

Let's make a deal at Softworld

Terrorism cuts attendance, but the focus stays on strategic alliances

Gillian Shaw



It's business as usual for Softworld 2001 as delegates heading to Vancouver from around the world refuse to let the attacks of Sept. 11 get in the way of building a brave new world — electronic version.

While attendance is expected to reach only 500, down from a high of 800 in earlier years, the delegates who do come for the three-day event, starting Nov. 4, will be looking to make deals.

"The focus this year is on strategic alliances, that's the path to happiness," said Sean O'Mahony chief executive officer of Bitmovers (www.bitmovers.com), a Vancouver wireless software startup.

"My personal opinion is that in 10 years from now there will be maybe 25 software companies on the planet — it will be like the car industry and you'll have to make partnerships to survive."

With other conferences having been cancelled in the wake of Sept. 11, O'Mahony said Softworld offers British Columbia companies an opportunity to make international connections without having to put people on planes or pay hotel bills.

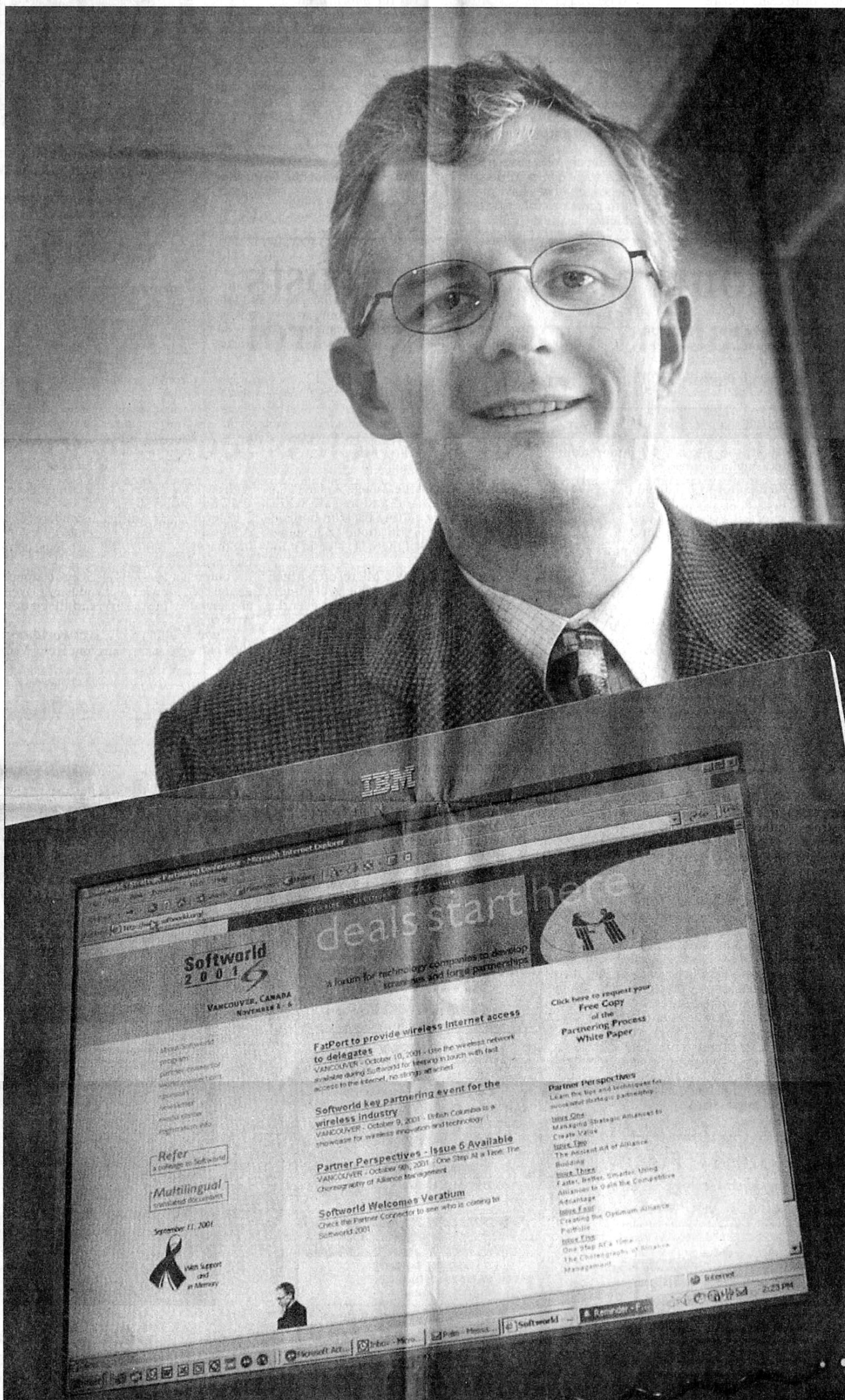
"There are still key people coming and, for the price of entry, you have a chance to meet them," O'Mahony said. "I want to meet the Sun [Microsystems] people — but the chances of me trying to do that on my own and finding the right person is almost zero and getting in front of them is even less."

"But they'll be in Vancouver and with a bit of luck they'll be sitting next to me at one of the events."

O'Mahony is a director and vice-president of the newly formed Wireless Innovation Network of B.C., which makes its debut at Softworld 2001. WIN-BC is an industry group of startups that is collaborating in an effort make deals that would otherwise be too large for them to take on individually.

O'Mahony said there are about 60 startups in the wireless space in B.C., all with fewer than 50 employees and all less than three years old.

The companies have the advantage of being small, nimble and innovative, but they don't have an infrastructure for marketing and sales.



Softworld will be showcasing wireless technology

From D14

When their talents are combined, they can offer a package of hardware, software and services to potential clients.

"If we're doing a pitch, for example, to a company like Telus, invariably we can't do the whole solution," O'Mahony said. "We bring in other companies, we can bid on bigger projects and it spreads out the load."

Softworld will be showcasing wireless technology with a local company, FatPort, providing wireless Internet access for delegates.

Using an 802.11b PCMCIA card with

their laptop or handheld PC, delegates to the conference will be able to access the Internet at speeds up to 11 Mbps.

Conference chairman Derek Spratt said while conference attendance has been affected by the recent terrorist action, numbers are also down in part due to a tighter focus for the conference, now in its tenth year.

"We've actively filtered this," said Spratt, chief strategist at Intrinsyc Software (www.intrinsyc.com).

"We've tried to design this around specific set of metrics and paradigms; it is a bit of a risk to change, especially in a year when there is so much economic turmoil."

But Spratt said the change was made in answer to demand and he said while companies are cutting back on budgets and travel, they'll still attend trade shows and conferences if there is value in it for them.

His own company, a Microsoft partner, has committed to attending every international show Microsoft attends over the next couple of years.

"Some trade shows are actually up in attendance, the specific value proposition will determine if more people will go," he said.

"Everyone we talked to said, 'wouldn't it be better if Softworld was narrowed down, focused a bit,'" Spratt said. "We really want this to be business to business, especially in a difficult economy."

"We want it to be people doing real deals, talking about real world issues. The people who are coming are the ones that negotiate, the ones that do the deals."

"People are not coming here to window-shop."

Next-generation networks are top of the agenda for the conference

with such high-profile local companies as PMC Sierra and Sierra Wireless.

Enterprise computing also a key topic Adobe and Sun Microsystems representing that space along with such local companies as Burntsand.

Conference sessions also centre around digital content with such industry players as Canwest Interactive and Electronic Arts.

Softworld 2001 (www.softworld.org) runs Nov. 4-6 at the Fairmont Hotel Vancouver.

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