for its Canadian market. We (Canada Wide Media) signed an agreement to acquire *TV Guide's* former subscriber base in Greater Vancouver and Vancouver Island. This was a phenomenal opportunity (described further in response to Question #21).

#### 19. What was your worst moment?

The worst moment happened about 25 years ago, during a contract with a leading grocery store chain. We had spent an enormous amount of resources working in good faith on a joint project that they had inspired. The project involved the distribution of magazines throughout their chain. The day that the situation was supposed to "close" (the technical term for the selling), they cancelled the project. This could have led to litigation, but I didn't feel right about that. We decided that at Canada Wide Media we would take the high road and bite our bottom lip. We continue to do business with the particular grocery store chain to this day.

#### 20. What were the most difficult gaps to fill (or problems to solve) as you began to grow your company?

As we have grown from owning one magazine title to owning forty-two magazine titles, we have had to manage our finances carefully. We had very limited resources when we started.

Living on the verge of bankruptcy after being fired from my job has made me forever careful with money. I have detailed budgets for each of our magazines. I don't mind spending money, but only if there is a return on the investment; I don't want to waste a dollar.

I have three Certified General Accountants (CGA's) on staff, which I think is amazing for a small company. We also have audits done by Ernst & Young, even though we are not required to do so. I am very vigilant about our accounting procedures and financial controls, because numbers don't lie.

**21. What were the key attributes you looked for in people (partners, advisors, managers) as you grew the company?**

Let me answer that with respect to the mentors I leaned on as I grew the company. I would like to specifically mention Joe Segal, a successful and highly regarded billionaire businessman in Vancouver. He was born in Vegreville, AB, and came to Vancouver with \$50 in his pocket. He has been a mentor of mine for over 40 years.

I took him out for his birthday lunch in January of this year and asked him what one thing he regrets most. He said, "I didn't risk enough."

I said, "But Joe, you are a billionaire." He replied, "Yes, but if I had risked more, I could have been five times as wealthy, and think how much more I could have done for the community." That's his perspective.

I wanted Joe's feedback on my deal with *TV Guide* (see response to Question #18 above). The cost of the acquisition, depending upon the response from subscribers, could be substantial; however, the payback over the next five years could be even more. I phoned Joe in Hawaii, where he was vacationing, and discussed the different aspects of the deal. He said, "That's a no-brainer—write the cheque."

Having wise mentors like him has helped me grow the company well.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS  
reflective questions

**22. What have you found most personally rewarding and satisfying as an entrepreneur?**

I find it personally rewarding that our integrity at Canada Wide has never been called into question. Everyone knows we will do exactly what we say we

are going to do.

Because people trust us, they are happy to do business with us. We are respected in our community, and that is satisfying.

Ethical behavior starts from the top. There are no shortcuts. When new employees join the company, they get a handbook called, 'It All Started With A Ten Cent Magazine,' and our company values are at the front of the handbook.

**23. With respect to starting and running a business, what are the three most important lessons you've learned and hope to 'pass on'?**

First, remember to start small. I can't begin to tell you how many people come into my office and say, "I just started a magazine, and now I want to take it national." That's the kiss of death! Six months later they are out of business. We've been in this business 30 years, and we still don't have a national magazine—we would get eaten up by the guys in Toronto. So start small, don't overextend, and remember that starting a business usually takes either three times as long or three times as much capital as you expect, or both. That is true of any magazine we have bought, acquired, or started.

Second, get good support. You need really good staff, people you trust and people who will stick with you. You also should try to get good mentors. I have 3 fabulous mentors, all of whom are 15 to 17 years older than me. They hold me accountable. I have studied their lives, and think, "I want to be like that person." I truly believe that we become like the people we spend time with.

Thirdly, don't sacrifice your integrity for money. After reading a recent biography about Conrad Black, I was shocked by some of his business practices. From his example, I learned what not to do. Although I wouldn't mind being a billionaire, as I would be able to give a lot more to the community, I would not be willing to compromise my integrity for wealth. Make sure you guard your reputation and focus on your integrity. Everything else comes out of integrity: it is the key to making your life a masterpiece.

#### 24. What does the word “calling” mean to you?

I don't normally use that word, but I could view myself as being called to the magazine business, just as a person would be called to full-time church ministry or to be a missionary in Africa. In terms of God's direction in my life, I have a slightly different perspective. God does not often speak to me audibly, but He does open doors of opportunity—and I have almost always walked through them.

While Christians are more likely to understand the term calling, I try to use language that is understandable to non-Christians. 'Christianese' can create a barrier when communicating with others who aren't familiar with our faith. More importantly, I try to rely on actions rather than words. For example, I once went to a church service in Phoenix, Arizona. The preacher had only one eye, and his head was barely higher than the pulpit. I don't even know what he spoke about, but I remember this line: "Show me your life redeemed, and we'll never have to argue about the redeemer."

I like that principle, and that's what I aim for in everything I do. I want people to say, "This guy is different; what makes him different? And so I never use the word "calling" or the word "redemption."

#### 25. Do you feel “called” to entrepreneurship? If so, what does that mean to you?

I don't merely feel called to entrepreneurship; I feel called to ethical entrepreneurship. I am a Christian. I believe in Jesus Christ, I am not afraid to talk about Him, and I conduct my business with as much integrity as possible. Thus, I believe my calling extends beyond simply pursuing this career; more importantly, I am called to pursue it in a way that honors the Lord.

#### 26. Who, if anyone, affirmed that calling?

My calling has been affirmed by Christian friends. We have had a Bible study with the same people for 30 years, and they have affirmed me in my business decisions. I probably wouldn't go to my pastor or my church in search of affirmation, because I am not sure they can relate to my business, and I don't think they have the experience to tell me if I should or shouldn't do something.

Karen Foss, a wonderful Christian, has worked with me for 29 years. She has incredible wisdom, and I would probably talk to her about my calling. She is the Vice-President of Canada Wide, and runs a couple of the magazines.

#### 27. What do you believe your gifts are as an entrepreneur?

If God has blessed me with one thing, it is the ability to do public speaking. I know it is a gift from God. I prepare for every presentation by reminding myself that God has given me this gift, as well as each speaking opportunity that arises from it. So if I am addressing an audience in Winnipeg and it is my 100th speaking engagement of the year, I still need to be at my absolute best and deliver a dynamic presentation. I don't see it as just another event; I see it as a chance for me to impact somebody's world for the better. I continually draw on my faith for strength. I also have a positive attitude, which is very important. I have found that a positive attitude may not guarantee success, but a negative attitude guarantees failure.

#### 28. How do you integrate your business expertise with your Christian faith, and how are they complementary?

I seek wisdom by reading through the book of Proverbs regularly. Since Solomon, who wrote many of the Proverbs, was the wisest and richest man who ever lived, I find great value in following his example.

Also, as I mentioned earlier, my priority as a Christian in business is integrity. I cannot cheat someone at work, and then go to church and worship God a few days later.

Further, I strive to help people in tangible ways through my business. A week from this Sunday, for example, Canada Wide is publishing a book for the



Salvation Army called *The Leadership Secrets of the Salvation Army*, and we have given the Salvation Army \$500,000 worth of books across Canada to give away.

I mentioned the project at my own church and the pastor said, "Oh, can we have some books? I want to give them to the church members." Then he asked me to speak in church the next Sunday, and offered to take up a collection for the Salvation Army. I said, "That's not why I am doing this."

He replied, "I know, but some people in the congregation are sitting on \$100 that they would gladly give to the Salvation Army."

**29. How have you been involved in your local church?**

I donate and tithe to my church, and I speak at my church about once a year, generally on Father's Day.

**30. Have you been involved with your church denomination?**

No.

**31. Have you been involved in para-church organizations?**

I was involved in Young Life of Canada as the Chairman of the Board. I have spoken at their camps for about 20 years. In fact, I recently attended a reunion at their camp in Malibu (BC).

**32. How have you integrated Biblical principles into your business practices, thus acting differently than a non-Christian would?**

I have integrated the Biblical principles of honesty and blamelessness into my business—we go the extra mile to avoid questionable situations.

**33. What lessons would you 'pass on' to Christians pursuing entrepreneurship?**

The marketplace isn't going to automatically trust you when you say you are a Christian entrepreneur. You need to prove yourself trustworthy, and live in accordance with the faith you profess. You also need to be gracious toward other people, just as Jesus is gracious to you. Love other people, and do your best.

We are all born with the potential for greatness. I believe we could all go flat out for 100 years, at 100 miles an hour, and we wouldn't even exhaust the gifts God has given us. But guess what: He is expecting us to do something with them!

He has given us these gifts. He has given us the freedom to do something. He has even given us a chance to do business in one of the best countries in the world. But so many people come to church and say, "God did nothing for me this week."

You woke up this morning, and you got out of bed this morning. He kept you alive—that's what He did. Now do something with it!

When we meet our Maker, the first question He asks us is not about the 10 Commandments. That comes later. The first question He asks us is, "What did you do with the time and talent I gave you? What did you do?"

You have to take responsibility for yourself. God will open the doors, and you have to walk through them.

**34. How could your local church congregation support you as an entrepreneur?**

I don't think it is the responsibility of the church leaders to individually support everyone who attends the weekly church service. The people in my Bible study provide that network of support for me, as I provide it for them.

There is a story I tell about a man who prays to God and says, "God, I just want to win the lottery; I just want \$10 million." Nothing happens. The next week he prays to God, "God if you are up there, I just want to win the lottery—can't you just help me a little bit?" The third week he's praying, and a voice says, "Buy a ticket."

He'd never bought a ticket. How is he supposed to win the lottery if he doesn't buy a ticket?

In the same way, some businesspeople sit at the back of a church service, rush home afterwards, and get frustrated when the church doesn't meet their needs. Yet they have never become involved with the church; they think the church exists to cater to them, which is really not true.

35. What have been the biggest challenges for you as a Christian in business?

Actually, I can honestly say that I am not aware of any negativity I have experienced with regard to my faith. Everyone knows I am a Christian.

36. Who has been most helpful (and why or how) in addressing these challenges?

N/A

37. Have you hired people from your church? If so, has that been a positive or negative experience?

I haven't.

38. Have you done business with other people in your church? Please explain.

Not that I am aware of. Maybe people at church buy our magazines, but that's not a very direct business relationship.

39. Have your relationships with those people been positively or negatively affected—from a business and spiritual standpoint—by doing business together? How?

N/A

40. Are any passages of scripture particularly meaningful or inspirational to you?

Proverbs 23:7 stands out to me: "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." I commonly paraphrase the verse and work backwards to it, stating, "You become what you think about most of the time."

Earl Nightingale told me that, and I wish I got a dollar for every time I said it. Shakespeare also said something like it: "You become what you think about all day long."

Basically, my thinking today causes me to be who I am.