

Oregon man connects with colleagues via Cisco contest

By Hannah Disch

Observer correspondent

Not that long ago, if you had big ideas for big business, a major metropolis was the place you had to be. But today's technology has made it possible for almost anyone to collaborate with people around the world to exchange ideas, create business plans, and interact with representatives of global corporations, all without leaving the comfort of their home.

Brian McReavy, an Oregon resident, has spent the past several months doing all of this and more as a finalist in the Cisco I-Prize competition.

Last October, networking giant Cisco announced the I-Prize, a contest with the simple premise that there are parts of the world where there are inventors and entrepreneurs with excellent ideas for new technology businesses but no access to venture capital. Using the power of the Cisco's global network, competitors could take advantage of emerging collaboration processes and tools provided by Cisco.

Over 2,500 entrepreneurs entered the three-stage competition, eventually forming 1,200 teams from 109 different countries around the world.

Phase I: Brainstorm consisted of having the innovators register and submit ideas and summary proposals. Other registered entrants could comment and vote on the submissions. Participants could then find like-minded innovators and form teams.

In Phase II: Refine, 32 semifinalist teams, chosen by Cisco, worked with Cisco experts using state-of-the-art collaboration tools to build their business and technology plans.

Phase III: Present saw the 12 finalist teams presenting their business plans to a judging panel using Cisco's TelePresence for the opportunity to start a new business unit with access to Cisco's many resources.

McReavy first heard of the I-Prize from a childhood friend, Chris Herbert from Toronto, Canada. The rest of the HAN team (HAN is an acronym for Home Area Network) consists of Jeremy Brown from Oakville, Canada, Ken Wygand from Commack, New York, and Mark Auble from Lincoln, Neb.

"The HAN Team is a prime example of the collaborative process, because we have never physically met (as a group)," McReavy said.

Team Captain Herbert convinced Brown, who is his daughter's boyfriend, to look at his idea and join the team. It was Herbert and Brown who posted their idea on the I-Prize website, where they received the second highest number of votes from other registered entrants. It was through the Brainstorming phase that Herbert completed his team by adding Wygand and Auble.

McReavy said the team members come from very diversified backgrounds: Brown is a steamfitter, Auble a dentist and McReavy himself a salesman. Only Herbert and Wygand had backgrounds in the technology industry.

While the team members continue to work their day jobs, they spent several hours a night for the last seven or eight months meeting virtually using Cisco's WebEx tools. These Internet-based tools allowed the team members to hold online meetings where they were able to see each other on their computer screens, upload and share files from their desktops, and create PowerPoint presentations with embedded video. McReavy said these tools helped them to accelerate their collaborative efforts while their business proposal propelled them into the final phase of the competition.



Brian McReavy

The team used Cisco's TelePresence to make their final presentation to a group of Cisco executives with eight different locations participating simultaneously. McReavy availed himself of the TelePresence meeting room located in Cisco's Madison office, which has three screens "the size of a living room wall" in a conference room. Other TelePresence sites include meeting rooms located in Toronto, New York, and Colorado. McReavy really enjoyed the experience.

"Within a few minutes you almost forget that you're in a room by yourself — that's how realistic it is," he said. "It was a lot of fun to make a presentation with. One of our concerns was, would our passion for the idea come across, and it certainly did."

The HAN team is now waiting anxiously as Cisco evalu-

ates the business proposals of the 12 final teams. Judges are considering not only the technological innovation of the ideas but also the business opportunity behind each proposal. Ideas have to have the potential to bring in at least a billion dollars in revenue to Cisco over a five- to seven-year period. The winning team will share a \$250,000 signing bonus and may have the opportunity to be hired by Cisco as founders of a new technology business unit. Depending on the value of the idea, Cisco may also invest up to \$10 million over three years to staff, develop, and go to market with a new business based on the winning idea. Each team is prohibited from discussing the details of their proposal in detail until the completion of the I-Prize competition and the announcement of the winning team, which is scheduled for sometime later this month.

McReavy calls the I-Prize competition a once-in-a-lifetime chance.

"It was a winning experience just working with Cisco," he said. "They were very classy, supportive, and true to intentions of the contest."

He encourages young people to look for these types of contests and enter them. He added, "Regardless of where you are in the world you can be on top of it all just through the technology that's out there. If you've got a great idea, there are ways to bring it to life, with an amazing amount of hard work and perseverance. If I can do it from here anyone from anywhere can do it."