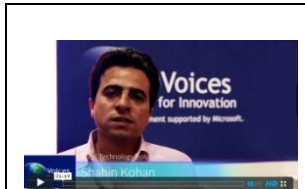


## VFI Members Meet with Elected Officials on Capitol Hill

During the Microsoft Worldwide Partner Conference, 107 executive members of Voices for Innovation went to Capitol Hill to meet with their U.S. Representatives and staff.

These meetings gave VFI members the opportunity to highlight the benefits that technology is providing around the nation—and to raise IT policy and business issues that mattered most to them.



Video: Shahin Kohan highlights key policy issues impacting his company.



Video: Ken Meyer discusses the need for fair competition.

“A great experience,” said Shahin Kohan, CEO of Focal Technology Solutions in Los Angeles, summarizing his one-hour meeting with U.S. Representative Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA) and her chief of staff. “They were very responsive and understood the issues I discussed.”

Ken Meyer, Services Manager of Solbrekk Business Technology Solutions, located in the Minneapolis area, echoed these sentiments. He said that Representative Keith Ellison (D-MN) was “very friendly” in their meeting. “He sat beside me, not behind his desk, for our one-on-one meeting, and his assistant took careful notes. I really feel that I have his ear.”

Kohan and Meyer both explained to their Representatives what their companies do and how they serve their communities.

Focal Technology is an ISV that primarily serves the fashion industry. The company’s AIMS (Apparel Information Management System) software has more than 7,000 users, mostly in the U.S. but also in several other countries.

Solbrekk is a diversified solutions provider offering a range of services such as virtualization, hosting, and document management to SMBs in a range of verticals. Meyer explained to Rep. Ellison that his 40+ employee company serves about 400 customers, averaging 30 employees each. “We’re touching about 12,000 people and we’re helping these businesses grow and increase employment.”

Meyer told Rep. Ellison that the technology sector succeeds and innovates when choice is preserved in the marketplace. Restrictive legislation, on the other hand, would pose threats to IT innovation and flexibility. Intrigued, Rep. Ellison asked for a specific example.

Meyer was ready to illustrate his point. “I told him about a state proposal here in Minnesota a few years ago that would’ve restricted file formats. Even though Rep. Ellison was a member of the Minnesota State Legislature at the time, he had never heard about the proposal. He said that in the future I should email him about specific legislation to help bring him up to speed on technology issues.”

“We don’t have the resources to defend ourselves against piracy internationally.” – Shahin Kohan, CEO, Focal Technology Solutions

In his Capitol Hill meeting, Shahin Kohan focused on another critical IT sector issue: software piracy. Focal Technology has a thriving U.S. business, but the company is wary of selling its software in countries with weak intellectual property (IP) protections.

“I told my Representative that the first copy of our software that we sell in China will be our last,” said Kohan, citing significant software piracy there and in other nations. “We don’t have the resources to defend ourselves against piracy internationally.”

Interestingly, Kohan’s customers—members of the fashion industry—face similar challenges. “The garment industry itself has brand-name products and copyright-protected fabric patterns, but they can’t get IP protection everywhere.”

Kohan said that Rep. Roybal-Allard took a keen interest in the challenges posed by piracy, with the recognition that both the software and fashion industries are important to her Los Angeles congressional district.

Kohan also shared with his Representative how his company is collaborating with non-profit Fashion Business Inc. (FBI) to provide technology skills training and job placement to displaced workers in Los Angeles’ garment industry. “She was very excited to hear about our job creation effort,” said Kohan.

“[Rep. Ellison] said in the future I should e-mail him about specific legislation to keep him up to speed on technology issues.” – Ken Meyer, Services Manager, Solbrekk Business Technology Solutions

In fact, Rep. Roybal-Allard plans to visit Focal’s offices and to tour the training facility used for the Apparel Job Skills Training Program.

Ken Meyer is organizing a follow-up in-district event with his Representative as well. “I’m arranging for Representative Ellison to meet with tech business leaders in our local chapter of the IAMCP [International Association of Microsoft Channel Partners].”

The meetings on Capitol Hill also provided VFI members with the chance to discuss broader business issues as well, including taxation, the budget deficit, and healthcare. “Uncertainty in the business environment is hurting investment,” said Kohan—a message that he relayed to his elected official. Rep. Roybal-Allard, in turn, discussed how she expected new healthcare initiatives to help small businesses.

Kohan noted that his policy engagement enables him to advocate both on behalf of his business and for the customers he serves. “We have no direct government business, so you might ask, ‘Why should we care?’ These issues [piracy, skills training] are clearly important to our customers. Voices for Innovation is a platform that helps you get involved.”

Meyer made a similar point. “VFI can help put the pieces together.”