

# ESSENTIAL GUIDE

FOR CANADIAN ENTREPRENEURS



## BROTHERS UNITED

Tell Us About Us takes on a world of trouble

### THE FAMILY TOOLS:

How to communicate, resolve disputes and still grow your business

### PLUS:

Secrets of successful business succession



Brothers Tyler (left) and Kirby Gompf are beating the odds by growing a business together

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Watching each other's back:  
Kirby (left) and Tyler Gompf

# A TALE OF TWO BROTHERS

This growing Winnipeg research firm builds strong client relationships, thanks to two supportive siblings

**T** Tyler Gompf stormed out of the Winnipeg electronics store, disgusted with the service ethic of a clerk who appeared more concerned with closing up shop than selling a stereo. Rebuffed again when he tried to complain to management, Gompf enlisted his brother Kirby to form a business to help companies connect with disgruntled consumers. Ten years later, Tell Us About Us Inc. serves clients as varied as Winnipeg-based Rice Financial and U.S. fast-food companies Dairy Queen and El Pollo Loco. But the real success is how the Gompfs have made a brotherly business work.

Along with their friends and partners Scott Griffith and Brent Stevenson, the Gompfs have grown TUAU into a full-service customer-feedback research firm, which conducts consumer and employee surveys, offers 1-800 numbers for customer complaints or inquiries, and deploys "secret shoppers." TUAU consultants analyze the results to help clients improve their operations, while the firm's custom software collects feedback for client follow-up. With 54 employees, TUAU last year collected 34 million customer opinions.

"We're enabling companies to maintain and grow relationships with their client base," says Tyler. "It's a way to make sure that customers are treated right, and to help management understand the issues and deal with them."

Still, running a business with your brother definitely has its ups and downs. Kirby says the Gompfs communicate easily, and normally find themselves on the same page "just by nature" when it comes to strategy and decision-making. "We're really good friends, first and foremost."

But with their distinct personalities, the brothers sometimes butt heads. Tyler, 33, is the big-picture guy, with a nose for new opportunities, while Kirby, 31, is more operational, adept at turning ideas into action. He often finds himself having to rein in Tyler's wilder ambitions, such as the time he purchased a T-shirt press to start distributing printed shirts. As senior partner, Tyler gets the final say, but the pair achieves balance by always bouncing ideas off each other first. "Knock on wood, to date, we've never had any disagreements we couldn't overcome," says Kirby.

As the company grew, the brothers started to see overlap in their roles. Last October, they met to formally define their roles and expectations, with Tyler emerging as CEO and Kirby as COO.

They agree that the hardest part of working with family is "turning off" work after hours, given how passionate the pair are about growing their business. Kirby has a young family and Tyler is engaged, but with evening phone calls to each other often consuming an hour or more, says Kirby, "I'm sure we drive every single person in the family nuts."

Of all the benefits, the most rewarding has been "seeing the pride our mom and dad have in us," says Tyler. From providing a \$5,000 startup loan, to knowing when to give advice or just listen, he says, "We've always had a very supportive family."

Back at work, Tyler says, "My vision is to reach \$100 million in revenues by 2015." Even Kirby, the realist, thinks that goal is within reach. To get there, they're expanding TUAU's reseller network of consultants and research firms to tap new industry verticals. For now, they'll focus on the U.S. market, which represents 95% of sales. But global expansion may not be far off, says Tyler—as long as the two brothers are watching each other's back. "It's the best," he says. "I wouldn't want it any other way."