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Simulated CEO

New business program allows firms to train staff and learn how they'd react as management.

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Darci LaRocque started Swirl Solutions to offer training for BlackBerry users.

GERRY KAHRMANN — THE PROVINCE

Think you know your BlackBerry?

TIME SAVER: New business offers training, tips

BY WENDY MCLELLAN
BUSINESS REPORTER

Little device has endless abilities

When Darci LaRocque sees someone using a BlackBerry, she can't help watching them tap away on it, then asking whether they would like to learn a better way to perform the same task.

Her suggestions are always gratefully accepted.

"People think they know how to use their BlackBerry, but they don't know how much there is to figure out," she said.

LaRocque has read all the manuals and, after a couple years teaching executives at one Vancouver corporation how to use the addictive little machines, she has launched her own business offering training courses to companies and individuals who want to learn how to use the device more effectively.

"I live, eat and breathe BlackBerrys," said LaRocque, president of Swirl Solutions. "I love training and watching people's eyes light up when they figure out how to do things."

LaRocque's passion for BlackBerrys began three years ago when she was working in the IT department of a company that decided to give the wireless devices to 20 executives to see whether they were useful to people working away from the office. The pilot project was a huge success and the number of users in the company quickly rose to 400.

The executives got the BlackBerrys and LaRocque was

Darci LaRocque offers these tips:

- Typing "#TAXI" on any cell-phone will call for a taxi anywhere in North America. But the call will cost you \$1.25 plus applicable taxes and airtime according to your rate plan.

- The "Do Not Disturb" option under profiles will send calls directly to voice mail without ringing the phone. You shouldn't even see the call coming in, but will be alerted when a new voice mail is received.

Use during meetings.

- In an e-mail, type the letter "L" to "reply to all." For Suretype Models, type the letter "A."

- In an e-mail, type the letter "R" to reply just to the sender. For Suretype Models, type "Q."

- If you lose your BlackBerry, the finder can call you if you filled out "owner information." Look under "Options/Owner" and under the information area, write, "If lost, please call . . ." and type in a number other than your BlackBerry number.

responsible for helping them learn how to use them.

"They don't come with instructions any more, but you can go online and look up the 200-page manual," she said.

"Nobody reads the manual. Wherever I went in the office, executives would ask me about how to do things, so I decided to set up a training session on tips and tricks."

LaRocque expected perhaps two dozen people would be interested. But the day she sent the e-mail invitation, 200 signed up. And when she started talking to IT staff in other companies, she found that while many companies provided BlackBerrys to employees, they weren't teaching them how to use the devices.

It was the beginning of her new business. LaRocque started offering training sessions part-time while working at her

IT job. As well as teaching people how to use the devices more efficiently, she also helps companies find cost-saving measures and set up policies for BlackBerry users.

This month, she started training as a full-time career.

"People seem to think BlackBerrys are just like a cellphone — some think it's just for e-mail — but there's a lot to learn. I teach time-saving, cost-saving ways to use them, and save time for the company help desk, too," LaRocque said.

Vancouver clinical nurse specialist Elaine Unsworth, who took the training, said she learned "so many little things that made everything quicker."

"I love my BlackBerry — I don't know what I'd do without it," she said. "I'm not truly addicted. I can turn it off. But I have it with me all the time."

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Canadians plugged in

Canadians are plugging in to technology with increasing frequency, according to a Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission report published last year:

- Nearly 75 per cent of households now have per-

sonal computers compared to 49 per cent in 1998;

- A quarter of Canadians say they spend 25 hours a week on the Internet;

- Sixty per cent used a cellphone in 2005;

- Twelve per cent own an MP3 player; and

- Three per cent have a BlackBerry.

Worldwide, BlackBerry says about eight million people subscribe to its mobile e-mail service and industry analysts forecast the number will more than double by 2009.

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