

# IT is the business game-changer

By JAN DEAN

It might seem odd to celebrate a company's 17th anniversary with a big party, but that's just how Waterloo's Data Perceptions Inc. rolls.

They've been holding an anniversary bash every year since their 10th. And they've added a post-Christmas January get-together and a summer barbeque to their celebration calendar.

The goal, says company founder Eric Sundin, is to give their associates and sub-contractors a chance to get to know each other. The October event that includes customers on the invitation list, gives everyone a chance to network.

"One of our visions at DP is to make this one of the best places to work for sub-contractors," explains Sundin. That's doubly important because with only half a dozen full-time employees who act as senior consultants and project managers, the IT solutions firm relies on a roster of outstanding sub-contractors to make projects successful.

It's a business model that allows the company to stay lean and yet able to tackle complicated major projects for a variety of companies.

Diversification is a definite plus in our current economy, and a lesson that Sundin learned early on. After founding DP in 1993, the company had four large telecom customers that accounted for 90 per cent of their revenue.

Then came Y2K. Between January and March of 2000, all four clients stopped outsourcing business, leaving DP in the lurch.

"We needed to rebuild the company and diversify," says Sundin. "We opted to work for mid-size local companies." That hadn't been an option when the company was founded. Start-ups that grew here were sold. Sundin says that with the success of companies like RIM and Open Text that trend changed and there was work here for DP.



Eric Sundin

Sundin says that DP's IT project leaders look at problems differently. A problem that Raytheon had with their ARP system had gobbled up the time of Raytheon troubleshooters for two or three months. DP solved it for them in less than a day.

A recent project saw DP develop a ground segment for Raytheon's shipment tracking system.

Sundin says the projects they tackle vary enormously, but essentially they're helping

A big bonus was that the change of clientele also allowed DP consultants to work closer to home and their families instead of constantly travelling to the GTA.

That strategy has paid off for DP and for their local clients.



The Data Perceptions team (from left to right): Heather Sundin, Office Administer, Rita Sundin, Accounting, Shaun Webber, consultant, Eric Sundin, president, Scott Murphy, vice president, and Neil Murray, consultant.

businesses build infrastructure. As project leaders they choose the best people and applications to meet a company's specific IT needs. That includes bringing companies into IT compliance mode with Sarbanes Oxley legislation in the U.S.

Sundin says that IT is a young industry. Something we have a tendency to forget with our smart phones, computers, and instant connectivity.

As the industry and technology mature, people are becoming more specialized – and consequently more productive.

He says that back in the 1990s, companies had IT steering committees usually made up of one person from each division. That didn't work all that well because it takes tech know-how to steer and plan a company's IT development.

The flip side of that is that companies with highly specialized workers very often won't have the appropriate people for a specific project. Sundin says DP people become the architects for those projects.

Having a ready pool of sub-contractors who are "honest, humble, service-oriented and team-players" committed to the same core values as DP allows his 'architects' to pull together the right team for a job very quickly.

He says that his company typically employs about 20 sub-contractors at any given time from a pool of about 200 small

companies. Making sure that this pool shares the same values enables the team to come together quickly and be more productive.

Keeping track of where DP senior consultants are is the job of office manager Heather Sundin, who is also Eric's wife. With personnel so often deployed to temporary offices at corporate facilities, tracking staff can be tricky. The Monday morning staff meeting is critical.

Sundin started his company with the intention of being a software producer. That it morphed into a company that builds IT infrastructure was happenstance, but it was his own early interest in Microsoft that enabled DP to progress.

He recalls the day when he bought a copy of MS DOS when he was an engineering student at the University of Waterloo. He jokes that he ate lunch alone that day.

However, his early interest in Microsoft put him on the ground floor as the tech giant grew.

In fact when DP went on the Internet in 1995, they arrived there a full six months before Microsoft. DP had opted to go online simply so they could get software programs and updates quickly, rather than wait for snail shipping which could take up to three months.

What's next in IT?

Sundin says communications. Especially when it comes to work flow.

"Companies work with a wider group of supply chains," says Sundin. "They work with more specialized people and communication is key. It's not capital that defines a company's success, it's strategic planning."

"Technology levels the playing field. Small companies can do a lot more than they could before."

Sundin says that what's critical now is the interface between the 'techie stuff' and people – simplifying the process to make productivity gains.

"A lot has been touted about productivity," he says, "but it's incremental improvements that are the game changers in every industry."

He likens modern corporations to the farm his grandfather started. That farm was low tech – a family farm that produced accordingly. Now farming has gone corporate and uses technology. It's a lot more productive. If the goal had been subsistence, a farmer could simply work less to produce the same amount. But humans are competitive and ambitious. The more we can produce, the more ambitious we become.

That's happening in business too. We don't have a 10-hour work week. Instead we're working longer to compete globally.

DP is there to help local businesses do just that. For more information go to [www.dataperceptions.com](http://www.dataperceptions.com)

## BMO donates \$4 Million for research and innovation

BMO's \$4 Million Gift to Perimeter Institute to Accelerate Research and Innovation in Canada

Establishes the BMO Financial Group Isaac Newton Chair in Theoretical Physics at Perimeter Institute

BMO Financial Group announced a \$4 million investment in the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics (PI), in Waterloo.

The strategic contribution establishes the BMO Financial Group Isaac Newton Chair in Theoretical Physics at Perimeter Institute, and represents the largest single donation ever made by BMO to support science in Canada. It is also the largest corporate donation received by PI in its ten-year history.

BMO's \$4 million investment will be matched by \$4 million in private funds from PI's existing endowment for a total of \$8 million.

It is anticipated this private core funding will attract additional funding partners.

The Chair will be identified through a highly competitive and rigorous international search and only scientists of the very highest international calibre will be considered.

The BMO Financial Group Isaac Newton Chair in Theoretical Physics at Perimeter Institute represents the first of five such positions to be named after scientists whose insights have defined modern physics: Isaac Newton, James Clerk Maxwell, Niels Bohr, Albert Einstein and Paul Dirac.

The first Chair is named for Sir Isaac Newton, considered by many to be one of the most brilliant and influential thinkers in human history. He described the universal laws of gravitation and motion, laying the groundwork for the modern scientific description of the physical universe.

"Perimeter Institute is already a global leader in basic research, and there is no question these Chairs will serve as a

magnet for talent – a 'brain gain' – bringing even more of the best theoretical physicists to Canada," said Bill Downe, president and Chief Executive Officer, BMO Financial Group.

"The Institute's ambitious thirst for new knowledge places it at the very frontier of discovery. Its thinkers can change our world by boldly pushing the boundaries of our current understanding of physical laws.

"We couldn't be more proud of this association and hope that our unique investment in the BMO Isaac Newton Chair in Theoretical Physics will enhance innovation in Canada and encourage other private sector donors to fund Chairs at PI."

Neil Turok, director of Perimeter Institute, said, "These five Chairs are an integral part of Perimeter Institute's vision as it grows toward pre-eminence as a world centre for foundational physics, bringing together the most brilliant theoretical

physicists of our time under one roof. We are profoundly grateful for BMO's visionary investment in creating this inaugural Chair. It is a made-in-Canada solution to the very real challenge of attracting the best and brightest minds to our country."

Mike Lazaridis, Perimeter Institute's founder and Board Chair, said, "Theoretical physics has driven the most important insights and technological advances in the history of humankind. Although the outcomes from basic research may not be immediate, they are inevitable, and BMO recognizes that in order to move science, technology and society forward, we must invest in the breakthrough research that makes innovations possible. I sincerely appreciate BMO's participation in the public-private partnership that is driving PI forward."

PI is a successful example of private and public collaboration in science research and education. For more information go to [www.perimeterinstitute.ca](http://www.perimeterinstitute.ca).