

WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE

I INNOVATOR OF THE YEAR

James Baum '86



Innovation has become the mantra of our time, but few understand that innovation goes beyond invention. James Baum, you are one of the few. From your early days taking apart computers, to your remarkable career dismantling whole industries and rebuilding them smarter and stronger, you not only solve problems, but seek a future yet to be imagined.

Your fascination with how things work first emerged in your childhood. You have described yourself as “one of those kids who took things apart and put them back together.” An early-model Apple computer, brought home by your father, quickly became the apple of your eye. You taught yourself programming languages and wrote your own computer games. Your innovative and entrepreneurial nature was also evident in the tree-cutting business you launched as a teenager.

You came to WPI in the early 1980s, when most software programs were still punched out on cards for computers the size of conference rooms. It was here that you came to understand the link between engineering and computers, and learned firsthand how your knowledge and skills could be used to solve problems of consequence.

Since graduating, you have gone far beyond creative problem solving to playing a pivotal role in launching a technological revolution. At Parametric Technology Corporation, your work on the Windchill and ProEngineer systems changed the product development process for thousands of discrete manufacturing companies all over the globe. You served as chief operating officer at Endeca, a software company that ushered in the age of online

shopping, now the backbone of today’s global marketplace. Netezza Corporation has revolutionized how organizations approach data warehousing and analytics. As its president and CEO, you led Netezza through 14 quarters of growth, ultimately driving the acquisition of Netezza by IBM in what was dubbed “the most disruptive acquisition of 2010” by Information Week.

Now, as CEO of an innovative new company in robotics, you are leading the development of new products, processes, and systems that will change yet another industry. You passionately believe that innovation first and foremost depends on the “human element.” In each of your ventures, you have established the culture and built a team that enabled innovation to thrive. Without the many people involved in each of these ventures whose commitments and behaviors were inspired by a culture of innovation, not one of the ventures would have been a success. Your innovative and entrepreneurial spirit is evident not only in your business success, but also in your personal life—as an avid pilot, skier, and father.

James Baum, you have proven time and again your ability to recognize a powerful new technology and figure out how to realize its potential. Your work has transformed the way businesses do business and, in many ways, some of the fundamental underpinnings of the global economy. You are an inspiration to our students and you bring pride to the entire WPI community. We are honored to recognize you as the 2011 WPI Innovator of the Year.

Dean, WPI School of Business

President, WPI

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