

Winter 2002

Volume 8 Number 4

AXiS

News

Thirty-something and still at IT

The Local Government Users Association, a sister group to AXiS from the days of the ICL Computer Users Association can claim to be a few years older than us. It can trace its origins back to 1969 whereas unless we thread our way back through the George 3 User Group we have to be content with 1975. But we are both still active and to prove it the LGUA held another AGM and Conference at the end of November at York.

Of course York became a favourite venue during our AMSU period and it rather looks as if AXiS having moved to more southerly venues in recent times our LGUA sister has taken residence in York.

Like AXiS the number of delegates has reduced in recent years but the quality of the programme remains high and as your reporter I was delighted to have an excuse to visit York and also find the programme very worthwhile and interesting. I was unable to attend the AGM which preceded the conference but I understand that the LGUA is in good hands under the Chairmanship of Peter Ryder from Preston Borough Council and there are sufficient funds for the Group to keep going for the foreseeable future.

Local Government Reform - challenges and changes

The first session had been billed as "The Queen's Speech - What does it mean for you?" Tony Travers from the London School of Economics suggested that the recent Speech had not that much material from which to make a presentation for the LGUA but he capably drew out the 'e-related' issues and discussed how local government is being reformed by the present Government. Isn't it interesting how 'modernisation' has become the latest key word - very much evident in connection with the current fire-fighters dispute. But modernisation is a big issue for local government.

Tony reflected on how we have reached the present position. Pressures for improvement today owe much

to the pressure of the 'boom and bust' years pre-1975-76. Mrs Thatcher's views about central department inefficiencies still prevail in Whitehall and the present Blair government continues with the Thatcher theme. The existence of good IT makes it much easier to control everything.

From the early 90s we had performance indicators. Rewards (awards) were given for good things such as the Citizens Charter introduced by the Major Government during the mid-90s, and the concept of Beacon Councils post-1997. Best Value was another post-1997 feature and shortly we will see Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPA) providing a league table based on performance indicators. How will it all pan out and what will it all mean at the sharp end?

In the Thatcher era the enthusiasm was for markets, quasi-markets, and contracting believing that competition in the marketplace was healthy even to the extent, for example, that schools should compete for children and hospitals for patients. The Major government brought more contracting and greater use of comparative data whilst having some concern for quality and introducing more regulation with its attendant inspection and audits. The Blair government has a greater concern with quality and brought a big increase in regulation. Each successive government has just added to what went on before. All initiatives since the early 90s have been additive. The Government appears afraid to let go but eventually central control will prove more difficult to sustain. So perhaps we might look forward to fewer controls?

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Dates for the Diary 2002

30th April Spring Conference, Bletchley Park

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Editorial

This issue has been held to enable me to report on the LGUA event held at York during the last two days of November. Since we were not able to run our own Autumn event as planned this issue would have been really thin without a conference report. As it turns out by taking the LGUA report in full the News is larger than anticipated, but since I no longer have to manage size to match the Printer's rules (and of course consider costs) it is not so much of a problem. Though focused on local government I think that it touches on issues which are of interest to most of us whether as IT users or citizens receiving a local authority service.

I was disappointed that the Conference at Bletchley Park did not go ahead in November, particularly as I lost the opportunity to look at the proposed demonstration of George 3 running on a PC. David Holdsworth is still willing to run it for us and I hope that we can put it on alongside the Spring event, probably during the afternoon prior to the main Conference Day. More on this shortly but planning has started.

May I take this opportunity to wish everyone a joyful festive season and the best of health and happiness in 2003.

Don Folland

Chairman's Column

I am pleased to be able to read Don Folland's report on the LGUA conference in this issue of the newsletter. I have attended this event for a number of years and

always found the programme interesting and thought provoking.

Unfortunately, I was unable to attend this year because I have been moving house. It is amazing just how many organisations you have to tell about your new address and phone number. To complicate matters further, we have no house number just a name and we decided to change this. It takes a while for the various postcode systems to be updated with the new name. So some mail is coming to the old name. To save long waits in queues at call centres, I have attempted to do as many updates as I can online via the Internet – this seems to have been successful with one exception which seems to refuse the update. An email from the organisation tells me that the update has been done but their system persists in showing my old address. I am sure that I would be more inclined to believe them if they still had their VME system!

Then there is the Broadband issue. We previously lived in what I consider to be a large town - surprisingly our exchange was not enabled but it did at least have a threshold set for upgrade. Now we live in the country – no chance – BT haven't even set a threshold for our exchange! I await developments on this issue with interest.

Can I also apologise for the rather short notice of the postponement of the Autumn event. This has now been rescheduled for 30 April 2003. The programme will be updated to reflect current issues. We will be arranging for some workshop sessions on the previous day. The venue remains the same – Bletchley Park. Please register your interest if you have not done so already.

Harold Clouff

Paul Rappaport (1949-2002)

AXiS members who remember Paul Rappaport will be sorry to learn of his death during the summer.

Paul began his career in the IT industry in 1967 when he joined IBM as a computer programmer. He later completed several projects for the Electricity Supply Industry before he joined ICL (now part of Fujitsu) in 1972. His time at ICL was spent working in a number of different training and support roles, but always dealing directly with customers using ICL products and services.

It was while he was working for ICL that he began to see the benefits that a formal approach to the management of computers could bring to anyone using information technology systems. He left ICL in 1981 and, with two partners, he founded Ultracomp Limited. Paul's almost evangelical approach to Service Management practice, soon established the company's high standards of quality, professionalism, and ethics. Ultracomp gained a world-wide reputation as the

leading Service Management training and consultancy company.

Paul was a pioneer of Service Management best practice and was instrumental in making Ultracomp the first commercial company to invest in the development of ITIL, the IT Infrastructure Library. Originally developed under the auspices of the UK Government's Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA), ITIL is now at the heart of the IT strategy of many of the world's largest corporations including Microsoft, HP, Exxon and Shell.

In 1999, Paul was awarded the first ever "*Lifetime Achievement Award for Service Management*" by the *itSMF* (IT Service Management Forum) in recognition of his contribution to the establishment of best practice standards in IT. The *itSMF* has decided to rename the *Lifetime Achievement Award* in honour of Paul and it will be presented, annually, to someone who has made an outstanding contribution to Service Management

Continued from front page

More regulation reflects the concern in central Government about service standards and poor public management; about service failures such as child abuse scandals. Comprehensive Performance Assessments will provide an indication of how good is a particular local government authority.

The result of this is to have the most scrutinised, audited, regulated, reformed public sector in the world - possibly. The international perspective remains generally for decentralisation and fewer moves to regulate.

So what was in the Queen's Speech to affect LGUA members? Overall the proposals were modest. The Local Government Bill offers some relaxation of central control - perhaps linked with a good score from a CPA? There will be some reform of the grant system. Regional Government for England is perhaps the most significant proposal. The likeliest candidates in some order of preference are North-East, North-West, and Yorkshire & Humberside. The candidate regions must be operating already on a unitary government basis.

For the long term does the electorate want centrally-assured public service provision? Highly publicised failures tend to scare ministers. Will we see current measures replaced by new ones?

Political Undercurrents

Karen Swinden also looked briefly at the Queen's Speech. Karen is a founding partner of Kable Ltd which is recognised for its knowledge of public service IT and telecoms markets and e-government. Her interpretation of the recent speech was to suggest that restructured government will make everyone more confused; more elections will be generated at a time when voter turnout is at an all time low; changes to licensing laws means there will be more time to get drunk; but the government will clamp down on anti-social behaviour; and there could be more financial freedoms.

Karen currently runs Kable's online research database which comprehensively analyses public sector ICT spending across Europe. She is therefore in a good position to comment on results and trends. It is significant, she observed, that about 35% of government transactions are undertaken by local government but the sector is largely ignored by Government. Local government is effectively one organisation supporting dozens of different businesses.

Looking at the Spending Review 2002 some £6 billion is allocated for ICT. Health is expected to grow the fastest, central Government will grow most in terms of value, but local government will receive only about £300 million.

Spending predictions come in the face of serious risks. There is a skills shortage right across the European public sector, and there is a long history of IT failures particularly in large scale projects. There is disruption in the supplier community and there will be a significant shortfall in funds for local government; up to £600 million would be available up to 2005 when in fact research suggests that somewhere around £2.1 billion will be needed.

What has the Government in mind? There will be more financial freedom and perhaps joint procurement could help to deliver savings? More private sector input is likely and there could be more centralisation, such as Care Direct (care services provision similar to health services via NHS Direct). And another restructuring exercise in the shape of English Regional Government.

e-Democracy

An eye-catching title introduced this presentation by Julian Bowrey, who is e-Government Programme Manager from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. "e-Democracy" is about using new technology to energise the democratic and political life of the nation - to quote from an official paper from the eEnvoy in July.

Julian firstly mentioned publication on 27th November by ODPM of the National Strategy for local e-Government which is intended to give council leaders, members and senior managers a clear view of what can be achieved, the issues they will have to tackle and what the Government and local government nationally are doing to help. A new website is being built specifically to help and guide local councils in implementing local e-government. The site - www.localgov.gov.uk - provides policy information and guidance, best practice examples and contacts and information on partnership agreements, model contracts and business cases.

There are two strands of activity at present: e-participation and e-voting. Participation is about national projects which are local authority led but would include other stake-holders. The objective is to increase citizen participation in local authority decision making and increase turnout at local elections. There should be significant outcome by December 2004. The underlying themes include a consultation module, tools to "e-enable" councillors to be more effective, web-casting with online resources, and e-citizens to support and engage the socially excluded.

e-Voting planning is targeting a general election sometime after 2006. The technology is being considered to provide suitable choice for the elector, eg, internet, telephone, kiosk at polling station, post and text messaging. Possible approaches are being piloted now. A number of innovative procedures were evaluated in several areas during the May 2002

elections including extensions to postal voting and electronic voting, eg in Swindon, Liverpool, Chester. In 2003 some 25 pilots are anticipated to further pilot electronic voting and soft solutions such as manifestos online.

The point was made that democratic renewal is not dependent upon e-voting alone. Use of technology is only part of the story, if perhaps the easier part but it offers the potential to extend choice and access to the political process.

Some relevant web sites:

www.local-regions.odpm.gov.uk

www.edemocracy.gov.uk

www.electoralcommission.org.uk

Freedom of Information Act and e-Government

The final session of the day dealt with the important ramifications for local government of the implementation of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act. The speaker was Jim Amos, Honorary Senior Research Fellow at The Constitution Unit, University College London. Following a career in IT and telecoms Jim in recent years has undertaken research at the Constitution Unit in the field of freedom of information. This included research into the practical experience of business with FOI laws in USA, Canada and Australia. He is well placed to advise on the issues.

The FOI Act will have a greater impact than most people expect. The successful implementation of FOI depends on the e-Government programme. The Act of 2000 requires everything in place for operation in January 2005 when the citizen is freely able to ask for information which a public body is expected to hold.

The scope extends across more than 80,000 authorities which includes not only the tiers of government down to and including parish councils but also doctors, dentists, schools, and any company providing a service for a public authority. The Act provides for any person the right of access to information, and the person does not need to provide any reason for the request. Any written request for information is subject to the FOI within the rules of Data Protection. The Act applies to all information that is held at the time the request is made.

It is thought that the impact of the Act might be high though there is no knowledge as to how much use will in fact be made. Perhaps we could draw from experience in Australia where there was little interest when their scheme was launched but interest grew very quickly. In a situation where a decision is finely balanced as to whether or not to release certain information then the 'public interest' test must tip the balance in favour of release.

The availability of a good IT infrastructure should help to deliver information more efficiently but much will

depend on good electronic records management and publishing. The requirement for public authorities is to adopt and maintain a scheme and to publish information in line with that scheme. Information must be reasonably accessible and, with regard to public interest, whenever information is withheld the reasons must be properly stated. All requests for information should be recorded; this is particularly important should a complaint arise.

A morning with Anite

Before the published programme got under way on the second day Terry Allen, Divisional Director with Anite Public Sector, asked to say a few words to counteract recent computer press commentary in connection with staff cutbacks which among other things suggested that Anite had not been working to any coherent strategy in recent times. Terry briefly reviewed the history of the various software acquisitions, all part of Anite strategy to provide a large customer base coupled with good product experience. Naturally there was a downside in terms of some duplication, such as accountants, and diverse technologies. However Anite had embarked on a fusion programme to ensure that all elements worked together under a common development strategy, and under one Development Manager. The strategy included developing working partnerships with local authorities and suppliers, particularly where specialist areas like GIS are involved. In these cases Anite often takes on prime contractor status.

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Choice-based Lettings

This presentation by Mike Parry of Anite considered the changing market for social housing. There are pockets of low demand but also some areas with really long waiting lists, some as long as 9 years. Demand for housing in the highly desirable areas steadily increases and the less attractive areas show reductions in demand. Mike described initiatives that are helping to redress the balance in certain local authority areas, eg London Boroughs of Camden, and Haringey, and Bolton Metropolitan Borough. Use of online systems allows potential tenants to choose from the current letting portfolio, exercising their personal preferences as far as possible.

The effect of choice is showing an increase in selection and demand in the low desirability areas. Choice tends to lead to fewer refusals and in turn this means lower allocation costs. Client 'self-service' can remove costs. An example of the process can be found at the Bolton MBC website: www.homesforyou.org.uk

Joint Working: System Interaction

Anite's Kelly Gaddes looked at the question "Why should Housing, Social Care, and Revenue and Benefits Departments work together". It's obvious that people's needs cross systems and if an holistic response to their needs can be established then the value of the local authority's service increases. Processes and workflow jobs need to follow a person across the relevant systems.

Kelly has been involved in developments that can help, working from the premise that an event should trigger a simple alert in all relevant departments, eg, Social Care, or Revenues and Benefits. Such alerts can be cheaply delivered electronically, eg by email, to the right person in the relevant department.

The approach which Anite has been promoting addresses the issue of individual local authority departments working very much in isolation and not willingly sharing information. By taking the Anite way administration is more efficiently delivered, customers are better satisfied, services can be more pro-active, staff time can be focused, public funds can be saved through early intervention, and shared use of core data can enhance its quality.

This approach relies on the willingness for all departments to co-operate. Experience shows that this can be difficult to achieve because individual departments are sensitive and protective of their own priorities. The Anite solution uses a rule based business objects approach to facilitate the event triggers and send appropriate information where it is required.

Information Management is critical for FOI compliance

The third of the main Anite presentations was given by Steve Blake. It nicely complemented the previous afternoon's session on the Freedom of Information Act. Steve had a number of quotes, such as describing FOI as "the greatest ever single challenge to face public administration". Elizabeth France from the Data Protection Authority has declared "If you do not link FOI, DPA and records management your road ahead is disaster"

Anite conducted a survey this year to assess the extent of FOI activity in local authorities and who is involved. It showed that 46% of staff then looking at the issues were legal officers with the balance spread thinly across many other departments. Many responses suggested that there might be little public interest which may account for the fact that there has not been much progress to date. Some think at 18 months distance its far enough into the future. Many senior managers are not taking it seriously, and, perhaps linked to this, many have no resources at present to make a start.

The survey showed that only 10% were unaware of the implications of FOI but 40% are struggling to get to grips with the issues. It is critical to get senior management involved and committed now.

Significant process needs the Lord Chancellors Department to vigorously promote the Act and its associated responsibilities. Budgets need to be set now. The lessons learned from the Year 2000 exercise should be applied - those who started earliest showed a 30% lower overall cost than those who left things till later.

Information Management is very much the crucial requirement in order to find the particular piece of information when it is called for. It is necessary to know what information is held and where it is held. It is not enough to report that information has been destroyed. It will be a requirement to report when and why information was destroyed. Records must be maintained for current and future reference and evidence when required.

Steve outlined the tasks to be undertaken starting with an Information Management health check. Where do you stand in readiness? Compare with the Code of Practice published by the Lord Chancellors Department and audit your department's functional organisation. Check resources and establish key lines of communication. Plan to resolve any issues revealed by the health check audit. Importantly, appoint someone with authority to take action.

A number of tools are available. In addition to the Code of Practice, the Lord Chancellors Department

provides Model Action Plans. There are ERM toolkits, record management standards, and websites to assist. The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) website (www.jisc.co.uk) is worth a look. A training programme will be required to establish which duties require which skills, address skills gaps, and provide an awareness programme.

An Information Management and FOI policy statement should be issued to meet your Authority's business needs, to address the needs of your stakeholders and conform to relevant legislation. Then act upon the IM and FOI policy.

The session stimulated an amount of discussion. A notable quote suggested that public demand for information could be reminiscent of the Martini advert - 'any time, any place, any where'. Though exceptions can be claimed it is considered the options for claiming exceptions in the local government area are limited. Experience from Ireland showed that their Ombudsman would frequently rule 'no justification to refuse information' when they adopted FOI and now few exceptions are claimed. They found that in addition to a senior FOI officer each department needed someone trained to find the required information. The Irish experience suggested that if one operates within the spirit of the Act it should work well.

The final message "Be prepared"

Supporting people : Opportunities and Challenges

The final session of the morning, and the conference, was presented jointly by Anite's Kelly Gaddes and Amanda McGlennon from the Royal Borough of Kingston. They talked about the implementation of the Supporting People programme which provides the framework for local authorities in England to improve the quality of life of vulnerable citizens by helping them to achieve greater independence. The programme promotes housing-related services which are cost-effective and reliable, and which complement existing care services. Housing and social services departments will need to work in close partnership with health providers, probation services, users, providers and other representative groups.

The programme brings together multiple funding streams to provide housing related services to help vulnerable people live in their own accommodation. By April 2003 Supporting People teams within each local authority will have the legacy funding from the

national pot of money - from housing benefits, social services, etc. It is crucial to record people's need and have some consistency of recording. A main aim is to raise standards and quality of service and to target the services required.

There are several issues concerning service provision. Small providers work under significant financial constraints; few records may be kept and tracking systems may not be in place. There is competition for cash across the client groups.

Anite has worked with Cap Gemini Ernst Young (CGEY) and DTLR to develop a Supporting People Local System (SPLS) to assist collaborating organisations to co-ordinate their various activities and administer the several facets of the SP programme. The key requirement is to ensure that from 1st April 2003 all providers will be paid correctly and ensure there is no disruption to the provision of services for vulnerable people. The focus will move towards monitoring performance and identifying any gaps between need and supply.

CGEY and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister are looking to the future provision of an SP service which will open access for the public and professionals, to provide a national online booking service and an electronic link for service users, providers and commissioners.

Further information can be found at:
www.supporting-people.odpm.gov.uk
www.aniteps.com

Close

Peter Ryder closed the conference with thanks to all presenters and to delegates for supporting the event. He remains confident about the future for the LGUA itself and promised that there are plans for another conference next year. As your reporter whose interest in local government is largely as an end-user and a parish councillor I found the presentations of real interest particularly touching on the implications of the Freedom of Information Act. I thought that the conference material merited a much wider audience, and indeed some would be of interest and value to AXiS members.

Don Folland
for AXiS News





to the Editor

Tim Musto, an AMSU friend from a few years ago, has written recently from South Africa. He regularly reads AXiS News and keeps in contact through our web site. His thoughts are published here as a reflection of views of a former ICL customer overseas.

It really hurts to hear of the declining VME numbers more so as both the operating system and hardware are now mature and problem free. I think a lot of it has to do with the manner in which ICL has communicated with its customers - it tends to dictate and annoy them from what I gather locally.

Funny how a number of sites quoted they wanted to leave legacy systems and move onto more modern platforms. Then they choose UNIX and SAP. SAP is over 30 years old and I would hazard a guess that UNIX is older so one really wonders why. I think 2 things would have helped VME modernise and hang in there. A Graphical User Interface and the use of TCP/IP for its comms protocol. The latter is being mentioned in the last few releases.

I have been involved with a local company doing amazing work emulating the VME environment on a PC so it's great to see someone carrying it forward to the 'new platforms' that seem flavour of the day.

As for the [AXiS] Golden Circle - wow, it seems like just yesterday we were all at York University talking about the release of the SX - incredible how time flies. Yes please, I'd love to stay in comms. Not sure how many events I'd get to attend, but keep me posted and lets see how it goes.

I've spent some time on the Trimetra range and still remain amazed at how they shrunk a computer room full of discs and front end processors into a little filing cabinet. I expect the NOVA series will impress further. Already we're storing 80 GB on a single DLT tape - the mind boggles! We had to schedule transport for the myriads of reels when we had 50 GB!

I had heard something about discontinued support for some hardware. The fact that it includes the FDS range is going to have a large and wide impact right the way down to Cape Town. There are two sides to every story so it made interesting reading to hear ICL's reasons which are not altogether unreasonable as tabled. I believe it will expedite the "decision time" for many sites, and ICL may be cutting its own throat as some will opt out for other systems. Catch 22.

The last AXiS News mentioned how email had made it possible to arrange a VME get together so quickly. If you look back through the issues, you will see a "tailpiece" on one of the back pages where Bill Hill (past chairman) and I were communicating over the net in the pioneering days. Pioneering days in that the

commercial world was just starting to tinker with email in the form of X.400. I was fortunate enough to have a genuine internet address via the local prof at the University of Zimbabwe and a number of slip connections through to Grahamstown University in South Africa. Bill was battling to get X.400 to co-operate. Do you recall the format of an X.400 address? Strewth - if you thought UNIX was funny by being case sensitive, X.400 took the cake with all its parameters.

Thanks for the news Don - where would users be without this forum? Speechless and uninformed?

My best regards to you and the former (and current) crew

Tim

Reply from Malcolm Earnshaw, High Performance Systems, Fujitsu Services

Thanks to Malcolm Earnshaw for this prompt reply:

As one wise sage said 'The only constant is the increasing rate of change'.

This is true in the mainframe computing industry as I'm sure it is in many others in today's fast changing world. Withdrawing products from support is always a painful activity. Fujitsu doesn't want to do it as it can force customers to move away from VME more quickly. Customers don't want to change their working environments and certainly don't want to spend any more money. We note with interest the comments in the letter about the amazing consolidation that has happened in the industry over the last 10-years or so, and interestingly enough, many customers have found that moving to these more modern technologies has dramatically cut their running costs to the extent that they can recoup their investments in new technology in well under two years. The key complaint we get, from customers, is not that we shouldn't have withdrawn support for these antiques, but that we should have done it long ago.

Good GUI and application integration is a key requirement for many customers (and increasingly so) and TCP/IP has been available on VME systems since early 2000 with the release of OpenVME V4. The HostTalk portfolio of products, designed to integrate VME (at application level) with commodity platforms can provide a graphical interface to VME applications, WITHOUT any application change. Web enabling of applications is also possible.

Malcolm

Fujitsu News

Multi-million pound IT services contract from Southern Water

In November Fujitsu Services won a multi-million pound, five-year contract with Southern Water to manage, support and enhance the company's customer billing system. The new contract, won in competitive tender, reinforces the previous five-year partnership with Southern Water.

Fujitsu Services will continue to operate and support Southern Water's customer billing system which helps to collect over £400 million each year from four million customers. They will also provide and maintain the IT infrastructure and provide facilities to upgrade the billing application to ensure that it continues to meet the business needs of Southern Water and to support new working practices.

Fujitsu gets top marks for IT support

Ufi Limited, the government-backed organisation behind the **learndirect** e-learning network, has awarded Fujitsu Services a £10 million contract to implement and run a managed data centre to support online learning initiatives

The contract, for three years, will provide a managed data centre to support Ufi's Corporate Learning Environment (CLE) application as well as providing a full disaster recovery centre for its **learndirect** business. The new data centre, in the Sheffield area, will provide hosting for the recently launched **learndirect** corporate initiative, which has been created to address the specific training needs of small to medium sized enterprises.

From a central Government initiative, the Ufi is tasked with delivering vocational learning to individuals and industry, in order to boost business competitiveness by arming employees with the skills they need today and for the future through online learning. Offering over 800 courses covering ICT, the skills for life - literacy and numeracy - and business management skills, **learndirect** corporate enables individuals to learn at a pace that suits them and wherever they have access to the Internet - at home, at work or in one of over 1,800 **learndirect** centres.

The Fujitsu managed service solution which includes Helpdesk, Enterprise Services and Network Services, is based on a 24/7 service with strict SLA requirements for availability, performance and stability of the environment. At the core is a SUN FIRE 15K with

associated hardware (38 Dell servers and 12 Sun Servers), software, network and services necessary to meet Ufi's requirements.

Luton Borough Council aims for the Lord Chancellor's record management standard with Fujitsu Services help

Luton Borough Council has awarded a contract to Fujitsu Services for a document management system that will reduce the amount of time spent processing requests for personal information from several working days to just four hours. The objective is to give citizens an improved quality of service from the Council, with shorter response times on queries for personal information held by the Council. Council staff will no longer have to manually search for documents within its file systems and across the four Microsoft Exchange mail servers which do not have global search functions.

The Fujitsu solution is based on KVS Enterprise Vault software. It will enable Luton Borough Council to manage and automate the archiving, retention and retrieval of information stored in Microsoft Exchange mailboxes, personal folder files and public folders. The software compresses and stores emails and attachments, removing the file from the exchange database, decreasing the amount of storage needed in the Exchange database while retaining the information in a secure format. This will contribute to Luton Council's ability to achieve standards set in the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Act for management of personal information.

Luton Council is working towards the 2005 e-government deadline and is increasingly using email as a method of communication with its citizens. Under the Data Protection Act, the Council is legally responsible for the security of all information supplied by individuals including within email. The implementation protects emails from being corrupted or information within them being altered. Emails are condensed to about 50% of their original size, saving several gigabytes of space on the email servers.

By 2005 Local Authorities must conform to the Freedom of Information Act, which gives individuals the right to see all personal information an organisation holds on them. [See report from LGUA conference on page 5 of this issue of AXiS News] The solution provides enhanced functionality for searching across all folders, meaning that the IT department no longer has to dedicate the equivalent of half a full time member of staff to track emails.

TNT to cut customs clearance times with electronic document management

Fujitsu Services recently signed a multi-million pound, three year contract to supply TNT Express with 'PACS' (Pre-Arrival Clearance System), a global electronic document management system that will revolutionise its international deliveries.

Previously to clear TNT's deliveries through customs involved a time-consuming, paper-based process, including up to four items of paperwork for each of its 30,000 daily consignments. Each parcel came with paperwork physically attached, which would have to be collected upon arrival at an airport or port and then sorted for appropriate clearance by customs officials.

The new Fujitsu document management system will scan customs related paperwork into an electronic format, which will be electronically transmitted to the parcel's destination depot. There local TNT staff can begin the customs clearance process whilst the parcel is still inbound. The improved system will reduce the customs process by up to eight hours.

Staff can work more efficiently and consistently, rather than in brief periods when relevant flights land. The system will also cut down on lost paperwork and is expected to reduce the costs of paper handling and storage costs by more than £1 million per year. Aided by Fujitsu's global reach, TNT will roll the system out across its entire international operations by the end of October.

Fujitsu Services designed and developed the application in partnership with Meridio Limited. It fully integrates with the Meridio Document Management product at its heart. The solution will be hosted in TNT's worldwide data centre and integrated with its other systems for maximum functionality. It is fully scalable, to allow for growth in deliveries and is flexible enough to absorb future document types and formats. It also conforms to TNT's security policy, essential in such a data-sensitive business.

The key benefits of the system include considerable cost savings, quicker deliveries, improved customer satisfaction, reduced paper handling costs and improved staff productivity. Fujitsu and TNT are also committed to participating in regular user workshops to continually improve the performance and functionality of the solution.

From the Archives

“IPA - the pot of Gold at the end of the Rainbow”

This headline of 20 years ago was unearthed, just like the ‘pot of gold’, from AXiS (strictly the 2900 User Group) archives of 1982. An article originally published internally within ICL was reproduced in our Newsletter of November 1982 to introduce the series of ‘coloured books’ that contained a working set of interim standards devised to intercept the ISO’s evolving Open Systems Interconnection standards. Several UK bodies in the scientific and academic arena plus British Telecom agreed these interim standards rather than delay product lines whilst waiting for the International Standards to be approved.

ICL in promoting its Information Processing Architecture (IPA) had already committed to adopting ISO standards but took the pragmatic view that since many of its customers in the academic community wanted to use one or more of the Rainbow Books on ICL equipment it should endeavour to support the Rainbow books where practical, eg the IPA facility FTF issues a protocol based on the Blue Book.

The ‘colour’ of the books derived from the colour of the card used to bind the book. The relevant colours as far as ICL was concerned were:

Red: A network independent Job Transfer and Manipulation protocol. This was developed by the National Physical Laboratory

Yellow: A network independent Transport Service.

Green: Character terminal protocols on PSS. A recommendation of the use of X3, X28, and X29 protocols used when teletype compatible terminals are driven across packet switching systems like PSS.

Blue: A network independent File Transfer protocol.

Tailpiece

As this issue of AXiS News is published close to Christmas this year here are a few jokes which might be worthy of your Christmas crackers:

I went on the Internet to get some software to increase my cache. But, the download is too big for my cache and crashes the computer. It's a cache 22.

“At my office they spent £1 million on a computer system that was supposed to be a turnkey solution, turned out to be a turkey solution.”

“Gobbled up your money did it?”

“Yes, but it was just a poultry sum.”

What is a computer's first sign of old age?

Loss of memory.

What does a baby computer call his father?

Data.

What is an astronaut's favourite key on a computer keyboard?

The space bar.

What happened when the computer fell on the floor?

It slipped a disk.

Why was there a bug in the computer?

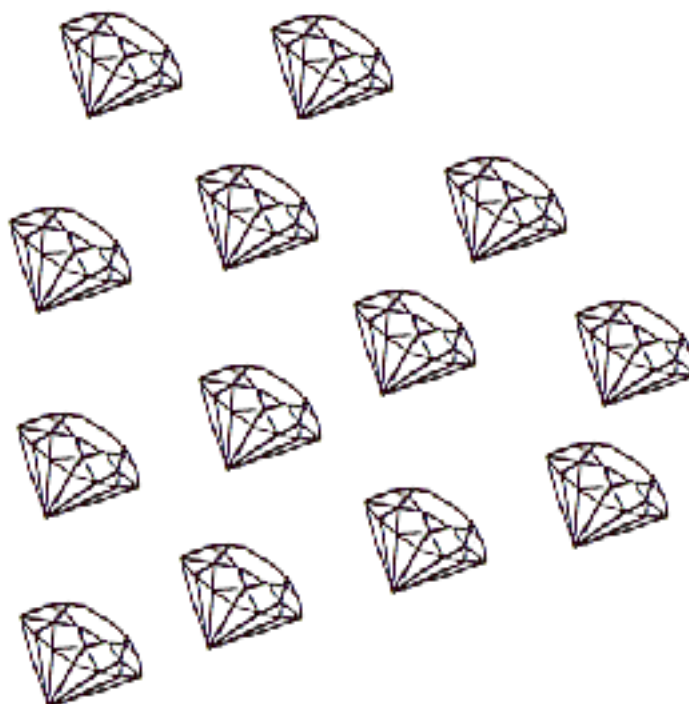
It was looking for a byte to eat.

What is a computer virus?

A terminal illness.

.. and specially for the AXiS News Editor:

The box said "requires Windows '95 or better...", so we bought a Macintosh!



AXiS SPRING CONFERENCE 2003

Are you reliant on VME to support your business?

- *then you need to attend the AXiS conference*

Do you need to reduce costs and increase efficiency?

- *then you need to attend the AXiS conference*

Do you need to exploit your investment by integrating it with the rest of the world?

- *then you need to attend the AXiS conference*

Are you planning to migrate off VME

- *then you need to attend the AXiS conference*

The AXiS conference is run *by* VME users *for* VME users and is a great opportunity to network with your colleagues and peers - exchanging best practise methods and learning how other organisations are solving the problems you may be experiencing.

Not only will Fujitsu Services be letting you know what they are up to and where they are going but a range of organisations will also be demonstrating their products and capabilities in the VME environment.

Need VME? – then you need to attend the AXiS conference

The AXiS conference will be run annually and is aimed at key technical staff and IT management of organisations that rely on VME to support their business operations.

The next AXiS conference will be held on 30th April 2003 at Bletchley Park, near Milton Keynes. Under its World War 2 cover name of Station X Bletchley Park was home to some of the finest brains of the day who were responsible for breaking “unbreakable” codes and cyphers, the most famous being the Enigma machine cypher. Its association with early computer technologies, eg the development of Colossus, the world’s first programmable computer, make it an excellent location for an AXiS event.