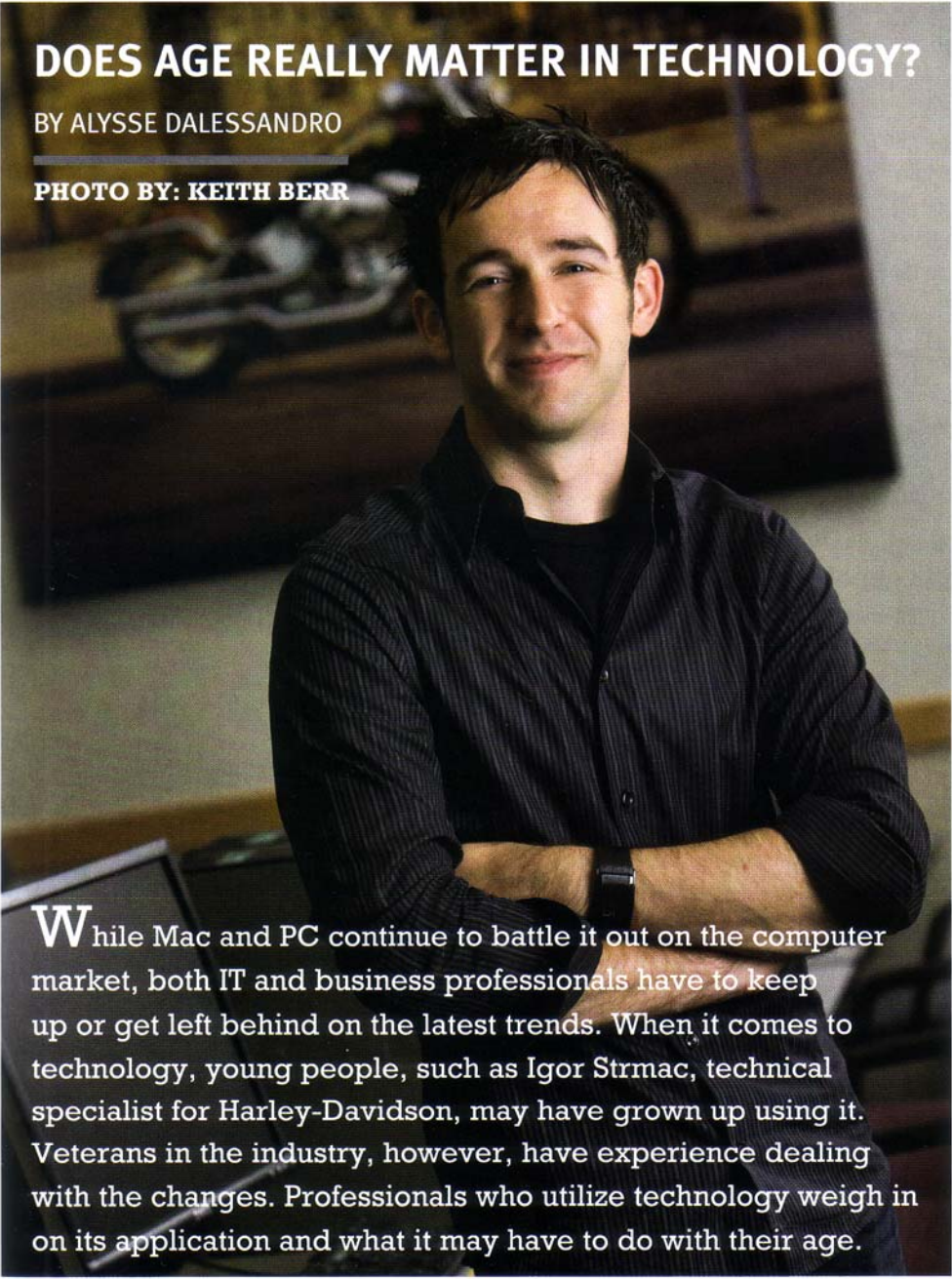


DOES AGE REALLY MATTER IN TECHNOLOGY?

BY ALYSSE DALESSANDRO

PHOTO BY: KEITH BERR



While Mac and PC continue to battle it out on the computer market, both IT and business professionals have to keep up or get left behind on the latest trends. When it comes to technology, young people, such as Igor Strmac, technical specialist for Harley-Davidson, may have grown up using it. Veterans in the industry, however, have experience dealing with the changes. Professionals who utilize technology weigh in on its application and what it may have to do with their age.

In only one room of the Rock the House (RTH) Entertainment Group offices, there is a high definition television with satellite signal along with a wireless keyboard and mouse. All employees use "PDA smart phones" according to Matt Radicelli, founder and owner. At 29, Radicelli and vice president and COO, Steve Tanruther, 33 are the eldest at RTH with their youngest full time employee being 21. Are these gadget-loving businessmen an anomaly or a sign of the future?

"Everything we do is based on technology," says Tanruther. Their office has no need for keys because the employees use an access

control system that reads RFID chips. As for printers, those are almost extinct, as the majority of correspondence is done by E-mail.

Although RTH started as a mobile DJ company when Radicelli was still in high school, he says they have evolved into a "full blown production company." Both men do not attribute being tech savvy to their age, but rather to their interests. Radicelli adds, "We have a pretty high aptitude for technology and we didn't go to school for it."

"As a small business, we're not the norm," says Radicelli. "We're taking risks and steps beyond even large businesses."

This may have something to do with the entire staff being part of the Millennial Generation. "We are absolutely an instant gratification generation," says Tanruther.

Radicelli does not find his generation "too reliant" on technology. "I think we're just as reliant on technology as clothing: just things that help us live better," he says. "We don't work real hard to keep up on the trends."

Igor Strmac, 28, takes a different view of keeping up with technology. Strmac graduated with a computer science degree from Mount Union College in 2002, and he currently works for Harley-Davidson. In project management, Strmac helps in developing software known as a dealer management system, which is used in more than 450 Harley-Davidson dealerships across the country.

"I WASN'T BORN KNOWING EVERYTHING ABOUT TECHNOLOGY, SO IT TOOK PRACTICE AND STUDYING," STRMAC SAYS. "I DEFINITELY HAD TO SIT DOWN AND READ THE BOOKS."

In addition to having the hard technical skills, Strmac says employees must possess soft skills like communication and interpersonal skills. "A lot of IT professionals can be too tech savvy without the business know-how to back it up," he says. "Clients want you to be more than just the guy behind the computer."

Part of Strmac's job is ensuring that the dealerships understand the "business value" of the technology. "If I can't explain why they need it, I'm not going to be successful," he says. His success might also rest on another factor. "The younger generations don't always have the experience in the corporate setting to see the value," he says. "The Baby Boomers are the seasoned professionals with the most real-world experience, and the businesses are usually going to have the most confidence in them."

At 43, Dennis Sommer has been in the technology field for more than 20 years. As founder and CEO of Executive Business Advisors, Sommer runs a management

consulting company that specializes in bringing understanding when it comes to “selling, developing and using” technology. Executive Business Advisors decodes technical terms for the not-so-technical minds.

“THE COMPANIES THAT BUILD THE TECHNOLOGY ARE CREATIVE, BUT THEY REALLY DON'T KNOW HOW TO EXPLAIN IT TO THE USER,” SOMMER SAYS.

Like Strmac, he explains how technology will help grow the business, but the explanation process differs based on the age of the client. “A person in their 60s might ask why do I need it, but a person in their 20s just wants the coolest, new thing,” Sommer says.

The younger generation might have an upper hand on tech-savvy professionals like Sommer. “For people ages 18-25, they are very comfortable with technology because they

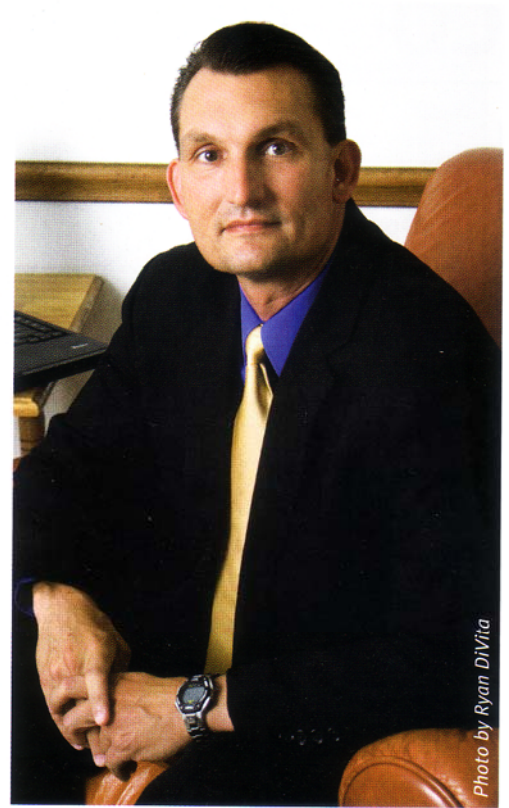
have grown up with it,” he says. “There might still a knowledge gap but it’s much narrower,” he says.

At any age, Sommer advises that some knowledge should be universal. All business professionals should know how to use E-mail, research on the Internet and use a word processor, according to Sommer.

Strmac agrees with Sommer’s advice on necessary tech knowledge and adds to the list how to operate both an Apple Macintosh and a Windows operating system.

No matter their age, professionals agree that technology is becoming more and more advanced and predominant in the workplace. You don’t have to be a natural born techie; you just need a willingness to embrace change. □

*For more information: www.rthgroup.com,
www.h-dnet.com,
www.executivebusinessadvisers.com*



Dennis Sommer

Photo by Ryan DiVita