



### Nicom Presented With Winning Customer Award from Microsoft Corp.

**N**icom recently received an international Winning Customer Award from Microsoft Corp. Awards were presented to 35 companies from around the world and we are one of only two companies in Canada to win an award. The winners were announced at the 2004 Microsoft Worldwide Partner Program Conference, Microsoft's premier annual event for Microsoft Certified Partners, on July 13, 2004 in Toronto, ON. Over 9500 attendees from around the world made the conference a great success. Nicom was chosen for exceeding customer's expectations based on the successful and innovative implementation of a customer solution, based on the Microsoft Platform and using Microsoft's latest technologies.

The Microsoft Certified Partner Program provides partners, you have to qualify to become a partner, with various resources in training and support. Partners also have access to various marketing tools and networking opportunities to assist them with promoting their companies and services and identifying opportunities.

Our winning award submission was based on a Novell Netware migration that we performed for



**Microsoft Partner**  
**2004 AWARD WINNER**

Above: Nicom President David Nicholson and the Head of Business Development, Kera McAllister

Nova Scotia Hearing and Speech Centres (NSHSC), Halifax Office. NSHSC had a server that was reaching the end of its useful lifespan and the staff were concerned with having difficulty getting ongoing support for their system. After reviewing their current system and their needs, we made recommendations for new hardware and a server operating system. After NSHSC accepted our proposal, we implemented the recommendations which included configuring a new Windows 2003 server and migrating services, data and user information from the Novell server to the new Windows server. During the changes, both the old and new servers were accessible by the users so there was very little downtime or disruption to daily tasks. Once completed, NSHSC had an up-to-date system that more than met their needs and has the capacity to be expanded for their future needs.

We were extremely pleased to have received this international recognition from Microsoft. It certainly validates the high level of service that we provide to our customers.

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I recently attended a four day computer security seminar put on by Microsoft for its partners. It covered a wide range of subject matter from client and server operating system security issues through to software development issues. I thought if I would share some of these highlights with you, it may help raise some awareness of security issues that may unknowingly be in or on your network.

On the client computer side, Microsoft stressed that if someone can persuade you to run their software program on your computer, you have individually given them control of your computer. They can do anything on your computer that their program is capable of doing. This applies to viruses that come through e-mail attachments, or web pages that attempt to exploit a security vulnerability on your computer. To help prevent this, Microsoft is emphasizing a three pronged approach to the problem: Use a firewall; ensure the latest security patches are installed; and use an antivirus program with up-to-date virus definitions. Microsoft has attempted to address these three areas in Windows XP Service Pack 2. A new feature called Security Center warns you if the Windows Firewall is turned off, if Automatic Updates is turned off, if a virus scanner is not installed or if the definitions are out of date.

On the server side, the course covered configuration issues both in the Windows Server operating system and server software such as MS Exchange Server and MS SQL Server. The most common security threat does not come from hackers on the outside trying to get in, but from valid network users accessing data to which they are not authorized. Sometimes companies spend

thousands of dollars on expensive firewalls, and sophisticated security policies, but your system can be compromised by using accounts that have a simple system password or no password at all.

Wireless LANs, which are increasing in popularity, are potentially the greatest security vulnerability that can be added to your network. Don't get a false sense of security because you are using WEP on your wireless access points. WEP encryption can be cracked in less than 15 minutes. Treat any and all computers connecting to your network with wireless technology as external clients and use VPN to restrict connection into your network.

The fact that Microsoft presented this course in multiple cities across North America illustrates the increased emphasis they are placing on security in their products. This should indicate to us that we (as users) should be placing greater emphasis on the importance of security on our networks.

### Murphy's Laws of Computing:

A specialist is someone who knows more and more about less and less, until he gets to the point where he knows absolutely everything about nothing.



## New Employees

We are extremely pleased to introduce you to Nicom's two newest employees, Stephen Young and Keith Lowe.

Stephen has a Bachelor of Science and is a graduate of ITI. He has spent the last three years working in Florida.

Keith is also a graduate of ITI and is a Microsoft Certified Professional with many years of software development "under his belt".

We are excited to have these individuals join our software development team.



**M**ost businesses and many home users today, have a permanent high speed connection to the internet. This normally means that other people on the internet may be able to access your system. When a computer is "on the internet", it means that it is vulnerable to attacks by such means as viruses, worms, Trojans and hackers who attempt to take control of your computer or access information on the system. A firewall is a system that is designed to prevent such access to your system or network from an outside source which, in most cases, is the internet.

Firewalls, which can be either a hardware or software solution, help reduce these risks at a very reasonable cost. There are a wide variety of firewalls available today, ranging from free software firewalls for a home system, to purchased firewall products costing thousands of dollars that will protect even very large companies' computer network(s). Free software firewalls, such as ZoneAlarm, will give you some protection but to access all of its features you must purchase the full retail version.

A hardware firewall/router combination is also a good option for home or small office use and can be purchased for under \$100.00. This product gives the added advantage of allowing multiple computers to easily share your high speed internet connection. For larger offices and networks you may require a hardware firewall with more options or a fully featured enterprise software firewall such as the Microsoft Windows ISA Server.

To explain what a firewall does we first have to look at how systems communicate on a network. Programs that communicate over a network or the internet use certain protocols and ports. For example, when you browse the internet, you use something called HTTP on port 80. There are 65,536 ports available for use and the first 1024

ports are the most commonly used; however most systems only need to use a few of these ports. With all of these ports available, it certainly means hackers can find many ways to get into your computer system.

A firewall will "close" those ports that do not have to be made available and allows you to "open" only the ones that you require. You can also configure the direction in which you want information to flow. For example you can configure Port 80 so that you can browse the internet but not allow outside users to view web pages from your system. If you do not host your own web site this would be appropriate but, if you do host your own web site, then you have to configure your firewall to also allow incoming requests on port 80. Different applications will use different ports so you will have to open the appropriate ports on your firewall. As you can see, this can be quite a technical task to take on yourself. Luckily, there are experts available at Nicom that you can call upon for help.

If your system cannot be found on the internet you will be at a much lower risk for attacks. By using a utility, called ping, hackers can try to reach an internet address or a domain name and will often get a reply back from the computer which, in effect, says "I am here". Getting this reply back verifies that they have found a valid address. Most firewalls can be configured so that they do not respond to ping requests, thus making your system just a little more difficult for hackers to find.

So, how safe is your system? There are utilities available that will test your system and report what ports you have open. One popular one is ShieldsUP which does a free online scan of the ports being used on your system and reports back to you. You can try it out at [www.grc.com](http://www.grc.com).

### Murphy's Laws of Computing:

No matter what goes wrong with your carefully planned database system, there's always someone who says they knew it would.



**A**s business owners, we go to a lot of trouble to define the perfect domain name (the www address) for our companies and then use this domain name as a major part of our "branding". In today's technological age, Domain Names are seen as our Store Front Windows, and people typically window shop before entering our stores. If we were to lose this domain name, the cost to the business could be very substantial, not to mention extremely embarrassing. Lose my domain name - how could this happen?

Forgetting to renew your domain name registration is a very risky thing to do. Believe it or not, there are unscrupulous companies out there that are just waiting to grab your domain name as soon as it becomes available. Why would they do this? Because if they are able to grab a Domain Name that is linked to a business, they are pretty much guaranteed that the company will pay them top dollar to get their Domain Name back.

There are many organizations (registrars) that provide domain name registration services. Keeping track of your registrar and your anniversary date are very important, yet for some reason, seem to be the hardest things to remember.

An excellent solution to keeping your 'Store Front Window' and not having to 'move' by changing your web address is to write your renewal date in your day planner, set it up in your electronic calendar, tell friends. Most importantly, read the emails from your registrar. Usually the registrars send emails 3 months in advance of your anniversary date, emails that many of us delete assuming they are spam!

Don't risk losing your Domain Name - 'Your Store Front Window' - to a buyer that is only interested in selling it back to you at a much higher price!



## About Nicom Ltd.

**N**icom has been helping organizations become more efficient through the use of information technology since 1982. We provide all the services required to effectively define and implement these technologies for organizations.

### Services We Offer:

#### IT Consulting

- Strategic Planning
- Requirement Analysis

#### Software Development

- Custom Database Applications & Systems
- System Integration

#### Technical Support

- Ongoing Maintenance & Support
- Procurement, Installations & Repairs

#### Web Design & Development

- Corporate Website Design
- e-Business & e-Commerce

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Networking Infrastructure Solutions

