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John Regazzi-President and CEO-Engineering Information Village

Judy Luther
Consultant

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ATG Interview with John Regazzi

President and CEO — Engineering Information Village

by **Judy Luther** (102 West Montgomery Ave. #B, Ardmore, PA 19003;
phone: 610-645-75461 fax: 610-645-5251) <jluther@earthlink.net>

I was delighted to meet John at ALA Midwinter and have the opportunity to speak with him about the innovative approach Ei has taken to creating and producing their products. If you haven't seen Engineering Information Village, known familiarly as Ei Village, it's an award-winning Web site <<http://www.ei.org>> that's an excellent example of how a company can be innovative in meeting the information needs of its users. John welcomes your comments and questions and can be reached at <jjr@ei.org>. — JL

ATG: What are the origins of **Engineering Information, Inc. (Ei)** and where is the company today?

JR: Ei was started in 1884 as a division of the **American Society of Mechanical Engineers**, which spun off its abstracting and indexing publications as a not-for-profit foundation in 1934. Ei has the distinction of being the oldest abstracting and indexing organization.

In 1994, the company was reorganized, creating the **Engineering Information Foundation**, a private grant-giving organization focused on engineering education and research, women and engineering and engineering in developing countries. Engineering Information Inc., the publishing arm, became an employee owned company.

We engaged industrial engineering consultants to help us train in quality management and help us evaluate the production process, and then hired one of that team to oversee quality maintenance on a continuing basis. Primarily as a result of rethinking the production process, we downsized to a flatter organizational structure. In the late 80's Ei had about 150 employees, with fewer than five in sales. Today there are approximately 40 employees, of whom 18 are in sales, marketing or customer support. We manage the data center and receipt of materials while many services are contracted (some to former employees) and the staff manages quality.

In order to improve quality for our subscribers and spend our budget more efficiently, we approached publishing as a manufacturing business and did a baseline study on keying, throughput quality and terms omitted/assigned. Our production increased from 200,000 a records to 500,000 records in a year while processing time for a record to get into the database decreased from 12 weeks to 3 weeks.

This approach was presented at the **NFAIS Conference** in 1996 for our colleagues in the industry.

ATG: How long have you been at Ei and what is your position?

JR: I've been CEO of Ei since 1988, when I was brought in to help provide new direction for the company. I had been working with **The H.W. Wilson Company** and had experience in applying technology to developing new publishing services and retooling production lines to provide additional product lines.

ATG: How did you conceive the idea of Ei Village?

JR: It was an evolving process. We had for some time been trying to respond to requests by information specialists to help bring their users into the information-seeking process. We were looking for ways to affordably deliver **Ei Compendex**, the primary engineering abstracting and indexing service, to end user desktops. In the process, we discovered that most engineers didn't want access to just one database, so we expanded our interface to accommodate more than 150 other databases, as well.

Although initially reluctant to admit there was much of value on the Internet, engineers came around to believing there's actually a great deal of valuable informa-

tion but that it's hard to find and chaotic. We saw an opportunity to take core Ei competencies in published literature and apply them to the vast Internet resources. We visualized this as a great electronic book where we could organize formal and informal information sources and integrate them with free material of value or interest to technical professionals and managers. Our service was first planned as a gopher site, but then migrated to a Web environment and released in August of 1995.

We know from working with engineers that they want to network with other engineers. Colleagues were no longer "down the hall," so we used the technology to offer community-oriented services, and to bring together those services with information resources in the intuitive environment of a cyberspace engineering village.

Ei Village actually has three major areas: (1) formal databases, including a wide variety of data resources such as **Ei CompendexWeb**, as well as newswire services such as **AP** and **Reuters**, which have been reindexed to bring technical news to the surface; (2) a simple-to-use navigational tool for the Web, which will search through the 15,000 relevant and reliable sites we've identified and abstracted, linking to some 60,000 pages; (3) and access to a support-network community, including researchers who provide up to 15 minutes of help in locating information.

ATG: To what do you attribute the success of Ei Village?

JR: I think there are several reasons it has been so successful. It's very comprehensive in that it provides information from a variety of sources which are all related to engineering. It offers creative applications of the technology, which delivers new value to organizations that they don't have now. And it does all this at tremendous savings. When an organization has unlimited site-wide access, analyses of actual searches show that large corporations have saved as much as \$250,000 and academic institutions over \$600,000 compared to other means of accessing the data.

Besides selecting and organizing 15,000 Web sites for their substantiveness, relevance and reliability, providing guides to what's available within those sites, Editor's Choices, and an easy gateway, Ei also provides its residents with

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exclusive features, such as a technical alert service, a current awareness service, a community of senior engineering colleagues, technical librarians, and access to information in 150 online databases, as well as the option of unlimited access to its own **Ei Compendex** on the Web. The service was developed to help technical professionals and managers solve problems and work more productively, while encouraging them to take more advantage of formal research tools.

ATG: Tell us about the recognition that Ei Village has received.

JR: Last year, **Engineering Information Village** received the **Information Industry Association** and **Online Access Magazine HotShot Award for Product of the Year** as "Best Science/Technology Service" online, along with some extremely favorable critical notices in the press.

Of course, we're very pleased with the rave reviews Ei Village has received. If I may quote from two of them, "Ei Village exemplifies the best existing commercial integration of people, information and the Web for engineers." "This is a product that understands what you can do with the Web."

ATG: What's ahead for Ei?

JR: I think our focus will be on **Engineering Information Village** for some time to come. We're continually looking for ways of expanding the content, community and services, and are talking with potential publishing partners to offer the widest breadth of professional products and services through Ei Village. We recently signed with the **Community of Science** to offer a database of experts which will expand on the engineering consultants already available through the Village. We're also beginning to expand in the area of fulltext. This spring we'll once again offer fulltext in the form of a direct-from-Ei document service. Called **Electronic Ei Text**, it will be a 24-hour service especially for subscribers of Ei Village and Ei CompendexWeb who order electronically. We'll also offer **Electronic Ei Text: Featured Articles on Call**. We expect within the next year to considerably grow Ei Village in the area of fulltext services.

ATG: What is the culture at Ei?

JR: Restructuring as an ESOP has influenced the culture. We're a very lean organization of professionals. Staff productivity is measured by revenue per staff member and sales per staff member, which are among the highest in the industry.

ATG: Where are you located?

JR: In 1994, Ei was relocated to the campus of the **Stevens Institute of Technology** which has a great view of the Manhattan skyline. (You can check it out through our home page under **Ei Views Manhattan** at <<http://www.ei.org>>. **Richard Widdicomb**, the Stevens Institute of Technology Library Director, serves on our Advisory Council and introduced the idea of our moving to Stevens. Our presence provides students with employment in editorial and systems work in a thriving technology environment. The library maintains the collection of titles and Ei also provides articles on a document delivery basis. Ei has come full circle in 100 years, returning to a university setting, where it began life in 1884 on the campus of Washington University in St. Louis.

ATG: What do you like to do for fun?

JR: I'm a big Knicks fan and was pleased when the Knicks beat the Bulls. I enjoy sharing sports with my three sons who are all basketball fans. The best book I've read recently is *In My Own Country* by Abraham Verghese, about the lives of people in a small Southern town touched by AIDS, as seen through the eyes of a local physician. 🐾

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