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EDITORIAL

**BUSINESS TIMES**

**Mississauga Business Times**

**Lange digs deep to find biz solutions**

**RICK DRENNAN**

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Eric Lange isn't some loopy left-wing tree-hugging environmentalist who dreamily reads Thoreau under a spreading oak and spends his other off-hours watching Michael Moore films. You won't see him blowing his summer vacation as a volunteer crew member on a Greenpeace vessel and its never-ending battles with Big Oil and Big Whaling.

No, he's a slightly pudgy, middle-aged businessman with a penchant for doing deals. His firm, Lange Transportation and Storage Ltd., just celebrated its 20th anniversary in business. The company specializes in the movement of trade and consumer shows and high-value and sensitive electronic devices like MRIs.

The boss also dips his toe into other sideline businesses, proving that he's a born entrepreneur who loves the thrust and parry of capitalism.

On the surface, most people would say Lange is a poster boy for bald cupidity. But look again.

This is a businessman with a conscience. A social activist. A green crusader.

Not only is he a pioneer in the environmental movement, but if there was an Al Gore Award for helping save our beleaguered planet, Lange should get the statuette - or be given an honourable mention.

Last July, Lange purchased a 70,000 sq. ft. building at 3965 Nashua Drive in Mississauga. The facility was split unevenly: one-quarter office, three-quarters warehouse. It was a 30-year-old building, but solidly built, and fit Lange's needs to a tee. He was thrilled with his purchase - until the first monthly hydro bill came in: \$3,800!

He gulped noticeably and looked at it again.

Yep, \$3,800 alright - and that was for the juice being used to keep on the lights and heat for the painters and plasterers. The full contingent of Lange Transport wasn't moving in for another four months.

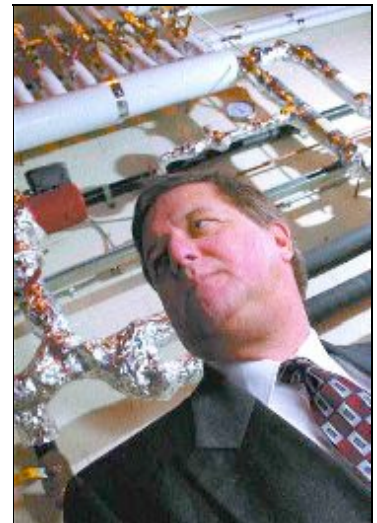
What would the bill be once the entire operation turned on the lights?

Lange was afraid to ask. He was afraid to look. He was afraid to move. He figured he'd just made one of the biggest boo-boos in his business career.

Okay, he said, bucking up. Now is the time to take stock of the situation.

Lange had a building that was a glutton for energy use. He guessed the cost of his monthly hydro bill, then multiplied that by twelve to get his yearly figure. If you multiplied that figure

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by a dozen years, Lange was staring at a P & L statement that had a whole lot of L eating into the P.

There must be a better and cheaper way, he thought.

At this point, some business leaders might throw up their hands in disgust, chug-a-lug a bottle of Chablis, or sell the farm and take up permanent residence in the Caymans.

Not Lange.

He was a successful businessman because he was dogged, and met challenges head-on.

Mount the parapets, over the top, CHARGE!

That's was Lange's business motto.

Actually, it wasn't his motto, I made it up. But it sounds good and puts into context who he is and how motivated he can get.

There's nothing halfway about the guy. He's a business warrior.

### Meeting of the minds

There wasn't a definitive moment when Lange decided to fade to green. The process to redo his building began after meeting with his General Manager Dion Burt. They figured if they replaced the old windows, they'd keep the heat in in the winter and out in the summer. They also saw some cost savings in cutting back on the use of lights. The installation of three 'solar tubes' would allow more natural light to filter into the office.

But this was all finger-in-the-dike stuff. Penny pinching. In the end, their supplier of hydro held all the cards - and even controlled the firm's destiny. They needed something big - a new way of doing business.

Then they discovered it right beneath their feet. Geothermal power.

Geowhat?

Like you, I was stumped.

I knew geo was the Greek word for earth, but thermal is what I wore under my ski pants when I hit the slopes in minus 9 temps last week. But before we even get to how Lange implemented geothermal technology into his new building, let's take a trip to the local library and remove a blue book from one of the stacks: "A Short History of Nearly Everything."

The author is Bill Bryson, and a few years back, he scored mega-success with this non-fiction page turner. Bryson had a few modest goals when he set up to pen his masterpiece. First, he wanted to explain the really big questions about our world, like: Why are we here? What are we? How did the universe form? And why is geothermal power so important in our lives?

I'll answer the other questions in future columns, but right now, we're interested in the last one.

According to Bryson, the earth beneath our feet isn't a very pleasant place. Things are always shifting, and stuff (real hot stuff) is just itching to bubble to the surface. If you happen to be walking along a place that is about to bubble and blow, it's adios amigo.

Remember the fair citizens of Pompeii who got vaporized in their tracks when Mount Vesuvius blew its stack in 79 AD?

According to Bryson, if you happen to drill a hole in the earth to the depth of 10,000 meters (which no one has ever managed to do to this point), the temperature would be a sizzling 180 degrees Celsius. If you kept drilling and drilling to the 3,500 mile mark (the actual core of the earth), the temperature would be about the same as the surface of the sun.

Geothermal power plants harness the heat from the earth and convert it into electricity. Wells are drilled into geothermal reservoirs, which are natural pockets of hot water or steam that lie well below the groundwater table. The water or steam is drawn to the surface for energy conversion. Once heat is removed, the water is returned to the geothermal reservoir



Photo by Stephen Uhraney

Eric Lange (left), the businessman/environmentalist, checks out his geothermal building on Nashua Drive. Above: the final break from a dependence on hydro when the Lange Transport meter is removed.



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through an injection well. It's a bit more complicated than that, but you get the point.

The good thing about geothermal use is that its clean, and, of course, free.

So let's get back to Lange. Somehow he found out about the benefits of geothermal.

The problem was a big one. To do a complete geothermal retrofit of his building (building his own little power plant) would cost \$600,000.

When Lange took the proposal to his TD bank manager, the banker said, Geowhat?

I'm not sure if he really said that, but if I was a banker and I had someone wanting 600 big ones to drill holes into the earth, I might raise an eyebrow and a few objections.

Somehow Lange - no doubt a loyal and trusted customer - talked the bank into banking the project.

Lange moved quickly. He hired SelectPower (a division of Guelph Hydro) to oversee the project. GeoSmart Energy of Cambridge did the engineering, and Main Air Systems of Mississauga was hired as the mechanical contractor.

Tapping into Mother Earth meant drilling 28 holes, six inches in diameter, 10 feet apart, and 360 feet down. The workers actually saved time and money by drilling the holes in an unused driveway that circled the building. The old air conditioning was removed, existing ductwork was fixed, and by mid-November of last year, the entire building was up and running, and powered by Mama Earth.

The temperature in the office was a perfect 72F, the warehouse was kept at 55F, and the air was light and perfect.

The November hydro bill?

Zero. Zilch. Nada. Nothing.

To say Lange is thrilled with his old/new building doesn't do it justice. He wants to tell the world how this all makes perfect sense. Save the earth, and save money.

I think it's fair to say that in the beginning, Lange's motives for going green weren't purely altruistic. He set out to slash his hydro bills, and may have found the treasure at the end of the rainbow.

But give him credit. He even put his money (or the bank's) on the line. He opened himself up to finding another way of doing business. He exemplified all the great character traits in a first class entrepreneur. He might even help save the world in the process.

Like all good stories, this one needs a good ending, and last week, Lange Transportation provided it. One of the Lange employees finally removed the hydro meter attached to the outside of the building. It was a scene that would make even Greenpeacers stand up and shout.

If there's a downside to all this, it's this: why doesn't the federal and provincial governments give tax breaks or financial kickbacks to companies that go green? Wouldn't that give incentive to others to follow in Lange's footsteps?

But let's not get too negative about this. After all, Lange's leadership has given the green movement a huge boost in the most unlikely of places, the business community. Lange has proven that it not only makes moral sense to embrace environmental causes, but it also makes good financial sense.

Just think of the ramifications if other business leaders jump on the Go Green bandwagon? Will Donald Trump be crewing for Greenpeace? Will the Exxon Valdez be refitted as a cruise ship?

The possibilities are endless.



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