

Polylogics Survives The Test Of Time

by John Greiner-Ferris

If you have ever taken the advice of the popular AT&T advertising campaign and let "your fingers do the walking" through the Yellow Pages, chances are you used a telephone directory that was published using software developed by New Jersey-based Polylogics Consulting, Inc. Polylogic's Open M-based Directory Advertising System (DIAD) is custom sales management software that oversees the entire pre-press operations of some of the largest directory publishers in the United States.

And while Open M's high performance keeps the directories rolling toward the presses, it's Open M's openness and application development environment that preserved the investment Polylogics and its customers made in DIAD. Developed in 1981, the original application has not only survived, it has grown and expanded to embrace technologies no one could have predicted—the advent of PCs, desktop publishing, and RISC chips—just to name three.

Open M gives Polylogics the freedom to change its application

"The development cycle is a long-term process for us," said Polylogics' President Mark Wieder, probably making the understatement of the year. His customers compete in a \$2 billion market. A big market like that attracts a lot of competitors greedy for market share. Differentiation means survival, so Polylogics must constantly offer new product features to keep its customers competitive. Over the course of its nearly 15-year life span, the developers at Polylogics have continually refined and improved DIAD.

Once the developers at Polylogics decide to add a feature or make a change, Open M doesn't limit them. "You make a decision in the design of an application, then over time you realize it wasn't the best way to implement a particular data structure," said Wieder. "A number of applications begin referencing that [data structure], and the applications start getting harder to build upon." So, you have a choice. You can continue to kludge. Or you can change. With other technologies the answer isn't so easy.

"Breaking away from the past is an enormous expense in time and money," said Wieder. "The easiest thing to do is continue on. You're always under pressure to get your application out. Open M has cut down the development time so that making changes 'the right way' is feasible."

Open M preserves the life of the application

Open M has, according to Wieder, huge advantages over other technologies. Unlike other database technologies which claim openness, Open M really delivers.

Originally written in the early 1980s with another vendor's M technology, DIAD was ported to the InterSystems' product for the PDP/11 in 1985. "The PDP/11 was the platform of choice in those days," Wieder states.

DIAD now runs on today's platforms of choice: PCs, VMS, and UNIX. That's one application—identical source code—running in multiple environments. "Very few solutions let you have that kind of portability," said Wieder. "It means we don't have a Tower of Babel, and we don't have to make concessions for whatever platform we're writing for."

And as far as tomorrow's platforms? "You don't know what's going to happen in the future," answers Wieder. "You don't know who's going to win the platform race, or the chip race. But we don't have to care. We're not paying a price in performance even though we're running a truly open solution."

"We never had to convert or rewrite the application, and we've been able to grow and expand it to address aspects of the business which didn't exist when the application was first written," continues Wieder. "Now it interfaces with Macs and PC networks and other hardware that wasn't even dreamed of in, say, 1985. The application survived intact. And that's a very rare accomplishment."

Polylogics Consulting, Inc.

Solution
Directory Advertising System
(DIAD) - Sales Management software for Yellow Page directory publishing

Platforms
UNIX, PC, VAX, VSM, Windows, Macintosh

Open M-based solution
Open M w/SQL
M/PACT

Selling the Mystique of M

Because of Open M-standard technology, DIAD has withstood the test of time. Open M's "huge advantages" are not trivial: its rapid application development environment allowed Wieder to refine and upgrade his application over time to accommodate emerging technologies, and it preserved not only his, but his customers' investments as well.

Two issues Wieder faces periodically luring sales opportunities are 1.) not getting ruled out because of Polylogics' size or its platform, and 2.) getting larger customers to consider DIAD.

Selling M is part of the sales cycle, just as it would be if Wieder were selling any other technology. "We educate people on it, and we do have a good solution," Wieder said.

The other issue—getting large customers like the Bell operating companies to consider DIAD—is easily overcome.

"We're a small company and sometimes we're viewed as a risk to larger companies," explained Wieder. "We've brought larger companies into InterSystems, partly to show off the technology, partly to show the success and size of the company behind us, and to show there is a healthy universe of users of this technology."

This strategy works for Polylogics: "We're almost always selected once we're seriously considered," said Wieder.

DIAD's ready for the future

As technology continues to advance, Wieder isn't concerned about DIAD's future. With the surge of the Internet, more customers are putting data on line in directories on the 'Net or on Web pages, or on CD ROM products. "The information in our system is amenable to those media because every piece of information is tagged at a very low level, at the field level," Wieder explained. If a user wants to pull up simple names and phone numbers for an on-line directory, it's a simple matter of plotting points on a map. Just as DIAD embraced desktop publishing and PCs, Wieder believes his Open M-based application will also embrace whatever technology comes along. "Even if I was starting over I'd use M," Wieder maintains.

M

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High-Tech Help

Is your company trying to get a high-tech idea off the ground? The federal government can help.

The Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program awards \$1 billion each year in research and development contracts to small technology companies. SBIR awards fund early stage R&D that has private sector commercial potential and serves a need of a participating federal department or agency.

To participate in the SBIR program, companies must:

- Be for-profit, American owned and independently operated
- Have 500 or fewer employees
- Employ the project's principal researcher

SBIR's sister program, the Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) program, awards \$70 million annually for cooperative research projects between small companies and research institutions such as universities and federally-funded R&D centers.

SBIR and STTR are administered by the Small Business Administration. For a list of participating federal departments and agencies, proposal submission deadlines and a detailed description of the two programs, call the SBA's Office of Technology at (202) 205-6450 or visit the Web site at <http://www.sbaonline.sba.gov/SBIR>

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M Programming:

A Comprehensive Guide

See cover 2 for more information.