

Technology



Richard N. Velotta also covers tourism, gaming and small business for In Business Las Vegas and the Las Vegas Sun.

RICHARD N. VELOTTA

IT entrepreneur thrives amid health care overhaul debate

Las Vegas small-business man Russell Suzuki has had a great run in the past few months.

The president and CEO of Falcon Technologies was recognized by the 300-member Asian Chamber of Commerce for his work, which included volunteering his technological expertise to the organization.

Then, he was selected 2009 Entrepreneur of the Year by the Technology Business Alliance of Nevada.

Finally, he was among the honorees of In Business Las Vegas' Nevada Entrepreneur Awards for 2009.

You may have even seen him interviewed on television recently because he is the right guy in the right place for one of the key political issues of the day: health care reform.

"You might say I'm in the middle of the perfect storm," said Suzuki, who went to high school in Las Vegas before becoming a hospital administrator at Nellis Air Force Base.

He didn't fully develop the idea for what would become the key to his business until he served a tour at Los Angeles Air Force Base, a space and missile systems center just south of Los Angeles International Airport.

There, he helped convert thousands of paper medical records to computer records. Little did he know that computerizing medical records was going to be a key piece of President Barack Obama's plan to overhaul health care and that stimulus funds would be made available to medical practitioners to upgrade their record-keeping.

That's where Falcon Technology comes in.

When Suzuki founded Falcon in August 2005, it was just he and his wife, who he met while at Cimarron-Memorial High School.

"I was lucky because she has a great background in accounting and human resources, and I was good at providing tech support and that's how it started," he said.

But a big plus was that he spoke the language of the medical community, and between his tech expertise and knowing the needs of medical professionals, he was in the perfect place to position Falcon to handle the IT needs of that industry.

With technology affording the opportunity to locate almost anywhere, Suzuki chose Las Vegas because of his family ties. Once he developed a reputation for being able to connect the medical dots, Falcon grew from a mom-and-pop operation to a small business, mostly through referrals.

He worked closely with an authorized reseller of Allscripts MyWay software and also works closely with major players Dell, Hewlett-Packard, IBM/Lenovo, Switchvox, Rhino Equipment and Digium to provide hardware for clients.

Today he has eight full-time employees and works with several contractors. He has only a handful of Las Vegas clients, but he works with health care organizations in California, Utah, Arizona and Montana.

Half to three-quarters of his customers are doctors.

The company projected revenue of \$1 million in 2009, and he expects business to grow by 10 percent to 20 percent next year.

Suzuki says the future is bright for his company since recent surveys indicate there aren't enough health care IT experts available to service demand. In addition, only

about 15 percent of the industry has converted from paper to computerized records.

So why is it so important to convert paper records to computerized versions? Anyone who has worked with databases with thousands of entries knows.

"Patient safety is the biggest reason for the need because there are so many inefficiencies built into paper record-keeping,"

Suzuki said. "There are more people killed by preventable medical errors than car accidents or breast cancer each year."

Electronic record-keeping enables easier tracking of drug and allergy interactions and can speed the transmission of laboratory results and X-rays to doctors.

"The real improvement is that emergency-room doctors can pull up key informa-

tion on a computer and everything is there for them," Suzuki said.

Now that Falcon is in the public eye, Suzuki gets to answer questions from people like me about what he thinks about Las Vegas' prospects for attracting more tech jobs and diversifying the economy.

SEE VELOTTA PAGE 12

VELOTTA

FROM PAGE 11

He hasn't had much opportunity to sell Las Vegas to colleagues, but he suggests that economic development leaders point out that the recession has made commercial property as affordable as it has been for years and that now is a great time to get into a market that eventually will rebound.

He's also high on networking through chambers of commerce. Suzuki can't say enough good things about how contacts within the Asian chamber has helped him. He's also a member of the Latin Chamber of Commerce in Las Vegas.

Technology Business Alliance of Nevada, incidentally, passed out eight other awards at a recent luncheon. The technology CIO of the year is David Farlin of Boyd Gaming; the technology company of year is zappos.com; the technology transplant of the year, FDM4 America; technology educator of the year, Dr. Mitchell Forman, Touro University; technology startup of the year, I Velocity; technology service company of the year, Smart City Networks; green developer-design firm, Tate Snyder Kimsey Architects; and inducted into the TechNevada Hall of Fame, Tony Hsieh of zappos.com.

Preview speakers

Speaking of chambers of commerce, the Las Vegas Chamber has announced its slate of speakers for Preview Las Vegas 2010, one of the largest annual forecasting events in the city.

This year's theme is "Engage, Evolve & Emerge."

Among the speakers will be MGM Mirage Chairman Jim Murren, who likely will get plenty of ink and airtime in the weeks ahead of the opening of CityCenter. There are differing opinions about what the opening means for Las Vegas, but one thing that can't be denied is that its success or failure will dictate how fast Southern Nevada recovers from the recession.

Murren is expected to share his vision of Las Vegas and the outlook for the city's largest employer.

Also speaking will be economist and best-selling author Steven Levitt, who wrote "SuperFreakonomics: Global Cooling, Patriotic Prostitutes, and Why Suicide Bombers Should Buy Life Insurance." He will share his views on unconventional thinking in an unconventional world — which should fit Las Vegas nicely.

Frequent Preview presenters Rossi Ralenkotter, president and CEO of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors

Authority, and Jeremy Aguero, principal with trend-watching Applied Analysis in Las Vegas, also are on the slate. The program will be emceed by Punam Mathur, vice president of human resources for NV Energy.

Preview is scheduled Jan. 28 at the Thomas & Mack Center and Cox Pavilion at UNLV with the program running from 8 a.m. to noon. Tickets are \$60 for chamber members and \$80 for nonmembers.

California discounts

The sluggish economy has produced some remarkable deals for consumers, and locally we've seen how resorts are deeply discounting to get people through the door.

But there's no shortage of competition from other states and this deal from theme-park operator Six Flags recently caught my attention.

The company, which operates Six Flags Magic Mountain in Valencia, Calif., has introduced Play Pass, which at \$55 is less than the usual daily cost of admission. But to get repeat business, Play Pass is good for all of 2010. That means if you buy Play Pass, available online or at the park, you can return throughout the year, including for special events such as concerts and the October Fright Fest before Halloween. There are no blackout dates.

Play Pass also is good for admission to other Six Flags parks across the country near San Francisco, Chicago and Atlanta.

Magic Mountain, incidentally, is adding a new roller coaster, Terminator Salvation: The Ride, opening in early summer. It will bring the number of coasters in the Southern California park to 17.

Readers like local properties

Conde Nast Traveler magazine has an annual readers choice edition in which around 25,000 of the magazine's readers weigh in with their favorite destinations worldwide.

Las Vegas got a few mentions in several categories in the survey conducted this year.

No Las Vegas property made the list of the top 100 hotels in the world (headed by the Four Seasons Tented Camp Golden Triangle in Chiang Rai, Thailand.) But the Four Seasons Las Vegas ranked No. 18 in the top 100 hotels in the United States. Bellagio was No. 20, Venetian was No. 38 and Encore was tied for No. 44.

In the list of the top 75 mainland U.S. resorts, Wynn Las Vegas was tied for No. 8, followed by Palazzo, tied for No. 10. Ritz-Carlton Lake Las Vegas was tied for No. 70.

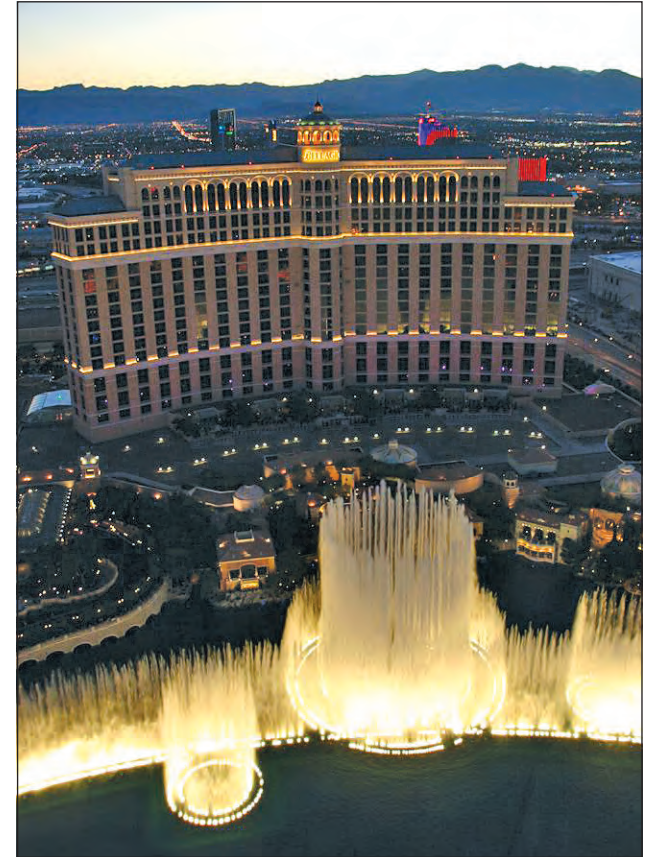


PHOTO BY RICHARD N. VELOTTA

Hot property: *Bellagio ranked No. 20 in Conde Nast Traveler's list of top 100 hotels in the United States.*

Las Vegas failed to crack the top 10 U.S. cities, according to Conde Nast readers, with the top 10 being San Francisco; Charleston, S.C.; Santa Fe, N.M.; New York; Chicago; Honolulu; Carmel, Calif.; Savannah, Ga.; San Diego; and Boston.

On the transportation side, only two of the readers' top 10 domestic airlines don't have service to McCarran International Airport. That list was topped by Virgin America, followed by JetBlue, Midwest, WestJet, Frontier, Alaska, Continental, USA 3000 (which doesn't fly here), ExpressJet (which doesn't fly here) and Southwest. International carriers that have a presence in Las Vegas include Virgin Atlantic (tied for No. 3) and Korean Air (No. 8).