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Washington Technology Industry Association

One of the oldest trade associations of its kind in North America, the Washington Technology Industry Association (WTIA) traces its beginnings back to the dawn of this state's nascent software industry in the early 1980s. During the quarter-century that followed, the organization has grown to represent not only that increasingly significant business sector but also the emerging tech realms of webservices, gaming, and interactive media, while integrating long-established advanced manufacturing sectors such as electronic components and medical devices as well. From supporting early stage entrepreneurs earnestly building their first prototypes to representing the political interests of the largest and most established technology companies in the world, the WTIA today boasts more than 1,000 company members; numerous global partners; the production of more than 75 annual programs and events; a satellite office in China; and a history of being involved in important legislation that has helped advanced the industry.

The Old Economy

For many decades the economy of Washington state revolved around a few bedrock industries including timber, mining, fisheries, military bases, agriculture -- and Rainier Beer, which in the early 1900s was the largest industrial enterprise in the entire state of Washington. The first significant local company that relied on advanced engineering and technology was the Boeing Airplane Company, which came to dominate the Seattle economy after the 1920s. But technology of a whole 'nother sort would, in time, come to define the region.

In the early 1980s a revolution in the computer software and telecommunications industries was on the threshold of erupting. Seattle natives, Bill Gates (b. 1955) and Paul Allen (b. 1953) -- computer hobbyists-turned-entrepreneurs -- had established the Northwest's first microcomputer software company when the duo relocated their upstart software company Microsoft Corp. from Albuquerque, New Mexico, to Bellevue on January 1, 1979.

As the software industry began simmering, Paul Suzman (Managing Director, Business Space Resources) pushed to have the Economic Development Council of Puget Sound commission a group of Harvard University MBA students to conduct a study examining which new industries the state should focus on encouraging. The 1983 report ultimately suggested that -- in order to wean itself from the local economy's dependence on Boeing -- "the Puget Sound [area] should likely be the nexus for development software industry and also what has become known as biotech" (Suzman).

A Software Hotbed

By 1984 it was clear that the area was, as *The Seattle Times* put it, "becoming a hotbed of software development, but it didn't have the infrastructure to support the fledgling industry" (Dudley). That's when -- as Bruce Milne (head of Accountants Microsystems, the second-largest micro software company in the region) recently recalled -- there was a shared frustration among his fellow tech CEOs that "we simply didn't have the understanding and infrastructure in the local business community that we needed." Indeed, as he told *Washington CEO* magazine, "The industry didn't have many resources. Diskette duplication, trademark and copyright support, packaging, creative work, funding -- we had to go down to the Bay Area for everything."

It was while talking over drinks at the national Computer Dealer's Exhibition (COMDEX) in Las Vegas, in November of 1983, that Milne and a group of commiserating Northwest-based CEOs envisioned a potential solution: the founding of a nonprofit trade organization that would "support and develop the growth of software firms within Washington" (*Northwest Investment Opportunities*). "Within six months," says Milne, "we had a full blown state trade organization, with two boards (industry and advisory board), a political alliance with the [American Electronics Association] AEA," and a kickoff event (on July 15, 1984) that featured an introduction by Congressman Rod Chandler (b. 1942), a letter of support from Governor Booth Gardner (b. 1936), and a keynote speech by Senator Slade Gorton (b. 1928).

A Solid Foundation for Software

That new organization was the Washington State Software Industry Development Board (WSSIDP) and Milne's first step was to solicit a representative from the seven leading software firms -- including the four largest employers in the industry (Boeing Computer Services, Microsoft, AMI, and MicroRim) -- to serve on an Executive Committee. Next they researched and selected a nonprofit, quasi-governmental, business organization, the Economic Development Partnership for Washington (as led by Bill Grinstein, president), to associate with. That move solidified the WSSIDP's independent credentials and the WSSIDP now had a base in the EDPW offices (1218 3rd Avenue) where it held its initial Executive Committee meeting on March 12, 1984.

The next step was to assemble an advisory board that, as Milne put it, "included 32 industry leaders from everywhere but technology." That this board -- which soon included Suzman -- did *not* consist of software development or marketing bigwigs is significant. By reaching out to numerous and varied service providers -- including major legal, advertising, banking, media, print, and educational organizations -- the WSSIDB gained credibility with the business establishment. Early supporters including Suzman, Chuck Katz (Perkins Coie), accountant Russ Riggins (KPMG), and WSSIDB's first investor, Woody Howse (Cable & Howse Ventures) -- not to mention Seattle's old-guard business elites like John Nordstrom, Herb Bridge (b. 1925), Howard Wright, Norton Clapp, and Eddie Carlson (1911-1990) who all presumably foresaw the economic potential of encouraging the software sector in this state.

Schmoozing and Progressing

As important as it was to build a community to support the business needs of a growing industry, it was clear that education and advocacy were needed at the capitol down in Olympia to help policymakers understand the exploding sector. A particularly notable longtime board member and advocate, Peter Parsons -- a law partner in Weinrich & Gilmore (1980-1987) and Davis Wright Tremaine (since 1988) -- humorously recalled how the group

"realized that the Washington legislature cared little for the needs of the tech community. Why should they? Apples, wood and Boeing had been their primary concerns for many decades. Geeks did not contribute to elections and were rarely heard from. The association mounted a major educational campaign/schmooze festing effort. When Olympia suddenly realized that technology employed more people and paid more taxes than apples, it was the dawning of a new era. I remember the trips to Olympia and the bad wine, but the year is lost to me" (Parsons).

When Milne's 18-month term as chairman of the organization -- which had quickly been renamed the Washington Software Board -- expired, he was succeeded by fellow Executive Committeeman, Wayne Erickson (CEO, Microrim). The WSB began refining its mission, goals, and structure -- and

added Paul Brainerd (b. 1947) -- founder of Seattle's Aldus Corporation (which would soon revolutionize the publishing world with its Pagemaker software program) to its Executive Board.

Software Fair

On June 11, 1988, the group -- which had recast itself as the Washington Software Association under the leadership of chairman, Bob Fulton (president, Generic Software, Inc.) -- sponsored the state's first SoftFair convention at the Seattle Center Exhibition Hall. It featured exhibits touting the products and services of more than 40 up-and-coming tech firms and garnered plenty of media coverage, which helped vastly to raise public awareness about the remarkable growth of the industry.

The Seattle Times reported that at that time "Washington now has the third largest -- and fastest growing -- software industry in the nation. There are more than 450 software companies in this state, generating as much as \$1.5 billion in total sales this year and directly employing more than 7,000 people" (Lalonde, June 6, 1988).

No Longer a Start-up

It was also in 1988 that the association (now relocated to Bothell) incorporated. When Fulton completed his term, Julie Schaeffer (who had hired on as a board staffer in 1986) was hired as executive director. In 1994 Schaeffer resigned and was succeeded by Kathy Wilcox (formerly an attorney with Heller Ehrman), who joined an organization that had grown to a staff of eight and 950 members. At that point in time, Wilcox later recalled, "We were a typical trade association that was barely meeting current expenses We had a profile within our industry, but we didn't have a profile in the community" (Soto).

Over the next several years Wilcox built strong ties to the downtown Seattle business establishment, expanded programs and services for members (including a popular health insurance plan), created a strong base of financial sponsors, and added well respected board representation. Under the leadership of influential board chairs that included John Wall (Wall Data), Bill Baxter (Bsquare), Katherine Schuitemaker (The Resonance Group), and others, the WSA became a serious, well-respected trade association.

As local high-tech industry began to grow and expand with new sectors, a small group of Digital Media companies organized to meet under the banner of the Digital Media Alliance. When the value of joining forces became clear, the organizations came together and in 1995 the association renamed itself the Washington Software & Digital Media Alliance.

The New "E-conomy"

As the Internet exploded on the scene, it was clear that a whole new set of new technology firms were emerging -- companies whose entire product or service was web-based. With yet another name change -- the group became the Washington Software Alliance in 1998 -- efforts were undertaken to stabilize and raise its public visibility. Initially the alliance had supported itself solely on membership dues but in this new era of electronic (or "e-commerce") business transactions, the organization began broadening its income stream to other sources.

Among those were augmented member-services, sponsorship programs, education forums, and in 2000 the publication of a book -- penned by 68 experts in the areas of business law, marketing, finance, sales, intelligence, and global commerce -- *Cracking the New E-conomy: Business Tools for the Entrepreneur*. By the following year the organization had shifted names yet again: this time to the concise, WSA.

Beyond Software

In July 2006 Wilcox retired and the WSA hired a new CEO, tech industry veteran and one-time WSA vice chairman, Ken Myer (b. 1957). Brought aboard in November, Myer -- the former IBM and Active Voice executive and co-founder of Interval Systems -- took over leadership of the WSA, which now counted 13 employees and 900 members.

Myer embarked on a concerted effort to both accelerate the number and types of services available from the organization while evolving the association -- from one that served just the software and information technology industries into one which served a broad set of tech sectors and professionals. In addition to creating a more robust schedule for WSA's education and networking events and ramping up the lobbying of governmental leaders on various national and international issues affecting the industry, Myer also seized on an opportunity to create a unique type of relationship with China.

Bullish on the China Shop

In May 2007 Myer made a momentous announcement at the WSA's 14th annual Investment Forum event: The organization had solidified a partnership with the Shenzhen Software Industries Association (SSIA) and would be opening a sister office in southeast China. The town of Shenzhen was a logical site for such an undertaking given that it was the home of 1,500 software companies -- making it one of the key centers of high-tech industry in that country.

In the years that followed, Myer led five delegations of area tech executives to Shenzhen to establish relations with leaders of the municipal government in an effort to further open doors and create business opportunities. "We are fired up about this new initiative" he enthused (Cook).

WTIA Comes Of Age

It was at the WSA's annual Industry Achievement Awards event on February 7, 2008, that the newest name for the organization was revealed: the Washington Technology Industry Association. This final change was intended to better reflect the broader array of businesses that the group had begun to represent and increasingly *intended* to represent. Twenty months after signaling that ambitious goal, WTIA made good on its promise.

On September 28, 2009, Myer announced that long-in-the-works negotiations had successfully concluded, with the result being that WTIA would immediately become the state presence and national partner for AEA/TechAmerica. This was a merger that resulted in 100 new company members joining the organization from the electronics and device-manufacturing sectors. That move continued a national trend towards the ongoing consolidation of high-tech industry associations. TechAmerica itself -- the "industry's largest advocacy organization" and the "technology industry's only grassroots-to-global advocacy network" -- had come into being with previous mergers of the American Electronics Association, the Cyber Security Industry Alliance, the Government Electronics & Information Technology Association, and the Information Technology Association of America (WTIA, 2009).

Myer's vision of a broader mission for his organization, unveiled in 2008, had now come full circle. "This is a great day for the technology industry in Washington," he said in launching the TechAmerica partnership. "By joining forces with TechAmerica, we're providing our members with access to national programs and influence. We're also broadening the composition of our membership to include more companies in the electronics and device segments of the industry, complementing our

existing strength in software, digital media and telecom. It's fair to say that the WTIA now represents the full spectrum of the technology industry in the state" (WTIA, 2009).

Sources:

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Washington Technology Industry Association logo

Courtesy Washington Technology Industry Association (WTIA)



Washington Software Board logo



Bill Gates addressing Washington Software Association, ca. 1980s

Courtesy Washington Technology Industry Association (WTIA)



Governor Booth Gardner addressing Washington Software Association, ca. 1980s

Courtesy Washington Technology Industry Association (WTIA)



**Washington
Software Alliance**

Washington Software Alliance logo



WSA logo



Washington Software Association headquarters, Bothel, ca. 1988

Courtesy Washington Technology Industry Association (WTIA)



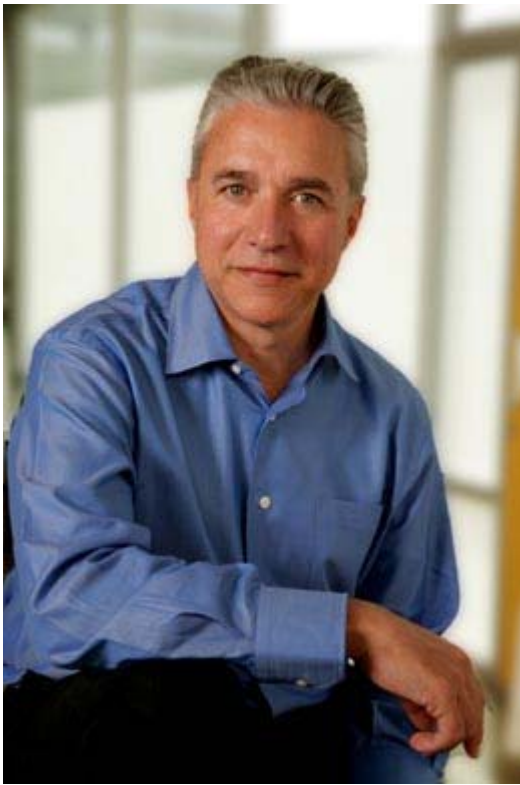
Bob Fulton (l.), Julie Schaeffer, unknown, Washington Software Association headquarters, Bothel, ca. 1988

Courtesy Washington Technology Industry Association (WTIA)



Kathy Wilcox, CEO, Washington Software Association

Courtesy Washington Technology Industry Association



Ken Myer (b. 1957), Washington Technology Industry Association CEO

Courtesy Washington Technology Industry Association

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