

Cisco
Technology is Sustainability
Mark Showers, Monsanto Company, CIO
Air date: July 25, 2008

URL: http://newsroom.cisco.com/dlls/podcasts/ciscocast_monsanto_072808.html

Peter Shaplen: Hello, and welcome to this Podcast Series about *Trends, Technology, and Business*. From Cisco Live in Orlando, Florida, I'm Peter Shaplen.

And Mark Showers is the Chief Information Officer at the Monsanto Company; 24-year veteran, he has primary responsibility for strategic direction of IT resources and its daily operation. And, Mark, first of all, nice to see you.

Mark Showers: Thank you.

Peter Shaplen: I was reading off of your website, and I want to just pull one graph. This is from the site. It's the pledge, *Growth for a Better World -- We want to make the world a better place for future generations. As an agricultural company, Monsanto can do this best by providing value through products and systems we offer to farmers.*

And, of course, one of the words that caught my eye there was systems.

Mark Showers: Well, the systems in this context is all the things around agriculture to help us essentially produce more food while using less of the environments of the earth's resources, in particular, water and land.

Two primary roles for technology in this. One is in product development itself. The other is helping the farmer themselves with the information to make better planting decisions, anything we can do to leverage that information to knowledge to try to improve the overall yield of the products.

Peter Shaplen: Does the network enable you to determine to see food requirements on a global basis in a way that you couldn't before, and how?

Mark Showers: How the network is impacting us in terms of our understanding of global food would be simply in terms of decreased time to understand how fields are doing around the world, being able to look at both product movement, pricing, impacts, macroeconomic impacts in a much faster way.

And that would tend to take place in our company. We plan to double the yield by 2030, all while reducing by a third the amount of natural resources, essentially, land, water, energy it takes to actually produce those crops.

Peter Shaplen: It's clear that Monsanto is focused on environmental sustainability as part of your global business strategy. How are you doing that from a CIO perspective?

Mark Showers: We had the opportunity a couple of years ago to design and construct a new data center. It's only the third LEED-certified data center in the country. LEED is Leadership and Energy Efficient Design. It actually has natural ambient light, which is a unique characteristic of data centers.

The other aspect, it completes a major consolidation effort for us. One less data center obviously takes a lot of power consumption and cooling and water out of play.

Peter Shaplen: What are the one or two key deliverables for you as the CIO to your CEO? How are you measured?

Mark Showers: One of the key items right now for Monsanto is growth. So what is IT doing to actually help facilitate that growth? And one mechanism is revenue, managing our inventory better and being able to help grow the revenue side. Process also plays a big part in that. How do we help the company run more efficient and effectively?

From a network perspective, some of the biggest changes we're undergoing right now are around unified communications, rolling out things like voice over IP, WAN concentrators, using a lot of these technologies and techniques to improve the throughput as we put more and more on the network. We have a lot of our employees that are out essentially in very rural areas, and so we're trying a lot of techniques, things like MeetingPlace with the unified inbox, with instant messaging, all those tools and techniques to try to push the employees further along from a collaboration perspective while [inaudible] maintaining the security and information governance that we need as a corporation with a lot of intellectual property.

Peter Shaplen: What do you define as success?

Mark Showers: Success for us ends up pretty directly going to the success of the farmer using our product. Just like Cisco or anybody else, if your customers aren't successful, they aren't going to be customers very long. And there are an awful lot of farmers around the world that don't make much money. They're very small-holder farmers. And so we need to make growers successful. We need for them to share in the profits.

You know, it's a very fun time at Monsanto. We really do have a major impact on the world. Food production is a very, very important element of society today, where people used to take it for granted, and we're helping that through great technology innovation, and information technology is a huge part of it.

Peter Shaplen: Mark Showers, the CIO of Monsanto Company, thank you for speaking with us.

Mark Showers: My pleasure.

Peter Shaplen: And thank you for joining us. You'll find an archive of this and other podcasts from Cisco Live, all of that online at Newsroom.Cisco.com. From Cisco Live in Orlando, Florida, I'm Peter Shaplen.