

THE BUSINESS NEWS

Serving Brown, Calumet, Door, Kewaunee, Manitowoc, Marinette, Oconto, Outagamie, Shawano & Winnebago counties

August 4, 2008

www.thebusinessnewsonline.com

Vol. 6, No. 7 \$1.00

Company says Silverlight will change way we work

Perhaps you haven't heard about Silverlight yet. You will if you plan to watch the Olympics online this summer. But Silverlight is about far more than Web video. If the predictions of one local technology company are right, Silverlight is about to revolutionize the way we work.

Tim Miller is a project manager and developer at Skyline Technologies, based in Green Bay, and Patrick Deprey is the company CEO. Together they sat down and gave me a demo of this new Microsoft technology.

Deprey likened Silverlight to the advent of Microsoft office and desktop applications. "We really feel it is going to be changing the way people are working, one more time," he said.

What's so special about Silverlight? It delivers a faster, more dynamic experience on the Web.

And to be clear, we're not merely talking about Web sites — we're talking about Web-based applications. Silverlight delivers a desktop quality experience over the Internet.

Today, companies are increasingly turning to Internet-based applications. Instead of downloading software — and storing it and keeping it updated — many applications are now delivered wholly online. That trend may explode, thanks to Silverlight.

"We get rich true applications," said Miller. "Not a Web site with pages, but applications. You don't have to have this on your desktop anymore. All you need is browser and broadband access."

Silverlight is built with XAML (pronounced zammel), Microsoft's proprietary mark-up language. This is the same presentation language used in Vista, Miller tells me, which helps explain the attractive demo applications — complete with shadows, animation, and Vista-esque page toggling.

"We've moving beyond usability," said Miller. "What Microsoft talks about now is user experience."

To back up a bit, I should explain that at a basic level Silverlight is a browser plug-in, similar to Adobe Flash. This is an add-on to your

Internet browser that lets you view video content, play games, and see special site effects.

While Adobe is developing a product called Flex that will compete with Silverlight's development features, its Flash player currently dominates the market for rich media. So, before developers start jumping into Silverlight, Microsoft must first get a toehold with users.

They're doing fairly well, with more than 1.5 million Silverlight downloads per day in March. That number is expected to jump come August when NBC will offer all its Olympic video exclusively through Silverlight.

Once companies can expect that the Silverlight plug-in will already be installed on user computers, they'll be more likely to create interactive Web applications that use it.

For now, Deprey says many of their customers are hesitant to use such a new technology.

Still, there are some that feel that Silverlight will give them a competitive advantage.

Such is the case at Fulfillnet in Green Bay which will soon begin working with Skyline to develop an application built on Silverlight. The company will be creating a new module for its ShopDev brand management software already delivered over the Web.

President and CEO Kate Burgess said Silverlight will allow them to present data in new ways that enhance user productivity.

"Silverlight allows us to take that information and be more visual with it," she said. "Being more visual with that data helps our users be more efficient with it."

It's not just efficiency alone that Fulfillnet is after, but a cutting edge user interface. Client services and IT manager Rob Czypinski said the enhanced visuals will help them stay ahead of the competition.

"A large part of our business is marketing based. They are very motivated by presentation and the looks of things," he said. "Silverlight gives us the ability to present that information in a more integrated, rich environment.



JAIME LEICK

TECHNOLOGY

At Carspot.com in Milwaukee, director of mobile technology Damon Payne said the company is developing a new interface for car dealers built on Silverlight. When ready, dealers will use the application to upload vehicle photos and other product information.

Payne believes that Silverlight will increase the amount of information dealers load to the site, simply by making that experience more enjoyable.

"If we can come up with something that is flashy, that people think is neat, we can get them to do more themselves rather than call in for support," Payne said.

Plus, he believes it will help dealers understand their product better.

"It's easier to show them a benefit if it looks cool," he said. "It could be something very useful but we may not be able to sell them on the benefit. But if it looks cool, it's a much easier sell for us."

Silverlight 2.0 is available as a free download from www.microsoft.com/silverlight, where you can also view application demos.

In the next column, I'll outline some of Silverlight's distinct benefits.

If you have a technology issue you'd like to see discussed, or a technology news item, contact Jaime Leick at jleick@thebusinessnewsonline.com.