

The Business at Hand

by John F. Covin



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I have written in past columns about the changing nature of our role as providers of information processing. Our customers are technologically sophisticated in more areas of their lives than ever before. One resulting trend is that their requirements and expectations also are becoming more sophisticated. Sometimes we find that what was good enough at the outset of a development project may not be acceptable later. Even before the project is finished, in some cases, customers become disenchanted, change their expectations, and suddenly we become the enemy because we cannot meet their expectations or because it takes "too long" to complete the project.

The second emerging trend is that "more for less" is now the business criteria for success. We have seen takeovers, acquisitions, and mergers in the computer industry; they are rampant in the health-care and communications industries. The effect is uncertainty, apparent chaos, a lot of wild-eyed expressions, and, naturally, stress.

The IT industry's customers and suppliers alike are subject to today's business environment. My company faces the stark reality that 40 percent of our business is with companies that are takeover targets within our industry. That impacts our potential revenues. Our suppliers also are subject to the same pressures, which affects our ability to plan. Also affected is our confidence that we will be able to deliver products and services reliably and still meet customers' dynamic expectations.

The third emerging trend I see is the growing impatience among customers and non-IT-oriented decision makers. Our profession's limited ability to communicate in non-IT terminology is the source of this growing impatience. I call this communicating in terms that are not user friendly. When these encounters happen, typically, the result is frustration, anger, distrust, and basic ineffectiveness of the whole organization.

What is the relevance of these observations to the M Technology Association? MTA is a business subject to the same tough business climate as our membership. Our Board of Directors has taken a proactive approach to the climatic changes over the past several years. Adopting the organization's name (MTA) responded to our belief that we all could communicate better with a new identity and image. Prior to that, a commitment to accelerated public relations activities was made based on the belief that we are the best-kept secret in the IT industry. Thus we are expanding awareness of

M Technology in the IT industry by sharing our secrets, speaking in terms that non-M people can understand.

By the time you read this, you will no doubt have heard or read about yet another possible change in our vendor community. The ultimate outcomes cannot be forecast. The immediate impact varies depending on each person's situation. Predictably, there are degrees of response in some or all of the following: certainty, uncertainty, hope, promise, fear, trust, distrust, and confusion.

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MTA's response to the 1994 business environment is to deliver only those products and services that you, the members, want and need. For example, we are responding to your expressed desire to learn other compatible technologies by planning regional training on Visual Basic, M; and other technologies for which there is sufficient demand.

We continue to welcome your opinion on those professional development topics you would like to see offered at our Annual Meeting, and that will help you deal with today's business climate and technological innovations.

The Board of Directors is considering holding future annual meetings in conjunction with other trade shows. This concept is appealing because it gives our:

- PR efforts a large, confined audience;
- Exhibitors a larger potential audience;
- Annual Meeting potentially more registrants; and
- Participants the benefits from another trade show and the advantage of saving on travel dollars. (By the way, watch for some good airfares to Chicago—they will make it easier to attend the 1995 meeting.)

We also set some very aggressive goals for the 1995 Annual Meeting. We want 200 newcomers, 200 college students, 850 prior meeting registrants, and 50 non-M users in the mix of our attendance figures. We want to sell 60 exhibit booths. And, we want to generate \$250,000 in net revenues for MTA. The 1995 Annual Meeting Program Chair, Steve Casey, together with his committee, is generating a lot of excitement and anticipation. They are ahead of schedule in achieving many of these goals and on course for reaching others.

I urge you to respond to the current business climate by telling your elected Board members how we can help you and your organization. We promise to **listen**, we'll try to **understand**, and make every effort to **deliver**. Let us hear from you. ■

John Covin is the MTA Board Chair and the senior vice president for information and client services at SciCor, Inc., in Indianapolis.

1994-1995 M Technology Association Board of Directors

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NEW EDITORIAL CALENDAR FOR 1995

If you'd like to write about M application areas, new systems and installations, interfacing, programming techniques, challenges of technology, or something related to M, let us hear from you. Book reviews, meeting notes, product announcements, and industry events are also of interest. All submissions are reviewed and are subject to editing. Final determination about copy submitted for publication rests with the editors. Send your proposals to Marsha Ogden, Managing Editor, MTA, Suite 205, 1738 Elton Road, Silver Spring, Maryland 20903-1725. Phone: 301-431-4070, fax 301-431-0017, or use FORUM.

The 1995 publishing cycle is as follows:

Publication date: *February 1995*
Deadline: November 18, 1994
Focus: **Changes in the M Workplace**

April 1995
January 13, 1995
New Technologies and M

June 1995
November 1, 1994 (early submission to special committee)
Annual Meeting Proceedings

September 1995
June 30, 1995
Tools for Development

November 1995
August 17, 1995
Object-Oriented Systems

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