

The following letter was written in response to the Viewpoint column in the March 1998 issue of M Computing.

## The View From Afar

One of the things that I like best about the art of the impressionists is my ability to observe different images in the same picture. I am not fooled though, I know that I am only playing games with that most subjective of mental processes called perception. I know that when I get close enough the comfortable image that I have discerned will fragment into thousands of crude brush strokes and I will have to deal with reality.

When I look at M in the USA I can play the same game. One view is of a laager of Mom and Pop applications shops developing variations on public domain software of a certain quality surrounded by hostile Windows alternatives. I see screens with rolling displays and varying numbers of "carrots" indicating to the user the data input required and I hear mutterings about the inadequacies of the tools that they "have" to work with. I like this view because it compares well with the software that is commonly extant in Europe today.

Another view that I have is of 1980's "MUMPSters" corraling in the bar telling each other about the benefits of M and how the rest of the world is missing out. Of how the various bodies within the M community will, with due regard to democratic process, create the ultimate software tool that will put the world to rights.


All of this amuses me and makes me feel superior, as of course Europeans always will be, but I am not fooled, know that I am just kidding myself. I know that across the breadth of the Atlantic there is a vibrant population of Americans every bit as capable as, and in many ways more advantaged, than there is in London, Paris and Prague. I am however sometimes not so sure that the great respect that I hold is reciprocated.

More recently I have come across a different and far less comfortable perception of M in the USA. This is typified and promulgated by a group of persons who are collectively sorry for themselves and wallowing in their own despair and keen to see others in the same situation. These are people who upset my karma and for whom I have no time at all. I find these people a bigger threat to the future of M than Bill Gates (whose technology is after all just another sales opportunity) since they undermine the confidence of others and cause them to look for greener grass elsewhere - usually with destructive results. These folks may leap on the changes in the structure of the MTA in Europe as proof of our collective doom. They are profoundly wrong.

In Europe we have just completed a round of association re-engineering which, quite frankly, I could have done without. No doubt soon the rules will change again. The requirements of our membership are changing. Personally I find that I do not need to attend an M forum to get up to speed with the technology. I can pick up the phone and my vendor will deluge me with information. I do not need an MTA-E to promote the technology. If I open a trade magazine I can find advertising that supports the efforts of my company to sell product, put there by that same vendor. I do not need an *M Professional*. If I want to read informed comment - or even just gossip - about the state of M, I can open the rag of my local MTA or the glossy text of *M Computing*. In all of the above areas the MTA-E was just duplicating effort, and sucking the resources of the local groups and vendors to do it. We have stopped doing that. This is good.

Set free from the need to send us their cash the local groups in both the UK and Germany are doing very nicely. Set free from the need to support an oversized annual meeting the vendors are able to market more effectively to the outside world.

And the MTA-E? Well, that is doing very nicely too.

True we no longer have a publication of our own but nor do we seem to need one. We have adopted the *M Computing* and the Web as our means to communicate and Prof. Wolfgang Kirsten, the retiring editor who worked for 11 years unpaid, is now devoting his energies to the publication of the M Börse - auf Deutsch. Our Web site may be a little sluggish, so far, but we are getting there and at least we do now have the money to ensure that it does - freed up by the saving on the *M Professional*. True we no longer have a 4 day annual meeting, but nobody misses it. Two days is enough time to spend chatting to old friends finding out how the world of M is getting on, and the board time liberated allows us to travel more and support directly the local groups, (we see so few Americans at MTA-Russia these days). Those who choose to ascribe their own colors to the picture in Europe should remember that for us volunteers time is short and we can not afford any duplication. - the working year is only 48 weeks long, at least for us superior Europeans anyway. 

—P.N. Willis, President - MTA-Europe