

## Positioning for a Flat World

If Columbus had an advisory committee he would probably still be at the dock.  
Arthur Goldberg (1908 - 1990)

If you haven't read *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century* by Tom Friedman, you really should. The thesis of the book is that we've moved into an era in which a number of "flattening" forces are dramatically changing the nature of competition. At the core is the impact of 2+ billion new potential customers and employees onto the world's main economic stage and the critical role that changes in information technology are having in making all this happen.

The book is good reading for anyone in our community struggling with the simultaneous trends of: 1) the explosion of information; and 2) the dramatically increasing stakes of (mis)managing that information.

But that's not why I mention the book – although all of that might be good fodder for a column someday. I mention the book because of what Friedman sees as the key factors of future wealth creation – whether for nations, for companies, for communities or for individuals -- and the relevance that these factors have to AIIM's evolution as an organization.

He sees the three factors that are critical to wealth creation in the flat world as: 1) *infrastructure*; 2) *continuous education*; and 3) *governance*. When I read these I had one of those "AHA" moments and thought, "I'll be darned. That's exactly what we are trying to do at AIIM over the next few years." A couple of points to illustrate this...

**Infrastructure.** Friedman's core point is that investments in infrastructure are critical *right now* to provide a platform for future collaboration and tap into the opportunities represented by the "flat world." Here at AIIM, there are a number of initiatives in the works that might at first glance seem like small potatoes, but I believe will be critical to our evolution. Here are two:

1. As you read this (knock wood, or I'm in big trouble with our Board), there should be a new AIIM web site available at [www.aiim.org](http://www.aiim.org). The new site will dramatically improve the accessibility and timeliness of the information available to our community.
2. Early in 2008, you will see new "social networking" tools launched on the AIIM web site. These will allow members of our community to find each other and learn from each other as never before. Think about the kind of networking that occurs within individual chapter meetings and put it on steroids (sorry Barry) and make it available globally. There's a lot of untapped knowledge out there.

**Continuous Education.** We are convinced that training is our most effective role in finally making this crazy industry take off and achieve the kinds of hockey stick growth curves everyone has forecast for years:

1. We've spent a lot of money over the past two years to build the industry's leading training program. AIIM now provides more records management and content management training than anyone else in the world. In September we launched courses on business process management (BPM) and information organization and access (IOA). In December, we'll launch another new program on E-mail Management. And early next year, a 6<sup>th</sup> program on Enterprise 2.0 technologies.
2. We also launched a new "Market Intelligence" division, headed by industry veterans Carl Frappaolo and Dan Keldsen. Their charter is to thoroughly understand and document the user trends shaping our industry and to document and quantify best practices.

**Governance.** Let's face it, "speed of decision-making" is not a term usually linked to associations. We take great pride in the role that the AIIM Board plays in providing strategic direction for the staff and for the industry, while resisting the temptation to "run" the organization (a common failing of many professional and trade associations). So here are my two last initiatives to position AIIM for the future:

1. A thorough rewrite of the AIIM bylaws and Board policies. I know, I know, not exactly scintillating reading. But necessary.
2. We are convinced that the key to our success lies in dramatically expanding the scope of our community. We need to reach into non-traditional AIIM audiences (vertical organizations and folks that just frankly haven't heard of AIIM or ECM) and drag them in. This will require communications that are much harder hitting and much more focused on the very real pain points that organizations are facing – not on "technology."

So there you have it. I'm not sure Tom Friedman had us in mind when he wrote *The World is Flat*. And I know we didn't have *The World is Flat* in mind when we wrote our strategy. But it's nice to have company.