

Distance educators REACT to need

When **suzanne wilson** arrived in Australia in 1983 as a 25-year-old, she could not have had any inkling that in the next three decades she would become one of Australia's leading innovators in distance education services.

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Award-winning distance education innovators Suzanne and Michael Wilson.

text

Richie Hodgson

Her arrival in Australia coincided with her first step into what was then a fledgling IT industry. Suzanne began her apprenticeship in computing in Melbourne and considers she was fortunate to have entered the sector when it was in its infancy. "Out with the typewriter and in with the PC," was Suzanne's succinct description of her transition into the IT world.

After working up to the position of national service administrator with Labtam International, Suzanne and husband Michael decided to refresh their lives with a new adventure. The couple moved to Western Australia to own and operate what would be the first of several hotels, restaurants and a nightclub. After a decade in the hospitality industry, Suzanne and Michael were again hungry for adventure, but this time mixed with a little more leisure.

"We bought an old yacht and took to the high seas, living aboard for the next six years," she said. This was some adventure for the self-described "lousy swimmer" who was without one ounce of sailing experience.

Eventually the Wilsons found their way to Darwin and as soon as Suzanne had regained her land legs, she completed a Masters in Business Administration at the Northern Territory University (a predecessor institution of CDU).

The latest twist in the dynamic duo's lives came in 2004 when they identified an opportunity to improve the way education was delivered to geographically dispersed students.

"Through my husband's work as a satellite engineer, we got to know the Schools of the Air and how lessons used to be delivered by HF radio, as many Territorians would know or have experienced," she said.

"With improvements in technology, computers started being the way forward in distance education and we decided to launch our own company specialising in the provision of distance education solutions, M & S Consultants Pty Ltd."

The couple devoted their time to developing the software tool known as REACT – Remote Educational and Conferencing Tool. REACT is a solution for delivering interactive distance learning lessons and video-conferencing to meet the educational needs of regional and remote students of all ages.

Launched in 2005, REACT won the Northern Territory Information Communication Technology award for innovation in that year and went on to win the prestigious national Consensus software award in 2006 for innovation, performance and potential.

In her current position, Suzanne trains clients to use REACT software, manages the marketing, documentation and accounts of the business as well handles the everyday administrative functions. Even with her substantial roles, Suzanne gives all the credit to Michael as the developer and writer of the software.



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Suzanne Wilson is also a lecturer in marketing at CDU.