

NEW COMPUTER NETWORK FOR WAG

Winnipeg-based IT Firm's System Increases Productivity

BY CARMINE AVISO

The Winnipeg Art Gallery's new state of the art computer network has proven to be a real boon to the management and operation of Manitoba's premier art gallery. "Our new system brings the WAG into the new millennium," says WAG director Pierre Arpin. "You can't manage a museum or art gallery efficiently any more without proper IT."

The network was designed by Clear Concepts—a Winnipeg-based IT firm—as a result of Clear Concepts partner Scott McKenzie contacting WAG deputy director Eva Rempel two years ago about a call for a new website design. McKenzie and his partners, Shane Hartje and Chris Mitchell, founded Clear Concepts in 2001 and have built their IT solutions business primarily by word of mouth.

As a result of McKenzie's contact with Rempel, the WAG asked Clear Concepts to do a needs assessment of the gallery's computer network. What McKenzie and his partners found was an outdated system—based on Windows 95 and 98 programs—which tended to break down frequently. The WAG then hired Clear Concepts to design a new network that would increase productivity and efficiency.

"We came up with a plan of action that would meet the WAG management's goals and fit their budget," McKenzie says. "We incorporated what we could of the existing assets in the new network. But for a network of almost 70 work stations, we had to acquire a lot of new hardware."

The new network deployment provides Clear Concepts with the capability to securely and cost effectively manage the network from any remote location, something that the earlier system wasn't capable of

providing.

In order to provide the minimum of disruption for WAG staff and visitors, Clear Concepts first deployed the network two weeks before installation in a lab and pre-tested everything to ensure that the system was functioning properly. The actual installation in the WAG last October required just a day

managed and maintained professionally, it should run day after day without major problems."

He notes that the WAG is saving thousands of dollars more by contracting out administration of the network to Clear Concepts rather than paying a designated staff member to fill the role. "In the first six months, we only had to devote four



WAG director Pierre Arpin (right), with Clear Concepts partner Scott McKenzie, reports that the WAG's new IT network (which was designed by McKenzie's company) has had a huge impact on the organization.

and a half.

Pierre Arpin assumed his position at the WAG last September 1. "The project was well under way when I started here," he notes. "The new network has had a huge impact on the organization. It has made a substantial difference."

The new network has also made a significant difference in the WAG's financial picture, McKenzie states. The cost of the installation will be recouped by increased productivity and a reduction in down time due to computer malfunctions.

"A computer network is like a fleet of vehicles," McKenzie says. "Provided the network and network infrastructure is designed and prepared properly, in addition to being

hours per month to maintain the WAG network," McKenzie reports.

"It's been a learning curve for some of our staff," Arpin says. "But once people become comfortable with the technology, they have a very positive attitude about it."

Clear Concepts is also involved with the launch of the WAG's new website, and has provided a web content management interface that allows for real time updates of the site by gallery staff members.

To move the Gallery even further forward, Arpin says the WAG is hoping to add state-of-the-art collection management software to its new system sometime in the next few years. ■

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