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LEDUC

... A transplanted Belgian programmer in Yarmouth

Philip Leduc is fluent in English, French, German and Dutch – as well as in MS Access, MS Office automation, Visual Basic, HTML and ASP.

All of those languages help this transplanted Belgian define technology on Cape Cod. He has been a project engineer, a sales support engineer, and a business software developer for Volvo ITT and TMP, owners of Monster.com.

His business focus: small business database applications that help companies improve sales and order handling. “With 15 years of experience in sales support, we can build you a program that is easy to use, takes in consideration your way of doing business and reduces your administrative workload so you can spend more time with your customers or your family,” he said.

Leduc, in business only about a year, recently came to the aid of the Cape Cod Technology Council. For four years, the organization had been operating with two Access databases – one to keep track of member companies and contact information, the other to register individuals for the monthly meetings. But operating two separate databases was getting very cumbersome, creating duplication and overlap.

“There are a lot of Cape Cod companies that haven’t yet explored the potential of Access,” said Leduc. “A company that invests in a database can make back their investment in half a year. It saves a great deal of employees’ time and energy.”

Over the course of a month, Leduc merged the council’s two databases into

a newer, sleeker and far more accessible one. He interviewed the primary users of the databases and reviewed their general goals, queries, forms and relationships. He burned a copy of the databases to a CD and went on his way. While he worked on the merge at a separate location, council employees were able to continue working with the databases. Because the merged version of the data would be coming from Leduc, data inputting had to be put off for only the week’s time it took Leduc to complete the merge.

All in all, the process took four weeks to complete.

The reform of existing databases and creation of new ones serves a purpose that can be summed up in one word: streamlining. Because so many businesses still work with only Microsoft Excel and/or QuickBooks, few are aware of the tremendous benefits of a database. Access, a program in the Microsoft Office suite, often goes ignored by small businesses.

“Businesses are able to do far more than record-keeping when they employ this program,” said Leduc. “Customer jobs are easily recorded along with contact information. Once a customer has built up a significant history, the database can perform a query designed by the user to narrow down the type of jobs done for the customer in order to best determine what product to market to that customer.”

“The reverse is also true,” he said. “An Access database query can search for all customers who have purchased a certain product. The business can then use those names in a type-specific direct mailing for a sale on that product. In the same manner, the business can search for the most popular product within seconds rather than through a manual count, making marketing that much easier.”

As with any advancement in technology, use of Access does require a degree of expertise. This often prevents small businesses from making the transition, as few can spare the time to learn enough to create a usable database. That is why Leduc advises companies to have a qualified Access programmer build the database from the ground up. “Otherwise, when you eventually hit a roadblock, it will be more expensive and difficult to

rebuild than if you had originally gone with a specialist,” he said.

AmeriCorps Cape Cod encountered that problem. “Our database was very poor. Information wasn’t stored properly and the database wasn’t built along the lines of a normal database,” said Michelle Woods of AmeriCorps. “Philip basically took the data from the old database and created a whole new one.” The database he created needed to be extremely “user-friendly,” since 25 different people at AmeriCorps enter data into the database.

“Designing a really good database is more than programming code,” said Leduc. “It’s about assessing the client’s needs and the direction they want to take the company in. A lot of people are surprised at how much Access improves employee efficiency and improves their marketing ability.” ■

The Cape Cod Technology Council is a nonprofit membership organization committed to helping technology and businesses grow and compete on Cape Cod and the Islands and Southeastern Massachusetts.

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KEYNOTE: Colin Angle, Co-Founder and CEO of iRobot Inc.