

Brendan Seaton

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What is “The Industry”?

As I take over the reigns of CHITTA from Steve Huesing, I ask myself “What is this Industry thing?” When I hear people talking about *The Industry* (with a capital THE), it often sounds like some mechanized beast, with a heart of metal and a soul to match. To some, *The Industry* is what sucks up the money set aside for Health IT by federal and provincial governments, health regions, hospitals, long term care facilities and health professionals. It is populated by *Companies* that *over-promise* and *under-deliver*.

To paraphrase Pogo “Yep, son, we have met *The Industry* and he is us.” We are all *The Industry*. If you own or operate a company you are part of *The Industry*. If you work for a company you are part of *The Industry*. If you own shares in a company you are part of *The Industry*. If you have a pension plan (who are the biggest shareholders) you are part of *The Industry*. Even if you don’t work for a private company, those precious health care tax dollars that fund your livelihood are the result of a robust market economy driven by; you guessed it, *The Industry*.

I joined CHITTA not because of *The Industry* or the *Companies* that are members of CHITTA, but because of the *People*. Yep, son, *The Industry* is populated by *People*; clever *People*; *People* with ideas; *People* with specialized knowledge of ICTs; *People* with energy; *People* who take risks. Just the kind of *People* I want to be around. The *People* in the ICT industry serve the healthcare community well. *People* in healthcare want to heal the sick and injured and promote health and wellbeing. They don’t want to manage networks or troubleshoot computers.

A strong and vibrant health ICT industry is one of the critical success factors for eHealth and the pan-Canadian EHR (though I don’t think I’ve seen this in an Infoway strategy paper... Yet!). The healthcare community must rely on the *People* in *The Industry* to ensure that the technical infrastructure is in place, that knowledgeable and skilled *People* are available, that all the pieces work together, and that innovative solutions are developed to meet the information demands of a

sector that deals daily with life and death decisions that affect each one of us.

So what do the *People* in *The Industry* need to thrive? They need three things.

First, the *People* in *The Industry* need the healthcare community to recognize the value of ICTs as tools that can improve the health of their patients and, at the same time, improve their own quality of working life. ICTs have to make healthcare jobs easier and more productive. This is the only thing that will encourage the healthcare community to invest more of their limited financial resources into health ICTs. The *People* in *The Industry* have a part to play in demonstrating that ICTs bring real value to health care providers and their patients. But so do other stakeholders, and we must work together to convince health care providers who must use these systems that there is a real value proposition.

The second thing the *People* in *The Industry* need to thrive is a level playing field. The health ICT marketplace is a complex and demanding environment where there is a lot of risk. Investors, healthcare providers and vendors need business models that distribute the risks fairly and ensure that reward is commensurate with the risk. Governments and other investors must also realize that a competitive marketplace is the best vehicle for ensuring economy and innovation.

The third thing the *People* in *The Industry* need to thrive is a clear definition of the technical and business requirements for ICTs and standards so that they can develop solutions and products that support regional, provincial and national visions for eHealth. eHealth and EHR systems consist of many components that must work together (or interoperate in eHealthspeak). Standards leverage investment, lower costs and reduce risk for both health care investors and vendors. They increase the market opportunities for companies competing in the national and global health ICT marketplaces.

Which brings me to CHITTA. We have assembled a new team of *People* to represent all that is good with

The Industry. There's myself. Gavin Tong, our new VP of Standards (Gavin will look after that third thing mentioned above). Elaine Huesing, one of the best-known People in *The Industry*, is our new Executive Director. We're in the process of renewing and recruiting for our Board of Directors; more good *People*. Added to this is the team of industry experts from ITAC (Information Technology Association of Canada) who will help to support the *People* in *The Industry* and all of their clients and customers.

In 2006/2007 I took a year off to take a close look at the world of eHealth. I studied the wide variety of risk issues confronting eHealth initiatives. One of the most obvious things I found is that no one anywhere has yet figured out how to do eHealth and EHRs properly. I have no doubt that we will very soon. But my optimism is dependent on goodwill and a spirit of cooperation of all people committed to implementing ICTs in health care.

I can assure you that the *People* in *The Industry* will do their part. ●

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