

Earth and Sky Studios

Web Design and Development/Marketing

Twisp, Washington

www.earthandskystudios.com



Jennifer and Ross Allen-Tate, founders of Earth and Sky Studios, know that technology is the solid foundation that allows them to build a thriving business within a rural community. Set in the Eastern Washington town of Twisp, in the Methow Valley, Earth and Sky offers a comprehensive portfolio of Web design and development, graphic arts and marketing services. In these wide-open spaces, establishing dependable connections between in-house staff, customers and service providers is essential. Earth and Sky relies on wireless IP with support from an air card wireless system for added mobility. This is especially important, since Jennifer and Ross work flexible hours - from home as well as from their studio. As rural entrepreneurs, they have learned to be

resourceful and inventive in solving business problems. Jennifer explains, "Technology is THE core of our business. We use email, PDFs and websites for uploading content, proofing and web development. We actually helped to start the local ISP four years ago so we could have reliable Internet service - we are still using it."

Earth and Sky clients range from small businesses to public agencies all across Eastern Washington. By working with customers over such a large territory, Jennifer has learned valuable lessons about what it takes to do business at a distance. She believes communication is the key to effective long-distance business transactions. Jennifer understands that one important element is: "...setting up strategies and structures to avoid communication breakdowns. We have a lot of clients that we have never met."

To serve their growing customer base, Earth and Sky has one part-time and three full-time employees, as well as a growing number of widely dispersed subcontractors. Jennifer has discovered that, "I don't necessarily need a large base of local candidates with skills that are specific to our business. What I need is a team of people who are enthusiastic and willing to learn the skills I require." A case in point is Britta Gibson, Earth and Sky's graphic designer. After operating her own freelance graphic arts business, specializing in traditional printed products, Britta joined the company two and a half years ago. She learned the art of designing for the Web from Jennifer and Ross and is now the full-time designer for the business. But the bulk of contributors to Earth and Sky products and services are subcontractors. Jennifer states that, "We work with a wealth of different providers from all over - Wenatchee, Seattle, Bellingham, Portland, California." The list is growing and Jennifer wouldn't have it any other way.

"Telecommunications is the backbone of our company. It lets me access human resources in other areas – especially in rural areas – so I can expand without having to add more office space."

- Jennifer Allen-Tate
Co-Founder, Earth and Sky Studios

Jennifer grew up in the Methow Valley, graduated from the local high school in 1992 and received a B.A. degree in anthropology from Washington State University. After living in Hawaii for a year, Jennifer and Ross returned to the Methow Valley to be closer to family, and to have a better balance between work and play. She says, "My husband and I love the mountains here, the natural beauty – we like living in a rural area a lot. We like to be able to be out in the trees, to go hiking and snowboarding." Another major factor drawing Jennifer and Ross back to rural Washington was that with the growth of broadband it's now possible to build a full service technology-based business in a rural community.

Based on her own successful experience with Earth and Sky Studios, Jennifer is confident that other businesses will want to locate their operations in rural areas. As companies hear the stories of productive, profitable and fully connected businesses set in more relaxed and beautiful environments, the benefits of rural business will create its own momentum. Jennifer sums it up this way, "Instead of small communities saying: 'Hey, hey, think of us', urban businesses are going to be looking for the right small community."