

Winter 2000

AXiS

News

Volume 6 Number 3

VME Alive and Well

Feelings in some quarters that ICL is allowing VME to quietly fade away have been positively dispelled in a series of useful one-day technical seminars under the banner "ICL's 20/20 Vision for Open VME". These were arranged during the latter half of November at some fine racecourse venues, Ascot, Haydock and Wetherby. Enthusiastic punters might have been disappointed that no racing took place but the presentations surely caught everyone's attention. And the bacon butties for 'breakfast' went down a treat!

VME development has been brought to the fore and, just like the good old days, customers are once again being given some insight into VME future development plans. It seems that with the issue of flotation now set aside, attention can be focused on product development. This is not to suggest that VME is the only game in town but there is encouraging recognition of the value of investment in legacy systems still running efficiently and effectively on VME.

An important message from the 20/20 Vision presentations has been the significance of information and application integration in order to underpin successful e-business. Companies seeking to reach existing and new customers via the Internet can build upon the strength of the existing systems supporting their core business whilst reaching to meet the needs of their web-enabled customers.

Bob Hawkins, Director of Business Development, Infrastructure Services Division, opened the proceedings to talk in a very positive way about ICL since the flotation issue was laid to rest. The current ICL logo now carries the legend that ICL is "a Fujitsu company" which serves to highlight the strength of the

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relationship. Bob assured the audience that Fujitsu have no plans to break-up ICL which is regarded as a significant member of the Fujitsu family. Further ICL whilst developing e-business services remains committed to supporting traditional IT systems and services. The final message for customers, ICL's 20/20 Vision is that: "with the growth of e-Business, OpenVME systems will play an increasingly crucial role at the heart of your IT infrastructure. With ICL's continuing commitment to Open VME, it is the ideal platform for mission critical IT solution and can help you exploit the potential of e-Business."

During the day presentations addressed the continuing development of OpenVME with a glimpse of what might come with OpenVME 5; how e-Business can be enabled with OpenVME by use of the new product HostTalk to provide access to reliable tried and trusted legacy applications; and, by reference to some case studies, a look at Enterprise Information Infrastructure (ei²). Either side of lunch were two presentations from third party suppliers, Network Designers Ltd and Sysop. Each reviewed product lines which continued the theme of harnessing, indeed exploiting, the investment in existing 'legacy' systems.

So VME is very much alive and well and hopefully supporting corporate IT services near you.

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Editorial

It was disappointing that we were not able to hold the planned 25th Celebration Seminar at London Zoo. This had been regarded as the 'home' of the VME User Group and therefore it would have been appropriate to have celebrated there. Our Vice-Chairman, Harold Cloutt, explains in this issue how we almost made it. The hiccup in our programme has had a knock-on effect on the Newsletter. Issue 3 was held back to report on the event. I have had to slip an issue out of the schedule so that this current issue will be the third and last one in 2000. I now have to beat the Christmas postal rush - with help from our regular Norwich Printing Services.

This winter issue is actually being prepared on a brand new super duper iMac. Yes, since the mid-80s the newsletter has been prepared largely on Apple systems. For the last 5 years a sturdy 66 MHz PowerMac has been managing quite well but with time at a premium and higher internet traffic to manage, both e-mail and AXiS web site maintenance, the steady chug of the processor was taking its toll of production times and telephone costs. It was agreed that it was time to retire it gracefully and approval was given to invest in a 500 MHz iMac which can hold its own against a 1000 MHz PC. An ethernet connection enables the old PowerMac to act as archival and backup storage, saving the need to procure additional or external storage. Apple architecture remains as reliable as ever. And this system comes with voice commands - so my fingers will be less tired at the end of the day!!

With the festive season approaching the News team extends Seasons Greetings to all readers.

Don Folland

Dates for the Diary 2001

12 Feb Deadline for copy for AXiS News
Vol 7 No 1

At the time of going to press dates for main events in 2001 are not confirmed.
Watch the Events page on the AXiS web site :
<http://www.axis.org.uk>

Vice Chairman's Column

Can I first of all apologise to all those who were planning to attend the 25th Anniversary Seminar at London Zoo which we had to cancel at fairly short notice. At the point at which we had to take the decision there were too few delegates to make the event viable. However, it seems that there were postal delays which meant that some of you did not receive the calling notice in time to book. The lessons from this are twofold. Firstly we need to send information to you earlier and secondly it is important that you keep us informed of your correct address.

Now to more positive things. Last month, I was able to attend the ICL 20/20 Vision event at Ascot Racecourse. This gave a very positive view about the future of ICL and the VME system. I was able to talk to many of the user delegates about AXiS and encourage them to register for information about our future events. I was surprised just how many had attended our meetings in the past but had simply lost touch.

AXiS of course is not just about VME. Our member sites have an interest in other aspects of computing and your committee are planning to address this in future events. We are currently in the process of arranging our programme for 2001. This will include some new features. There will be the usual focus group meetings during the year. Also, there will be two day events in the Spring and Autumn. We will advise you of the dates just as soon as these have been arranged.

Finally, can I make a request for volunteers to join the Committee. In this "e-age" we find we can conduct the majority of our business by e-mail. Face-to-face committee meetings are held in conjunction with other events. In this way membership of the committee should not take up too much of your time. If you are able to help please get in touch with myself or our secretary Don Folland. Addresses are on page 2.

Harold Cloutt

Focus Group News

TRIMETRA USER GROUP

An inaugural meeting of the Trimetra User Group was held at ICL's Customer Centre, West Gorton, on 14th June 2000. This proved to be so popular that places were restricted. Its the first time this has happened at an AXiS meeting for quite a few years. This meeting was very encouraging for Ian Myatt, Hyder plc, who has agreed to be Chairman for the Group.

Bryn Bircher, ICL's VME Marketing Manager, opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to ICL's Customer Centre. Thanks to Bryn and the team at the Customer Centre, the day went very smoothly. Delegates were welcomed with a small delegate pack which, in addition to the usual agenda and notepaper, included a CD incorporating all the presentations in Powerpoint format and a handy mouse mat. Copies of the presentations have also been made available on the AXiS web site.

Stuart Heath's presentation, Casablanca in Action, started the day's formal proceedings. Gresham has been traditionally associated with backup and storage systems. This session showed how the company has turned its attention to e-business, web testing, etc but is also running a personnel agency dealing mainly with contract staff but also recruiting permanent staff for clients. Casablanca, a web front-end for VME, is not exactly a new product but with a greater interest in e-business today it has become a major component in Gresham's web solutions portfolio.

John Earley, from the Patent Office, provided a case study showing Casablanca deployed as front-end to three key databases, for patents, designs, and trade marks, on a Trimetra delivering Patent information over Internet services. Being able to deliver patent information online addresses the current government's requirement that Departments should be more open and accessible. For the future there are plans to enable applicants to enquire into trademark refusal and submit patent Office Form 9C online. Further information can be found at <http://www.patent.gov.uk> For further information about Gresham's services go to <http://www.gresham-computing.com>

Managing Legacy Print Systems was the theme of the next presentation, from Tony Waknell who is National Accounts Manager at Integrated Document Solutions. Tony reviewed legacy print systems for VME, eg Oslan Band printers, and talked about migration to the other Trimetra environments, ie UNIX and Windows NT, referencing issues such as migrating customised solutions, and accommodating a variety of printer

types. He described a host independent solution which offers print management of all output, automatic scheduling of bulk work, automatic routing to distributed devices, integrated dynamic document composition, and integrated datastream conversion. It offers a new lease of life for LP/FP Band printers and cost effective replacement of desk-top lasers.

For the next session it was good to see John Quinn at an AXiS event again but this time he appeared as Director of Sales and Marketing for Sysop. The company took delivery of the second Trimetra DY to be installed in the UK. John outlined the Sysop systems and services which the DY supports. He reviewed customer trends such as ring-fencing residual workloads, outsourcing workloads, sharing storage servers, consolidating storage and centralising backup. The Sysop portfolio provides software for VME systems, enterprise, network and service management solutions, as well as comprehensive training. For further information about Sysop go to: <http://www.sysop.co.uk>

Ian Pickering is Technical Director of Network Designers Ltd. His presentation carried the legend "Moving to the world of e-Commerce and e-Business using existing host systems". The session looked at the Internet and the World Wide Web, cherished system integration ("cherished" is the word that Ian prefers to "legacy") and thin clients. Having a web site does not necessarily mean that you are achieving e-Business. e-Business is about extending the reach of your systems and services to your customers, partners and staff using Internet-based technologies. e-Commerce extends the reach of your commercial processes to include being able to advertise, sell, take orders and in some cases fulfil orders through Internet technologies. This session thoroughly examined the issues and the questions to be answered particularly where moving forward with 'cherished systems' in tow. What are the pros and cons of replacing the whole system? Ian described NDL products Active Host Publisher and Active Terminal Server, tools that will help the move into e-Business and e-Commerce without wasting the investment in existing systems. A short live demonstration by Trevor Simpson provided an effective conclusion to this session. For further information about Network Designers go to: <http://www.ndl.co.uk>

John Lawton, Product Manager, for Protek Bolden James, said that one result of combining the skills and experience of Protek and Bolden James was the product Secure Impart which applies security to connectivity to VME systems. Impart is a set of ICL

connectivity applications plus data transport. Secure Impart applies additional security features and provides a set of security services. It offers secure access to VME-based web pages, encrypted link from browser-based applications, secure internal connections, and a security enabled gateway. The security services offered include security health checks, security policy definition, vulnerability testing, and secure messaging systems. For further information visit: <http://www.protek.com>

Integrating VME into the New World was the title of the final presentation, from Tina Quenault who is another regular ICL presenter at AXiS events. Her

session linked many of the threads from the earlier sessions. She covered Enterprise Application Integration and the current requirements driving it, the ICL strategy for VME integration, and IDMSX Data Extraction. Tina discussed the pros and cons of integrating new and legacy systems looking particularly at the benefits to be derived from exploiting existing applications. A number of useful case studies supported her messages. It was encouraging to hear that ICL is bringing Cochise and Dialogue Manager development back on track. Delegates were left with positive feelings that there could still be another 10 years life in VME. For further information visit: <http://www.icl.com>

Application monitoring helps Hyder maintain high service levels.

AXiS member Hyder Services provides IT services to water companies, health authorities and local government right across the country. Using a wide range of applications and environments makes it difficult to pinpoint application problems, so Hyder asked ICL to develop an application health check and monitoring system for their VME service.

Taking ICL's suggestion to develop the Patrol Knowledge Management application, field trials were started. These highlighted a range of issues, many due to the size and complexity of Hyder's installation. ICL responded quickly and had every problem addressed in the next iteration of the system.

Hyder Services runs nearly a hundred different applications under OpenVME. It also inherits operating procedures with applications that are less than optimal.

Normally, an outsource provider in this situation would have to develop expertise in every application, but the new Patrol system enables Hyder staff to understand how applications behave without the need for specialists or code investigation. As a result, first level support can explain an issue to a customer and no application-specific expertise is required.

Trimetra User Chairman Ian Myatt, Technical Consultant, Hyder Services, commented "This is exactly what a large scale commercial site such as ours needs".

If it is time for your check-up and you would like to know more about application health checks and monitoring under OpenVME, why not give ICL a call to discuss your requirements.

Are you prepared for the euro?

AXiS has raised this issue before but there has been no member call so far to set up a Focus Group. Although Britain is outside the euro zone, British companies still have to take account of euros if they want to trade with the rest of Europe. The advent of the euro in 12 European countries may mean changes to the way you do business. UK firms cannot afford to ignore the euro - it's an issue that can affect your bottom line.

The introduction of euro cash in the euro area will take place in just over a year's time, on 1 January 2002. This

means that firms in countries that have joined the single currency have only just over a year to get ready for the euro. By 1 January 2002, all firms in the euro area will have to deal in euro. After this date, electronic payments in the present European currencies will no longer be available, This would mean, for example, that you would not be able to take payments from German customers in marks; or pay French suppliers in francs.

Printing the euro symbol

There will be a need to produce invoices, orders, payments and statements with the euro symbol on them. This may not be so easy. Integrated Document Solutions (IDS) have been studying the issue and have developed a simple solution which will enable band printers to print the euro symbol from any system.

Cheques and pay slips by tradition have been printed on a band printer because the technology offers better security. This means that users are likely to need to channel all such print output to the band printer, regardless of whether the data comes from a mainframe or a UNIX or Windows-based system. Current users of ICL band printers will find it impossible to create the euro symbol, but recently IDS, working closely with ICL, has come up with a quick and simple solution that can be implemented in a matter of minutes. The solution not only enables the printer to print the euro symbol, but also allows the band printer to accept TCP/IP data from Windows and UNIX systems, as well as output from a VME mainframe.

Advice from the Treasury

You may already have received a letter from HM Treasury inviting businesses who trade within Europe to look at some free case studies to show how some

typical firms have gained from trading in the euro. If your firm:

- sells goods or services to firms in countries that have joined the euro;
- purchases goods or services from firms in these countries;
- has factories or other operations in these countries;
- belongs to a group with subsidiaries or a parent company in these countries;
- supplies firms which operate or supply services in these countries; or
- faces competition from firms in these countries;

then you can get free information which could help you make financial savings, break into new markets more easily, or keep one step ahead of your European competitors.

The case studies are drawn from Clothing Producers, Construction industry, Design and Supply, Food and Drink, Giftware, Manufacturing, Precision Engineering, Services: News Analysis, Software, and Transport. These case studies could help you develop a euro plan. The case studies can be downloaded from the Treasury web site at: <http://www.euro.gov.uk> or call 08456 010199 quoting reference DMHMTE (calls charged at local rate)

E-Commerce News

Consumer Rights Established

The Government is seeking to “make the UK the best environment in the world for e-commerce”. However since 31st October 2000 the implementation of the Distance Selling Regulations has created new difficulties. On-line consumers are now being afforded unprecedented legal protection and many on-line businesses are wholly unprepared for the new regime. Detailed information on each product together with relevant supplier details must now be incorporated on the relevant web page. Confirmation of such information must be provided in writing at the time of delivery at the latest.

The consumer may withdraw from the contract up to 7 days after delivery of the goods, no reason needs to be given and no penalty can be imposed upon the consumer. If the seller does not provide the statutory information 7 days can become 3 months! Any refunds given must be made within 30 days and, unless the contract specifies otherwise, all contracts must be performed within 30 days. Failure to act in accordance with the requirements of the Regulation will be an

offence. Consumers who claim their credit card has been used fraudulently are entitled to a full refund.

As many ‘e-tailers’ work on a small profit margin getting it wrong could be crippling. Clearly, the Regulations need to be considered at the outset of a venture and not when the damage has been done.

New Europe Domain (.eu)

In September 1999, Internet Domain Registrations – a business-to-business domain registration company - approached the European Commission with the idea that Europe should have its own internet identity by introducing a domain which reflected the European community. The idea was immediately accepted as a good idea by the Commission, which has already agreed to the launch of such a domain extension for Europe.

IDR’s rationale for suggesting the introduction of the .eu was primarily driven by the fact that since 1999, the pressure on the ‘.com’ domain extension has been immense. With over 8 million .com domains already

registered – mostly by US companies and individuals – European companies were finding that domain registration opportunities were becoming increasingly limited.

The potential for the growth of .eu as the worlds' first 'area Top Level Domain (aTLD)' extension is huge and the Commission has suggested the .eu extension will, within a very short period of its launch, outstrip .com domains in sheer numbers of registrations. Although Terms and Conditions for the registration of

a .eu domain have yet to be finalised and a Naming Authority responsible for administering the .eu registration database has yet to be established, it is hoped that the .eu will be widely available to all potential registrants who wish to trade on the Internet with a European net presence.

A free pre-registration form can be found on the IDR website at <http://www.idr.co.uk>

Home Office IT 2000

The Home Office has selected Sirius as the winner of its IT 2000 contract. This is a ten year contract worth some £350 million over that period and is under PFI (Private Finance Initiative) arrangements for the delivery of Business consultancy and IT services to the Home Office. Sirius is a consortium of ICL, PriceWaterhouseCoopers and Global Crossing and won the contract in competition with a Sema Group led consortium of Deloitte Consulting and Global Crossing.

This innovative IT 2000 public-private sector partnership will allow the Home Office to be at the forefront of the introduction of e-Government, to maximise the delivery of many of its services and to improve the efficiency of the Department.

Under the IT 2000 contract, Sirius will take responsibility for owning, operating and sustaining the Home Office IT infrastructure and telephone systems. Together, the Home Office and Sirius will identify and implement IT-enabled business changes to improve the delivery of Home Office aims.

The partnership will enable the systematic introduction of new processes and ways of working using the most up-to-date and relevant technology. The transfer of IT and business change skills to Home Office staff will be a feature of the PFI partnership, which embodies the lessons learned in recent years from the introduction of new IT systems into Government.

DTI Seeks Views on Software and Business Patents

Patricia Hewitt, Minister for e-commerce and Kim Howells, Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs have launched a consultation on the need for patents to protect computer programs and Internet trading methods. Ministers have initiated the debate in recognition of the impact of e-commerce and the Internet in transforming the UK economy. The UK software and computer services market is the second largest in Europe, worth £21 billion. There are over 105,000 companies operating in this sector in the UK including all of the major global players. A third of the population are now online and over a quarter work in businesses that trade online.

Mrs Hewitt said: "We all know about patents for machines, chemicals and electronics. I believe they have served us well in bringing forward the technologies we all use, and which we often take for granted. With the e-commerce sector becoming

increasingly significant to the UK economy, it is vital that we initiate a debate on the need for patents in this area. We are seeking input on the potential impact of patents on innovation and growth, as well as feedback on the system in the US, where software and e-commerce patents are already available. These issues could profoundly affect the environment in which we do business. We need comments from all those who will be affected including those in the service, financial and business sectors who may never have come across patents before."

Dr Howells said: "We want to promote innovation and enterprise in UK industry. It is vital to strike the right balance between allowing exclusive patent rights without reducing competition and exploitation of ideas in this exciting and rapidly developing field. Until now companies have been able to develop computer software and business methods often without patents:

this might change across Europe. We must make sure that those most likely to be affected know what the possibilities are and have the chance to make their views known."

Ministers have asked the Patent Office to raise awareness, encourage debate and collect views. The Patent Office web site (<http://www.patent.gov.uk>) provides background information about patents and

how they may affect computer programs and business. It invites views on what arrangements would be of most benefit to business, consumers and the economy and offers a dedicated newsgroup for online discussion. There is also a link to the newly published European Commission consultation paper on the patentability of computer implemented inventions, so that views can also be registered directly with Brussels

From the Archives

Though our Group is 25 years old now, in terms of archive material drawn from early newsletters we can reach back only 20 years - the first 2900 User Group newsletter appeared in January 1980. It had been suggested to run 2 trial editions. Clearly the production was successful and there have been at the very least 3 but sometimes 5 issues each year ever since. The 2900 User Group in fact produced 15 issues until it undertook its first name change to Large Systems User Group in 1983. John Basher who worked at the Defence Operational Analysis Establishment at West Byfleet was the first Editor. He handed over to Don Folland, then working for CCTA, who has maintained the editorial role ever since.

Towards the end of 1980 the 2900 User Group was developing quickly to keep pace with the evolution of VME/B and a substantial raft of Applications (Superstructure) products. In fact it was agreed that a Superstructure Special Interest Group should be established. Bryan Parlett chaired the Committee set up to organise SIG meetings. He subsequently became main Group Chairman and later moved on to higher realms chairing our then parent body, the ICL Computer User Association and eventually the International Federation of ICL User Groups.

Chris Cheetham writes in a late 1980 Newsletter about the new Work Management System (SV50) in which ICL were introducing the facility to batch together the separate pieces of output produced by a single job. Communications and connectivity was of great concern as shown by a presentation from Chris Corbin, Southern Water Authority. He took ICL to task for having a wide range of products, 2900s, 1900s, System 4s, System 10s 1500s, 7500s, ME29s, Scanoptics, Keyedit - and it was not possible to connect them all together. He said "to succeed in our overall goal, we must all pull together to ensure that the computer and telecommunications technologies are tailored to what is required at a cost that is acceptable not only to each organisation but to society". Arising from his stirring words came a Communications Special Interest Group chaired by a certain Harry Barnes, from Dorset County Council. And Harry's enthusiasm for our Group's activities continues right to present times.

Tailpiece

Do you remember when....?

To systems I have known

To VME/B, or not to VME/B; that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The dumps and appalling documentation of fifteen year old
Intercode programs,
Or to take arms against a sea of amendments,
And by redesigning end them? To patch; to amend;
No more; and, by a patch to say we end
The heartache and the thousand natural cock-ups
That system is heir to, 'tis an error-free compilation
Devoutly to be wished. To convert, to transcribe;

To transcribe; perchance to emulate: ay there's the rub.

(First published in 2900 UG Newsletter No 2. March 1980 : written by Barry James, London Borough of Greenwich)
