MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND THE ARTS
THE HON DARYL WILLIAMS AM QC MP

2004 Consensus Software Awards
Sheraton on the Park, Sydney

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Introduction

1. I discovered tonight that there was a photo of me in the Australian Developer magazine with the Ministerial Foreward to these awards.

    I also discovered that I am wearing the same suit and tie in the photo as I am wearing tonight.

    I can assure you that I am wearing my other shirt though.

2. The Consensus Software Awards have become a great indicator of those who will assume a leading role in the Australian software sector.
    In an increasingly demanding global market place, such foresight is invaluable to the Australian ICT sector.

3. The awards are based on the recommendation of independent judges who give their time and expertise to identify worthy products and assess them against rigorous criteria.
    I commend these judges on their dedication to the local industry.

4. However, the way these awards are implemented is as important to their success as the judging criteria.
    The Consensus Awards are not a back-slapping ceremony where receiving the award becomes more important than the success of the product.

5. Besides providing recognition, the Awards also give winners the means to develop their products and open up new markets, both for themselves and the wider Australian software industry.

6. At a time when Australia has been recognised as the best place in the developed world to base software development operations, such ongoing development is vital.

    These awards form part of a framework of private sector and Australian Government initiatives helping the Australian software industry to realise its potential.

The Australian Software Industry

7. The KPMG 2004 Competitive Alternatives Study recently ranked Australia the best place in the developed world to run software design and web and multimedia operations.

    This was a great result for Australia, but the finding was based solely on our low business costs.

    Other aspects of the Australian software industry are central to its international success.

    These include the quality of Australian software and web developers, the strength of their ideas, their willingness to embrace innovation and Australia's track record of producing world-class software products.

8. Software development is increasingly becoming mobile globally.

    Low-cost centres are being established in countries like China and India, making it difficult for Australia to compete in the global marketplace on price alone.

    Australia has to differentiate its software products through excellence in design and application.

    This is our competitive advantage.

    And it is an advantage many of you here tonight are helping to develop.

9. There is no doubt we can continue to improve Australia's software industry to maintain this competitive advantage.

    To do this we must ensure that the Australian software industry is able to employ qualified people who perform at the highest level.

10. This year, many award finalists are working in the areas of human resource management and productivity.

    In previous years, the finalist list has featured outstanding examples of software for communications and security solutions.

    This shows the depth and breadth of the Australia software industry which is capable of providing innovative solutions for any market sector.

11. I am particularly glad, coming from Western Australia, to see that all Australian States are represented amongst the finalists.

    This reflects the spread of quality innovative thinking throughout Australia.

    Innovation is not limited to Australia's largest business centres.

    And I hope that in future years we will see finalists from the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory too.

12. In the "Where are we now" section of *Developer Magazine*, there are some fine examples of previous Consensus Software Awards winners and what they have achieved.

13. One of these, AiVision, has developed technology that allows anyone, anywhere, to check their own eye sight.

    AiVision originally approached Consensus to enter the awards in 2000. Consensus felt the technology was not yet ready for the judges' detailed appraisal, so encouraged the company to enter the following year.

    AiVision went on to win an award in 2001 and has since continued to open up opportunities overseas.

    It has just announced a major joint venture in the United States.

Government Initiatives and Funding

14. While the software sector is a significant industry in its own right, it is also a vital component of most other aspects of day-to-day life.

    It is easy to underestimate how important software is to the functioning of everyday appliances.

    More and more we are being sold intelligent products, fridges, washing machines, mobile phones, cars, that use software in some form or other.

15. Software is also the key to efficiency in most industry sectors.

    A good example of this is the software developed by previous Consensus award winner, Bowen and Groves, that is now used by manufacturing clients world-wide.

    Their Enterprise Resource Planning software system, M1, is designed for small to medium manufacturers and provides total integration and automation from quoting through to invoicing.

    With its unique smart screen technology and powerful integration tools, it is setting the standard in Enterprise Resource Planning software.

16. Because software is central to the function of so many manufactured goods, the Australian Government recognises that the availability of quality software has huge potential to make life better for all Australians.

    That is why the Government is a great supporter of the Consensus Awards and the Australian software industry.

    Austrade is a financial sponsor of these awards and various programs overseen by the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts assist the development of the Australian software industry.

17. Among the Government's major initiatives to stimulate innovation in Australia's ICT sector is the establishment National ICT Australia (NICTA), the ICT centre of excellence..

    The Government's $129.5 million contribution to NICTA is the ICT cornerstone of the Government's $2.9 billion Innovation Action Plan, Backing Australia's Ability.

18. New ICT businesses are vital for driving innovation in the sector.

    This is why the Australian Government has developed the Building on IT Strengths, or BITS, the incubator program for ICT start-up companies.

    Under the program, 11 incubator centres are being supported with funding of $86 million to help ICT start-up companies turn their technology ideas into successful businesses.

19. While direct funding for programs supporting the ICT and software sectors is essential, the Australian Government also recognises the importance of establishing a framework for the sector to help itself.

20. A key example of this is the Australian Government's Free Trade Agreement with the United States, which will enhance Australia's trade and investment relationship with the world's leading developer and user of ICT.

    The agreement will provide many potential opportunities for Australia's ICT sector to expand its exports to the United States and attract additional US investment.

21. One specific benefit for the software sector will be greatly enhanced access to US government markets for ICT goods and services, as well as support for an open e-commerce environment.

    I urge all Australian software developers to begin their preparations to capitalise on the preferential access that will be created by the Free Trade Agreement with the United States.

22. The activities of industry-focussed bodies are also important in addressing the needs of Australia's ICT industries.

    Software Engineering Australia National is an excellent example.

    It was established by the Australian Government under the Software Engineering Quality Centre's program to provide software process improvement products and services for the Australian industry.

    Although this program expired in September last year, Software Engineering Australia continues to deliver software quality products as a self-funding, not-for-profit organisation.

23. But this is only part of the private-sector solution to encouraging innovation.

While our tertiary institutions, who train our software engineers, can share in the accolades this evening, the future of our innovative and competitive software companies rests with the ability to train ever increasing numbers of software engineers and project managers.

24. The industry itself will need to become even more proactive in securing this training if Australia is to develop its standing in the ICT industry globally.

Conclusion

25. The Australian Government can provide you with the framework to enter new markets, but your innovation will enable you to utilize those markets and, hopefully, to open up new ones for yourselves and other Australian ICT businesses.

26. I urge all those here tonight to continue your fantastic work and to take full advantage of the rewards available in the international market for the benefit of yourselves and the Australian ICT sector as a whole.