> 66 I'm in a field that I love, in the most exciting time in that field ever. Plus, I don't report to a board or shareholders. 99

The Visionary
Jeff Philipp
President, SSI Micro, Yellowknife

Jeff Philipp's fascination with computers goes back to his high school years in Fort Providence in the early 1980s. He remembers working with cassette tapes and 5 ¼ inch floppy discs, "then if you were really lucky you could work on the big Apple Lisa," he says, still with boyish enthusiasm.

That precocious child is now at the head of SSI Micro, a global leader in remote and rural connectivity. It is the largest Internet service provider in the North, serving more than 60 communities in Nunavut and the NWT, and has taken its talents to projects around the world.

Philipp's passion comes from both the technology and the applications. "It's like Christmas every day for me," he says. "I'm in a field that I love, in the most exciting time in that field ever. Plus, I don't report to a board or shareholders."

He envisions a near-term future where we wave our cellphones at the cash register to pay the bill, then go home and drop it in a docking station hooked up to a screen and a keyboard and there's our computer. Ultimately, the phone (really a computer on which voice is one of the applications) will plug directly into your TV. "You won't even need a computer anymore," he says. "Households will buy a $400 TV and that is their computer."

His enthusiasm is tempered by the growing digital divide he sees facing the North, particularly the dozens of communities served by satellite. "You can only push so much capacity up over a satellite," he says. "You can't get it at a reasonable price, and your price does not get cheaper with volume to the level that it would on a terrestrial system."

The problem will only be compounded when all the technology is converged, as in the example above. Most of the converged technology is designed for large markets and SSI operates in a lot of places that max out at fewer than 300 subscribers. It will mean a lot of work for his company. "What we've been good at is finding those solutions that scale down into these markets," says Philipp. "That typically means we can buy the hardware, but the glue that binds it together is the software we write."