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## IT Management

### Doing Their Part

By Eileen Feretic  
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**Consider what our world would be like without the people responsible for today's technology.**

When asked to name individuals who have made a difference in the world, many people mention volunteers in humanitarian groups such as the Peace Corps, Habitat for Humanity or Doctors Without Borders. Some cite health care workers, teachers, police officers, fire fighters, or government and religious leaders who have worked to make the world a better place.

Not many of us are likely to include IT leaders in this august group. But maybe we should rethink that. Consider what our world would be like today without the people responsible for all the technology advances we've come to take for granted.

Suppose Vint Cerf and Robert Kahn hadn't designed the TCP/IP protocols and basic architecture of the Internet. And what if Tim Berners-Lee hadn't developed the World Wide Web [Web server](#) and client? The innovations of these individuals—and many others in our industry—have resulted in innumerable benefits to people around the world.

For one thing, [information technology](#) and the Web enable us to deal effectively with global problems that require vast computing power and the collaboration of experts in various parts of the world—challenges that would be hard to manage without IT. Global warming is a good example.

A report produced in 2006 by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, "The Climate Collaborator: Harnessing Collective Intelligence to Address Climate Change Issues," stated: "Like nothing else, dealing with climate change calls upon us to engage in effective collective decision making on a global scale. ... Building upon the foundation of the Internet, it is now becoming possible to harness the collective intelligence of thousands of people around the world to address this and other critical systemic problems."

Health care is another area in which IT advances play a major role. The use of mobile technology and electronic health records is improving diagnoses and treatments, enhancing patient privacy, bringing health care to remote areas and, in many cases, reducing costs. And potential benefits are huge.

In "Prescription for Change," published in The Wall Street Journal in October, Amar Gupta wrote: "IT security will eventually meet the expectations of the health care industry. ... When it does, powerful IT networks crisscrossing the globe will change the way much of health care is delivered." Gupta wrote that the advantages will include "more efficient health care at the most cost-effective rates," "more medical records to be transferred swiftly and securely," and the ability of health care professionals and their patients to "find authoritative and up-to-date information on every specialty online."

In the public sector, think about how IT advances have helped federal, state and local governments provide better service to their constituents—many times, at less cost. All of us have benefited from the ability to conduct government transactions online: applying for various licenses, checking local regulations, requesting assistance and doing our taxes.

One government standout is Teri Takai, California's CIO. When she was the director of IT for Michigan, Takai merged the state's IT into one department, saving taxpayers about \$100 million. Clearly, she has a lot of colleagues in this quest to improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of government through the use of IT.

When it comes to national security, there are numerous individuals who promote the use of technology to safeguard our country. These include Howard Schmidt, formerly

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chairman of the President's Critical Infrastructure Protection Board, and Rear Admiral Elizabeth Hight, vice director of the Defense Information Systems Agency, where she provides the president and military with global Internet-centric solutions.

Education is another industry in which IT leaders have made substantial contributions. Technology enables collaborative research on a global basis, lets students work on laptops and PDAs, provides digital textbooks and offers online courses.

Even nonprofits are profiting from advances in technology. Research has shown that electronic fundraising increases the number and size of contributions these organizations receive.

Technology has improved our quality of life in many ways, and numerous people have made IT viable and available. Our list of 50 of these individuals, developed by Baseline's readers and editors, is admittedly incomplete. (See "[50 Who Make a Difference](#)") But the story does illustrate the vital role played by technology creators, leaders and evangelists.

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