

# Defining the Future

*The Board Room column gives individual MTA Board members a chance to communicate directly about many relevant issues facing the Association. Several steps have been taken in recent years to examine Association activities and objectives and to direct us in ways that make for a stronger organization. For two days in May 1994, the Board of Directors met for the sole purpose of strategic planning for the years to come. This month, Board Room reports on outcomes from the meeting.—Editor*

A slight rephrasing of the original statement of our mission goes like this: to support the M community and M Technology. It is a statement much as any other association might make about itself. The original statement was written in 1977, when we incorporated as the MUMPS Users' Group.

But times are different. The business climate is volatile; resources to achieve much are dwindling. It's clear that MTA's status mirrors the outside: M still lays claim to superior ability and characteristics, but hasn't caught on as it should have; Annual Meeting attendance is flat; membership numbers are in decline; revenue is drying up.

During 1993 and early 1994, trimming the budget succeeded and stanching revenue shortfall. Now is the time to look into how best to meet members' needs, generate more revenue, and expand into new markets. In essence, it is time to capitalize on strengths and launch a revitalized organization.

To determine where to begin in redefining a mission that is unique to the

M Technology Association, Board members and Gail Penrod, the 1994 Annual Meeting Chair, and Stephen Casey, the 1995 Annual Meeting Chair, completed a questionnaire. The questionnaire, developed by a facilitator, gave everyone a chance to think about MTA's role and mission, the Board's role, the members' role, and the staff's job. When all the people gathered in May, individual responses became the starting point for long discussions about meeting the needs of our members, fostering development of M Technology, and promoting M Technology.

So, what do we need to do to change what we have done in the past in order to survive as a meaningful organization? We have embarked on an interesting voyage, having changed our name, having created a marketing campaign that placed us at the Spring COMDEX as a new exhibitor, and having asked some hard questions. How do we recreate the enthusiasm that carries a dynamic group along? How will we earn more revenue and return value to the members?

A lot of project ideas sprang up in the group. What can the members expect to see on the horizon? How will M be more visible? How will MTA attract more vendors to the organization and to exhibit at the Annual Meeting? How will we keep the Annual Meeting fresh?

One idea from the planning sessions is to develop a rapport with Microsoft by having Microsoft exhibits, introducing tutorials centered on Visual BASIC, and looking into conducting regional classes on the subject. A prototype tutorial offering instruction on accessing an M database through Vi-

sual BASIC is in the works, with a view toward scheduling the first class perhaps as early as this year in San Francisco.

Second, is to reconstitute the "best-selling" popular and informative tutorials from the Reno meeting—such as tutorials on the standard or windowing—for regional audiences. Perhaps scheduling ten regional tutorials or workshops in 1995 sounds ambitious to you, but boldness may be what it takes. The MTA Board hopes the first one will begin early in 1995.

Third, to foster interaction with other computer technologies and attract non-M people to M's world, there is a lot of interest in holding future MTA annual meetings in conjunction with other, related meetings. This should spark the interest of more vendors and more participants from both M and non-M backgrounds. That leads to higher visibility for M and more revenues for MTA. Board members are investigating handsome alternatives for 1996. Stay tuned on this one. We know you'll be booking tickets early to be in step with all the refreshing changes you'll see coming your way at the 25th Annual Meeting.

Above all we need your feedback on these projects. The Board cannot serve you unless you tell us how we're doing. We cannot help the organization get to the future without your vision. In short, we need to know you and your membership needs so as to anticipate the future and work toward it together. A list of your 1994-1995 Board of Directors appears on the following page. Let us hear from you. ■