

IT

By Charles Mandel

THE HIGH-ENERGY CIO

Kevin Brown runs a 90-person IT department for a leading Calgary company. He lectures across Canada on the subject of IT professionalism; and tends to the several boards he serves on. No one says he has too much time on his hands

Kevin Brown's route to his current job as CIO with Calgary energy firm, Enmax, may have been somewhat more convoluted than most. But he's also brought a longer-range view with him as well. "I think we want to be an IT group within the energy and utility business that other companies would follow," Brown says. The way in which he plans to achieve this is to ensure that his information technology team increases value through the application of technology and through a strong management team.

The native Calgarian — "probably one of three people," Brown jokes — attended the Southern Institute of Technology early on in his career and studied programming. But once he determined that the subject "didn't turn his crank" he joined the Royal Bank as a computer operator. After eight years with the bank in Calgary and Montreal, he joined Atco in Edmonton for 15 years and then moved to that city's Epcor Utilities as a CIO, before ultimately arriving at Enmax one year ago.

"I might surmise that I might of moved to a

a past president of the Canadian Information Processing Society (CIPS) both nationally and in Edmonton, and still sits on their advisory board for Calgary. When he's not lecturing across Canada on the subject of IT professionalism, he attends to the several boards he serves on: Edmonton's Capital Regional Housing Authority; as chair of Enmax's United Way program in Calgary; and on Edmonton's Street Performer's Festival. The latter, Brown says, is to "give the other side of my brain a little bit of a challenge."

It's not as if he needs any other challenges. He already finds those trying to ensure his 90-person department focuses on making sure their priorities are on the corporation's priorities and meeting the increased financial and regulatory compliance that makes up more of today's marketplace. "I'd say, quite frankly, the biggest challenge for all of us in our jobs is doing the right things right."

Part of that means becoming more business-focused than in the past. Twenty years ago, the head of IT managed technology for the

many companies, they often have a sharp eye out for best practices. Brown never asks for information of a confidential nature, but he does expect his suppliers to bring his attention to things that other companies are doing that he may not have yet introduced into his corporation.

At the end of the day, Brown says, the IT organization in most firms exists to support the business that generates revenue for the company. "Being aligned, being highly customer-focused, being very cost-conscious are what you would expect," Brown says, who adds he often tells students he speaks to that if they haven't acquired the desire for learning and understanding the business, then they won't be successful. "Not very many people in IT get fired because of their technical skills. They get let go because they're not good team players."

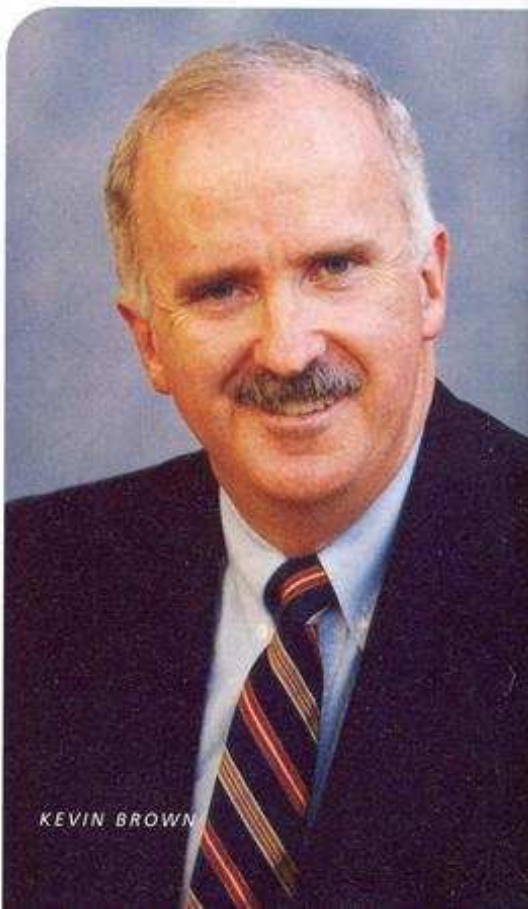
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CIO role a lot faster if I had went on to a get a degree at university," Brown says, but he doesn't have any regrets either. "I've had the school of hard knocks, which is always a great education." Brown says the lack of a degree may be a bit of a chip on his shoulder, but he makes up for it by reading everything he can, from the Harvard Business Review, to academic journals. "That's how I try to maintain my interest and ability in learning."

Brown has nothing to apologize for: his hard-scrabble years moving up the system have made him one of Canada's leading CIOs. He is

corporation, Brown says, which involved looking after the back-room applications. Today IT is front-and-centre and involves providing management with good advice. "Clearly, today's IT leader has to have a tremendous business understanding," Brown says. "Understanding how your business makes money and being passionate about your business is necessary to balance your IT skills to make a good combination."

To help him carry out that mandate, Brown looks to his suppliers as a source of advice and innovation. He points out that, as a supplier to



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