



Mission Statement: Meeting the array of needs for the established IT professional while seeking to develop the IT profession and provide a service to our community and society.

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NEWSLETTER INFORMATION

Published nine times per year (September – June) by the Minnesota Information Professional Society. We welcome materials for publication (articles, news or letters). Submit materials on disk or via email to:

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NOTE MEETING INFORMATION

MEETING PLACE:
Holiday Inn – Bloomington
35W at 94th St.
Phone (952) 884-8211

Meeting Times:

5:00 PM Social Hour
6:00 PM Buffet Dinner
6:45 PM Meeting & Program
8:00 PM Adjourn

For a Dinner and Program Reservation, send email to: reservations@mnips.org

no later than 5 pm on
Thursday, Oct. 12

\$28 Members
\$33 Non-members

Meeting NOTICE

Tuesday, Oct. 17, 2006

Minnesota Information Professional Society

Note: The MnIPS Networking Event has been indefinitely suspended – see the President’s Letter in this issue for more info.

Dinner Topic:
“Agile Methodologies: Solution or Revolution?”
Speaker:
Gary Cagle

SPEAKER TOPIC

When "Agile Manifesto" is googled, it provides an unusual sight -- 17 gurus agreed on software development values. Since that occasion in early 2001, the buzz around 'agile' has been hard to miss. Minneapolis hosts the AGILE2006 conference July 23-26. Business also wants to be 'more agile'.

Revolution or solution? Depends on perspective and a more specific focus, because there is NOT a single agile methodology. The Agile Alliance roadmap lists 12 different paths to agility. In all the buzz, there are certainly use-

ful perspectives on the timely generation of quality software.

This session will try to bring those key values and practices to the surface by bringing an overview of several approaches to the table for discussion, including one of the earliest methodologies that pushes best practices to the extreme, Kent Beck's eXtreme Programming (XP). We'll also survey distinctive aspects of other approaches to applying Agile values including Scrum, Test Driven Development, Crystal, FDD (Feature Driven Development), etc.

The goal is to both inform and discuss these approaches so that everyone can take away a better understanding of these new perspectives on software development and an idea of how it applies in your organization.

SPEAKER PROFILE

Gary Cagle has worn many hats in the computer industry. He came to Minnesota to work for Control Data in the '70s as a manager of an on-line consulting unit. He has worked as developer, designer, architect, and business analyst. He has been an independent consultant and trainer and has also worked for Perot Systems. He first became

enthused about agile development while developing in a 12 person, co-located team. He works at Simacor as an analyst and technical instructor, primarily with Java technologies.

President's Letter

Greetings to all in this early fall season! Our last monthly meeting was a happy and well-attended reunion of presidents and other active MnIPS participants, including presidents dating back to 1958. The list included Rollie Sullivan, Merlyn Scroggins, Rodger Schwartz, Tom Skramstad, Lisa Ward, Dave Farmer, Pete and Jan Thielen, Bruce Heaton, Bob Ahlstrom, Dennis Cummings, Earl Joseph, Jeff O'Connor, Roger Rydberg, Joe Perzel, Joe Reilly and Jim Sundlin. It was enjoyable to hear from everyone about his or her experiences in the industry at the time of their tenure and where they are now.

Turning more to the present state of things, the board has decided to indefinitely suspend the 3 pm – 5 pm Networking event before the monthly meeting. With attendance at the event in the 5 to 10 person range, combined with difficulty in getting volunteers for the committee, the time for this activity seems to have passed - hopefully for a long time into the future. Joe Perzel's years of effort as committee chair for this have been greatly appreciated. I view this change as a happy event, suggesting that the IT market is far better than it was when this activity was initiated. We will be providing information on the website in the

near future regarding networking events organized by other groups for those interested and in need.

Looking forward for MnIPS - for potential new members - are the activities of Marketing Chair Santhi Ulagaraj. Santhi has been busy contacting local colleges, including Dakota County Tech College and Inver Hill Community College, to introduce school leaders and counselors to MnIPS for them to promote the organization among students in related fields. We would like to organize an event with presentation and networking time at a campus – if any of you have ideas on a topic, are available to help organize this activity or are interested in doing a presentation (all you hiring managers out there!), please contact Santhi or me. Also, there is the possibility of participating in college fairs that could add participants to MnIPS' events. Lastly, if you know of any students, please do welcome them to our dinner meetings – the entrance fee is only \$15 for full-time students (and of course networking beforehand is valuable and free for those on a budget).

Please check your calendars for availability on October 17 to attend Gary Cagle's presentation on Software Methodologies at the regular dinner meeting. If your worksite is anything like mine, "agile" is a word tossed around frequently. It will be useful to better understand the various flavors of these development methods to know how they may actually be applied in outside of the theoretical world, so I am glad this topic is on the schedule.

I look forward to seeing you at the next meeting. Please feel free to contact me with any comments or suggestions you have either in person or at president@mnips.org.

– Chris Retkwa,
MnIPS President
president@mnips.org

Positioning IT for Success in Disaster Recovery Planning

(Summary of the Sep. 2006 dinner topic presented and written by Steve Quigley of Clear North Technologies)

Increasingly, more businesses understand the need to have a Disaster Recovery (DR) and Business Continuity (BC) plan. Unfortunately, many of these same companies, particularly medium and small businesses, talk about it for years but rarely make significant progress.

This isn't surprising. Like insurance, DR plans are perceived as important but there is rarely any sense of urgency to rush out and purchase it. In fact, many companies feel like "they're winning" if they can go a few more years without investing in a DR plan. And developing a DR plan can be a huge, unwieldy job that isn't that glamorous.

But the hardest part for most companies is...simply...getting...started.

This means getting senior management to agree to develop a DR plan, to provide initial project funding (i.e., "Plan the Plan"), and to support the effort as the project staff tries to gal-

vanize the various groups within a company and move them in a common direction (a.k.a. “herding the minnows”).

It’s a tough sell. At its core, DR is about **risk management** and **risk avoidance**, the degrees of which can be hard to measure and “normalize” across an organization. Showing a ‘Return on Investment’ (ROI) for a DR project is not always easy, or even possible in some cases. Sometimes DR is simply an expense.

But consider this: While generally facing the same exposures and disasters as large companies, small and medium businesses (SMBs) suffer greater risks and stand to lose more from disasters. Because they typically do not have as much staff and financial resources for DR programs as large public companies, SMBs as a group tend to be less prepared. Also, SMBs occupy fewer buildings and facilities, so a single disaster has better odds of destroying an entire company. Finally, SMBs tend to be private (versus public) companies, so there is less accountability to shareholders to have a DR plan.

But when companies do decide to develop a DR plan, IT departments often get chosen for leadership roles. This isn’t surprising when you consider what a critical asset information is to most businesses. With that role come challenges.

The ability of an IT group to lead the charge in building a company-wide DR plan often depends on how the IT group is perceived within the company. IT’s role in business is

changing as companies now demand more reliable and ubiquitous access (like a utility) to data and applications, with less tolerance for downtime or risky technology initiatives with questionable payoffs. Is your IT group perceived as competent and as bringing value to the business? Does the business feel that IT has a history of successfully aligning its objectives with the company’s objectives?

So, let’s take a breath and ask - How do you position your IT department for success in developing a DR plan?

First, define and understand your target audience for ‘selling’ the first phases of a DR plan. Chances are, you should be dealing with the CFO.

- Understand ‘risk avoidance’ and ‘risk management’ versus ROI. Know the implications for downtime on customers, revenue, supply chains and productivity.
- Benchmark what your competitors are doing (or have done) and how that relates to your company.
- Understand that a CFO’s greatest fear is that he/she does not have an accurate handle on the flow of money within the organization. So commit to being a “straight shooter” with budgets and projections. CFOs do not like surprises, even good ones.
- Don’t forget that a great DR plan can provide positive marketing value for a company.
- Be persistent. Sometimes your company’s business situation won’t support even the best ideas. But times and circumstances change.

- Investigate how investments in redundant IT systems can be leveraged to provide a company with a better DR platform. Systems that prevent “business interruptions” (and have an established ROI) may allow you to attach ROI to your DR plan.

Second, develop a framework so employees across the business can begin to associate costs to DR plans. Many departments understandably feel like they have the most critical data that should be recovered first, but the time & cost associated with making fast recovery a reality is not always apparent.

- Define data protection (having data safe and available in the event of a disaster) as well as business resumption (having systems and people available to use the data and applications after the disaster).
- Have departments define Recovery Point Objectives, or RPO. That is, how fresh does the data that was recovered need to be – one hour old? One day? One week?
- Have departments define Recovery Time Objectives, or RTO. How quickly does the business need to get back online, even with old data?
- Keep in mind that RTO and RPO generally vary by industry.
- Almost anything is possible in technology. But not surprisingly, the more aggressive the RTO and RPO, the higher the cost. Which solutions provide the best value for your company? Associate the costs of various DR solutions with the RPO and RTO

they provide so the business can make that determination.

Finally, as you begin to frame up your DR plan, here are a few observations and lessons learned from IT professionals who've experienced disasters:

- Despite your best efforts, recoveries rarely go as planned. But preparation gives your business options that others probably won't have.
- The ability for employees to communicate with each other once the disaster has hit is key, and as many learned from Hurricane Katrina, cell phones and traveling to predetermined com-

mand centers may not be an option.

- Disasters are not just limited to tornadoes, explosions, blackouts and other storms. Don't forget pandemics, new computer viruses, and loss of Internet.
- With all this talk of protecting our digital systems, an important DR tactic involves getting hard copies of critical documents catalogued and stored off-site for use in a disaster. Immediately after a disaster, electronic records can't be used without computers.
- When testing disaster recovery systems, the number one problem that's uncovered is a lack of change control within IT. The DR systems haven't been main-

tained to the extent that production systems have.

- Explore the use of third-party data centers.
- If you haven't already, review technology solutions such as thin client (e.g., Microsoft Terminal Services or Citrix Presentation Server) and server virtualization (VMware or Microsoft Virtual Server). These technologies help you to reproduce your IT environment with fewer resources for critical employees.

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