

MTA Board Meets for Strategic Planning

One word will sum up the overall theme of the far-ranging discussions about M Technology Association at the 1994 fall strategic planning meeting of the MTA Board of Directors: **change**. In this sense, MTA as an organization seeking to be a viable entity in the mid-1990s and beyond, is no different from all businesses today. Change, along with the flexibility needed to institute it, is the byword of all businesses that want to be relevant, that want to be players, now and in the future, because of the fast-paced nature of doing business today.

Getting down to its strategic-planning business immediately, the Board tackled the hard questions that every current business preparing for the future must ask itself at intervals: Why does MTA exist? Why should it continue to exist? As it is now organized, can it be financially viable in the future? If it deserves to continue to exist, how should it look and act as a professional association now and in the future? Thoughtful discussion of these questions resulted in a unanimous decision "to live," to be relevant to the future, and to recreate MTA as necessary in order to accomplish this. "It is our intention," said Board Member Catherine Pfeil, "that the basic purposes of this organization will not go away." As a foundation to build on, the Board defined this life-affirming decision as an MTA commitment to meet the **evolving needs** of members, as well as a commitment to **quality** in all endeavors.

"We see the Board's job as one of orchestrating what the quality of MTA's future will mean to our M community," said Board Chair John Covin. "Through our discussions, we've drawn conclusions about how things are and how things ought to be. We want to be more responsive than ever to members' needs and, at the same time, we have to be a financially viable organization."

The Board envisions a two-year campaign to recreate MTA that includes living in the present while planning for the future. One exchange of ideas by Board Members during this discussion is a representative example of the Board's awareness of the need for change. Dave Holbrook said, "By 1996, we need non-M users walking around our exhibit floor."

"And, at the same time," Chair John Covin remarked, "we need to bring our members a universe of solutions from which to choose."

According to the Board, the important points to consider in this two-year process toward a new reality for MTA are the following:

- What else can be provided to members that would be value-added services or products?
- Should MTA concentrate on being first a professional association or first a technical association?
- What kinds of partnerships should MTA pursue that would be advantageous to its mission?

- What should the Annual Meeting look like in 1996 and beyond?
- If the driving force of doing business today is finding solutions to business problems, how can MTA respond to this force?
- How can we continue to make MTA members feel special?

In order to accomplish this recreation of MTA, the Board believes certain things must happen. To begin with, members need to be kept informed as this evolution (or revolution) proceeds. Beginning with this article, members can expect to read often about the progress being made during the next two years in changing their M Technology Association so that it will be responsive and viable far into the future. Also, recent data on hand will be reviewed and new data will be collected from members, as the Board and staff seek to identify what members' evolving needs are. Data collection and evaluation will be based on surveys (accomplished through a variety of survey vehicles) involving at least the following: members, vendors, Annual Meeting evaluations, *M Computing* readers, advertisers, *MLink* readers, and nonmembers.

Every aspect of MTA's life will be reviewed by the Board during the next two years and be considered a candidate for change. Then, with the Board deciding when and where it is appropriate, the Board and MTA staff will organize committees to research options for change from how things are

presently done. For instance, as a result of some of the conclusions reached at this October strategic planning meeting, the Board has already instructed the staff to organize into committees to research three options for MTA's future Annual Meetings. This request was made with unanimous agreement by the Board that the importance of this annual event to members professionally (as of the last survey, a majority of members said the MTA Annual Meeting is the only conference they attend annually) and to MTA financially must remain a primary consideration. As it is now set up, the Annual Meeting is a major source of technical training in M for beginners as well as for experienced M professionals who want to stay abreast of our evolving technology. Furthermore, MTA members often comment that the Annual Meeting confirms many things for them, in-

cluding: how they are doing in their chosen work, how the language of M is doing in the marketplace, how well the M community is communicating, and how vital MTA is.

While embracing change where it is found desirable for the Annual Meeting, the Board's wish is to continue to provide the benefits that members already receive and to add more benefits. To this end, the options that are being considered for 1996 and beyond are the following:

Option 1. Continue to hold an independent meeting, but examine the value of all elements (tutorials, technical sessions, discussion sessions, exhibit hall) as they are structured today; then expand the meeting by adding new dimensions.

Option 2. Create an entirely new kind of conference by partnering with another association or organization.

Option 3. Become part of "Conference X"; as much or as little as we desire as an association, hold our conference in conjunction with another conference or trade show.

As the Board and MTA staff research then analyze these options for the Annual Meeting, members will be kept informed through *MLink* and other appropriate methods of communication. Most of you will be asked to participate at some point in this process, via focus groups, telephone interviews and surveys, or surveys through the mail. The Board also invites you to communicate your thoughts to them and/or the staff at any time: They seek a positive dialogue to assist them in this important campaign to redesign MTA to live, and live well, to serve the evolving needs of its members. **M**

1994-1995 M Technology Association Board of Directors

John F. Covin
Chair
SciCor, Inc.
8211 SciCor Drive
Indianapolis, IN 46214-2985
Phone: 317-273-7946
Fax: 317-273-4030

Vacant
Vice Chair
Elliot A. Shefrin
Treasurer
NIH/Gerontology Research Center
4940 Eastern Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21224
Phone: 410-558-8144
Fax: 410-558-8321

Richard G. Davis, Ph.D.
Immediate Past Chair
Mformation SYStems, Inc.
209 Edgebrook Drive
Boylston, MA 01505-0505
Phone: 508-869-6976
Fax: 508-869-6008

Catherine Pfeil, Ph.D.
Executive Director
VAISC6-San Francisco
301 Howard Street, Suite 600
San Francisco, CA 94105
Phone: 415-744-7520
Fax: 415-744-7530

John J. Althouse
Member at Large
J.J. Althouse & Associates
645 Lexington Road
Concord, MA 01742
Phone: 508-369-6076
Fax: 508-369-5623

David A. Holbrook
Member at Large
InterSystems Corporation
One Memorial Drive
Cambridge, MA 02142
Phone: 617-621-0600
Fax: 617-494-1631

John M. McCormick
Member at Large
InterSystems Corporation
One Memorial Drive
Cambridge, MA 02142
Phone: 617-621-0600
Fax: 617-494-1631

Susan A. Schluederberg
Member at Large
Connections Group, Ltd.
1100 Sunset Drive
Bel Air, MD 21014
Phone: 410-838-6062
Fax: 410-838-6062