

News Room

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MIT Sloan grad launches non-profit company that bridges digital divide for poor and disabled Cambodians

Cambridge, MA, June 24, 2002 — Not all graduates of MIT's Sloan School of Management dream of striking it rich in investment banking or the dotcom world. Jeremy Hockenstein (SM '00), who was trained as a strategy consultant at McKinsey and Company, is now CEO/COO of Digital Divide Data (DDD), a non-profit organization headquartered in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. DDD is a unique socially responsible organization that provides data entry/digitization services to western universities, companies, and non-profits while greatly improving the lives of its disadvantaged Cambodian employees.

DDD was founded in July 2001 by Hockenstein, in partnership with a group of international advisors and Cambodian nationals who have proven experience in the business, non-profit, and entrepreneurial sectors. When Hockenstein traveled to Cambodia in February 2001 with some McKinsey colleagues he discovered that many Cambodians were eagerly learning computer skills and English, thanks in part to a number of programs that were put together by the government and non-profits. In addition, he learned that more than 300,000 of Cambodia's 11 million people are disabled, many of them from land mines and polio. But he observed that, even after a 30-year civil war, Cambodians are an extremely optimistic people and are enthusiastic about work. Because technology jobs were almost non-existent, Hockenstein spoke with some colleagues who agreed that they could put together a technology based company which could harness this energy and help Cambodians benefit from the technology revolution.

DDD was launched with \$50,000, half of which was achieved by a grant from the Global Catalyst Foundation (GCF), a fund established by a group of Silicon Valley venture capitalists. In early June 2002, GCF approved another \$45,000 grant to support expansion of the organization. DDD is currently awaiting word about a grant from the Asia Foundation, which will allow them to extend their training to women who have been rescued from the sex trafficking trade. Over the past year, the company has grown from just 10 employees to over 40. Eli Silberzweig is a second-year Sloan MBA student who is interning for DDD this summer in its Cambridge (Massachusetts) office. He heard about the company through one of his classes, Entrepreneurship Without Borders, taught by Professors Simon Johnson and Richard Locke. In this class, founders of companies outside the U.S., primarily in developing countries, are invited to speak. When Hockenstein and Nhev SithSophary, DDD's General Manager who is based in Phnom Penh, presented to the class, Silberzweig was hooked. "I was really impressed that Digital Divide Data has challenged conventional wisdom in two important ways," he explains. "DDD is proving that you can provide the highest quality outsourcing from one of world's poorest countries while prioritizing employees' quality of life. Moreover, DDD shows that you can create a sustainable, technology based business in a nation where most people live on less than a dollar a day."

While DDD can digitize any information, its current work focuses on working for university libraries, digitizing academic journals, out of print books, rare manuscripts, or other scholarly materials;

digitizing newspapers and magazines; and digitizing the vast number of surveys implemented each year by corporations and non-profits.

"The technology revolution doesn't have to widen the gap between rich and poor," says Hockenstein. "We are bridging that digital divide — bringing the benefits of technology to Cambodians by providing valuable services to richer countries. Companies, universities, and NGOs that are struggling to both become more socially responsible and improve their bottom line are finding an opportunity to further both goals by working with us."

Springing from the vision of a recent Sloan graduate, DDD is bringing the technology revolution to some of the most disadvantaged people in one of the world's most disadvantaged countries — and bridging the gap.

For further information contact:
Paul Denning
Co-Director of Communications
MIT Sloan School of Management
E-mail: denning@mit.edu