

A man in a bright yellow shirt and dark tie stands in a server room, smiling. He is positioned in the center-right of the frame, with rows of server racks behind him. The room is dimly lit, with light coming from the ceiling. The text 'Mehmen's World' is overlaid in large white letters on the left side of the image.

Mehmen's World

Computerworld names Mehmen as Premier 100 IT Leader

Don't expect Dennis Mehmen's office to tell the story of his success. The unadorned walls, showing no evidence of his honors, focuses one's attention to the credenza laden with family pictures, kids' dinosaurs, Star Wars figures, trolls, and an interesting assortment of colorful memorabilia. An ordinary exterior belies the extraordinary national recognition he received just a few short months ago.

In December, *Computerworld*, the "Voice of IT Management," announced that it had selected Grinnell Mutual's Vice President of BIS and Chief Information Officer Dennis Mehmen, as one of *Computerworld's* Premier 100 IT Leaders for 2007.

Computerworld's 2007 Premier 100 IT Leaders honors the 100 IT executives who have led their organizations by mentoring and motivating employees; envisioning innovative solutions to business challenges; and effectively managing and executing IT strategies. The 2007 honorees will be recognized, with many presenting their success strategies, at *Computerworld's* upcoming Premier 100 IT Leaders Conference on March 4 – 6 at the JW Marriot Desert Springs Resort in Palm Desert, California.

"This year's class of honorees is characterized by a diversity that demonstrates the value of unique backgrounds and approaches in building an outstanding IT organization,"

said Don Tennant, editor-in-chief of *Computerworld*. "Yet what these individuals have in common is an expertise born of hard work and an intangible leadership quality they can tap to successfully champion IT not only as a business enabler, but as a business influencer."

Working as a business partner and influencer has been Mehmen's goal ever since he arrived at Grinnell Mutual in 1996.

Mehmen's relationship with Grinnell Mutual actually began on a farm in Shell Rock, Iowa, insured by one of GMRC's farm mutuals. After graduating from the University of Northern Iowa, he left for southern California in the mid-80's.

“I told my parents that I would only go for a month, and if I couldn’t find a job there I would move to Minnesota,” said Mehmen.

He found a job on his first day there as a computer operator for an auto insurance company. During his four year stay he was promoted through the programming ranks. After that, he did move to Minnesota where he worked as a consultant with Moore Data, and then with Northern States Power where he rewrote their Human Resources system. He moved to Wisconsin where he worked as a program director for a subsidiary of ACUITY, a company that wrote automated systems for insurance companies. When he moved to Strategic Data Systems (SDS) in 1994, he began working with Grinnell Mutual which was one of his accounts.

“I helped Grinnell Mutual implement System 92, and helped turn them into one of the best accounts for SDS,” said Mehmen. “Then Dan (Agnew) called and said that since I’d cleaned up the vendor side of things, why not come to Grinnell Mutual and clean up the rest?”

Agnew describes Mehmen’s first several months as a time of study and analysis.

“When Dennis came on board, the first thing he did was to visit with other areas. He evaluated what he had, what he needed, and how the division could be restructured with an external focus and true information systems vision,” said Agnew. “By putting the right people in charge and building management’s confidence in what he and his staff could accomplish, he was able to slowly grow his division into what we have today. With the past six to seven years of development, we are now able to give agents the tools

they need, and fulfill most of their technology requests.”

The role of IT at Grinnell Mutual as a key component in a successful business strategy is something of which Mehmen is proud.

“We’re now at the forefront in the planning process being utilized as a strategic asset,” said Mehmen. “We have to make sure that technology is not the burden or the reason why we don’t go forward with our products or initiatives.”

Mehmen’s top five priorities for the coming year include continuing with projects at the Business Resumption Center in Newton; business expansion; ease-of-doing business initiatives with Direct Underwriting; security initiatives; and succession planning.

“It’s great that we have a management team that understands the significance of working together,” he said. “They have been patient while we’ve been catching up technologically. But we’re never done – everything continues to evolve. Our challenge is to continue to find enough people and the right people who can do

the jobs we need to have done.”

As for his honor from *Computerworld* – his recognition along with some of the nation’s most impressive IT companies – Xerox and SunMicroSystems to name a few – Mehmen isn’t certain how it will be significant. The nomination for the award came from someone within the industry (he’s not certain of the nominator’s identity). He was then asked to furnish references from three additional people.

“I’m not sure I believed it at first. I don’t really know how to feel,” he said. “The average IT staff size for most of these companies is 1,400 – we have 110 people. When we put our company’s IT department up against a company like Progressive, we must be doing something right.”

“His counterparts clearly see his success at this company,” said Agnew. “I’m pleased that he has received recognition for the successful implementation of systems here, as well as for his expertise. Clearly Grinnell Mutual’s success has been tied to Dennis Mehmen’s success.”



Above: Mehmen (right corner) drops by a meeting organized by Marcella Shifflet with BIS support staff.