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## Focusing on code is a job-killer

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No too long ago I attended a schmooze fest (sponsored in part by this publication) and put on by a networking group in Toronto called BitePro. While this event had a bit more of a schmoozing vibe to it than most peer to peer gatherings I've attended, it was the speakers that made it stand out.

No, not all of the speakers could stand out from the noise generated from all the schmoozing, which drowned out the presentations to all but a handful of people who gathered near to hear the speakers words. What stood out, was one speaker in particular and the message of his talk.

Mark Fox of Navator at the top of his voice called for the schmoozing to stop so that he could be heard. Next, he took a pass on the microphone perhaps to drive home the theme of his talk. While he focused on the future of IT in Toronto and Canada at large, he made one point very clear. As IT professionals we need "to see beyond the code and technology".

What did Fox mean by this? Fox wants us to think about the best solution for the business and not just what we can code. Sure we may know Java and want to use it, but does a company with a 20-page Web site and no transactional features really need to develop its Web site in JSP, when basic HTML or XHTML combined with some Perl or PHP would do? Wouldn't this low-tech site actually be faster and hence create a better user experience and cost the owner less to build and maintain?

I've written and spoke in the past about the problems of over-engineering and over-designing and I think many of us in the IT field are also guilty of also over-thinking the solution or, worse, not thinking at all about the solution. Just I have always stressed the need for proper business requirements gathering prior to project architecture and coding we even need to take an extra step back and think about the business.

Before we start thinking about the business requirements, we need to ask the business how is this effort going to help the business. Is it going to reduce cost, improve customer service or generate revenue? Without this first basic question being asked, how can we come up with the appropriate solution?

If a business idea is only going to generate \$30,000 of savings over the first two years, does it make sense to suggest a \$100,000 or solution? Is there is a \$20,000 or better yet a \$15,000 solution available? These are the types of question a professional would ask before recommending or implementing a course of action.

In an earlier column, I alluded to how someone might deal with a doctor (have him do the knee surgery in half the time for a quarter of the price). You also won't want to go to a doctor who said "I'll fix your knee by putting in an artificial knee at the cost of \$200,000" when you could cure your knee problems with some exercise or perhaps with a pair of orthotics in your shoes for \$800.

If we're going to keep the IT field growing here in Canada and start getting the recognition we want as professionals, we need to see beyond the technology and think of the business first. Just as a doctor has to think about the overall well-being of his patient, we have to think about the overall well-being of the business. If we don't, get ready for business never treating us like professionals and treating us like a commodity.

And when buying a commodity (just like toilet paper) business will look for the lowest price. And that may include offshore development.

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