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**Resident Bloggers**

Stephen Ibaraki
 Industry Analyst
 FCIPS, I.S.P., DFNPA, CNP,
 MVP



Barnaby Jeans
 IT Director

EnergizeIT for Neil Squire: Empowering people with Disabilities

I really enjoyed my time at EnergizeIT since it is about working with the community and giving time and resources to things that matter.

As a highlight of my day, I had the special honour and pleasure of introducing Dr. Gary Birch, executive director of the [Neil Squire Society](#) (NSS) and a noted researcher in the field. Gary provided an inspiring talk in the morning about NSS followed by a [video](#) in the afternoon. Gary noted that Microsoft technologies are integral to some of the technologies they provide. This is what it is all about--supporting community needs too!

Due to the generosity and support from the "geeks" at the Vancouver event, a good sum was raised for Neil Squire from the sale of Microsoft supplied Geek T-shirts. Moreover, Neil Squire made many new friends who dropped by their booth to see their technology and research in action and want to do more. I want to thank Neil Squire for sharing their compelling story, to the attendees who provided their support and to Microsoft in hosting this worthwhile charity at EnergizeIT.

I have another privilege today. This time providing an introduction to a blog post from Greg Pyc, NSS's National Operations Manager. Greg has many great stories and deep insights so I have invited him to blog here...Watch for them!

I also invite the audience to share their thoughts, talents, and ideas with Greg...or send me an e-mail at sibaraki@cips.ca

Enjoy!
 Stephen Ibaraki

By Greg Pyc
 National Operations Manager
 Neil Squire Society

Is technology keeping pace with the needs of people with disabilities?

This is a peculiar question as technology has been viewed, generally, as an empowering tool for those with disabilities. We need only to look around us to see the proliferation of technological marvels and how they have enhanced the lifestyles and dignity of individuals.

A quick scan of products available for people with disabilities is testament to the ingenuity of their developers and the real need that exists today. Some noticeable examples are the hundreds of configurations that have been developed and marketed for keyboards and mice - each unique keyboard or mouse caters to a very different type of ergonomic need and new products are flooding the market every day.

Any internet search engine will list the thousands of sites dedicated to technology for people with disabilities.

But in terms of accessibility, there are subtle shades of grey here. Let's rewind to 1984 as my first introduction. I was working on my honours thesis at McMaster University and was desperate to type it, and I couldn't type. The thought of edits, more edits, white out and even more edits all on a typewriter unnerved me to no end. Enter Atari.

At that very moment in time Atari had the 130XE with disk drive, the availability of a dot matrix printer and no monitor (all for \$3,500.00 and it even connected to your TV). And they had a cartridge that plugged into the back with a magical "word processor" that allowed me unlimited edits and I could print my thesis with no fear of white out and the dreaded cut and pasting problems associated with a major paper.

That was very intriguing and served me very well but I soon discovered gaming. Big time. Two dimensional games that were impossibly difficult to avoid and for the day, they rivaled any arcade. I had line-ups to get into my apartment.

My then neighbour had a disability. He was a quadriplegic and had very limited movement of his arms, with little finger dexterity. Games were played then on a very simple joystick with one red button. Jim wanted to play the games but the joy stick was too difficult to manipulate.

The solution to Jim's dilemma was not a technological revolution but it did work. We made a base, bound it with duct tape and made a simple lever so he could press the little red button that was the nerve centre of that particular joystick. Jim could play any game and became quite proficient at a road race game, loosely based on F1 racing. He also played other games quite well and while he excelled, he was never quite up to the rest of the gang, who, in all honesty, practiced a disproportionate amount of time in my small living room.

This small example highlights one of the emerging problems when technology, in this case the Atari and their game cartridges and the advent of the joystick, accelerates at a very rapid pace. It becomes affordable (and fun) for the general public and prices drop, but people with disabilities find they are unable to use it to their full capacity.

We have come a long way with very long way but there are bumps on the road, not high hurdles, and these bumps need to be addressed. And the one area that needs immediate attention is personal digital assistants.

Over the next several articles we will explore technology and its use by people with disabilities to highlight not only the empowering aspects it provides, but the problematic ones as well.



John Oxley
Director IT Pro Evangelism
Microsoft Canada



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Greg Pyc is the National Operations Manager of the Neil Squire Society. He was disabled in a motor vehicle accident over 30 years ago and is a paraplegic, requiring the use of a wheelchair.

Published Wednesday, June 28, 2006 10:56 AM by [cdnitmgr](#)
Filed Under: [Stephen Ibaraki](#), [Guest Bloggers](#), [Events](#)

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Comments

re: EnergizeIT for Neil Squire: Empowering people with Disabilities

Wednesday, June 28, 2006 6:20 PM by [Ben Knightly](#)

Great event, fine job! Just can't wait until next year!

I particularly liked Greg's story.

re: EnergizeIT for Neil Squire: Empowering people with Disabilities

Wednesday, June 28, 2006 11:24 PM by [Stephen Ibaraki](#),
[FCIPS,I.S.P., sibaraki@cips.ca](#)

Hi Ben,

I am glad you enjoyed this as much as I did. EnergizeIT is the best!

I spent some time with Greg a few weeks ago. He has some great stories including about their work with NASA. I hope he shares them here.

Lisa, their Development Director posted a comment in the IT Pro Blog so I'm hoping she'll provide an update here too. She talked about her son being "inspired" by the event. Lisa, do you hear me ... can you share more?

Cheers,
Stephen Ibaraki

re: EnergizeIT for Neil Squire: Empowering people with Disabilities

Thursday, June 29, 2006 6:09 PM by [KI](#)

Liked the event, bigger venue would be nice next year such as Canada Place. Good to see Neil Squire sponsored by MS. Right thing to do.

re: EnergizeIT for Neil Squire: Empowering people with Disabilities

Friday, June 30, 2006 12:28 PM by [Lisa Thompson](#)

Hi Stephen;

We are so appreciative for the opportunity to have been involved with EnergizeIT this year. Every time we are able to introduce more people to the incredible work of this organization, and watch them become inspired, it is truly heartwarming. Every day I continue to be amazed at how the innovative use of technology is literally changing people's lives.

Yes, Adam, my 13 year old son was fortunate to be able to sit in on the session. When I saw him intently taking notes, I knew he was headed for trouble! ...a geek in training???

You'll be happy to hear that the geek t sales and donations raised \$640. As an example, this amount of money is the approximate cost of the assistive technology required to provide access to a computer for a person with a physical disability. Thank you all for your generosity!

Lisa

re: EnergizeIT for Neil Squire: Empowering people with Disabilities

Friday, June 30, 2006 2:11 PM by [Stephen Ibaraki](#),
[FCIPS,I.S.P., sibaraki@cips.ca](#)

A bigger venue would be nice ... great suggestion. I'm sure Microsoft is listening.

We are appreciative that Microsoft invited us to participate and give EnergizeIT a 5/5 rating! Like Microsoft, we are also strong supporters of Neil Squire ... I blogged about it earlier: <http://blogs.technet.com/cdnitmanagers/archive/2006/06/09/434386.aspx>

Best regards,
Stephen Ibaraki
CTPS National Vice-President

re: EnergizeIT for Neil Squire: Empowering people with Disabilities

Friday, June 30, 2006 2:46 PM by [Stephen Ibaraki](#)
[FCIPS,I.S.P., sibaraki@cips.ca](mailto:sibaraki@cips.ca)

Hi Lisa,

John Boufford, our CIPS National President, made a commitment to support Neil Squire at INFORMATICS 2006 and I'm glad that EnergizeIT was able to continue that support.

I really enjoyed my talk with Gary at the EnergizeIT event. I'm looking forward to the podcast with Gary that will appear here where he provides deep insights into your organization, and the projects Neil Squire is working on. I'm hoping that we can continue to generate support for Neil Squire.

I can see that your son is a budding computer guru and it's great that EnergizeIT inspired more passion in him. Ok, Microsoft watch out!

That's awesome, the monies raised; actually tops in the country when you look on a per-attendee basis. In talking with Gary, IT professionals can make tremendous contributions to the Neil Squire Society by getting involved. So this is a call to action for IT pros too!

Cheers,
Stephen Ibaraki

re: EnergizeIT for Neil Squire: Empowering people with Disabilities

Tuesday, July 04, 2006 3:09 PM by [Anne](#)

It's an interesting blog. They provide a very important and required service.

re: EnergizeIT for Neil Squire: Empowering people with Disabilities

Tuesday, July 04, 2006 6:27 PM by [Linn Manne](#)

Our team went. First time for a Microsoft show. We will definitely go next year. The national IT society added something that wasn't just about Microsoft but about prof development. Nice touch Microsoft since working in computing is more than technology! Computing resources added/donated to public charity groups (Squire)--kudos again!

You had a booth for Squire, how about a booth for prof development too? We talked about this afterwards.

Overall, good job and keep it up. We hope you run this again but with more notice.

EnergizeIT Load-Fest Tips: Microsoft Virtual Server under Windows Vista

Wednesday, July 05, 2006 10:11 AM by [Canadian IT Manager](#)

A little old history...Don't you love those mysterious invitations one receives? I got one in 1999 from...

re: EnergizeIT for Neil Squire: Empowering people with Disabilities

Wednesday, July 05, 2006 1:09 PM by [Stephen Ibaraki](#)
[FCIPS,I.S.P., sibaraki@cips.ca](mailto:sibaraki@cips.ca)

Anne, they also contribute advisory services. For example, when a technology firm is working on new hardware or software, it's best to engage NSS early on rather than do a retrofit afterwards to address people with disabilities.

Cheers,
Stephen Ibaraki

re: EnergizeIT for Neil Squire: Empowering people with Disabilities

Wednesday, July 05, 2006 1:12 PM by jointer

Linn,

As someone who had the privilege and pleasure of helping to run the Vancouver EnergizeIT event, all suggestions for improvements are very welcome. I feel confident that everyone involved within Microsoft and within the IT community (like myself) is looking forward to making next year bigger and better. The public reception over the involvement of the Neil Squire Society has been particularly satisfying and kudos to Stephen Ibaraki for taking the initiative.

An area for educational institutions, vendors, etc. would be a great addition. It would be rewarding to see the event evolve into an opportunity for all interested parties to engage each other productively in a relaxed and fun environment.

In fact VANTUG (www.vantug.com) would like to become more involved with the educational community on an ongoing basis. We feel that there is mutual benefit to be derived and I would like to encourage you contact me to explore such possibilities.

Cheers
Graham Jones
jointer@vntug.com

President, VANTUG
graham.jones@vantug.com

re: EnergizeIT for Neil Squire: Empowering people with Disabilities

Wednesday, July 05, 2006 1:14 PM by [Stephen Ibaraki](#),
FCIPS,I.S.P.,sibaraki@cips.ca

Linn, I have worked with a lot of companies globally. I can say that MS is very responsive to your input.

The national group you refer to is CIPS or Canadian Information Processing Society. You can click on my name to find out more or go to www.cips.ca. I also welcome questions about the industry, career development, professional development, our society and more. Just send me an e-mail at any time or give me a call at 604.812.5717...

Cheers,
Stephen Ibaraki

re: EnergizeIT for Neil Squire: Empowering people with Disabilities

Wednesday, July 05, 2006 2:48 PM by [Stephen Ibaraki](#),
FCIPS,I.S.P.,sibaraki@cips.ca

Graham,

Thank you for the fine coordination you provided and acting as emcee for this "unconference." This new format is the wave for the future of this industry and you were a key factor in it Graham. I also enjoyed the collaboration with the other user group leaders who made many contributions to the event.

Cheers,
Stephen Ibaraki

What do you think?

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