



Rick Birkenstock, General Manager, Avanade Canada; Internationally Recognized Technology and Business Leader

This is the next blog in the **continuing series** of interviews with leading professionals. In this blog, I interview Rick Birkenstock, General Manager, Avanade Canada Inc. Rick is an internationally recognized technology and business leader.

Best regards,
Stephen Ibaraki, **FCIPS, I.S.P., MVP**



Rick Birkenstock, as General Manager, leads the strategic direction and growth of Avanade Canada solutions. Avanade has more than 7,200 professionals in 22 countries, including more than 230 in its Canadian business, which has offices in Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Ottawa and Montreal. In fiscal year 2006, the company grew its business by 25%.

A seasoned leader, Rick is responsible for running Avanade's business in Canada.

Rick joined Avanade in May of 2000 with more than eight years of consulting experience with Accenture. While at Accenture, Rick worked as a technical architect on a wide range of projects for Fortune 500 customers around the globe. Rick recently moved to Canada from the United States where he held the Technology Infrastructure Practice Director role for the US-West Region. During his tenure with Avanade US, Rick managed a large consulting team across many customer projects with considerable focus on maintaining customer relationships and ensuring high quality delivery. Rick has directed accounts with clients such as Nissan and Fox Entertainment.

Rick grew up in the Midwest United States and graduated from Grinnell College with a Bachelor's degree in Sociology.

This is now the 5th anniversary of the company's presence in Canada. Since it first opened its doors in Mississauga, Ontario, Avanade Canada has experienced great success and substantial growth in this country, realizing a 67 per cent increase in revenues and a 48 per cent increase in employees since 2003. Founded in April 2000 as a joint venture between Accenture and Microsoft, Avanade merged the strengths of both founders - Accenture's consulting and Microsoft's technology expertise - into a single company. Today, Avanade is the leading technology integrator specializing in the Microsoft enterprise platform. The company's success in Canada is yet another proof point that this "power of three" resonates with organizations of all sizes, across a multitude of vertical industries in this country. Over the past five years, Avanade Canada has worked with several enterprises to help them meet their business objectives, including First Canadian Title, PCL Construction, and Future Electronics.

To listen to the interview, click on this [MP3 file link](#)

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Interview Time Index (MM:SS) and Topic

00:038:

Rick describes his roles with Avanade.

01:31:

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With your fifth anniversary, how did Avanade achieve this success and what key lessons can you share?

"...It's all about deep expertise, delivering on expectations...the strength of our internal communities and the ability to get a question answered (quickly) just by leveraging the knowledge network of people that we have around the world....also our reusable assets, frameworks and solutions that we've built over the years..."

03:03:

What do you hope to achieve in the next 5 years and how will you meet these goals?

"...We'll need to evolve our very tech-heavy and deep expertise business into one that also provides business solutions. Customers, more and more, are looking for not only the technical expertise but also for their systems integrators to understand their business and be able to talk their language..."

05:13:

Why is Avanade's Accenture/Microsoft partnership thriving in a market where similar industry partnerships often struggle?

"...I think Avanade is unique because there is a real level of commitment between Accenture and Microsoft...plus the fact that the Microsoft products continue, (wave after wave), to get more Enterprise ready and be accepted and be in the heart of these companies and how they run their business..."

07:00:

Can you talk more about industry-tailored solutions, opening service delivery centers in Canada, and establishing market share?

"...The delivery center model is interesting because it is somewhere in the middle, it's a lower cost but higher quality output....what really enables this is the communications networks that are available to us..."

12:04:

What are the challenges and opportunities facing IT vendors in the Canadian marketplace and how should they be addressed?

"Challenges:...being able to bring the best and the deepest experts to the table.....getting a multi-site delivery model and being able to do it right and on time and on budget.....being able to provide business solutions to customers..."

Opportunities:.....business intelligence.....collaboration, universal communication.....the different tools and products that increase productivity....the investment being made in the resources industry in their enterprise systems..."

15:48:

Please provide your insights on current and future IT trends and how they will change the way Canadian companies do business in five years?

".....With the pressure of a global economy and a stronger dollar, it really means a lot to bring these companies in Canada a solution which will help them save money, to be a better fit for their organization and to increase their productivity..."

19:00:

Can you delve into the top risks for businesses and how they can be resolved?

"...Even the unexpected is impacted by a strong Canadian dollar....The challenge there is to help companies become leaner and meaner in their IT operations and their solutions that they implement to run their business, as well as, being able to increase the productivity of their information workers..."

20:45:

What question would you ask if you were doing this interview and what would be your answer?

"....People are your greatest asset....how do you find and keep your people?..."

23:24:

You've had an incredible amount of success. Could you share some tips or pointers?

".....You've got to pick what you really love and you are really passionate about (in IT) and stay true to that...Pick an employer that is going to give you a career path..."

25:54:

What specific attributes or characteristics have you worked on that led to your success?

".....If you're the type of person who gets bored easily, likes new challenges, wants to work hard, IT services is where it's at..."

27:23:

You have also developed an excellent ability to build relationships and manage expectations and you've focused on having business acumen, together with a service-oriented attitude. There are a lot of soft skills and elements to where the industry is going and also the kinds of communication you have with your employees and customers

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and to the industry. How important do you think those are as compared to the technical element?
"....*The softer skills, the communication skills are absolutely imperative. Unless you are the world's guru on a technology, just being really deep on a technology is not going to cut it forever.....If you just have the technical skills, you only have half of what you need in this market....*"

29:18:

Rick share some final comments on IT.

Posted: Tuesday, December 18, 2007 7:29 AM by **cdnitmgr**

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