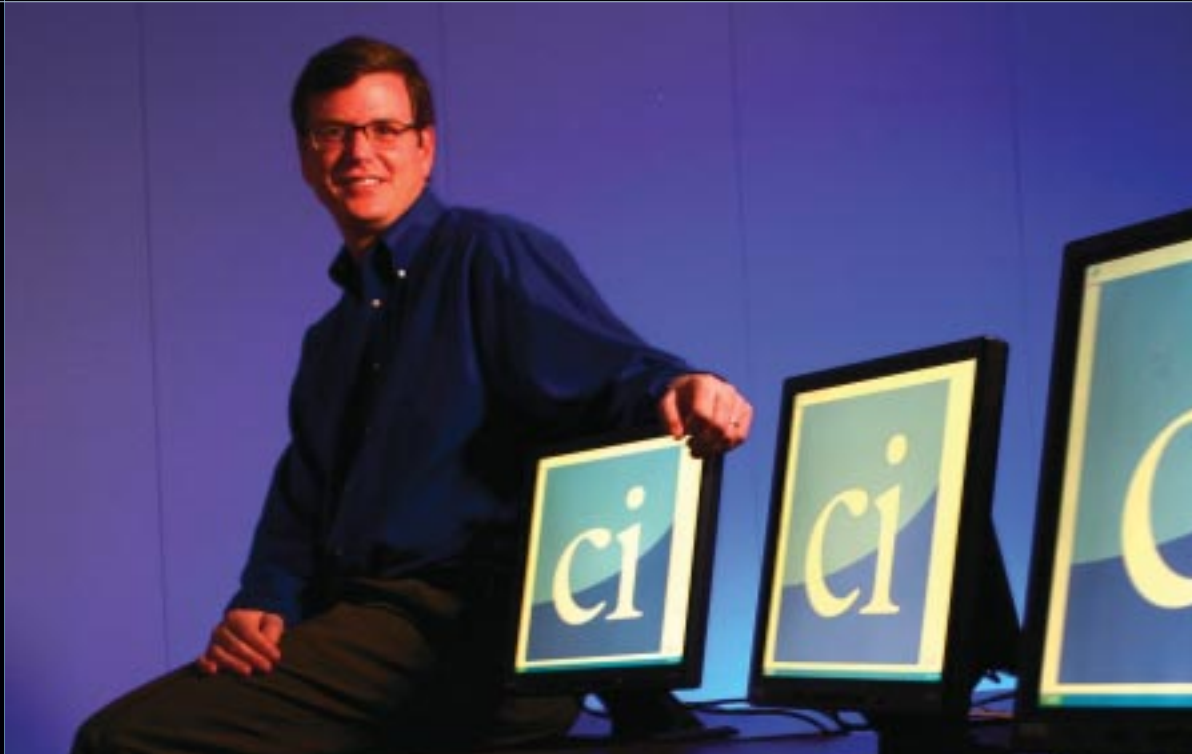


Channeled INTELLIGENCE

By Rafaela Ellis E-COMMERCE GURU ROB WIGHT

**"I'm not bragging when I say we literally are running e-commerce out of Central Florida for the world. We are the only ones doing this and we are right here."
— Rob Wight**



To comprehend Rob Wight's success as an e-commerce guru, it helps to know that he began his career as a skier. Who better to launch an Internet start-up in the wake of the dot-com bust than a guy who thrives on speed, danger and unpredictable changes in climate?

"It's the competition of ski racing that taught me a lot of basic truths," says Wight, founder and CEO of Channel Intelligence, Inc., a full-service, e-commerce marketing firm based in Celebration that sold \$2 billion in services last year. "Any pro athlete will tell you that the difference between winning and losing a race is hundredths of a second, so you have to put in the hard work up front to get good at what you do."

For Wight — a Saginaw, Mich., native whose career has included stints at Wang Labs and Microsoft — winning his race has meant spending more than two years developing a unique software system that links manufacturing clients to dealers and consumers with just a few quick clicks of a mouse.

By 2001, when Wight was ready to sell his one-of-a-kind product, he had little trouble convincing major manu-

facturers — including Kodak, Hewlett-Packard, Canon, and even his old employer, Microsoft — to entrust their Web marketing to Channel Intelligence.

"When everyone talks about e-commerce, they mean buying stuff on the Web," Wight says. "Our business is the business of helping the manufacturer to help the consumer buy their product. We're the middle man. What we allow [companies] to do is place a button on the page where you're looking at a particular product. When you click on that button, up pops a list of dealers

ICE



PHOTO BY CHARLES HODGES

problem manufacturers had that didn't used to exist: people wanting to know exactly where to buy their product," Wight explains.

The concept was so innovative that it spawned a cadre of competitors, most of whom Channel Intelligence quickly dispatched.

"We have never lost a piece of business to anyone," Wight says. "It's because of the fact that we built the technology first, instead of rushing into the market. We took our time, we innovated, and that created a foundation that other [companies] didn't have."

Wight chose Central Florida as his hub of operations for two reasons: familiarity and climate. As a sales and marketing executive in the 1980s, Wight spent 10 years at Orlando's Maynard Electronics before moving to Colorado and then Washington State in a series of job changes. When doctors told him the Seattle weather was exacerbating his young son's severe ear infections, he made a decision to move his family south.

"We could have moved to Los Angeles, Arizona or Texas, but Florida was very much home for us, so we moved to Orlando in the summer of 1998," says Wight, whose family now includes his wife and three children, ages 11, 7 and 2.

Wight says Central Florida also was a perfect match for a company with Channel Intelligence's ambitions.

"What other part of the country can say that, when they create something, it becomes the standard of what is done?" Wight asks. "For tourism in Florida, we are *the* place that people come. Think about the space coast —

we aren't a place where rockets are sent off the earth, we are *the* place."

The same is true for e-commerce.

"I'm not bragging when I say we literally are running e-commerce out of Central Florida for the world," he says. "We are the only ones doing this, and we are right here."


Wight says the quality of the local workforce has also had a hand in making Orlando the new high tech Mecca.

"One of the great things that we need in this business is smart, dedicated people," he says. "If you look at the 36 people we have in the company today, we've only brought in two people from outside [the Central Florida area]."

With the company poised to add some 80 jobs this year, and with a five-year plan calling for a total of 1,500 employees, Wight expects he'll have to cast a wider net to attract the quality of worker he needs. But, he says, Channel Intelligence's unique corporate structure should help in recruiting.

"Do senior people have to have more room because they're more important? It doesn't make any sense," he says. Instead, every employee at Channel Intelligence, regardless of title, has an identical office with identical furniture and equipment.

Perhaps the greatest contributor to Channel Intelligence's success, however, is Wight's tireless drive and fast-forward mentality.

"This is truly what I enjoy doing, innovating in the software industry," he says. "I have family, we go to the beach, we do all the fun things we can do in Central Florida, but I would say my passion is this." 

who have that product in stock right now, so you know what physical store has that product."

In other words, manufacturers don't have to hire programmers to create links between their Web sites and those of the dealers who carry their products; Channel Intelligence does it for them, using a sophisticated computer program that interlinks a client's home page to the pages of every distributor and retailer who sells their product.

"Our service, when we launched it two years ago, finally resolved the one