human-centred
software engineering

telepresence

In the demanding, fast-paced world of software consulting, the people of Telepresence Systems have met success by focusing on the important role of human factors, not just the intricacies of technology.

Telepresence Systems, Inc. President Ron Riesenbach (left) and Vice President Garry Beirne (right).

"Our practice focuses on building highly usable business applications," says company founder and CEO Ron Riesenbach. "A business problem is rarely solved by deploying flavour-of-the-month software, but rather, by carefully designing business processes and configuring select technologies to allow groups of people to effectively communicate, inform and transact with one another."

With a vibrant team of about two dozen software developers and business analysts (many with advanced academic credentials in Computer Science and Engineering), the company focuses on the development of business applications accessible through the Web, through WAP and through the telephone via VoiceXML. Telepresence's clients include many blue-chip Canadian and multinational organizations in the financial services and telecommunications sectors. By focusing on the user-interface backed up by their thorough software engineering practice, Telepresence has made its customers very happy.

Just ask the operators of Canada's largest stock exchange, whom Telepresence enabled to market and sell their valuable trading data via a fully web-enabled e-commerce system. Or ask the members of a major North American telecommunications firm, which hired Telepresence to design and develop a system for customers to tailor their personal toll-free phone service using a personal web page. Or you could ask the owners of a major financial newspaper, which now uses a web-based configuration system for its business subscribers to search and request relevant news articles.

"In each case," says Garry Beirne, Vice President, "we took the client patiently and carefully through the complex process of turning abstract ideas about business needs into concrete systems that support human interaction through the latest technology."

Telepresence considers everything from the unique business culture of each client to the social experiences of users on the World Wide Web. "The most important parts of any e-commerce system are the context, tasks and interfaces of the humans trying to get work done – technology by itself is rarely a solution," says Beirne. This human-centric perspective has been part of the company's pedigree since it was created in 1995 as a spin-off from an international university-industry R&D consortium studying the most effective approaches to long-distance workplace interactions.

"That was where we honed our technological skills and learned to think sociologically," says Riesenbach. With this understanding of the business ecology of the workplace, the company also strongly believes that they are successful only when their clients can independently operate and extend the systems they are acquiring.

"The worst thing in the world is to create a dependent client," says Riesenbach, who suggests that if you have not helped someone do and understand more, you have not really helped them at all. "Real tech transfer happens on two feet."

For that reason, each project incorporates client staff members as part of the development team, who will be well placed to undertake necessary maintenance and extension responsibilities once Telepresence has completed its job.

As the high tech industry weathers some of its greatest technical and economic challenges it has ever faced, Telepresence celebrates a more enduring philosophy that continues to win over the hearts and minds of everyone who gets to know them.

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