

Introducing Cowboy Montana, Technology Upstart

Let me introduce myself: I am, in the words of one B&E editor, an “American white guy” and an erstwhile Montana cowboy, whose parents grew up speaking German on the plains of North Dakota USA (they have in the meantime forgotten German and learned English) and who, when I was a youngster, moved to the wilds of Montana where for 8 years I was educated in a one room school with no plumbing and very cold winters. I am honored to have been invited by B&E to write a technology column – how it affects business, IT, family, employers and employees, etc. -- for this English language business magazine read by a largely Indian audience which speaks many languages not even remotely related to English. And surprised? Yes, to say the least, and especially in view of the odd combination of facts in the first 2 sentences.

Heretofore my writing consisted of university essays and theses, occasional articles for trade or scholarly publications, and, most boring of all, responses to RFPs. Now I must find intelligent and interesting topics every other week. In some measure I hope that my words will partially restore the global imbalance created by the articulate voices of reporters Snigdha Prakash and Vikram Singh which are regularly heard on American National Public Radio. When Asian media personalities work for American radio and white guy cowboys write about technology for Indian publishers, perhaps as Thomas Friedman’s recent brief history of the 21st century proclaims The World is Flat.

By way of qualification, I offer that after life as a cowboy and brief forays into logging, mining, geophysical prospecting, education, and other less desirable professions, I’ve spent 20+ years as a software engineer, engineering manager, and most recently as CTO for a small but successful internet startup company. During these years I’ve developed certain biases about technology, technologists, and business all of which I’ll be delighted to share with you. First technology: Even though it may be complicated, for its users it should most importantly work without fail and must also appear simple and beautiful, and even more importantly, to help humans become genuine human beings. Second technologists: Even though we may be very intelligent, non-technologists are a smart bunch as well. And last to business: Making money is undeniably important to investors, employees, and the existence of the business. Making it in such a way that serves and develops the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual natures of investors, employees, the business, and its customers is however of paramount importance. These predispositions provide the foundation for much of what I will write in subsequent columns.

Future topics include the information explosion (Did you know that by one estimate the world in 2002 produced new information equivalent to approximately 500,000 new libraries, each the size of the American Library of Congress’s 19,000,000 volume print collection?), technology careers (What does humor have to do with hiring a good engineer?), education (Each human has some combination of seven different intelligence modalities, only two of which are addressed by most educational systems or are measured by standard IQ tests.), digital rights/restrictions management (What do Luddism, Lord Byron, and DRM have in common?), and other topics too numerous to mention (in other words, I haven’t thought of them yet).

As an American white guy writing for an Indian magazine I can't help but feel a bit peculiar in invoking Ganesha's name at the outset. However it isn't to be avoided since none of the branches of Christian religion has a saint specializing in the removal of obstacles. Indeed all branches, almost without exception, prefer to focus instead on the obstacles themselves as the means to spiritual development rather than on asking a Christian equivalent of the scribe of the Mahabharata for help. To paraphrase Dr. Brewster Higley's song Home on the Range and to request of Ganesha that, at least for this column, "there seldom be heard a discouraging word and that the sky is not cloudy all day" will, God willing, be blessed by him as well as by both his parents!

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