FROM THE EDITOR

The Look of Things to Come

by Richard F. Walters

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T he Annual Meeting in Reno this past June was perhaps a watershed for M in some respects. Everywhere—classrooms, discussion sessions, exhibit floor, social affairs, hallways—connecting M with the rest of the world was the focus. Exhibitors' new products take advantage of new features that permit M to become an equal partner under Windows and X Window System in graphical user interfacing. Links between M and Visual BASIC, M and C, M and SQL, and M and whatever abounded in the exhibit area. Interoperability was in.

Technical presentations centered on ties between M and object-oriented systems. M control of large image databases illustrated the breadth of M's versatility. At the same time, and perhaps more importantly, they stressed the value of complementing the power of M with special strengths of other languages and standards.

I deliberately selected the term *watershed* and wonder if we ought to be asking ourselves, as M matures and takes its place beside other standards that are more widely recognized, some serious questions. What will we do as we become better known? As M extends to those who really couldn't care less about the language, except that it is the best solution for some component of their programming needs, what purpose will we serve? Will MTA atrophy at that point, some vague mission having been served? Will MDC fold its hands and say the job is complete? These attitudes have been cropping up in private conversations lately.

It is tempting to say "a good job well done." But are we nearing the point where our job is done? Personally, I don't think so. Much as I like M and use it, I would be (and have been) foremost among those citing needs to strengthen the language. Mentioning just two areas in need: internationalization is far from complete; and object-orientation, so tantalizingly close to M in its programming approaches, is not quite "there" yet in M.

As for visibility, we have a very long way to go, even though M secured ISO approval and has a growing share of many markets. We continue to need a forum that our meeting offers where we can exchange views, learn new developments, and apply gentle (or other) pressure on implementors to introduce necessary functionality.

Too, we need to take the message to kindred souls attending COMDEX or reading *BYTE, IEEE Computer*, and other widely read periodicals to gain the prominence that we richly deserve.

So, if you sometimes feel complacent about our progress, remember the words of that philosopher and pioneer baseball player, Satchel Paige, who said "Don't ever look back; they might be gainin' on you."

Dr. Walters is a computer science professor at the University of California at Davis. Please address your comments to him in care of *M Computing* at the MTA.