

From the Chairman

by Don Gall

The MTA has been going through an evolutionary process in the past years that mirrors the evolution of the use of the M language. Some years ago, M was all that was needed to create any kind of database that could be imagined. It was the input tool, the storage tool, the inquiry tool and the reporting tool. Life has changed. The M community's use of M has changed. The M community itself has changed. Along with all of this, the MTA's focus must also change.

From the first annual meeting in 1972 until three years ago, the annual meeting of the M community was an opportunity for Mumpsters to get together to talk about M issues with other Mumpsters. Three years ago the MTA Board of Directors set about to bring M to the world. For these past three years, the MTA annual conference has been held in conjunction with the Database and Client Server World Conference in Boston. This gave the M community an opportunity to get a first-hand comparison of competing technologies and to see products that can be used to enhance the capabilities of M.

The World Wide Web is having a major impact on many aspects of our lives. The ability of individuals to use the Web to get technological information has had a major negative impact on conferences. Technology is moving too rapidly to wait for an annual meeting to find out what is new. Thus, we find that along with the decline in attendance of the MTA Annual Conference, we have seen a decline in the attendance at the Database and Client Server World Conference. In fact, most major conferences have been shrinking — even Comdex, if reports from the latest Las Vegas event are accurate. What we now see is a movement toward smaller and more focused meetings. We see meetings dedicated to single topics such as JAVA, Data Warehousing, Internet and Intranet, etc.



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Since last June's MTA meeting, the MTA staff has been investigating a number of options that would enable the MTA to continue to provide educational services to the members. In the November Board of Directors meeting, we decided to energetically pursue two separate but related paths:

- Provide an expanded and more comprehensive web site for the MTA members
- Move to a more focused stand-alone MTA educational conference

The MTA Board feels strongly that these two means of communication among members can both be used effectively to improve the skills and abilities of the MTA membership. Let me now detail the proposed changes in these two areas.

Expanded MTA Internet Services

The current MTA web page is maintained by Oleen Healthcare Information Management and runs on a server at Oleen's Silver Spring, Maryland facility. Both of these services are provided as a joint venture with the MTA. The Internet Service Committee, chaired by Kathy Malin with members EuJin Ch'ng, Greg Kreis, Bob Miller and Kate Schell, has produced three audio presentations from the June MTA Conference and daily reports from that conference. To provide the expanded services detailed here, the MTA will continue to work with Oleen and the Internet Service Committee, but may also contract for support or obtain additional services on a joint venture basis. Expanded services intended for the members-only portion of the MTA web site include:

- **Sections for Special Interest Groups (SIGs)** — a forum for the exchange of information, reference material, questions and discussion of common interests such as Windows interfaces, SQL, Electronic Commerce, etc.

- **One-hour information sessions** — These will likely be aligned with the SIGs and may be developed as a result of continued interest in a specific topic. They may include lectures, Q&A with experts, and discussion of new technologies. The mechanism for topic identification and funding of these offerings is now under study.
- **More technical content** — including an information clearinghouse function.

Education Meeting: San Diego, September, 1999
 While the Internet is very good at rapidly disseminating many types of information, it can not, at least at this time, provide the stimulating and productive face-to-face interaction and group debate of ideas that can take place in an educational meeting. The MTA Board has therefore decided to sponsor a standalone meeting next September in San Diego that will

- emphasize key M-related technologies and trends
- strengthen users' abilities to integrate M with other technologies for maximum results

Benefit from Knowledge-Sharing

It is clear to me that the formation of the Special Interest Groups can play a central role in both the expanded web site and the modified educational meeting. I see them as a guiding influence on the educational directions taken by the MTA. I hope that those of you with expertise and experience in a critical area will take the time and effort to share your knowledge with other MTA members. As our highly educated teenagers of today would phrase it, "It's like that sowing and reaping thing, you know!" **M**

Don Gall is CEO of Omega Legal Systems in Phoenix, AZ and Chairman of the MTA Board of Directors.

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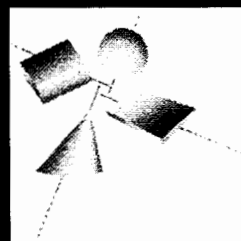
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