epitalk

Spring 2009

Let's Put the D Back in Detroit

Perspective from the Top

Recently, the backbone of our region, the automotive industry, has taken some big hits from government and the national media. On the heels of a mayoral scandal, this did not improve the perception the nation has of our home city and state.

But, I think any true Michigander or Metro Detroiter will agree there are a lot of things to cherish and celebrate in and around this area. The Epitec Group is one of those proud citizens.

With the skilled workforce, tremendous dedication and spirit of the residents, it's no wonder so many companies continue to do business here. These traits, and generous tax benefits, are even enticing new industries to consider our region for business. I'm sure you've heard about recent movies being filmed in Michigan or the production studios planned in the area. This is breathing life back into unoccupied buildings, providing viable income for communities and the state, and creating permanent jobs. It also gives outsiders a first-hand look at the tremendous natural resources our area provides, and Midwestern hospitality they can't get anywhere else.

The film industry is a big win for our area, but there are many other opportunities. We eagerly anticipate the results from the hard work organizations such as Detroit Regional Chamber, Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau and Renaissance Detroit are putting into boosting the area's image and overall self-esteem. Renaissance Detroit took it so far as to launch Dnews, a program to publicize the city's positive news and information, late last year.

Super Bowl XL, The MLB All-Star Game and NCAA Final Four Tournament may have launched the region's 15 minutes of fame, but we've got plenty of time and reasons left to continue to shine.

As we prepare for the arrival of new businesses and industries, The Epitec Group continues to support local clients and businesses by offering special programs and incentives to our employees. Similar to our extremely successful Epitec Client Alliance Program ecap with Ford Motor Company, Epitec employees receive discounts and special services from local companies including AAA of Michigan, Comerica Bank and Michigan First Credit Union. Be sure to take advantage of these programs – they are designed to benefit you and companies in our community – a few are highlighted inside this newsletter.

Summer is only a few short weeks away. Soon we'll all be reveling in the beautiful natural resources such as parks and lakes this area provides. As you enjoy the summer weather and all the activities that come along with it, remember that experiencing four distinct seasons is yet another benefit that living in this region provides.

Content

Apple Introduces Speaking iPod

Apple's new iPod shuffle is revamped and it's speaking volumes, literally. The new music player is equipped with Apple's VoiceOver technology, which with the press of a button, will speak song titles, artists and playlists into the iPod earphones without interrupting the music.

The VoiceOver technology works smoothly and easily due to the shuffle's new capability to sync with iTunes. When the iPod is synced with iTunes, the VoiceOver kit will seamlessly integrate with the shuffle to generate announcements.

The new shuffle speaks in 14 different languages automatically selected by iTunes. It looks at song data, such as the title, artist, and album information, then applies algorithms to choose the right language. It also will speak in a different tone depending on the computer system synced with the iPod.

The new shuffle, is half the size of previous generations, but now holds up to 1,000 songs. Other improvements include allowing the user to create multiple playlists, which VoiceOver will announce to help the listener find the right song mix without taking their eyes off what they are doing. It also lets the user know when the battery is low.

These improvements are easy to use because of the shuffle's new earphone system. The body of the shuffle does not have controls, but instead Apple put the controls on the earphones, making it easier to navigate through the music. To learn more and see how it works check out your nearest apple store or visit www.apple.com/ipodshuffle.

Green IT: Are You Doing Your Part?

A 'green' movement is underway across the world and everyone is looking for ways to reduce their environmental impact and cut their carbon footprints. Laptops, PCs, data centers, computing networks, mobile phones and telecommunications networks all have huge carbon footprints, but there are many ways the IT community can lessen it's impact.

Naturally, the use of computers and other technologies reduces the use of paper, can help reduce travel and helps maintain a sustainable supply chain; however, there are many other ways for IT professionals to go green.

Obviously, power is a major resource to the IT industry. Therefore, an easy way the IT community can limit their environmental impact is by reducing overall power consumption. And the government is helping out. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) ensures IT products are energy efficient through its ENERGY STAR® program.

For products to be approved and labeled with the ENERGY STAR distinction, they must meet strict energy guidelines. The guidelines vary for products and are based on performance-based specifications that determine the most efficiently operated products. Desktops, laptops, game consoles, integrated computer systems, desktop-derived servers and workstations are all eligible for ENERGY STAR.

ENERGY STAR computers have a power management system that goes into a low-power sleep mode after a designated period of inactivity, which reduces the spinning of hard disks and decreases power consumption. The systems also must have an energy efficient internal power supply, to make sure the entire computer system is reducing its energy usage. According to the ENERGY STAR Web site, if all computers sold in the United States meet ENERGY STAR requirements, the energy cost savings would grow to approximately $2 billion each year, while greenhouse gas emissions would be reduced by the equivalent of 3 million cars.

The IT community is also taking part with 'green computing.' By using virtualization – management software for virtualized environments – organizations can consolidate their servers into fewer pieces of hardware. By doing so the equipment makes the most efficient use of available system resources, which reduces energy and cuts costs.

Virtualization's greatest impact comes from the data center and is where the largest companies are investing resources. Data centers consume a large amount of energy and are expensive to run. But they are being adapted to provide more benefits at all levels by reducing the consumption of power and cooling facilities, which organically conserves energy.

Companies are learning that green data centers are perfect for lowering costs, reducing electricity use and minimizing their impact. Unfortunately it is difficult to green a data center, because it's difficult to determine the amount of energy being used and by what equipment. Therefore, the breakdown of what constitutes efficient usage and waste is not easy. It is rare to find power-consumption metering that breaks down usage levels and most organizations only see the utility bill combining all energy usage into one lump sum. For now, if an IT department does 'green' a data center; IT professionals have a hard time proving energy savings.

Finally, one of the most vital and perhaps easiest ways for IT communities to go green is to reuse and recycle IT equipment in an ethical, environmentally friendly manner. Electronic products are the fastest growing waste product and according to the EPA more than 63 million computers in the United States were traded or thrown out in 2007 alone. When discarded, computers spread more than 100 chemicals, leaking harmful toxins such as lead, cadmium, barium, mercury and other harmful chemicals into the surrounding environment.

With new upgrades coming on a regular basis, IT equipment can be replaced almost as soon as it's purchased. If equipment is viable, it can be donated to charities, schools or individuals. With today's unemployment rate at an all-time high, finding an individual or organization willing to take discarded equipment should be an easy task.

If the equipment does not work or is more than five years old, it should be recycled. Electronics consist of valuable resources, such as precious metals, copper and plastics, which require considerable energy to process and manufacture. Recycling these electronics recovers valuable materials, conserves virgin resources and results in lower greenhouse gases. The EPA states that recycling 1 million desktop computers prevents the release of greenhouse gases equivalent to annual emissions of over 17,000 cars. If 1 million cell phones are recycled, it will save enough energy to power more than 19,000 United States households for an entire year.

In addition to power management, virtualization, 'greening' data centers and reusing and recycling, there are many IT professionals utilizing green strategies and collaborating together on various campaigns to help ensure the industry is contributing to a greener world. A good example is the EPA ENERGY STAR'S nationwide Low Carbon IT Campaign. The campaign brings together IT organizations pledging to focus on power management to save energy and reduce its carbon footprint. The campaign provides informational materials, best practices and other resources for IT professionals to share. To join the cause, visit www.energystar.gov/lowcarbonit.

If IT professionals are interested in going green, but are unsure where to begin, they can hire a green consultant to evaluate energy needs versus energy usage. The cost spent on a consultant will be offset in long run by the energy savings.

Green Giving

There are a few things to consider before donating used equipment, such as:

- Contacting the organization that will receive the donation and make sure they can accept the equipment.
- Not directly donating, but taking used equipment to someone certified to refurbish electronic devices.
- Once a device is refurbished, it can then be passed on to those who need it, for little or no cost.
- If the equipment is a cell phone, check with state and federal regulations.

Helping Save Your Pennies

Everyone looks for ways to save money. The next time you are searching for a 'deal' remember Epitec offers employees benefit programs that can help save money on various products and services.

Epitec employees who become members of Michigan First Credit Union have the unique opportunity to take part in the preferred auto dealer program, where they get special rates on auto loans through Michigan First as well as special perks and discounted pricing from the network of preferred dealers. Membership also provides access to a full range of financial services along with a complete lineup of loans at competitive rates.

There's also "On The Job Banking" from Comerica Bank – a set of personal banking services from Comerica that provides savings and discounts on a variety of products and services, including traditional checking and savings accounts, loans, investments and insurance. There's no cost to Epitec employees and since Epitec offers direct deposit, all you have to do to start saving is sign up!

For information on these, or any benefit programs available to Epitec employees, contact your support team at support@epitecgroup.com

Please send any questions or comments to support@epitecgroup.com. Your input may become a topic in future issues of *Epitalk*.

Industry Insight

Dr. Cheri Speier, Professor of Information Systems and the Associate Dean for MBA and MS Programs at the Eli Broad Graduate School of Management, Michigan State University

Dr. Speier received her Ph.D. in Management Information Systems from Indiana University in 1996. Her primary research interests include the influence of work environments on decision making, individual acceptance and use of technology, effective user training environments, and the effective use of information technology to support supply chain relationships.

At Michigan State, Dr. Speier teaches enterprise information systems at the undergraduate and graduate levels and a seminar on behavioral information systems at the Ph.D. level. She also teaches in the executive education program at Michigan State University.

Q: Given Michigan's economic climate, where do you see technology jobs fitting in?

A: I believe technology jobs are and should continue to be a critical component of Michigan's economic recovery/growth strategy. We've had great success in bringing some larger IT companies to Michigan in the last few years – Google's move into Ann Arbor and IBM's Global Delivery Center for Application Services in East Lansing. I think the IBM story is a great one – East Lansing was selected as the optimal location due to a variety of ongoing partnerships with Michigan State University that would enhance the capabilities of the Center. At the same time, IBM has wonderful access to talent with the hiring of our MSU and other graduates and professionals around the state. At steady state, this IBM Center could create as many as 1,500 new direct and indirect jobs here in Michigan.

Q: What new technologies coming down the pipeline the next 5 to 10 years will improve or revolutionize the way we do business today?

A: I think there are three core areas of emerging technology. The first is collaboration – how does technology better support anytime, anyplace work activity, particularly activity that cuts across multiple organizations? We are seeing a number of organizations create value using Web 2.0 technologies and while there will be some winnowing of Web 2.0 companies, these capabilities will continue to grow. In fact, many would say we've already moved on to Web 3.0! One capability I think we will see come to fruition with Web 3.0 is semantic web technology – a capability where search engines are not just matching search strings to keywords found in web pages, videos, etc. but where there is sufficient understanding of human language. In essence, web searches will be able to find what we actually are looking for, not just the key words we use.

Two other capabilities are mobility and more agile system connections between organizations. We've already seen the power of Blackberrys and iPhones in facilitating connectedness between employees and organizations. With continued investments in mobile infrastructure, we will have greater and faster access to information that resides within our organizations, on the Internet, etc.

Finally, significant cost and improvements in business processes will come from greater interconnectedness between the data in our organization and those of our suppliers, customers, etc. While the Internet provides a wonderful conduit for sharing information, most of our organizations still struggle with getting data and information out of one system across the Internet and into a customer/supplier's system automatically. There are a number of developments in standards, systems, middleware, etc. that will ultimately result in the ability to automate the transmission of data between systems much more seamlessly.

Q: What advice do you have for young people just starting out in the IT field?

A: I truly believe IT is and will continue to be an exciting career field. We see the articles in the press about and have personal experiences with IT being outsourced to countries with developing economies. I do believe that there is a large base of professionals worldwide who can support basic skills such as programming. At the same time, most organizations need individuals who can ensure that these basic skills are applied to maximize value for their organization. This contextualization requires both technical and business/organization knowledge as well as effective project management and communication skills. These roles might be in the form of project managers, IT architects, database developers, etc. I think the critical advice is to develop skills beyond the basic technology – ensure that you can help an organization embed technology in such a way to create business value.

Q: What is Michigan State University doing in the area of IT?

A: One of the exciting things is having the breadth of faculty information technology interests in a university setting like Michigan State – there are so many research projects, it's difficult to know about all of them.

These projects occur in colleges across the University – computer science and engineering, telecommunications, business, education, healthcare, etc. We have faculty who are creating IT-facilitated health service capabilities to ensure that patients in rural areas have access to specialists found only in major metropolitan areas. We have faculty developing new IT-based educational platforms to provide customized student education. Our faculty are on the cutting edge of technological development with inventions in biometrics, pattern matching, the design of virtual environments, etc. They also are investigating the use of technology to protect food and other products in our supply chains from contamination or terrorist attack.

iSpots

Consultant

Kim Tarkowski

STATS

Title: Senior Technology Project Manager

Hire Date: June 2006

Responsibilities: Kim manages the internal technical team, departments and vendors to ensure projects are delivered on time and within budget. She's also responsible for maintaining effective communication and ensuring client goals and objectives are met.

Successes: Working in a number of high-profile positions and gaining the respect of many executives.

Why She Chose This Field: Her high energy and personal drive, as well as her love of technology and managing people for success.

iSpot Exclusive: Kim enjoys hiking, biking and Florida sun-filled vacations. She also is married and has a daughter in her 2nd year at the University of Michigan.

Corporate Employee

Sevan Kulwicki

STATS

Title: Associate Rainmaker

Hire Date: June 2008

Responsibilities: Sevan's primary responsibilities are to manage both the client and on-site employee's needs. She also helps recruit and screen qualified candidates, and assists them in securing a position and orientation at the new company.

Successes: She moved through the recruiting process and into sales within in her first year, which she attributes to working hard and being honest.

Education: Bachelor's Degree in Communication from Michigan State University.

iSpot Exclusive: She enjoys spending time with her parents, younger sister and her dog, a Shih-tzu, named Tank.

Milestones

January

Nan Zhang (3 years)
Venkateswara Kadali (4 years)
Jennifer Gentry-Saulski (4 years)
Jake Covert (4 years)
Keith Hollie (7 years)
G.T. Madavan (9 years)
Fred Gordon (19 years)

February

Ananth Lakshmanan (3 years)
Chung-Ing Chen (14 years)
Lawrence Crehan (16 years)
Josephine Sheppard (25 years)

March

Dave Camilleri (3 years)
Venkat Dannana (4 years)
Sandy Major (4 years)
Jon White (5 years)
Wendy Zheng Fane (7 years)
Maria Sitarski (10 years)
Michele Rodeffer (10 years)
Rebecca Csatari (11 years)
Jerome Sheppard (31 years)

April

Chandra Mohan Laghuvaram (3 years)
Yahia Mawry (3 years)
Herman Pierce (3 years)
Thomas Csatari (12 years)

Project iSpot

(L-R) *Paul McCormick, Christopher Hogan and Timothy Steffes*

The Epitec Group, led by Chris Hogan, Paul McCormick and Tim Steffes, works with the Fordstar Dealer Communications Group to manage helpdesk applications, develop and support multiple Web sites and ensure Ford Motor Co's security measures are followed.

Hogan's main duty is to convert the helpdesk application from the programming language and associated development environment, Visual Basic 6, to an updated version, Visual Basic.NET. He also maintains the data-mine and provides custom reports from dealer databases.

The Telecommunication Services Webmaster, Tim Steffes, develops and maintains Ford's Web sites and is responsible for the development and maintenance of the Web Site Content Management System (WS-CMS). The WS-CMS allows employees unfamiliar with HTML to publish group or project data to the Ford intranet. He also develops and supports advanced plug-ins for the WS-CMS including simple forms that send emails to advanced databases that track complex workflow processes.

McCormick guides employees and his team through security-related issues or project changes. He executes security, infrastructure and application control reviews and monitors network logs for security issues. He also approves ISP changes and moderates the change control board for dealer-related communications.

THE epitec GROUP
From Start To Finish, We're There For You.

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