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**Patricia MacInnis Computing Canada's Editor talks with Bernard Courtois, President of ITAC**

There are those special industry voices that need to be heard in our forum. They provide great insights and create a wonderful context for their views.

I just finished an [interview](#) with Patricia MacInnis, Editor of Computing Canada. However her recent March 17th editorial just struck a chord with us in this forum; so we invited Patricia to guest blog it. She connects the dots giving us the big picture!

Here's Patricia blog from her editorial: Computing Canada, March 17, 2006, Vol. 32 No. 4

It's a SME world after all

The thing I love most about my job is the opportunity it affords me to meet interesting people from all sides of the IT industry. Recently, I sat down with Bernard Courtois, president of the Information Technology Association of Canada.



I've always regarded ITAC strictly as a vendor association representing the interests of its various members and lobbying -when necessary - on their behalf. While that assessment is accurate, it is not complete. ITAC's interest in the overall health of Canada's information technology and communication sector is not to be discounted.

Courtois and I had a frank discussion about the state of affairs in Canada's IT industry, mulling over such topics as the impending skills shortage, productivity gaps between Canada and the U.S. and the impact of offshore outsourcing. It was one of the most illuminating conversations I've had in recent months.

Let's begin with the productivity gap. Courtois told me about a recent study conducted by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards in Ottawa that shows that small and medium enterprises in Canada are falling behind their U.S. counterparts in terms of investing in IT and communication technologies. In 2004, information and communications technologies investment per worker in the Canadian business sector was 45 per cent of that of the U.S.

Part of the reason for the discrepancy, Courtois said, is the hyper-competitive environment in the U.S.'s SME space. South of the border, SMEs see advanced technology as a key advantage in gaining a competitive edge. And although SMEs comprise the majority of businesses in Canada, SMEs here have been lulled into a false sense of security, Courtois said, relying on what has traditionally been a relatively low Canadian dollar. But with the strength of our dollar in recent years, small and medium businesses must find new ways to compete in the world market. Technology, Courtois argues, is the obvious differentiating factor.

The next trend we reviewed was the drop in enrolment in post-secondary IT education across the country, a multi-faceted problem. Computing Canada has followed this issue closely over the last few years, but Courtois was able to shed new light on the domino effect that goes hand-in-hand with decreased enrolment.

Courtois said he's found that some uninformed high school career counsellors have been steering students away from careers in IT since the dot-com bust. The news that the industry has had a marked recovery since then apparently has not made it to some schools.

ITAC, along with the Software Human Resources Council and other industry associations, has been warning of an impending skills crisis. If our colleges and universities aren't producing enough Canadian IT grads, Courtois insists we will have to look beyond our borders to fill those vacancies. One logical choice would be India, which is producing large numbers of well-educated graduates, especially scientists and engineers. But it's going to take a holistic effort from all sides of the industry to maintain our position as a leader in the development and adoption of information technologies. And the time to begin is now.

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Thank you Patricia for sharing your insights with the audience here at CIM and we look forward to more posts.

Stephen Ibaraki

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