Members Talk - MTA Listens: The Annual Conference, Part II

by Kristi Hanson

MTA extends many thanks to those who have taken the time to convey their ideas. The previous issue of M Computing *reported on the evaluations returned by 1996 Conference participants. Following is a look at how the Conference planning reflects input from these evaluations and from the 1997 Pre-Conference Survey. Readers interested in more details are invited to contact MTA.*

- "It would take a major catastrophe to prevent me from attending the Conference."
- "I'm self-employed but I would always find a way to go."
- "What kind of business contacts can I make and keep to help us get more work?"
- "I need to be convinced it will be a quality technical program."
- "I'll keep attending as long as it is a good place to meet and discuss with fellow M users."

Is the MTA Annual Conference important to the M community? If so, why, and what will bring you to the Conference next year? MTA has asked the M community these questions through two formal vehicles, the 1996 Conference Evaluation and the 1997 Pre-Conference Survey.

The 1996 Conference Evaluations Told Us That:

- The MTA Conference is valuable to M practitioners.
- Partnership with a major computer trade show is a good idea.
- Seeing what's new in M, M problem-solving, and seeing M and other technologies in one setting, are all highly valued conference elements.
- Interfacing/connectivity and the Internet are the hottest topics anticipated for 1997.

The 1997 Pre-Conference Survey Added:

- Nearly all intend to come in '97 (more than half of those who responded came in '96).
- Interfacing, especially with the Internet, but also client/server, GUIs, Windows, ODBC and others, are the most critical topics for M workplaces.
- Main decision points on attending the '97 conference are cost (72%), topics (33%), and classes (31%).

M community input guides the Conference planning. MTA staff and Conference Steering and Program Committee members have thoroughly studied the wealth of suggestions from these surveys. On this foundation we are building a program that will match M community educational needs with appropriate training, discussions sessions, and expanded opportunities for vendor involvement and professional networking.

The 1997 Conference Takes Shape

The 1997 MTA Conference will once again take place in conjunction with DataBase and Client/Server World in Boston, May 18-22 at the Hynes Convention Center.

We're preparing to pack the MTA Conference program with tutorials and discussion sessions on M's cutting-edge capabilities and M-related topics, at least one M site-visit, and various social networking opportunities.

MTA conferees can also attend five sessions of their choice in DataBase & Client/Server World conferences and visit M vendors and numerous other computer technology exhibits in the DataBase & Client/Server World Expo. MTA is informed that ESI Technology Corp., Henry Elliott, Inc., InterSystems Corp., Micronetics Design Corp., and Sea Change, Inc. have contracted for exhibit space as of Nov. 1, 1996.

Technical Content Focuses on M's Cutting-Edge Capabilities

"What can I learn to help us do a better job?" is what one M user asks in evaluating whether the conference program is worth the time and cost of attending. This summarizes the responses of many. The technical content of the Conference, tutorials and discussion sessions, is just emerging as of this writing. Conference Steering and Program Committee members are seeking the most polished presenters of the hottest topics, from Internet to OO to re-engineering. They know what the M community wants to learn, both from their individual experience and the suggestions supplied by the '96 Conference evaluation and the '97 pre-Conference survey.

The Solutions Center Opens a Welcome Door to Vendors and Conferees

Survey respondents said they wanted 1) "The continued involvement of M and other "major" non-M vendors. . . to keep on the edge of what our vendors and the OTHER vendors are doing" and 2) "A good place to congregate informally". The Steering Committee has addressed these two urgent Conference goals with a single stroke: the Solutions Center.

The Solutions Center is a large conference room housing informal table-top vendor displays. Vendors of M products and services and consultants are invited to be there to discuss technical solutions. Organizations seeking more M staff may be there as well. The Solutions Center will be open Monday through Thursday.

For the attendees, the Solutions Center will have a coffee-break area (YES, we're planning to have refreshments!) where you can converse with colleagues. The Solutions Center will serve as an M hub throughout the Conference.

Product Demos Give Vendors and Users Additional Meeting Opportunities

To maximize the opportunities for vendor/user interaction, the Conference program will include Product Demonstrations by vendors.

How Do the MTA and DataBase & Client/Server World Schedules Interface?

Some folks were unclear about how the MTA Conference fits with DataBase & Client/Server World. One person advised that "The MTA should go out of its way to explain the relationship between its schedule and that of DataBase and Client/Server World". We can understand the confusion. Please see the chart at right.

You should be receiving both the MTA Conference Registration booklet and the Database & Client/Server World information in February. MTA registration gives you access to the two-day Expo and to five DataBase & Client/Server World sessions of your choice (excluding seminars with a separate fee attached) from the Tuesday-Thursday conferences.

MTA's program of tutorials and discussion sessions will be lighter on Thursday, to give conferees maximum time to spend in the DataBase & Client/Server World Expo with M and non-M vendors.

Thanks for the Help - Don't Miss the Final Results!

Thanks to those people who responded to the 1997 Pre-Conference Survey, and to the 111 who returned '96 Conference evaluations. You've given us a full and up-to-date picture of the conference elements you view as vital. The Steering and Program Committees are doing a fantastic job of incorporating your suggestions with their expertise to develop a high- quality, comprehensive Conference program for 1997. Hope to see you there!

MTA and DB & C/SW
Combined Conference Schedule

Sunday May 18	M Technology Association
Monday May 19	M Technology Association MTA Solutions Center Database & Client/Server World (pre-conference)
Tuesday May 20	M Technology Association MTA Solutions Center *Database & Client/Server World
Wednesday May 21	M Technology Association MTA Solutions Center *Database & Client/Server World **Exhibit Hall Open
Thursday May 22	M Technology Association MTA Solutions Center *Database & Client/Server World **Exhibit Hall Open
Friday May 23	Database & Client/Server World (post-conference)

* MTA registrants may choose five sessions among these days.
** Housing M and non-M Vendors

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Kristi Hanson has been an MTA staff member since 1992. She was the unofficial program chair for the 1996 Conference and is working closely with the 1997 Steering Committee.