I had to learn a lot of acronyms to prepare for the “Future Vision for Information Technology Forum” I attended recently:

- UNCOMN.TV (which cleverly stands for unified community): an online technology company that “combines the power of traditional TV, the global reach of the web and the interactivity of social networking to deliver content about living, learning and earning in Northeast Ohio.”
- NEOSA (Northeast Ohio Software Association): the technology network of COSE (which, as a refresher, is the Council of Smaller Enterprises)
- RITE Board (Regional Information Technology Engagement): an independent industry-led initiative administered by Lorain County Community College, supporting regional education institutions with a pipeline of industry communication

All that studying – and those are just the sponsors who put it together. It was worth it though, and not just because it was an excuse to spend an evening at Pickwick & Frolic . It was a chance to sit on the sidelines of an awesome concept brought to life by the vibrant Barbara Oney (@ BSOney) and her UNCOMN.TV team.

Oney comes from 20 years of marketing and producing experience in the entertainment industry – as a vice president at Universal Studios, worldwide director at 20th Century Fox, director at MGM and president of a marketing company with clients from Warner Brothers to HBO.

Returning to her native Cleveland, Oney launched UNCOMN.TV Network LLC to balance a lopsided statistic from the Ohio Board of Regents: The number of degree holders entering Ohio minus the ones leaving equals negative 9,120. (See also: Why college graduates flee the Buckeye State , and other stats here .) Battling that, UNCOMN.TV develops content to entice talent, businesses and resources to the region. Its channels showcase college, career and community – like the

Got*City GAME! Channel
, featuring programs about things to see and do locally, and the
Flannel Channel
, highlighting careers within the region's growing industries like IT.

But this forum, which helped kick off Cleveland's Tech Week 2011, broke away from the network's regularly produced programs with a live streaming format. Several local colleges (Baldwin Wallace College
,
Lorain County Community College
and
Kent State University
) held remote "Watch and Chat" parties where students gathered to watch the live feed and simultaneously engage in the conversation.

" Cleveland is the third fastest growing IT job city in the country ," Oney says. "We need to get this kind of positive information out to the brain-gain crowd to reverse the brain-drain phenomenon challenging Northeast Ohio."

The evening featured:

- Lev Gonick , CIO, Case Western Reserve University – "Living the Future Today: The Role of Research Broadband"
- Bob Pavey , Partner, Morgenthaler Venture – "The Role of Venture Capital in Information Technology"
- A.J. Hyland , President and CEO, Hyland Software – "Growing Tech in the CLE: Where Do We Go From Here?"

[View video of the LiveStreaming IT forum on UNCOMN.TV's archives.]

Read on to learn the three things Northeast Ohio needs in order to tap into the future of IT.

The main theme spanning each presentation was that IT opportunities will be abundant – even in Northeast Ohio. But Hyland says a few things need to fall into place before NEO can become an IT hotspot:

1. Funding

"Entrepreneurs will follow the money," Hyland says. "Unless we figure out ways of making money accessible to them and find ways to commercialize ideas, they're going to go other places."

Sure, when it comes to capital, there's plenty of excitement around technology start-ups. But there's buzz about energy and health care companies now, too. As the overall field of venture capital contenders shifts, where does that leave IT?

“Ten years ago, IT was the majority of VC spending,” Pavey says. “IT is where most of the money got invested, from semiconductors to software. That changed over the last decade … because health care is getting a bigger slice of money right now. If we’re going to invest $20 billion a year, half of that might go to IT.”

Hyland would like to see more VC activity locally, and he’s not alone. Although he’s not a fan of government involvement in business, he said the effort should start with state and local government: “We need a strong voice in government first to create funding in the region.”

2. Entrepreneurs

Hyland has seen an increased effort recently to recruit businesses to the region. While the intentions are good, he thinks it’s backwards to try luring outside companies when future entrepreneurs are already here.

“There are increased graduation rates at high schools,” he says. “Find ways to get them in colleges. Show them this community supports them and is a place to start a company and be successful. Free agency isn’t going to solve our problems; we need to build it from within.”

Technology creates new vehicles all the time to help young entrepreneurs develop their skills and ideas. Gonick says the next big thing is the virtual network, which creates a shared environment for experimentation and innovation – kind of like this LiveStreaming event, multiplied and transported to a science lab.

Gonick threw out yet another acronym, GENI: Global Environment for Network Innovations. It's a project sponsored by the National Science Foundation, "a virtual laboratory for exploring future internets at scale … providing collaborative and exploratory environments for academia, industry and the public to catalyze groundbreaking discoveries and innovation in these emerging global (social) networks."

That virtual environment will fuel future innovation, bringing every resource straight to young entrepreneurs so they won't have to leave Ohio seeking it.

3. Support

"Once companies are up and running, will we have the infrastructure to support them?" Hyland asks.

Not unless we change our Cleveland attitude.

“Even with all this support, this money and all these entrepreneurs, we as a region have a tendency to get apologetic rather than aggressive,” he says.

Funny, I’ve heard that same thing coming from the Hilarities stage before when Cash Cab’s Ben Bailey said Clevelanders greeted him with apologies instead of welcomes.

“The inferiority complex is pretty bad here in Cleveland,” Hyland says. “One way to get over that is to invest in education, give students a chance to commercialize ideas and a community to support those.”

And by “support,” he doesn’t just mean rewarding successful companies with capital.

“We cannot crucify failures,” he says. “Give thinkers and doers a chance to make something

happen, and don't drag them down if they don't do that."

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Still, you're probably wondering: Are there really IT jobs in NEO? Well, just look at Hyland Software .

"From 2008 to 2009, we grew 9 percent, which sucked – flat was the new good, but I don't accept that ," Hyland says. "From 2009 to 2010, we grew 27 percent. We've already hired 100 new employees this year, and plan for another 100 by the end of the year."

Most of those are local hires – if you include native Clevelanders who left and want to return, a trend he's noticing in resumes recently.

"Hot stuff is happening here," he says. "There's a reason to come to Cleveland. There are great

IT opportunities here. … There's a work ethic aspect to this region that's hard to duplicate, and we've made our success with that mentality."

What's next? Tune into UNCOMN.TV's next LiveStreaming Event: 6ixth City Tech Fest on Saturday, July 23 from 1-7 p.m. EST, featuring interviews and live chat with top entrepreneurs and experts in the areas of information technology and business start-ups. Watch & Chat LIVE!

Brooke Bates is senior editor of Interactive Media at Smart Business. She contributes to the seeming minority of non-native Clevelanders living in Cleveland, so she can say without hometown bias that it is a much cooler city than you may have heard. If you missed her live tweets from this forum, start following @batesbn .