

Hitting the Mark

Perspective from the Top



January is one of my favorite times. As the first month of the year, it is a time to celebrate the personal and professional successes of the previous 12 months as well as making plans for improvement in the coming year.

2007 was an outstanding year for us. Our objective was "Exceeding Client Expectations" and, as a team, we certainly obtained that objective. In fact, each of Epitec's customers ranked us as one of their top three suppliers. We also can proudly boast a 98 percent project completion rate, which remains well above industry standards. And thanks to excellent customer service, our 2007 sales were up approximately 25 percent from 2006. I would like to thank

everyone for their dedication to Epitec and being a part of this success.

As we move into 2008, we should build upon our performance from 2007. Our objective this year will be "Sustaining High Performance."

As with last year's objective, each and every team member will play a crucial role in our success. As a company, we believe it is not enough to only hit our targets sometimes – we need to hit the target every time. We all must be engaged and focus on what can be done now to achieve business results. The hard work and determination of the Epitec team helped us grow in 2007, and we believe you can lead the way to additional successes in 2008.

This dedication will lead to new and exciting opportunities to work with great companies on unique projects utilizing cutting-edge technologies.

As our customers' technology needs rise, it is essential for us to increase our recruiting and sales teams with committed and driven people. We hope to continue the growth we experienced this year and look forward to exceeding our clients' needs through a capable and motivated staff. Already, five recruiting academies and two sales academies have been scheduled for 2008.

2007 was a very good year. We look for 2008 to be even better!



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Android Cell Phones May Open the Door to a Mobile Phone Revolution

Throughout 2007, many of us heard rumbles about Google's answer to the cell phone industry. Some said that the company was developing a "Gphone" to rival the Apple iPhone. While the true extent of Google's plans remains to be seen, the Internet giant gave us all something else to talk about when company executives announced Google's mobile software platform called Android, a free, open-source operating system based on Linux.

Google hopes Android will lead to cheaper, better phones that will be more open to third-party applications. On a practical level, the platform will allow every aspect of the phone's user interface to be customized. For consumers, this translates to more freedom to use their cell phones how they want. They will be able to add applications, and change software to add new capabilities or fix unwanted flaws.

On a larger level, Android may lead the next big revolution in consumer technology. Just as the Internet introduced the computer world to a slew of innovations while exposing a wider audience of consumers to technology, Google is hoping Android will change the face of the mobile communications industry.

To help develop applications for Android, Google has created the Open Handset Alliance, a partnership of 34 companies, including T-Mobile, Sprint Nextel, Intel, Qualcomm, Motorola, and eBay. Other smaller, more specialized companies are also included in the group. Google is also seeking the help of hundreds of third-party developers through the Android Developer Challenge, which will award \$10 million in prizes to developers who build the best software to enhance the operating system.

Unravelling the Secrets of the Semantic Web

Hollywood seems to love the idea of inanimate objects taking over the world. Back in the old days it was a robot that learned to talk, and more recently we've seen computers learning to think. But what about an Internet application that learns to understand plain English? That would be the Semantic Web.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines semantics as: "the meaning or relationship of meanings of a sign or set of signs; especially connotative meaning." In other words, semantics is the meanings we imply through words and phrases.

There's been a lot of talk over the last few years about the Semantic Web. Some search engines, like Google, can rank Web pages and provide results close to what you are looking for based on the way you phrase words. The truth is, however, that Google, Yahoo!, or any other search engine can't really understand what you're asking for.

For instance, say you wanted to know what to feed your new pet painted turtle. You enter "painted turtle" "proper diet" into Google's search page. The search engine brings up Web pages that include the phrases "painted turtle" and "proper diet," but does not have the capability to find only pages describing the proper diet of a painted turtle. It cannot interpret exactly what you are looking for.

The Semantic Web actually understands the meanings behind words you use and ways in which you phrase them. A search engine using semantics would more precisely understand what you wanted to find without the help of quotation marks or the word "and." Take our painted turtle example. If you entered "proper diet of a painted turtle" into a search engine with semantic Web capabilities, all of your results would be menus for your new pet.

The Semantic Web, sometimes called Web 3.0, is an extension of the current Web. It can handle information in more useful ways, processing meanings within documents instead of simply the documents themselves. The Semantic Web uses all those fun things you learned in English class years ago, such as diction, sentence structure, and grammar. Some Web tools, such as tags, already use this breakthrough technology.

While no mainstream search engines, like Google or Yahoo!, have yet been fully mobilized with semantic capabilities, an online business networking tool is now in the works. Enter Twine.

Radar Networks, a San Francisco company, announced its new Web site, Twine.com, at the 2007 Web 2.0 Summit held in San Francisco.

Twine, now in beta testing, harnesses the many capabilities of Web 3.0.

Twine is a full-featured Web application that helps users organize and share information. You can upload e-mails, bookmarks, documents, contacts, photos, videos, product information, data records, and just about anything else you like. Because Twine understands the meanings behind the information you upload, it organizes everything automatically using its semantic capabilities to analyze your information. It can highlight the names of people or companies mentioned in an email, for example, and group these names into categories. A user can then explore connections between different documents, seeing information organized in a new way.

The application will learn from user behavior over time. The machine learning process allows the software to refine its understanding of documents through use. For example, it may "learn" that what it "thought" was the name of a person is really the name of a company.

Although it is currently available to only about 100 testers, Twine already has Web experts talking because it is one of the first commercial ventures to try harnessing the Semantic Web.

In an interview with New Scientist, Radar Networks Founder Nova Spivack talked about some of the advantages Twine will offer.

"Twine is a service that helps you de-fragment your digital life," he said. "Today we all have different bits of data in different places; there is no easy way to see all you know, and share and manage it."

"I like to think that in the order of 10 years it will become more like an assistant than a Web page," Spivack said.

Plans are also in place to provide tools for other Web sites to upload information to Twine. Information available could include listings from social media networks, and even proprietary data from the stock market.

In addition to transforming the interactions of information sharing between businesses, Twine could provide the beginnings for entirely new forms of advertising. By understanding the interests of users through semantic capabilities, Twine would allow advertisers to better target their audiences.

So are you ready to have your life reorganized by the Semantic Web? This could be exciting.



Automation Alley Report Has Good News for Michigan's IT Industry

Automation Alley, a technology business association based in Southeast Michigan, released its Third Annual Technology Industry Report: Driving Southeast Michigan Forward early this January. The document, prepared by the Anderson Economic Group, details the economic climate of Southeast Michigan's technology industry from 2004 to 2005.

The report consists of data regarding university investment in research and development, student enrollment in science and engineering graduate programs, levels of funding in research grants being awarded to small businesses, and growing activity in the defense and homeland security industry. Overall, the report indicates that the future looks bright as

companies remain in Southeast Michigan and the region retains high-wage and high-skilled jobs.

While businesses in the technology industry are downsizing amid Southeast Michigan's current economic situation, the report indicates that companies are staying in the area. This is good news for those working in Michigan's IT Industry. As the local economy improves, businesses will be able to hire and retain larger IT staffs.

The study also found that companies are retaining higher-level positions and that wages in the IT industry remain steady.

According to the report, most businesses specializing in the technology sector remain small (100 or less employees), providing more opportunity for growth as the economy improves. A copy of the full report may be found by visiting www.automationalley.com.



Epitec Spreads Holiday Joy

Several Epitec employees recently sponsored girls staying at the Vista Maria Home for Girls, a residential treatment agency for girls ages 11-17 from across Michigan who are in need of treatment for mental health, substance abuse, trauma recovery and other psychosocial issues. Without the generous support of these employees, 12 young ladies may not have received anything for the holidays.

Thank you to:

Josie Sheppard, Rebecca Csatari, Natalie Dudeck, Sandy Major, Celeste VanBelle, Maria Sitariski, Otis Glenn, Sam Woods, Kenja Johnson, Cynthia Cottage, Caroline Deacon and Sharon Fike.

On December 8, 2007, Epitec also sponsored a holiday party for Boys Hope Girls Hope, a nonprofit organization that helps young scholars meet their full potential by providing value-centered, family-like homes, opportunities and education through college. Each of the 11 students received an MP3 player and Target gift card.



Change in 401(k) Eligibility Requirements Benefits Employees

Epitec is pleased to announce a change to the 401(k) Retirement Savings Plan eligibility rule. All employees will now be eligible to enroll and contribute to his/her 401(k) Retirement Savings plan on the first day of the month following his/her initial hire date. Previously, employees were required to wait until the first open enrollment after 6 months of employment.

Epitec contributes 25 percent of the first six percent of an employee's gross wages to his/her 401(k) Retirement Savings Plan. The maximum contribution (as prescribed by the Secretary of the Treasury) for 2008 is the lesser of \$15,500 or 60 percent of an employee's annual salary. Employees over the age of 50 are also eligible to make a catch-up contribution up to a maximum of \$6,000 for 2008. To find out more about The Epitec Group 401(k) Retirement Savings Plan, please 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

Eric Morath, *The Detroit News*



Eric Morath joined *The Detroit News* business desk as technology, utility and energy reporter in October 2006 and now covers The Chrysler Group. Before working with the News, he spent two years as technology and manufacturing reporter for the *Oakland Business Review*. Morath graduated from Michigan State University in 2004. He resides in Royal Oak with his wife Amy.

Q: You've been in Michigan all your life and given your success, I'm sure you've had opportunities to leave. What keeps you here despite all our challenges?

A: As a business reporter, I appreciate the exciting and challenging business environment in Michigan. There are big companies and big industries rooted here, making Metro Detroit much more of a global business center than most outsiders realize – that makes for exciting stories.

Q: Given Michigan's economic climate, where do you see technology jobs fitting in? Is there room for growth amid these circumstances?

A: The immediate opportunities for high-tech jobs are tied to the automotive industry and our state's research universities. In autos, despite shrinking market share among domestic automakers, Detroit remains an R&D hot bed which could be further exploited, especially in areas such as telematics, alternative fuels and advanced batteries. The universities possess the knowledge to create new industries. More needs to be done to ensure that talent and intellectual property stays in the state and is cultivated to the point where it can become the basis for technology companies.

Q: What significant changes has Southeast Michigan's technology economy experienced over the last 15 years?

A: I've seen a growing recognition of entrepreneurship and the role it has in changing our economy. I think some will always aspire to become engineers at GM, but I think more people are willing to go on their own and desire to use their ideas to create new companies and jobs. That change needs to continue.

Q: Where do you think Southeast Michigan's technology economy is heading in the next 15 years?

A: We are at a crossroads. We could remain an automotive technology hub that continues to slowly lose ground to Japan, Germany, Korea, and soon China and India. Or, perhaps out of necessity, we will build on our automotive strengths and research universities and reestablish our state as a center for innovation. Silicon Valley? Not likely. But considering our institutions and industry, there is no reason Southeast Michigan couldn't become among the country's five or so top technology centers.

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

A: Ubiquitous access to high-speed wireless Internet. It won't be long before Wi-Fi, Wi-Max or similar technology is literally everywhere. First, having separate home, business and EV-DO-type access will be a thing of the past. Meaning virtual offices will even be more commonplace. More interestingly, such wireless access will deeply integrate the Internet to non-traditional equipment ranging from video cameras to machining tools to vehicles.

Q: What obstacles do you anticipate IT professionals in Southeast Michigan will face in the near future, and what suggestions do you offer to overcome these obstacles?

A: Establishing an entrepreneurial culture in a town known for its big companies. To overcome that IT professionals need to breakout on their own, and not be afraid to fail. That requires support. Support from investors and capital. Support from educational institutions. And support from one another. Those who have found success need to mentor those making their first ventures on their own.

Consultant



Rajiv Dhiman

STATS

Title: Rajiv is a developer/analyst with Chrysler's Peoplesoft Payroll System.

Hire Date: January 2006.

Responsibilities: Rajiv works in many capacities, including designing technical specifications, coding, trouble-shooting, testing, and providing support to Peoplesoft users.

Education: Bachelor of Technology in Computer Science and Engineering from Priyadarshini College of Computer Sciences in India.

iSpot Exclusive: Rajiv fell in love with computer-based technology in the ninth grade when he attended a trade show in India. To this day, he loves to work on small electronic projects at home in his spare time.

Corporate Employee



Mark Ruma

STATS

Title: Mark is Recruiting Manager for Epitec.

Hire Date: Mark is celebrating his 10th anniversary with Epitec. Josie Sheppard hired him in 1997.

Responsibilities: Mark is primarily responsible for the hiring, training and management of recruiters while also maintaining a recruiting department that supports Epitec's sales objectives.

Education: Bachelor of Science in Accounting from Wayne State University.

iSpot Exclusive: Mark, his wife and their 2 year-old son, Santino, are happily awaiting the arrival of their new baby boy, set to arrive in March. In the meantime, Mark plans to continue refining his "mad Guitar Hero skills."



(L-R) Back Row: Ephraim Blevins, Rudy Vuckov, Ed Grace Front Row: Padmaja Mulpur, Yana Fox, Mark Pitcher

The Epitec team, led by Ephraim Blevins, Rudy Vuckov, Mark Pitcher, Yana Fox, Padmaja Mulpur, and Edward Grace, helps Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan (BCBSM) ensure the quality of the system enhancements and the stability of existing accounts processed on the new Michigan Operating System (MOS) platform. Enrollees currently administered on BCBSM local legacy systems will be migrated to MOS for processing BCBSM membership, billing and claims.

As BCBSM transfers its local claims processing to a new national standard, the Epitec team is developing, testing, and implementing a reusable parallel testing process that compares claims processed on the local BCBSM systems to the same claims processed on the new MOS system, ultimately making the transition easier. The customer will be provided with reports showing the differences between benefits loaded on contractual documents in MOS and within the local systems. The parallel test will provide a statistical representation of claims for subscribers being migrated, ensuring there is no significant difference in claims processing between the two systems. Following the successful completion of MOS Release 1A, the team will modify the parallel claims test process for each successive MOS migration.

The pilot parallel claims compare test effort began in late October and is expected to run through March 2008. Epitec will be involved in each of the consecutive MOS group migrations, expected to last a total of two to three years.

Milestones

October

Aubrey Roberts (15 years)
Jeffrey Bonarek (12 years)
Diane Madigan (10 years)
Chung-Jian Huang (8 years)
Siddharth Nakade (4 years)

November

Daniel Wiest (14 years)
Kathy Muntz (13 years)
Mark Ruma (10 years)
Michael Gardiner (9 years)
Wynett Summers (8 years)
David Kirunchyk (8 years)
Paul Brucker (6 years)
Subrahmanyeswara Chitiraju (5 years)
Russell Carlson (3 years)
Srinivas Bodhanampati (3 years)

December

Norrickey Gibson (15 years)
Tariq Naseem (7 years)



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

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