

CIO Confessions

Toromont's chief information officer talks about why IT is the place to be

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WHO Mike Cuddy is chief information officer at Toromont Industries Ltd., which sells and rents construction equipment and builds compression systems. Based in Concord, Ontario, Toromont has about 4,400 employees in 115 locations.

WHAT Cuddy leads a 50-person IT department responsible for a technical infrastructure that includes Unix, Windows and IBM AS/400 systems, a private network and a significant number of internally developed Web applications.

tq What led you into a career in IT?

Mike Cuddy It was the opportunity to create improvements and different ways to conduct business. I worked in finance, marketing, logistics and different functional areas in business. IT has always had a much greater potential to deliver improvements in the way you operate a business in a shorter period of time.



Mike Cuddy is chief information officer at Toromont Industries Ltd. (McKenzie James)



tq How has IT changed Toromont in your time there?

MC Some of the more significant changes involve our sales and marketing area, where technology has allowed us to change our sales coverage model. We've also developed better performance metrics, and the visibility of information has allowed us to respond that much quicker to events that take place in the market. Personal productivity systems such as wireless connectivity, portable computers and e-mail have dramatically improved communication between people.

tq What are your key priorities this year?

MC One of the key areas for me is to understand how we can use wireless and mobile technology to create greater competitive advantage. Those technologies are just now becoming reliable enough to begin deploying typical business applications into mobile environments. Companies like ours can now look at extending their enterprise applications out to an anytime, anywhere model. We have service trucks and sales professionals on the road in front of customers. Technologies that allow us to get information into the hands of these people in real time or close to it will have a profound impact on how we operate.

tq What other technologies will have a big impact in the next few years?

MC Look at the phenomenal growth in the experience of Second Life, the virtual world system on the Internet. I look at those types of technologies to determine the potential opportunity they might present to Toromont. What will rich content and broadband-based delivery do for us? With technologies such as YouTube and mash-ups, can we begin to embed video along with applications? Can we embed training videos along with our actual applications so that our users are better educated in how to use those systems?

tq Is implementing technology getting easier or harder?

MC It gets easier to enable business change through technology every year. Contrary to what you read in a lot of magazines—that it's never been tougher—I don't think that's the case. We may be constantly facing greater expectations year after year because technology gets consumerized—almost everyone is familiar with what technology can do in some way—but today, to find and deliver systems and new technology capabilities has never been better or easier. I expect that to continue.

tq Why is that?

MC I think the barriers to developing new technologies and solutions are much, much lower than they've ever been in the past. Because of the declining cost of technology, you don't need a \$5-billion company to be able to invest in creative technology and develop innovative solutions. The Internet has made information from all around the world accessible. And the companies that manufacture computers use computing to design the next generation of computing. So 10 or 20 years ago, the time it would take us to come up with a working solution for a business problem was much longer than it is today.

tq What's your favourite piece of technology?

MC The personal technology I use the most is what I'm talking on—a Treo. It's an extremely effective piece of technology. I don't use an iPod or music player. I don't tote a digital camera around with me wherever I go. The technology I use is typically technology that I think will have a role in our company.

tq If you could have any new technology you can imagine, what would you like to see?

MC I really wish my phone would unfold into a bigger screen. I wish I could pull it out of my pocket and unfold it until it's a full-sized screen, with a full-sized keyboard. I could work away on it and then fold it back up and put it in my pocket. I don't understand why the cases of portable devices like phones, PDAs and laptops aren't covered in solar cells. Calculators had little solar cells on them 20 years ago. Why aren't these things covered in solar cells so they're constantly charging, and they never run out of power?

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