

The “Get Ready to Buy Books” Thread

Contributors: Lord Brian, James Jeffrey Freeze, Paul Gausden, Greg Kreis, Jeff Loeb, Sean Kelly, Paul Perrin, Michael S. Simpson, James G. Walker, (with editorial assistance from Valerie Harvey).

Online discourse is an important realm for exploring technical topics. Again I have selected topics from recent M-List traffic and used a format that will treat collections of excerpts as a contribution to *M Computing*. This approach provides print recognition to those who take the time to share their technical insights and engage in such discussion. (My ulterior motive is still that I would like to encourage technical article contributions to be published in *M Computing* from some of these folks!)

For this issue the thread topic is: *buying books*. The opinions expressed here are not necessarily the opinions of the MTA or even of the other contributors!

Threads are conversations—they have elements of “parallel distributed processing”—parts of the conversation go on independently. It is difficult to find an appropriate “linear” arrangement for this mode of presentation and this format cannot precisely represent the dynamics of online interaction.

It is important that more M users have contact with those who are exchanging technical ideas and that the authors get credit and acknowledgment in print. The representation of the “thread” intentionally has a different appearance from the full intertwining and embedding of the internet exchanges—each contributor is acknowledged as separately as is feasible for ideas and expression. The result is at the same time far less formal (given the conversational tone and cross-references between posts) than a technical article.

Greg Kreis: When I was programming exclusively in M, I was always surprised by the wide range and quantity of programming books being published. Now that I am also involved with other languages and technologies, I have had to adjust my book budget substantially

I haven’t decided if this is a good thing or a bad thing. After all, having to buy lots of books to get a good han-

dle on something indicates it is quite complex. Could M’s general lack of books be due to its simplicity (hence no crying need) or would a raft of books about M and M system design help spur sales and adoption of M systems?

Hmm... maybe it should say ‘Learn M in 10 days’ to emphasize its simplicity

James G. Walker: Unfortunately, since MUMPS is not in the PC “mainstream” not many people would buy a MUMPS book and hence it would not be profitable for the publisher and writer. Let’s admit it, we’re in a niche language. And no matter how good MUMPS is, that alone will not make it popular with the masses. How about Microsoft MUMPS? That might help . . . especially if it’s bundled with Windows 00.

James Jeffrey Freeze: I was in a book store over the holidays buying a reference manual on a Microsoft product. I was surprised at the amount of material devoted to Microsoft products—by far the dominant presence in this store, which had a pretty large chunk of floor space devoted to “computer related” subjects. I did not see one book on M.

Although I think M is a language that is fairly easy for one to become productive in in a short amount of time (an argument for limited published material), there is so much more to it than being able to create usable code (an argument for promoting published material). It would be nice to see more material on M, as it would only help in its marketing efforts.

Jeff Loeb: This is just a thought, but maybe MIS Press or Sams Publishing or whomever could come out with a book entitled “Learn MUMPS in 21 Days” or something like that.

I would think that books on M are available at universities that teach courses on M. The sites

http://www.amazon.com and http://www.barnesandnoble.com have some M books. There might be some books on M at http://www.books.com. And of course, there's http://www.mtechnology.org.

Lord Brian: What we actually need is a MUMPS for Dummies book, to bring M into the mainstream awareness. Once people know that there is a faster way to find, manipulate, and move data than traditional relational databases, they may begin to start using the right tool for the jobs of large volume data interaction.

Michael S. Simpson: I don't think lack of M adoption is due to the shortage of books, although I personally would like to see a few more choices. When I graduated from college, I had never even heard of M. I had heard of C, Pascal, Delphi, COBOL, etc. and had dabbled with them all, but M was foreign to me. I learned about M by accident when I tripped over a job that needed an M programmer and was willing to "train" me (this, of course, consisted of *The ABC's of MUMPS* and a terminal).

So, the problem as I see it, is that no one knows about M. When they hear about it, it's usually associated with "written in 1966" and "interpreted" which turns people off, consequently never giving it a chance.

What I think would help, would be an aggressive advertising campaign where a company would get people to come together and educate them on the advantages of M. Perhaps, even a demonstration that has M kicking butt on Oracle or something. Of course, this takes time and money with no guarantee that it will work. Not likely to happen.

Paul Gausden: I would suggest that it be called "M for the not so dumb" as I'm sure most here would agree it's a smart choice for the jobs you mention.

Paul Perrin: It would have to be sexy—easy to install/set up, web/java enabled, visual programming, an industrial strength database, some good web-examples.

Sounds good, but how do you get people to "give" this away with a book?

Sean Kelly: Would you buy MEASLES for Dummies with an ACNE Explorer CD if you saw it in a book shop? Seems to me we're putting the cart before the horse. Writers/publishers will only produce a book if

they think there is a demand for it. We need to create this demand through marketing and sales of our technology. **M**

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