



# The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

## Final Copy of Case Study

**YEAR:**  
*2012*

**STATUS:**  
*Laureate*

**Organization:**  
ITKAN

**Organization URL:**  
<http://www.itkan.org>

**Project Name:**  
ITKAN - Information Technology Knowledge Abilities Network

**What social/humanitarian issue was the project designed to address? What specific metrics did you use to measure the project's success?**

ITKAN was conceived and launched as a professional development and networking entity to support the passion, growth and success of interested students, new professionals and transitioning professionals with disabilities into technology careers. There continues to be a great disparity even at labor-force level (those with the skills and interest in a career) between general population candidates and those with disabilities (app. 16% vs. 9% currently). ITKAN also engages the business/employer and career support communities in its efforts to expose and address this challenge more broadly. In addressing our mission and vision, we meet monthly at the Microsoft Technology Center in Chicago, feature subject matter experts presenting on cutting-edge technology and applications, collaborate with like-minded organizations (i.c. stars, Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago Business TEAM), establish innovative technology team projects that engage members in the passionate exploration of knowledge and its application to real-world challenges (see Appendix #2 Fuel Call - a collaboration between MTC and SPR, linked via ITKAN), develop technology curricula as a channel for career entry and development into the IT field, and support this candidate pool as a strategic base of the labor force.

**Please describe the technologies used and how those technologies were deployed in an innovative way. Also, please include any technical or other challenges that were overcome for the successful implementation of the project.**

ITKAN has its roots with the Illinois Technology Association (ITA) and is directly affiliated with the Illinois Technology Foundation, the ITA's not-for-profit academic arm that supports students' interest in technology and its study. As such, all members have an inherent appreciation for, and interest in, better understanding and applying current and developing technologies to their career aspirations. We are currently launching our site, [www.itkan.org](http://www.itkan.org), and have explored authoring tools and applications with an interest on overall accessibility. The exploration of, and insight into, evolving technologies is a cornerstone of ITKAN. We have featured SMEs on many topics. Featured subject matter experts present on leading-edge and growing applications, technologies and processes within IT: Ajax; Web 2.0; SharePoint for the Enterprise; Windows 7 Mobile; business/social media tools; Kinect (see Appendix #1 from our SME presentation on Kinect); SAP Business Objects functionality. Currently members are working on the development of technology in both the mobile platform and Kinect space.

**Please list the specific humanitarian benefits the project has yielded so far.**

Through the ongoing development of ITKAN as a recognized resource and channel in the community for career development, network growth and mentoring, we are impacting the perception of candidates with disabilities into the technology sector. Our aspiration is to become recognized as a standard-bearer for passionate, career-minded candidates and professionals whose disabilities support rather than detract from their IT career aspirations. ITKAN members are engaged with Microsoft Technology Center staff in critical exploration of several developing technologies in the mobile and commercial platforms (Kinect, Windows Mobile), looking at innovative ways that they can impact the lives of users with disabilities. Recent examples are a facilitated discussion on the evolving face of mobile technologies and their advantages for and challenges to the disability community -- or specific segments of the community. Another is a project to utilize the technology of Kinect to improve how current screen reader technology supports the navigation of Internet pages and application documents for persons with severe vision loss to blindness. Since our launch in February 2008 -- and our transition to the Microsoft Technology Center in Chicago in the fall of 2010 -- ITKAN has made a significant impact in the discussion of disability and career in the region. Further, we have directly impacted the career opportunities of members and continue to evolve in both our mission and impact.

**Please provide the best example of how the project has benefited a specific individual, enterprise or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work.**

"As Chairman of the Illinois Technology Foundation I am honored that we are helping to support the success of innovative, career-minded students and professionals with disabilities through our support of ITKAN. This organization has been a valuable influence on opportunity in the tech sector for this undervalued segment of our workforce." - Bill Waas, Chairman, ITF. "ITKAN goes well beyond benefiting a specific individual or even a group of individuals. Society itself benefits, not by assisting our members as individuals, but by unleashing their significant talents into the business world. Organizations that are lucky enough to take on our members will reap the rewards of their innovative mindsets and unique perspectives." - Adam Hecktman, Director, MTC Chicago. "ITKAN is quite beneficial in providing and previewing the latest in assistive technology for people with disabilities. ITKAN provides useful demonstrations of new products, and allows the staff to participate in these demos. I also think that the business presentations are fascinating. I had the opportunity to try out an iPad, and I thought it would work well for me. I participated in a discussion in which each of us with disabilities suggested ways to make technology devices more accessible or properly adapted for the individual with disabilities. We all share and brainstorm, which is great!" - Marc Stein, member. "My participation in ITKAN has helped me to grow professionally through exposing me to new technologies, mentoring and opportunity. Specifically,

I have begun to learn SAP business objects and to train others in its application through our affiliate, SAPKAN." - Brian Aardsma, ITKAN Membership Committee Co-chair.