



## Human Resources Development Canada

### C U S T O M E R   P R O F I L E

**H**uman Resources Development Canada administers several acts pertaining to employment, labour codes and social security with the objective of enhancing employment and encouraging equality.

HRDC has a number of Centers across Nova Scotia that allow citizens to apply for the services under their particular mandate. HRDC also provides walk in services such as computerized access to an online job bank.

To better serve their clients, HRDC decided to put an electronic survey and feedback recording system into place to enable them to better gauge the level of client satisfaction. They hoped this would enable them to provide better service and value to their clients. HRDC employed Nicom Limited to design, develop and implement this new computerized survey and feedback recording system.

The system we created runs as a web based system using ASP technology over an intranet on a wide area network. The ASP pages running on Microsoft IIS server use a Microsoft Access database to collect the submitted survey and complaint data.

The system is entirely bilingual and displays the surveys in a manner that allows HRDC clients to easily complete the survey through easy-to-use touch-screen technology.

As a part of the entire project, Nicom also created a web based maintenance system which allows management to maintain and deploy surveys in a very flexible manner. Any survey can be comprised of any number of rated-scale, yes/no, and even-open ended questions. These questions can be added, modified and even removed, until the survey has been made active, at which time the survey structure is locked. Once made active, a survey is available to the public via the HRCC kiosks.

	Yes/Disabled	Disabled	No/Not	No/Not
Weighted	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Value	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Full Knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quality of Information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Customer Satisfaction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Customer Satisfaction Score	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Default	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

On the management side, the system offers web-based hierarchical point-in-time statistical reporting of submitted surveys allowing the HRDC to analyze client responses. The reporting breaks down the statistics by office, region and province which allows HRDC personnel to view responses for any survey that had ever been made available to the public.

This survey system has proven itself to be a valuable tool in the HRDC's continued quest for better customer satisfaction.

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## Breakfast With Bill Gates By David Nicholson

"**B**reakfast With Bill" was the subject line on the email from Microsoft. When I opened the email, it showed a photo of Bill Gates and stated that "as a valued member, you are cordially invited to Breakfast with Bill - an exclusive Microsoft event taking place in Toronto. Breakfast with Bill is an invitation-only event. The date is August 20; the location of the event is in Downtown Toronto and, in the interest of security, additional details of the location will be emailed to registrants closer to the event date". Intriguing.....

It just so happened that I was to be in Toronto working on a project that week and would be able to attend the meeting with Bill - me, in the same room as one of the most powerful, influential, not to mention richest men in the world!

It turned out to be quite an event. There was myself, Bill Gates, and about twenty-two hundred other people. Bill spoke for about an hour, mainly about the products that Microsoft is currently delivering and will be delivering over the near future. It basically boiled down to three things - XML, .NET, and Web Services.

One thing that I found interesting was how Bill felt about the new Tablet PC (soon to be released). He has been using one of these devices for about six months and now

wonders how he could have worked without one. He thinks the move to devices that recognize handwriting will be as revolutionary as the move from a command line interface to the graphical user interface.

He also mentioned the importance of security and said that Microsoft is spending one-third of its \$5 billion US R&D budget on, what he called, "trustworthy computing" - pretty impressive...

The end of the session was opened up for questions from the audience. There were quite a number of very technical questions about a wide-variety of products and platforms. I found it very interesting to see just how aware Bill Gates is of all of the technologies that are available - at a very detailed level.

I found Bill to be very comfortable in front of a large audience, a good speaker, and able to recover well when things didn't go as planned and also, when receiving "interesting" questions from the audience.

Just as an interesting side-note, Nicom is using the three technologies that Bill Gates was discussing - XML, .NET, and Web Services. We feel as he does - these are terrific advances in the computing industry which provide excellent resources for software developers to further open up the opportunities on the Internet.



## New Employees

**W**e are extremely pleased to introduce you to two new employees at Nicom, Orin Eisenhauer and Kofi Senaya.

Orin has a great number of years of experience providing computer repair and system support services for different organizations. His last position was with Compucollege where he administered a 350 station Wide Area Network spread over two locations and composed of a mixture of server and desktop operating systems. Orin will now be providing technical support services to our client base. He has extensive

knowledge and experience with the Novell and Microsoft line of operating systems and is already proving to be quite an asset to Nicom.

Kofi comes to us all the way from Ghana, Africa. He has a degree in Marketing and Human Resource Management from Mount Allison University and is also a graduate of ITI. Kofi is proving himself to be a major asset to our team by providing Visual Basic programming and advanced Internet development skills.



**W**hat is the most important things to keep in mind when designing a website? Content quality? With the design of the site being such a prominent thing, it is easy to focus on that alone. However, the main function of the design is to draw the user's attention to the content. Once that goal has been achieved, the relevance of the content switches to the main focus.

It may sometimes feel like more is better, but in all honesty, users don't always read very much online. There are obviously places within your site where you will need to go into great detail. However, quite often users must be drawn into those areas. A good way of doing that is presenting them with smaller, very descriptive bits of information that shows they are being offered something useful and informative. Or more specifically, it shows them exactly what they are being offered. This will help direct users into more specific areas of your site which they normally may not have taken the time to read.

There are numerous ways to enhance content, such as incorporating things like animation, sound and video. After all, this is the internet, so there's no reason to limit your site to just text and images. The use of additional media can be a powerful tool; however it is something which needs to be used wisely. For example; using audio that doesn't create the appropriate mood, may actually drive users away from a site. However, if used properly, these features will grab the user's attention and help to highlight specific content.

Although content is very important, there's no getting around the fact that people viewing a site will judge a book by its cover. Before a user is able to read a single word of

content, they will see the design and layout of a site. Strong design not only gives the site, therefore the company, a professional feel, it also is an important way to draw users to more detailed content. A very important part of helping draw users to content is making sure that the site's design clearly ties in with what information the site is trying to communicate. Many people feel that the most important thing is having information online and how it looks is secondary. However, a first impression is a lasting impression. Even if you have an excellent product or service, how your site looks could have a negative impact on how it is perceived.

There is one very key element that ties the content and design together. The site's usability. A strongly designed site with great content can still alienate users if it's not intuitive and easy to navigate. So, once again, we are brought back to content. It's important to remember that content is not just page after page of text. It is how that text is structured, organized and named within a website. At the root of that structure is how your navigation is broken down. Your navigation should be organized in a way which instinctively lets people know where to find things. While viewing your site, users should always be able to tell where they are, how they got there and where they need to go next.

Obviously in terms of usability and design, there are still many factors to consider. But hopefully this will be a good reference point if you're planning to launch a new site or re-design your existing one. For further assistance in this area, Nicom's web development team would be more than happy to help.

## MURPHYS LAWS OF COMPUTING

- Confidence is the feeling you get just before you fully understand the problem.

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## What is .Net? By Mike Hatfield

So, does this whole .Net thing have you scratching your head? What if I say "XML Web Services"? Still nothing? There's no need to worry. You are not alone.

Simply put, Microsoft.Net is a software concept that will help you run your business more efficiently and effectively. This can be achieved by unlocking the power of the latest in software and internet technologies allowing developers to create software systems that are more flexible, stable and scalable than ever before.

Officially launched in 2000, Microsoft has bet the farm that this next-generation software is the way to go.

As a company, Nicom has been developing .Net solutions since February of 2002 when Microsoft released their Visual Studio.Net toolset. I must admit that, for the first time, Microsoft has released a toolset and a technology that it is truly a pleasure to use.

We are able to develop more powerful applications without increasing the development costs by creating more for less.

More for less, a deal that is difficult to pass up in and of itself, but there are other benefits to having a .Net developed solution.

A .Net solution offers improved stability over its predecessors by featuring rich exception handling. .Net also offers "just in time" compiling that optimizes program code as you execute it. This optimized code then is cached so subsequent calls to the modules are already compiled and optimized until you shut the program down. That's techie talk for, "It just runs better."

More for less, improved stability, improved performance. Throw in scalability and internet web pages that function just like any other program to the mix, and we have THE winning combination.

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## About Nicom

Nicom Ltd. is a computer system consulting company based in Halifax and Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. We have been providing services to private industry and government departments since 1982. Our focus is on helping organizations become more efficient and profitable through the use of information technology.

### Services We Offer:

#### IT Consulting

- IT Assessments
- Requirement Analysis

#### Technical Support

- Network Installation
- Service Contracts

#### Software Development

- Custom Database Applications
- Data Warehouse Implementation

#### Web Development

- Corporate Website Design
- E-Commerce

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