

The State of M Technology Association

Address to 1995 Annual Meeting Participants
by John F. Covin, Board of Directors Chair

Address to the Members

Impact of the Changing Business Climate on MTA

MTA is experiencing the impact of the business climate on its members. In addition to the trend of declining attendance at the Annual Meetings, reductions in advertising and exhibit space have resulted from the loss of Digital and DataTree. A number of Annual Meeting participants have advised that an important incentive for attending the meeting in the past—hearing what the implementors are going to announce—has lessened with the decrease in the number of participating vendors.

The real purpose for MTA is membership services; to present value to the members. Members have to tell MTA and the Board what they value. What's valued today may shift dramatically to what's valued next year. MTA therefore, has to stay very closely attuned to members' needs, what they're willing to pay money for, what their organizations are willing to pay money for, and evaluate whether or not that's within the realm of MTA responsibility. The Board has embarked on an ongoing strategic planning process of analyzing the business environment climate and listening to the members. Members will see changes forthcoming in response to their needs.

Transition to the 1996 Annual Conference with Database & Client/Server World

The biggest outcome of the Board's strategic planning has been a reevaluation of this Annual Meeting. At the first strategic planning meeting, the Board recognized very easily that the Annual Meeting is the one event that is the hallmark of our community, the one event that generated the most expenses—and the most revenue—for MTA. When the trends of declining membership and Annual Meeting attendance became apparent, we scrutinized the meeting very carefully.

Conference Options

The Board defined three options for the Annual Meeting: 1) Continue what we're doing, try to find new people to replace the lost sources of income, and try to find those outside of the community who value what our community is about and bring them to our meeting; 2) Create a new annual meeting by finding someone else who would like to have this kind of conference and can't do it by themselves, and align ourselves and create a new meeting; 3) Find an already-established conference that had a clientele very similar to ours, and determine whether or not we could formulate an alliance. The Board determined that the best of the alternatives was the third one, to pick an existing conference and strike an alliance.

Having made that decision, the Board formulated a set of guidelines for the staff to follow in selecting a partner conference. The most important guideline was to maintain our identity. **There is a great spirit in the M community that most of us do not want to lose—the networking, the camaraderie.** The Board envisioned that if MTA went to a show that was too large, we would be consumed, we would be dispersed, we would be sounding the death knell for MTA. So **the first goal was to go to a place where we could preserve as much of our heritage and identity as possible.** Other goals included generating income and having the opportunity to expand.

If members are coming to the Annual Meeting to learn about the technology, and **if our technology has expanded and become open in the last few years, then it's about time for MTA also to become open and not have a closed meeting.** So part of the guidelines were to find another conference where we can entice people who are searching for what we have but don't know that it exists. If we can't bring them here to our meeting, let's go en masse to where they are—pick up our community and plop it down in the mainstream. We've talked about this for years, and next year in Boston with Database & Client/Server World we will transform our Annual Meeting into a conference in conjunction with their show.

In addition to the goals of preserving the MTA identity and spirit, generating revenue, and expanding into new

markets, is the goal of positively impacting the other show. Envision if you will 1,000 of us in Boston in the Hynes Convention Center in the midst of 20,000 other people like us who don't know about M. It's one thing for us to move our meeting, to learn about the other technologies, to go to our own tutorials and discussion sessions. We have said for years **we want to go to the mainstream, we want people to know who we are, we want them to know the power of the technology that we have.** So it's another thing to go and to wave the flag, to show the colors, to be there. It will change the nature of our meeting. You can stop anyone at this year's meeting and feel comfortable that you can talk about M and the technology in a comfortable language that they understand. Next year that will not be the case. For every one of us that's there, there will be twenty who do not know what we're talking about and are candidates to join our association, candidates to buy our technology, candidates to double our membership. That's what it's about. For years we have said why don't we see M and MUMPS printed in the publications, why don't we hear it talked about. This is the first step.

It's Time to Show Pride in Our Technology

I encourage you to go. I encourage you to take five people with you. **I encourage you to go proudly, waving the flag of M, not being afraid of what we have. We believe what we have is as good as there is.** There are people, however, who are not sure about that. "Gee, it's M. Look, there are only 500 people here this year. There must be something wrong with the technology." There is a difference between the technology and the MTA organization. They are tightly correlated, but they are very much different. The technology is owned by

implementors, and the technology is owned by VARs. MTA is a membership organization, and those are two very different things. Tightly related, but different. The declining trends of the membership should not indicate in any way a declining importance, value, and power of the technology. I think you understand that. But there may be people who are new to our community who don't understand that, and it's important that we help people to understand the difference.

I can tell you that the organizations that are using our technology are not saying that there's something wrong with it. They are vibrant, healthy organizations, able to deal with today's business climate because of the technology.

There are people who need our technology. There are people who need to know your experiences with the technology. And many of those people are going to be in Boston next year at the Database & Client/Server World conference. We need to have you there.

The Board feels that holding our conference in conjunction with Database & Client/Server World is THE thing to do. The Board and staff came prepared to be attacked for this decision in the same way we were accosted for the name change. But we haven't been attacked. One person put it very well—"The difference between the name change and this transition is like black and white. The name change was soft. It was 'I don't really understand why I need to do that.' This one, people are saying 'This makes sense. Why haven't we done this before?'" This one is much more substantial. It's much easier to understand the logic. So we came prepared to explain and defend. We have found we don't need to do that. We have found exciting responses. We found that you are

interested. **You believe that is the thing to do.** There are concerns. But there appears to be a foregone conclusion that this is the best thing for MTA to do. It's the best thing that we could do for our technology. It's the best thing that we could do for our vendors. Rather than have 500 people in the exhibit hall that already know about M, our exhibitors will get to have a 20-1 ratio of people that they get to sell their wares to, before whom they get to demonstrate the quality of their product. We think that's exciting as well.

1996 Conference Steering Committee

In order to accomplish our goals for the 1996 Conference, the Board decided to alter our traditional way of having a single person as a program chair for the Conference. Instead, we have established a Steering Committee of six people: Dave Holbrook, Fred Kohun, Greg Kreis, Bob Mappes, Roger Partridge, and Catherine Pfeil. They are quality people. They are the ones we are trusting to know things that we the Board and the staff can't know. They represent you. People who want to volunteer and be involved in the formulation of the meeting for next year should come to a meeting on Thursday at 11:00 a.m. The Steering Committee and several members of the Board will be there. We'll talk more about the goals in this transition year.

Thanks for being here. See you in Boston!

The M Technology Association's annual business meeting was held on Wednesday, June 7, 1995, at 8:30 a.m. at the Hyatt Regency-O'Hare in Chicago, Illinois, as part of the twenty-fourth Annual Meeting. The minutes of that meeting follow.

Minutes of the MTA 24th Annual Business Meeting

Approval of Minutes

The members approved the minutes of the June 15, 1994 business meeting as published in the September 1994 *M Computing*.

Board of Directors

Mr. Covin acknowledged the 1994-1995 Board of Directors: Executive Director Catherine Pfeil (completed first year of two-year term), Treasurer Elliot Shefrin (completed two-year term); Richard Davis (continues as Immediate Past Chair); and at-large members Dave Holbrook (completed two-year term), John McCormick and Susan Schluederberg (completed first year of two-year terms). He commended the Board for its vision and courage in battling what MTA should be doing differently in the current business climate and thanked them for their support, commitment, and hard work.

Mr. Covin welcomed the newly-elected Board members whose two-year terms began at this meeting: Vice Chair Dave Holbrook; Treasurer Elliot Shefrin; and at-large members John Glaser and Rick Marshall.

WMBOF-MTA

At registration, a number of the meeting participants received ribbons reading WMBOF MTA, and were advised to attend the association meeting to discover its meaning. Mr. Covin explained that the ribbons represented MTA's special thank-you to people who deserved recognition for their volunteer efforts: WMBOF MTA stands for "Worked My Butt Off for MTA."

Winner of Michael Distaso Memorial Fund Student Competition

Board Executive Director Catherine Pfeil, who also chairs the Distaso Memorial Fund Committee, presented a \$1000 award to Warren G. Weis, winner of this year's Distaso Competition, for his paper entitled "A Performance Analysis of Relational and Hierarchical Database Packages Based on Query Response." His research compared the performances of Oracle, FileMan, M/SQL and his own database on data retrieval operations. Ms. Pfeil noted that Mr. Weis' research revealed that in comparison to Oracle, M Technology is exactly the database machine that we think it is—in some ways better than Oracle, in no way inferior. Warren is a graduate student at the University of California, Davis. His paper is published elsewhere in this issue.

Recognition of Steve Casey, Program Chair for 1995 Annual Meeting

At last year's meeting, the Board of Directors set goals for this year's meeting as part of its strategic planning and intent to run the Annual Meeting in a more business-like manner appropriate to the tough business climate. The planning included goals for the number of participants returning from previous years, the number of college student participating, and the number of new attendees. Mr. Covin praised Mr. Casey for performing an outstanding job in working toward those goals, and presented him with a gift.

State of MTA

Treasurer Elliot Shefrin presented the financial report. In his review of 1994, he explained that MTA budgeted for income of \$1.137 million, but realized only \$1.073 million. The

primary reasons for the shortfall were a declining Annual Meeting attendance and lower publication sales. The full potential negative impact was blunted by the organization's ability to trim expenses, thereby, recognizing a \$17,000 improvement in the fund balance (net worth, \$203,000). Recognizing a trend over the last couple of years of divergence between the budget and actual performance, the Board enlisted outside expertise to participate in its 1995 planning process. MTA developed a budget calling for \$1.160 million worth of income, about eight percent above the 1994 actual level. In so doing, the Board recognized that 1995 is a transition year, and expected to spend about \$16,000 of MTA's net worth to fund operations during this year.

Mr. Shefrin noted that attendance at this meeting was down, and the meeting attendance translates directly into revenues for the organization. This circumstance alone indicates that the 1995 income is going to be much less than anticipated.

Mr. Shefrin alerted the members that MTA has fantastic plans for the 1996 Annual Conference, and encouraged them to contribute their ideas for other ways to raise revenues.

Mr. Covin commented on the impact of the changing business climate on MTA, discussed plans for transition to the 1996 MTA Conference, and took questions from the audience. (His remarks are recorded above.)

Drawing for Free Airline Ticket

Jonathan Andron, from the University of Miami School of Medicine, won the drawing for the free airline ticket.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 a.m. ■