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## Greening the corporation

### New Gastown business makes software to monitor an organization's green targets

**Bruce Constantineau, Vancouver Sun**

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Just a few short months ago, Vancouver-based Visible Strategies was just a concept. But now it's the only official Canadian partner of Al Gore's Live Earth team, preparing to launch a global blitz from its Gastown headquarters.

"Within a year, we want to penetrate every key market we're concerned with -- particularly North America and Europe," co-founder and vice-president Boyd Cohen said in an interview Thursday.

Visible Strategies produces "see-it" software that creates easy-to-understand images for tracking an organization's sustainability targets.

In the case of Live Earth, organizers used the software to produce images on its website that compare the sustainability performances of all eight venues where concerts took place this summer.

The images show London produced the most carbon dioxide emissions from electricity and fuel consumption, while Rio de Janeiro had the most emissions produced by audience travel.

Shanghai had the lowest total carbon usage, followed by Johannesburg and Tokyo.

Visible Strategies co-founder and chief executive officer Colin Grant said social and environmental targets are just as important today as budgets and profits.

"But those targets often get siphoned off into things called 'non-financial reporting' or sustainability plans,' which become backwaters that nobody reads," he said. "Stakeholders need to see that you're walking the talk every day.

"We build a tool that allows people to immediately get who you are and what you're trying to become."

Grant, a 44-year-old Scotland native, and Cohen, a 36-year-old American with a background in green building consulting, launched Visible Strategies in February of this year.



The Live Earth connection happened almost on a whim, with Cohen sending an e-mail to Gore's organization without really expecting a response. But they did respond three weeks later, and in May, Cohen and Grant went to Los Angeles to help Live Earth organizers set up their software.

They weren't paid for their work, but Cohen said the connection gave them millions of dollars worth of marketing exposure, noting Visible Strategies is mentioned on the Live Earth website and gets potential client referrals from Live Earth.

Local governments and corporations remain the biggest potential markets, but Cohen said Live Earth organizers are keen to work with Visible Strategies to produce software that can be sold to other cities and organizations looking to host global events.

He said cities bidding for the Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup soccer or other global music/entertainment/sporting events could all use software that tracks sustainability performance.

"The International Olympic Committee has mandated that all bid cities address sustainability issues," Cohen said.

"There's a big push for cities and organizations to reduce their [environmental] impact and be transparent about what they're trying to do."

Visible Strategies' client list currently includes Live Earth, City of Albuquerque, City of Beaverton, Langley Township, Public Works Canada, Coast Capital Savings, and Novex Couriers.

Grant and Cohen own the company, but a new Vancouver investor is expected to put a significant amount of money into the firm by the end of October.

bconstantineau@png.canwest.com

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