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2008 Distinguished Achievement Award - Business

John Connolly '74

A student in class once asked, “What can I do with a degree in sociology?” Do you suppose John Connolly or his parents asked that question when he graduated from St. Norbert College with his sociology degree? And John was initially an art history major who studied art in Rome for two years. Besides that, John hadn’t even planned to go to college in the first place; fortunately, a Norbertine priest at his high school in Philadelphia persuaded him to try St. Norbert College.

Now all of this might make one wonder how John could have possibly become president and chief executive officer of M/C Communications, a leading provider of medical education and event management solutions for health care professionals and others around the world. M/C Communications currently operates in more than 15 countries and educates more than 350,000 health care professionals.

Like many St. Norbert students who begin their careers modestly, John began his “rise to the top” by working for Prentice Hall Publications, selling textbooks in and around Green Bay. Within just two years, he had made his district the most profitable in the entire country. He was immediately promoted and, by 1989, he had become the founder and president of Course Technology, a publisher of books and software.

Three years later, after his company was purchased by the Thomson Corporation, John became president and CEO of International Thomson Publishing Media Group, a Thomson subsidiary.

Again, in 1996, John founded and became president and CEO of Mainspring Inc., a provider of advisory services, research and strategic consulting to Fortune 1000 companies. By the time it was purchased in 2001 by IBM, it had evolved from a startup company to a publicly traded one.

During the next three years, John served as global general manager of IBM’s financial services business. There he used his expertise in business strategy and change to lead the integration of IBM’s acquisition of PricewaterhouseCoopers Consulting to IBM’s Business Consulting Services, along the way developing a world-class strategy consulting service.

In 2004 he became president and CEO of Institutional Shareholder Services, the world’s leading provider of proxy voting and corporate governance services. During his three-year tenure in this position, John expanded his company from three to 12 offices worldwide, doubled the firm’s

revenues, accomplished a 250-percent increase in profits, and increased its client base from 700 to 1,700. Since March 2007, John has served in his present position as president and CEO of M/C Communications.

John has been described as having “a strong passion for education”... and as being “an expert in leading companies through change and managing critical industry shifts and regulations, and driving greater value as a result for all stakeholders.”

Certainly John’s steady, success-filled accomplishments in the world of business indicate what a worthy recipient he is of St. Norbert College’s Distinguished Achievement Award in Business. And may he be an inspiration to sociology majors everywhere!

St. Norbert College

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