



*Art Smith*

# M at the Crossroads

*by Art Smith*

As I am writing this, the Annual Meeting of the M Technology Association is in full swing. This afternoon, I participated in a panel discussion entitled "M at the Crossroads." The panelists, all members of the MDC, represented the three major North American M implementors (Inter-Systems Corporation, Micronetics Design Corporation, and Greystone Technology Corporation), the Veterans Administration and the MUMPS Development Coordinating Committee of Europe, as well as themselves. Each of us had ten minutes to talk about where we thought M is, or should be, heading into the future. After all panelists spoke, the audience was invited to ask questions or offer comments.

I opened the discussion, followed by Andreas Diekow (InterSystems Corporation), Keith Snell (Micronetics Design Corporation, and MDCC-E Chair), Roger Partridge (Greystone Technology Corporation) and Rick Marshall (VA and MDC Vice Chair). As the discussion proceeded, each speaker reinforced and built upon what the previous panelists had said. After the discussion, two separate people congratulated me on how well planned and orchestrated the panel discussion had been. They were impressed by the amount of work that must have gone into coordinating each speaker's topics with the others. Imagine their surprise when they learned that none of the panelists had discussed their presentations with any of the others prior to giving them.

How could this happen? To some extent, it is a tribute to the panelists' abilities in extemporaneous public speaking. Beyond that, though, I think it indicates that many, if not all, of the major players in the M community share a clear sense of direction for M. All of us are excited about the latest bells and whistles to hit the M world: GUIs, World Wide Web interfaces and object technology. But beyond that, we have come to realize a few more fundamental things about M and its place in the industry.

M has a number of strengths that are unmatched in the entire computer industry. It provides an extremely fast, powerful and scalable database technology. It is dynamically reconfigurable in a way few can match. It has (and has had for many years) many of the constructs that are currently the rage in the computer science press (e.g., persistent storage of variables ([globals]), dynamism and late binding (indirection and Xecute), the "third manifesto" of relational databases (hierarchical structure), support for internationalization (many things!) and interoperability (SQL and OLE)). It is essential that MUMPS not lose these strengths.

It is equally essential that the M community better educate the public about these strengths. The entire M community needs to market itself. This may entail an increase in advertising, but marketing is much more than just advertising. There need to be more articles in the general industry and academic press

pointing out the strengths of M with hard facts and sound computer science. We need to get M taught in college curricula so that new users come out demanding M. We also need to use M to develop new tools and applications going far beyond present markets.

For M to survive and thrive, it can no longer compete solely in the small niches it presently occupies. Few modern applications are constructed with a single platform anymore. M cannot survive just by providing a monolithic database environment. It must provide a tool which can interact and interoperate with other tools to allow users to develop powerful applications. It must fit into applications development as an extremely powerful component, capable of interoperating with other components to produce an exceptional product application.

The MDC and the entire M community must recognize and retain the many significant strengths that M already provides; we must develop further strength in interoperability and componentizing M; we must provide "sexy" new applications and tools; and we must market all of these strengths to the world. This is the path that M must follow from today's crossroads. **M**

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