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Canada's Association of Information Technology (IT) Professionals

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Five Biggest Issues Facing Technical Communities and their Solutions: from Nestor J. Portillo, Regional Manager, Americas Region MVP Worldwide, Microsoft Corp.

This is the [continuing series](#) of special interviews appearing first here in the Canadian IT Managers (CIM) forum from top-ranking business and technology leaders.

Last week we began our discussion with Nestor J. Portillo, and provided Nestor's rich history in the industry.

Today I put these questions to Nestor:

SI: What are the biggest issues facing MVPs in 2006, and in 2007? How can they be addressed?

NJP: I cannot see a specific situation relating to the program important enough to be considered as an issue. Because the MVP Award is an award-based program with criteria based on past contributions, Microsoft has no expectations of MVPs beyond the expectations of courtesy, professionalism, code of conduct and adherence to the community rules that we ask of all Microsoft community members. I would prefer to defer this question to any of our MVPs to have their thoughts about this.

SI: What are the five biggest issues facing technical communities today and what are your recommendations for meeting these challenges?

NJP: As an ecosystem, the technical communities are facing different issues mainly related to its own growth, technology innovation, competition with other communities' spaces and attractiveness. In my opinion the five biggest issues are:

1. **Spam.** Spammers and unsolicited advertisers are invading popular online spaces including newsgroups, forums and web boards with their unsolicited offers. Community members are afraid to be exposed to these unpleasant practices. Access control and moderation minimizes the negative impact that this practice has; today Microsoft enabled passport authentication at their community spaces to avoid spam machines and to block spammers.
2. **Attractiveness.** It is very well known that if you visit a site or community space where the content is static there is a high possibility that you will not visit it again. Valuable and updated content is key for community survival and the challenge is how to get content that matters in a timely manner. An interesting approach is identify a motivational mechanism that encourages community members to provide it - there is a lot of knowledge disseminated among the community members that with the appropriate motivation they will proactively provide it.
3. **Competition.** Every day new communities are emerging that compete with the existing ones, not only in terms of content but also in delivery channels. Technical communities need to be flexible enough to quickly tackle new trends. If you take a look at our main community spaces (MSDN or Technet) you will see that we are incorporating not only updated content but we also include non traditional delivery mechanisms such as: Web casts, video streaming, Pod Cast, etc.
4. **Collaboration.** Community participation is worthwhile and rewarding for some individuals, (but demands time), and is a valuable asset for almost everybody. Technical communities need to have and articulate a strong value proposition that motivates their participants to spend time helping and interacting with others instead of having ad-hoc or opportunistic interactions, which drive frustration and does not help the community to grow.
5. **Expertise availability.** This is a particular issue mainly present at the offline communities due to geographic boundaries, time zone differences and size that have a direct impact in their ability to gain access to specific expertise. Offline communities need to incorporate online tools such as Live Meeting, Webcast, audio/video streaming, etc into the agenda to compensate for the lack of local expertise by working to access remote expertise. Another strategy is the enablement of speaker bureaus to share local expertise among user groups.

Look next week for more of Nestor's insights. On Monday, Nestor will provide his three predictions of future trends and their implications to MVPs. Nestor will also give his top recommended resource URLs.

I also encourage you to share your thoughts here on these interviews or send me an e-mail at sibaraki@cips.ca.

Thank you,
Stephen Ibaraki, FCIPS, I.S.P.

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