

E-Technology Summit Puts Web Strategy on Center Stage

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Hartford, Conn., may be well-known for its insurance companies, but on April 24, the Hartford Business Journal brought people from across the business spectrum together at its e-Technology Summit and 2009 Strateg-e Awards to talk about growing their businesses through the use of (surprise, surprise) technology. Gathered together in South Windsor, Conn., attendees spent the day learning about everything from how to set up a corporate blog to the legal concerns that blogs might raise.

Keynote speaker Brian Reich, principal at EchoDitto, talked about how the internet is changing the way everyone does ... well ... just about everything. Some businesses may feel as if they're scrambling to keep up. One day cell phones are the rage, then blogs are the hot new tool, and before you know it, social networks are horning in on the action. But Reich has good news for those people: It's not about the tool; it's about your content.

If you ask Reich, newspapers aren't struggling because monetizing content is difficult—it's the content that's the problem. If your local newspaper is filled with Associated Press content rather than local, relevant reporting, why would you continue to buy that paper? "Technology facilitates the transfer of experience," says Reich, emphasizing the importance of what you're delivering rather than how you're delivering it.

Attendees looking to learn how to get their content to the masses, though, had plenty of speakers willing to help them figure it out. Eric Knight of Remarkable Technologies led a discussion called Turn Business Blogging Into Your Highest ROI Marketing Tool. Knight offered advice on how to start, maintain, and monetize a blog with no investment other than time. Recommending Wordpress as a platform, he told the audience how to get the most for their investments by using tools such as Google AdSense to bring in advertising revenue and how to spread the word through other free tools such as Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter.

Kane Bennett, Raymond & Bennett, kicked off the eTechnology Legal Forum: Potential Pitfalls That Could Sink Your Business session. Bennett discussed the risks businesses face by being a part of the World Wide Web—or by simply storing customer information. He touched on what he calls the "five technology bombs" that all businesses should think about: data loss, website compliance, software compliance, employment

law problems, and technology errors. Each of these challenges comes up with its own set of solutions, but one theme ran through it all: the need for preparedness, whether that came in the form of company policies or well-defined contracts.

Mike Dandini, VP and global practice leader, Technology Practice Group, The Hartford Financial Services Group, Inc., wrapped up the session with a few brief comments, which could be summed up as, "Don't assume you're covered." One of the day's hottest topics was social networking sites, and Dandini had some words of caution on that topic: "The popularity of social networking is only increasing, as are the various mediums and sites available to conduct these activities. Consequently, this is an area of the law that is still emerging, and many of the tougher issues have yet to be tested in either trial or appellate courts." This uncharted territory that opens businesses up to new legal peril also opens them up to huge numbers of potential clients.

Suzi Craig of group88 gave the ABCs of Social Networking talk to a packed room, and to many skeptics. Craig laid out the basics of the big three: Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. She described Facebook as the equivalent of your family pig roast, LinkedIn as the annual conference, and Twitter as a dinner party. Still, some people just didn't get it. "Who cares what I have to say?" they asked. That was the question everyone should ask, Craig said, before joining any network.

Those questions carried over into the final panel of the day, led by Rick Hancock of Fox 61 news. Panelist Peter Glyman of Geezeo seemed to get through to the skeptics by saying he'd found new clients on Twitter; he even contacted a reporter from The Wall Street Journal and managed to get coverage of his company in one of the biggest newspapers in the world. With other workshops ranging from Building a Virtual Office to Become Paperless ... Really, attendees got a nice taste of what it really means to join the technological revolution, on the web, in the office, and in the marketplace.