



Client Profile: Chefs by DESIGN Inc.

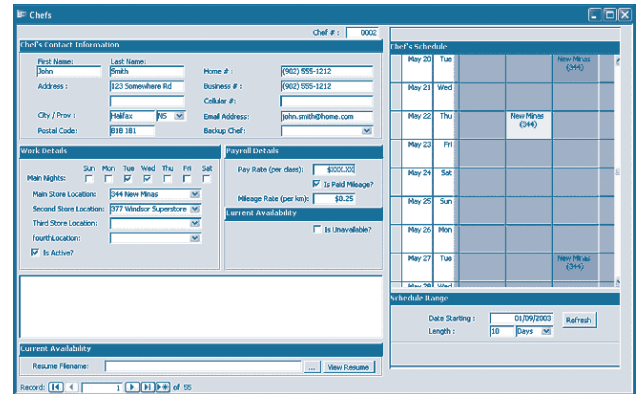
Chefs by Design is a multifaceted company that provides culinary support, as well as catering and consulting services, around the Maritimes with both local and international levels of expertise.

One service they provide to the public is the coordination and management of chefs who teach cooking classes at Atlantic Superstores around the Maritimes. Nicom was asked to develop a Microsoft Access based database system that would facilitate the scheduling of chefs to classes and produce the recipes that the chefs teach at these classes.

Managing 70 chefs located throughout the Maritimes, with hundreds of classes a month, was a laborious and time consuming task. A wall-sized white board and several Microsoft Excel spreadsheets were all that were used to accomplish this difficult task. It was nearly impossible to compile class reports or to pull together payroll and invoicing information.

Nicom provided a solution which included an easy to use scheduling mechanism; a facility to email individualized schedules to chefs around the Maritimes; recipe entry and automatic ingredient scaling; shopping list for recipe packages and also pulled together the payroll and invoicing information that management needed.

The application was developed using Microsoft Access which allowed us to develop the system



quickly and within budget, while providing all the functionality that was required.

Our approach was to develop the Chef Scheduling System as a multi-user system. We separated the user interface and tables such that the clients accessed the shared backend database through their local area network.

The system also includes flexible report generation so the user can choose to generate a report using very general or very specific data. All reports can be previewed on the screen, printed to their default printer or emailed to a specified email address as a Rich Text Formatted document attachment.

We used a "phase" approach on this project, developing the scheduling system to allow for the tracking of chefs, class locations and their schedules. First we developed this phase in a manner that would allow the integration of additional functionality.

The scheduling system provides automatic schedule validation to ensure that no two chefs are scheduled for the same time slot at the same location. It also checks that a chef is not scheduled to teach a class on a day that the chef has off unless overridden by the user. Classes can be scheduled by either chef or store location. A schedule overview is provided to the user from the main menu for a given day.

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The schedule grid provides access to individual class details, allowing the user to specify the chef/location, class description and class confirmation. This also provides a means for users to enter class report information.

In the second phase of the project we added recipe tracking to the database. This functionality allows the users not only to store recipe ingredient lists and preparation instructions in the database, but also to assign multiple recipes to a recipe "package". It is this recipe package that

the chefs will use in their cooking classes. The recipes can be automatically scaled to any number of servings and then be printed. The user is able to generate a package report that includes each of the recipes assigned to a particular package; each scaled to the same serving number and also provides a single combined grocery list of all ingredients.

This has proven to be a very powerful yet affordable database solution and has become an integral part of Chefs by Design's business

Murphy's Laws of Computing:

When you get to the point where you really understand your computer system, it's probably obsolete.



Planning for Disaster by David Nicholson

Have you heard the ancient Chinese curse - "may you live in interesting times"? I think many of us would agree that the past year could be called "interesting times" especially when looking at it from the perspective of planning for disaster.

There have been such a number of very serious problems, including 9/11, two wars, SARS, the massive power outage and more recently the major hurricane that hit Nova Scotia. If you are experiencing a feeling of vulnerability, you are definitely not alone. Even companies with state-of-the-art security and business continuity plans are left wondering "what's next".

Disaster Recovery Planning. Business Continuity Planning. There are any number of terms used to describe having a process in place to contend with unexpected events that have the potential to "bring an organization to its knees". Interestingly

enough most organizations have no plans in place to help deal with a disaster. Even having a proper method of backing up the computer systems which includes a rotation of tapes and offsite storage is a process that many businesses do not have in place.

Developing a business continuity plan does not have to be an overly onerous task. For many smaller businesses, this could probably be accomplished with a few meetings between key individuals. In a larger organization of course, the amount of effort will be compounded due to the large number of "systems" that are being used and the relative importance of each system.

I believe it is human nature to have that "it will not happen to me" feeling. However we believe that for the amount of time it takes to develop a business continuity plan, your efforts will more than pay for themselves, when a disaster occurs.



Taking Advantage of Website Statistics by Ryan Grant

A website can be a very powerful marketing tool. Naturally, to make any marketing effort effective, proper planning prior to launch is as important as fully analyzing its impact. Quite often with websites, people spend a lot of time planning beforehand and not enough time analyzing the results. This is unfortunate, because much can be learned from the information provided by website statistic software.

By analyzing your web stats you can learn much more than just how many people are coming to the website. In addition to learning what pages have been viewed the most, you can track return visitors, see where they are coming from and see how long they stayed. You can also look further to find out things such as the address of any website or search engine that may have referred users to your site or even the exact search term they typed in.

The information related to the search engines they used can be especially helpful. It will allow you to see where you are successfully being listed and what words or terms have been having been bringing you the best results. There is often a big difference between what you think users will search for and what they actually type in. Analyzing the stats will help solve part of the mystery.

Quite often website statistic software is included free with your hosting package. When that is not the case, there are many affordable solutions available. The cost is usually determined by the amount of traffic that your website receives. Like the price, how the software is setup can also vary.

Remember, the time spent developing a website is an investment. So take a little more time to get a true picture of your website's usage and optimize that investment.



The Pros and Cons of Web-Based Applications in Today's Business World by Mike Hatfield

The internet has come a long way from its early days of being a geeks-only playground to now being a cornerstone of today's technologically savvy business world. In fact, the World Wide Web has migrated from the exclusive domain of "dotcoms" into becoming an integral component of today's corporate processes.

In recent years companies have begun implementing new systems developed entirely using internet technologies because of the systems management promises made by these new technologies. However, what are these promises and how do they play out in real world scenarios?

One of the most difficult aspects of software development has always been the deployment process. Developing a computer system that will run correctly on hundreds of workstations is a challenge to say the least. Web-based applications need only a standard web browser, which is a piece of software that is found on any of today's workstations. Because of this, the web-based

client is "platform independent"; that is it runs as well on a Macintosh computer as it does on a Windows PC.

Another improvement the web-based application makes available is the single point of update. To implement new functionality we need only to update the software on the server computer and all the computers on the network will automatically have the updated software - where other traditional forms of software would require redeployment (reinstall on each computer).

With today's software development tools we can create very powerful and flexible web-based applications that overcome some of the limitations of traditional software systems. One limitation is that web-based applications are not as functional as traditionally developed applications.

It appears that web-based software has cemented itself into a place in the future of software development. It's an exciting time in the development world.



Are You on the Right Track? by Kera McAllister

Throughout our company's existence, we have recognized that one of our biggest challenges is informing the market of what can be accomplished if Information Technology (IT) is used to its full potential and how it benefits organizations. If an individual does not understand how to fully utilize IT, how would they really know if they are using what they could be using, to maximize their productivity and/or their efficiency?

If your organization requires a network or database or an e-business solution, it is important for you to understand that these technologies will decrease man hours and increase efficiency. Sharing files/programs from one computer to another, maximizing customer relationship management or gathering potential prospects online are but a few of the benefits of using information technology to its full potential.

Some of IT's general components are: IT Consulting: - the process of working with you to define the technologies that will improve your

organization; Technical Support: - providing the necessary expertise to help you resolve your computer system related problems; Software Development: - the design, development and implementation of custom software and/or the integration of custom applications with your existing or new programs; Web Development: - the design of a visually appealing website that leaves a lasting impression. Using web development as an example, one challenge in website design is "getting it right the first time" to avoid unnecessary expenses down the road (e.g., man hours required to get a "new" website redeveloped).

Understanding IT and its capabilities will bring you one step closer to maximizing your company's potential. You know your goals and where you want to be, but do you know if there is a technology available that can help you attain these goals more quickly and/or efficiently? You have to be informed of your options before you know what to ask for and it's our job to inform you.



About Nicom Ltd.

Nicom has been helping organizations become more efficient through the use of information technology since 1982. We provide all the services required to effectively define and implement these technologies for organizations.

Services We Offer:

IT Consulting

- IT Assessments
- Requirement Analysis

Software Development

- Custom Database Applications
- Data Warehouse Implementation

Technical Support

- Network Installation
- Service Contracts

Web Development

- Corporate Website Design
- E-Commerce

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