

THE **buzz**

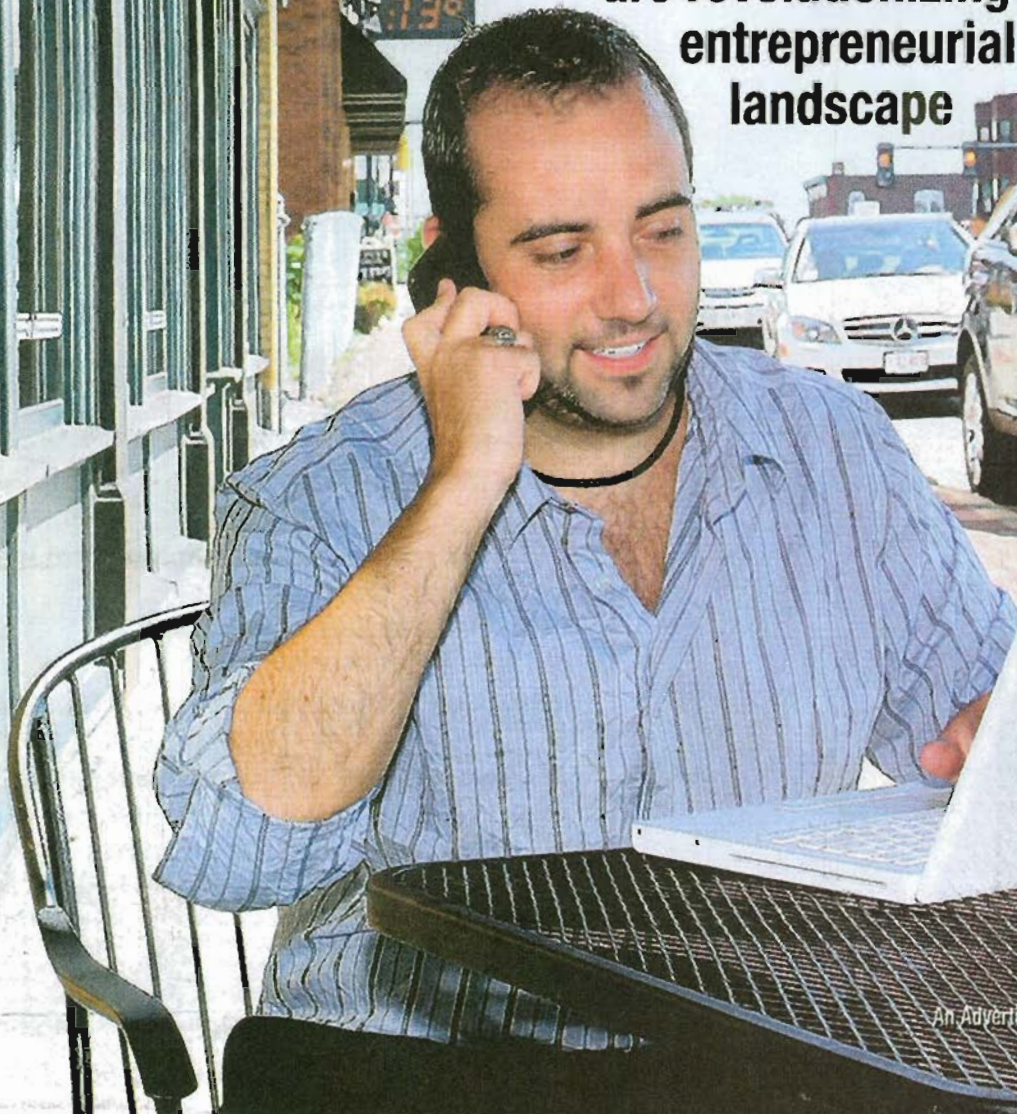
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Hotshots

Tech-savvy Gen Y's
are revolutionizing the
entrepreneurial
landscape



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Gen Y, flying high

By Rod Lee

Under-30s are using technology to full advantage in their quest for a place in the new American economy

Enter the "Gen Y" set, a new type of entrepreneur defined to a large extent by the modern gadgets with which they are building businesses of every kind imaginable.

Take Luke Vaillancourt, for instance. Son of Gary and Judi Vaillancourt, whose folk art enterprise in the Manchaug Mills building in Sutton is world-renowned and thus an entrepreneurial success story in its own right, Luke, just 25, recently launched a website,

Luke Vaillancourt, 25, recently started the website www.worcesterscene.com, a guide to restaurants, night life and social goings-on in the city.



www.worcesterscene.com, that captures his passion for the city of Worcester.

The younger Vaillancourt is a graduate of Worcester Academy and Rochester Institute of Technology. He turned down a job as a "digital asset coordinator" for Victoria's Secret in New York City ("all of my friends hate me for it," he says), opting instead to work for his parents in their store as "director of digital marketing." In this capacity, he constructed Vaillancourt Folk Art's new website.

After having difficulty finding a telephone number for a sushi place in Worcester, he decided to launch a website that would connect consumers with the city's restaurants, night life, arts and culture and other venues and social-circle happenings.

Up and running since earlier this year, www.worcesterscene.com is doing so well that Vaillancourt is thinking about starting a print version.

He spends, on average, about two hours a day on the venture. His principal mechanisms: a laptop and a cell phone. He could not do the job without them, he notes.

Vaillancourt is typical of technologically-astute people under age thirty who are revolutionizing the marketplace.

ANOTHER IS Laura Briere, founder of Vision Advertising and the World Green Business Association right here in Worcester.

Briere points out that members of the group born between 1977 and 1994 are "accustomed to a fast-paced world, rapid high-tech advances and opportunities around every corner." Attitudes are different, Briere says. "Risk isn't so risky anymore, and if one thing doesn't work out, we, the agile tech-natives, just move on to the next idea without batting an eyelash."

Briere adds, "Modern inbound marketing channels such as the video explosion of YouTube, social networking utilities such as MySpace and LinkedIn and other similar free tools are all a part of the latest boom in high-tech trends that enable endless possibil-

ity." As a result of such opportunities, members of the Gen Y crowd are able to take almost any concept "and run with it with much less starting capital," she says. Instead they leverage their thorough understanding of the "evolving opportunities and communities being introduced every day" to create all sorts of viable enterprises.

At a time when "transportation and other living costs" are on the upswing, Gen Y entrepreneurs will continue to "reshape the future of economic America simply by doing what (we) love to do, on (our) own terms," Briere says. As was the case one hundred years ago, small businesses and entrepreneurs will again become "the foundation" of the American economy, she predicts.

Briere points to Mark Zuckerberg, "the world's youngest billion-



Victoria Mariano, 21, launched her Spiritual Haze hooka-lounge and café business in Worcester last November; an evening operation, it is earning positive feedback so far.

'All we have to do is write up an event, push one button and send it to 400 to 500 people.'

**Victoria Mariano
Spiritual Haze, Worcester**

aire and founder of Facebook," as someone who epitomizes Gen Y entrepreneurs' innovative and enthusiastic approach to working life. In addressing what motivates him during an interview with Time magazine, Zuckerberg said, "...for me and a lot of people around me...we're just focused on building things."

LIKE LUKE VAILLANCOURT and Laura Briere, Victoria Mariano, a 21-year-old Clark University graduate from Albany, New York, relies heavily on the Internet in the operation of Spiritual Haze, a hooka lounge and café on Park Avenue in Worcester that she actually launched at the age of 20, while still in school. She says it was the first in the city; somewhat surprising in that "there are probably 25 hooka lounges in New York City and five in Boston"—for instance.

"It's huge," Mariano said of her dependence on the web and such portals as Facebook and My Space. "All we have to do is write up an event, push one button and send it to 400 to 500 people:" tremendous "word-of-mouth" exposure.

This ability to communicate instantaneously with so many prospective customers has enabled Mariano to organize a host of "events" since establishing her business...benefits for local musicians, "black-light graffiti parties," gatherings that call attention to the plight in Darfur.

Spiritual Haze has benefited by being "very intertwined with the schools in Worcester" as well, Mariano said.

Jane Porricelli, 27, a graduate of Brown University where she majored in History and minored in English, is another Gen Y entrepreneur who has found a niche; in her case, it's a Providence, Rhode Island-based web-run enterprise, www.momgenerations.com (also involving her mother, Sharon Couto, and her sister Audrey McClelland) that she describes as "a product review site for families."

Mom Generations also features "unique gift ideas."

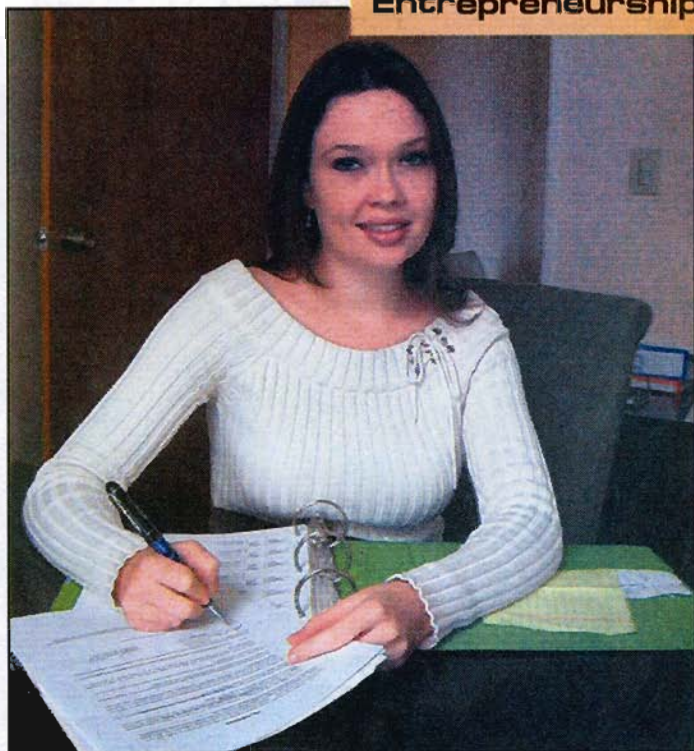
The business was launched in March of 2007 and is doing well, Porricelli said.

Porricelli worked briefly in printing sales in her family's business before starting www.momgenerations.com, and says, "I cannot even begin to express how big (current technology) is in what I'm doing. I have my Blackberry on all the time. I have Twitter (which offers "micro-blogging" opportunities) on...I've met tons of people by networking, attending different events and through social-networking sites. I could not live without the Internet and my Blackberry."

Gen Y entrepreneurs are quickly flooding the marketplace, either as founders of businesses or as key operatives. Barbara Clifford, president of the Corridor Nine Area Chamber of Commerce, is aware of at least two, in Michelle Panagian who has won plaudits for performance since joining PENTA Communications in Westborough, and Nicole Duquette who is new with Jillian's in Worcester.


It's not hard to find them; Theresa Rodrigues is CEO and founder of Night Life Media, a Somerville-headquartered web site. "We have blogs about events in the Boston area, a calendar of things to do, great prize giveaways, video of nightlife in Boston and we are adding a video-based social network. Very cool, hip and young stuff here," she says.

Luke Vaillancourt said that when he went to college at RIT, "I realized there is a mammoth social network out there." He and other Gen Y entrepreneurs are tapping into it to more than ever before—and realizing promising initial success.



Gen Yer Laura Briere started Vision Advertising, in Worcester, several years ago, and now has added the World Green Business Association to her portfolio.

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