

# Technology as a Tool

Greg Savard '89



Courtesy of Greg Savard

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*Tyler Technologies is the largest local government solution provider in the United States. Tyler solutions include appraisal and tax, citizen services, courts and justice, document management, education, financial solutions, land and vital records, pension management and public safety. Tyler has customers in all 50 states and offices across the country.*

*Savard works on the financial solutions team based in Falmouth, Maine. Financial solutions includes traditional enterprise resource planning (ERP) software as well as tax, education, pension and citizen services. Their customers are primarily cities, counties and school districts. Savard's primary responsibility is ensuring Tyler has a competitive product that takes advantage of emerging technology. Savard also manages the user experience team, oversees the development of products that can be leveraged across all Tyler solutions and facilitates collaboration across the development teams for the different solution families.*

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To say that technology has changed dramatically since I was a student at Thomas College might be the understatement of this decade. The explosion of tools and information has dramatically changed the learning process. At the same time, business has changed at least as dramatically. Billion-dollar companies dominate markets that weren't even imagined 15–20 years ago. Technology allows people to work from home as efficiently as those in the office, while helping the environment by reducing the commuter footprint. The one constant is change.

In many ways, the technology used to facilitate learning incorporates the same tools that have transformed business. Social networking sites like MySpace, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn allow people to build out their network and communicate with that network in real time. Online classrooms are, conceptually, the same as working from remote offices. Tools like Webex and Go2Assist allow help desks to see the computer issues first-hand, rather than relying on the user to accurately describe the problem. Information about competitors is immediately available online 24/7. The Internet enables businesses to remain “open” even when all their employees are out of the office.

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From a software development perspective, the changes in technology are a double-edged sword. Millions of people use MySpace and Xbox Live everyday without any formal training. Developers can leverage the user experience of these sites to assist them in improving the designs of their own sites. Mash-ups (*see Glossary*) allow developers to combine applications while empowering users to make better and faster decisions. On the other side of the equation, it can be difficult to confirm the accuracy of the information one finds on the Internet. The anonymity allows dishonest people to misrepresent facts.

Developers must also give careful consideration to the devices their applications will be viewed on. A Web page that might display perfectly on a PC or laptop could be a disaster on a SmartPhone.

The article in this issue of the Thomas Magazine about the benefits of educational gaming is interesting. I believe the potential for practical learning and skill development from gaming extends beyond the classroom. Online gaming provides the opportunity to identify problem-solvers and potential leaders. It also affords collaboration opportunities for people that have never met in person before. The phenomenon is large enough that IBM commissioned a study to see how massively multiplayer online role playing games might impact the way enterprises do business. The study yielded some interesting correlations between these games and business practices. The potential exists for companies, especially smaller and younger ones, to forgo traditional organizational hierarchy and, instead, determine leadership by those who are best-suited to address the task at hand. Beyond leadership potential, competitive games can teach people about appropriate risk taking, teamwork, innovation and problem solving.



I believe that Thomas is appropriately positioning technology not as a magic bullet, but instead as a powerful tool that changes the way all of us think and operate. Effective communication and problem-solving skills are at least as important as the latest technological tool. The one thing we can all be certain of is that technology will continue to change, probably at an ever-increasing rate. To be successful one has to be comfortable in changing along with technology, communicating verbally and in writing, making thoughtful decisions, and solving problems, in addition to knowing when and how to apply technology to the process.

