

# A Call to Action

*by Robert S. Craig*

**A**t the end of this Annual Meeting, I will be stepping down from the Board after serving two terms. These past two years have been exciting and educational for me. I've had the opportunity to observe the enthusiasm and involvement of many members of the M community, and have learned to appreciate the impact a few dedicated, committed people can have. I'd like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the entire M community, to thank them, especially John Covin and Richard Davis, who have guided MTA through difficult and challenging times.

There is one particular area that I would like to focus on in this column, and that is marketing. A common, recurring theme I hear when I talk with people about the M Technology Association is "why don't you guys do more to promote M technology?" This is a legitimate but complex and difficult question to answer; different people mean different things when they use the word "promote." Some think MTA should be doing direct advertising or going to trade shows. Others think it should be persuading schools to introduce M programming courses. Still others think we should be flying around the country, meeting with analysts and the computer industry press. The truth is that we should be making all these efforts, and more. These activities, however, require dedicated resources. This is why the Board hired Peggy Hoffman as full-

time public relations director and established the Distinguished Member program.

Peggy has done a tremendous job under difficult circumstances, as she worked to garner greater understanding and acceptance of M Technology by various industry organizations. In turn, the companies participating in the Distinguished Member program have offered invaluable proposals, ideas, and feedback through their Public Relations Advisory Board.

But there is a large portion of the M community that is noticeably absent from these MTA efforts. I'm referring to the M-based application vendors. Where are Creative Socio-Medics, Dalcomp, ELCOMP, Global Health Systems, IDX, Infomed, Interactive Systems and Management, NCS, National Systems Corporation, Nova Systems, SDK, SMS, Sanchez, Source Computing, Sunquest, Temple Information Systems, and Users, Inc.? These are all vendors who use M, yet none are in the Distinguished Member program.

I've heard that we shouldn't blame them for not participating. They're in the business of selling applications, not selling M Technology. Some don't want to advertise that they use M, either because it may create a negative impression in their customers' minds, or because they regard M's productivity as some kind of secret weapon. Some are reluctant to get involved because they are afraid their

staff members will be recruited away by other M shops. Some feel that promoting M Technology doesn't contribute to their bottom line, so why spend the money.

Legitimate concerns? Yes. Excuses? Again, yes. To these people, I say they are in the business of selling applications, but so are SAIC, Co-Med, Sentient Systems, Omega Computer Systems, Educational Systems, Inc., Antrim, Compucare, McIntyre Consulting, and others who have made the commitment to help us get the word out about M Technology.

Yes, your customers may express concern about M, but if you have a good application, you'll win more often than you lose. Most of them know you use M, anyway, and you're still making money. There are techniques that have been used successfully to deflect criticism of M, and if that's really the reason, give me a call at 617-890-1620. I'll be glad to send you some material I've used.

Worried about other application vendors raiding your shop? Well, each of the companies I mentioned is already a member of MTA, so the word is out. Staying out of the Distinguished Member program won't protect you from raids. If you use common sense principles of personnel management (incentives and opportunities for personal and professional growth, for example), it's likely that your staff will resist advances from other developers.

M is a terrific tool that might be regarded as a secret weapon, but consider this: other technologies are catching up with ours. If we don't join forces to promote M effectively to the industry as a whole, vendors won't select M for their new applications. M system vendors will struggle to fund the R&D needed to enhance the technology. Your application could wind up on a platform that isn't evolving. This may not happen tomorrow or next year, but it could happen. Failure to support the viability of M could result in your losing the edge M gives you today.

The real reason the M application vendors need to participate in the Distinguished Member program is that it's in their own long-term selfish best interest. Supporting the program with dollars, people, and ideas gives MTA the tools needed to promote M Technology effectively to the media, analysts, academic institutions, and others. It tells your customers and employees they're involved with a successful and committed company that's looking forward, thinking about the future.

Finally, it establishes your company as a responsible corporate citizen. Your organization probably contributes to the United Way, the Girl Scouts, or the local Little League. You do this because it doesn't cost you a lot, it's good public relations, and it's the right thing for a corporate citizen to do. So, why not commit at the same level to the only industry-wide organization working to promote the acceptance of the fundamental technology you've based your business on?

Here then is my call to action. If you're an employee of an M application vendor with annual revenues exceeding \$1 million, start an internal campaign to get your company to become a Distinguished Member. If you're an officer of one of these companies, don't wait for that first memo to cross your desk. Just do it! ■

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