

As CIOs Rise in Stature, Levy Documents the Trend

By Emily Sopensky

▶ As the Information Age barrels along at the speed of light, those who can grasp the present and envision the future become increasingly valuable. "Change" is the operative word, and it is the chief information officer — the CIO — who must embrace it.

Many executives turn to CIO Magazine for insight and guidance. The glossy, content-laden publication, "the magazine for information executives," has a large and loyal readership, currently numbering 130,000. The magazine recently expanded, adding a second section that focuses entirely on the business of Web development.

Joseph Levy, founder, president, CEO and group publisher of CIO Magazine and CIO Communications Inc., was in Austin

to participate in the first Austin IT Executive of the Year Award. He shared a few thoughts about the IT business and about his flagship product.

Sixteen years after joining International Data Group (IDG), the Boston-based mega-publisher that also counts ComputerWorld in its stable, Levy rose quickly through the ranks. He had an idea that wouldn't die: "My view was that all the IS newsweeklies — ComputerWorld, InfoWorld, PCWeek and Information Week — focused on the plumbing and not the benefits of the plumbing. When I pick up the phone, all I care about is that there's a dial tone. I don't care how I got the dial tone, whether it went through



Joe Levy

Emily Sopensky photo

routers or switching systems. I felt there should be a publication that talks about technology from the business end. Where is the return on investment? How do you survive the challenges

that CIOs go through?"

Levy firmly believes that the CIO role is being reinvented. "First the CIO must have vision and the ability to sell it to management. And the CIO has to have business expertise." More and more CIOs possess MBAs, he says.

Levy notes that the issues commanding the attention of CIOs today are the Y2K problem, the Euro conversion, and the IT staffing crisis. And, of course, the profound impact of the Internet. "When I went to school, I was taught the criteria to success in the capitalist society were based on capital. Yet Jack Bezos and Amazon .com have shown us that you don't need any of that stuff. Now someone who has never opened a store at a physical location can have the highest market cap of any bookseller."

Levy explains.

Sales are not the only benefit of the Web, says Levy. "Cisco is a good example. They are saving about \$500 million a year in customer service through their website. The hard part is to have faith that there will be a payback."

In the short run, Y2K is the most demanding problem facing CIOs. While Levy has no intention of moving to a well-stocked fortress by Jan. 1, 2000, he also has no plans to be on an airplane that day either.

He predicts that CIOs will be investing in networking this coming year, especially if it is faster and cheaper than what they have now. Investments also include solutions for retailing over the Internet and any enterprise application that allows you to stay closer to the customer.

Execs Recognized by Austin IT Community

► To honor the stellar performances of IT leadership in Austin, the Association of Information Technology Professionals (AITP) hosted the first Austin IT Executive Awards reception at the 1998 Austin ITEC Expo in December.

A committee of five judges chose **Jerry Gregoire**, Dell VP and CIO, as the Austin IT Executive of the Year. He is responsible for Dell's information systems worldwide. The other two finalists were **Steve Cox**, CIO of VTEL Corporation, and **Carolyn Purcell**, executive director of the Texas

Department of Information Resources.

Gregoire won primarily for implementing the "Run Dell on Dell" strategy. The goal is to run Dell's key business processes on Dell's own self-developed technology products. It is an evolutionary strategy that allows Dell to deliver business value in an incremental fashion, versus the "big bang" approach of building one behemoth to be launched once only.

Gregoire is considered a gifted strategist and visionary. Because he is constantly looking for new opportunities and new technology to be used in the factories as well as the sales and service areas, many also consider Gregoire to be the chief technologist at Dell.

Prior to joining Dell in July 1996, Gregoire spent 10 years with PepsiCo Inc., most recently as VP of information systems for Pepsi-Cola Company.

Special Technologist Award

In a special award, the judging committee also recognized **Steve Madere**, Deja News
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Jonathan Hines, Sean Lowery, Russ Finney and Steve Madere
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Russ Finney and Carolyn Purcell
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