

Sheridan Grad Darrell Keezer, Candybox Marketing | October, 2017 | Diane Moore

Darrell Keezer is a big fan of Cooperative Education. As the brains behind Candybox Marketing, a digital marketing agency specializing in social media and online marketing, Darrell himself started out as a co-op student at Sheridan.

Graduating from Sheridan's 3-year Marketing Co-op Diploma in 2005, Darrell has gone on to create his own successful company, employing co-op students of his own from Sheridan.

Candybox Marketing is a full service digital agency.

“We focus on acquiring new customers online. We do everything from designing websites to launching social media campaigns and making sure people are found on search engines, such as Google,” he explains.

But it wasn't always a smooth ride getting there. When Darrell graduated from Sheridan he connected with a small marketing services company and became their project manager. What began as a great opportunity, ended with Darrell facing his biggest challenge yet: launching his own company.

Darrell started off in the small company with just one developer and watched the company grow over the next two years as it brought on nine new developers. Things took a turn when the company was eventually purchased by a larger corporation. The restructuring left Darrell without a job.

“A month before they let us all go they doubled my salary because I was so key to the operation.”

The unexpected news of his layoff couldn't have come at a worst time. His wife was pregnant. That's when Darrell made a life-changing decision.

“I decided the only person who wouldn't fire me is me. So, I started Candybox Marketing.”

Darrell hasn't looked back. Now, he brings in 3 co-op students every year to help him grow the business.

“We give them control,” he says about his co-op management style. “[Basically], ‘here's your project, go ahead.’”

Darrell's very first co-op hire was Sheridan Marketing student, Mahfuz Chowdhury. Mahfuz had been searching for a placement for his co-op work term and happened across Candybox Marketing on LinkedIn.

"Mahfuz was incredibly energetic and enthusiastic. He brought a lot of passion to the company," says Darrell.

Mahfuz was so successful in his term at Candybox Marketing that the Canadian Association for Co-op Education (CAFCE) selected him for National Co-op Student of the Year for colleges, 2012. His work experience has been so rewarding that Mahfuz has stayed with the company for six years as an award-winning Candybox Marketing manager.

"I really counted on him and he did a great job," Darrell says. "I literally gave him his own projects and coached him, and he did the best he could do and he gave it 110%."

The experience was so positive for Darrell that he has regularly hired Sheridan co-op students, most of which have gone on to become full-time employees.

"We really value the relationship with Sheridan. We take on one new co-op student per term and in my experience Sheridan has an excellent marketing program."

"It's nice to hire local students for our local business and it's nice when people are closer by. We want to build a lifestyle here where you are working and living in the same area and having fun with it."

Why Co-op? And why Sheridan?

"Our main goal is always to find the next recruit. Co-op gives us an opportunity to see how they work with other people. We have to do a lot of training and editing, but in the end if they work out then it's a great recruitment tactic. I find that [Sheridan students'] innovation and creativity is second to none."

Darrell says they will continue to hire Sheridan and it's something other employers should be considering too.

"They're really well-trained students who are job-ready and who are motivated."