Staying Connected with University of Memphis

by Kevin Morgan

The HSIA/Stay Connected team recently concluded a 5-month project with the University of Memphis. The team had been working with the MIS3770 System Analysis Methods undergraduate level MIS course to design a functional High Speed Internet product. The students were charged with obtaining business and technical requirements from the Hilton team and developing what they thought would be the best solution for Hilton.

Course instructor Dr. Brian Janz and Kevin Morgan came up with the idea when discussing future technology as it relates to the internet. After a few months of planning, the course kicked off in August 2007 with a formal presentation to the students about Hilton Hotels and our business needs. Darrell DeRosia from Network Engineering, Christy Tweddle from HSIA Account Management, Tiffany Martin from Stay Connected Customer Care, and Kevin Morgan came together to work with the students throughout the course. They did presentations relevant to their specific areas to help the students gather data, participated in group discussions, and answered questions in group study sessions.

“I found great reward in working with the students from the opposite side of the business requirements. After all, we had the solution defined, so talking to the students about the product requirements posed an interesting challenge to the teams,” stated Darrell DeRosia, Lead Network Engineer for the HSIA Product.

Dr. Janz said of the program, “One of the challenges university professors face in the business classroom today is trying to make what we teach as real as possible for our students. The willingness of the Hilton management team to meet with my students throughout the semester and share with them their company’s information, challenges, and perspectives is highly unusual and resulted in a true win-win for Hilton and the University of Memphis. The students gained immensely from being able to work on Hilton’s high-speed Internet initiative, and their project presentations to the Hilton Executive Team really helped them develop professionally. Hilton was able to review the work of over 25 undergrads and identified more than a few students that would be potential candidates for internships or permanent positions. We all left with a greater appreciation of Hilton’s mission and value proposition for their customers, and I’d venture to say that we all became better Hilton customers for it.”

For the project, each of the five-person student teams produced executive summaries, and PowerPoint presentations. The Stay Connected team hosted the entire class in the Hilton Conference Room at the Audubon Woods campus in Memphis where each team presented their proposal to a panel of advisors. Involved in the panel were John Flack, VP of Hotel Broadband; Jana Branch, Director of Hotel Broadband; David Byerly, Senior Director of OnQ Global Support; contractor Art Becker; the HSIA team; and the University Project team.

“The project was an excellent demonstration of how the Stay Connected team and University were able to bridge the gap in learning to be involved at all levels. This is an excellent opportunity for getting the students involved, giving them firsthand experience on a real world problem, in a real world situation. I was extremely proud of our team and how they were able to reach out to the community at this level,” stated John Flack.