

Building a Unique Technology Company

by Nancy Knowlton

Over twenty years ago, when Dave Martin and I created SMART Technologies Inc., we wanted to do something significant, something that would change how people undertook and completed their work. We didn't exactly know how and we didn't really know what, but we were determined to have an impact.



We have never really accepted that things should be done a particular way if that way didn't make sense to us in the context of our environment or fit with what we wanted to accomplish. We both feel that we have created a company that is revolutionizing the way that teachers teach and children learn. It is this higher mission that drives our people and our decisions today.

Someone's Going to Do Something

We never let the fact that we were from Calgary (a city best known for oil and gas, cowboys and the 1988 Winter Olympics) or that we had never created and sold a product around the world stop us from dreaming big. We always thought that someone somewhere was going to do something important and that it might as well be us.

This thought played in our minds over and over as we struggled through the earlier years when no one understood our product or bought into our vision. Even in the darkest days we talked about changing the way that children learned and business people worked.

Dave's Idea

It was in the course of trying to figure out how we would use liquid crystal display technology (something that is old hat today but that was very new at the time) that Dave imagined a system that included a computer connected to an LCD projector (actually an LCD panel sitting on top of a standard overhead projector) and an interactive whiteboard. He imagined that people would be able to connect to and communicate with other people located anywhere in the world.

Many of the enabling technologies that make the SMART Board™ interactive whiteboard so functional and versatile today didn't exist those many years ago – but Dave had the foresight to imagine that they would some day exist. Today the enabling technologies that we combine with our products are not only more broadly available, but they also

have the functionality and price points that make the overall solution appealing to large numbers of customers.

Committed to our Customers

The easy part for many of our customers is spending the money on our products. While money is never plentiful, actually deploying the products in a productive and transformational way is the hard part. Effecting change in a pedagogically sound fashion takes commitment and assistance from us as well. We work hard to appreciate our customers' challenges and aspirations concerning where our products can take their students' learning experiences.

Reputation Is Everything

For us, our personal and corporate reputations are everything. We have always believed that it is not enough to simply do good things. We must *be* good. People have to believe that our company is here to serve a higher purpose beyond its obvious commercial mandate and that we support our customers at all levels. That perception comes from not just our words, but from our actions.

Not every good thing that we do is made public – we do not seek press coverage for all of our programs and initiatives, for instance. We believe that in many cases, goodness is its own reward.

Uniquely Appreciated

Nothing pleases us more than having people describe SMART as a unique technology company or a company that really understands and cares about education – both educators and students. People know that we are a for-profit company and that we have a large staff who directly depend on our decisions and actions every day for their livelihood. But they also see that we take a longer term, more strategic view of our customer interactions and that we are not motivated by short-term gain.

The SMART Brand

We have carefully built the SMART brand through the years to represent a company that our customers can trust for leading edge innovation, outstanding quality, superior service and long-term, meaningful relationships. We listen, consider and act – always in a responsible fashion.

Certainly unique and more.

Nancy Knowlton is the co-founder and CEO of SMART Technologies Inc., the world's leading supplier of interactive whiteboards. Nancy's husband and SMART co-founder, David Martin, is the inventor of the interactive whiteboard category. Together they have built a company that is focused on delivering easy-to-use, yet feature-rich collaboration tools, including the SMART Board interactive whiteboard. Nancy can be reached at NancyK@smarttech.com.