

# Where Do We Go from Here?

by Art Smith



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*Do you think that the Millennium and future MUMPS Language Standards are important? Do you value the ANSI or ISO status of these standards? What is it worth to you individually or corporately? The new "MDC Forum" at [www.mtechnology.org](http://www.mtechnology.org) welcomes your ideas.*

Here I am again, sitting on an airplane flying home from an MDC meeting. This was the 80th meeting of the MUMPS Development Committee, held September 16-19 in Seattle. This meeting brought with it more than the usual set of hopes and concerns. Partly this was because it was the first regular meeting following the InterSystems buy-out of Micronetics (the June meeting was a "special" meeting). Additionally, this meeting was the scheduled cut-off of the next edition of the MUMPS Language Standard, X11.1 - the "Millennium Standard."

The MDC, like the rest of the M community, is struggling to determine what will be the effect of a more limited set of vendors in the marketplace. As part of this determination, we have requested information from the MUMPS vendors regarding their intention to develop M systems that conform to the Millennium Standard. The responses we received prior to this meeting were disappointing, to say the least. In general, all the vendors either failed to respond at all, or indicated that

they are not currently committing resources to this effort, and would only do so if a strategic advantage were to appear. On the other hand, a recent poll conducted by the M Web Magazine indicated that more than half of the almost two hundred respondents felt that the ANSI M Standard was "very important."

The MDC spent a two-hour discussion session taking this information into consideration. We also looked at the declining membership of both the MDC, and the significant cost of canvassing a standard for ANSI approval. Several straw polls were taken, both at this session and in the formal MDC meeting. While the correct choices are by no means clear, we have determined what we believe is the best course for the MDC at this time.

We have, at this meeting, established an MDC Language Standard (being the existing ANSI/MDC X11.1-1995 standard, as amended by all MDC Type A modifications as of September 20, 1998), which will be the document submitted to canvass at such time, if any, as the MDC next chooses. Additionally, the MDC has agreed to publish this standard in some form (whether in hard copy or electronically remains to be determined) once the final form has been approved by a vote of the MDC.

Approving this final form will require at least one more MDC meeting. Right now, the MDC standard is a collection of nearly one hundred separate documents, each of which modifies either the 1995 standard or one of a few more recent draft standards. It is the responsibility of the standard editor, Mr. Rick Marshall, to accurately combine all of these changes into one single self-consistent document. This is no small task!! Historically, these documents require several passes before the MDC agrees that they accurately reflect the combined effect of all the MDC Type A modifications without introducing any other modifications.

The MDC has agreed that it wants to continue meeting at least long enough to reach this approval, assuming that adequate funding can be obtained for this purpose. While the Millennium Standard is undergoing this approval process, work on the next version of the standard will progress, as usual. Once the Millennium Standard is published, however, the MDC will re-examine whether or not it is in the best interests of the MDC and the M community to submit this standard for ANSI canvass, and/or to continue development of future MUMPS Language Standards. These choices will depend on demonstrated substantial interest outside the MDC in obtaining

American National Standard status for the Millennium Standard, or in developing future standards. It should be noted that International Standard status, granted by ISO, is the result of ANSI submitting the standard for fast-track consideration, not the action of the MDC.

Furthermore, the MDC will publish in some form the revisions to the newly approved M Windowing API (MWAPI) standard and the revisions to the recently approved Open MUMPS Interconnect (OMI) standard. These documents are already in their final form, and do not need any additional votes. We do not intend, at this time to submit these standards for canvass. Submission of any standards to canvass will require demonstrated substantial interest in the standards, and adequate funding to support this effort.

What about the object oriented language standard development (X11.7, or Omega)? Work on that standard continues. Indeed, Subcommittee 16 (Object Oriented Language) was probably the most active subcommittee at this meeting. This group is looking at holding a meeting on its own (without a meeting of the full MDC), possibly in March. It seems likely (and this is now just my opinion) that this group will continue to meet and work on this standard, even if the MDC should choose to stop meeting entirely. Many of us feel that this effort will help to shape the future of the M community, and the entire database community, in the next few years.

So, what do you think of this course of action? We really do want to hear from you. Let us know. Let your vendors know.

Help us figure out what our next step should be. **M**

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