

Winter 2003

AXiS

News

Volume 9 Number 4

Taxing changes for Inland Revenue?

After 10 years EDS has been elbowed aside by the Inland Revenue in favour Cap Gemini Ernst & Young (CGEY) and its main partner Fujitsu Services as the preferred suppliers for the ASPIRE contract, worth £3bn over 10 years. The announcement will be a significant blow to EDS and its partner Accenture, who currently run the Revenue's IT systems.

It is interesting to look back through AXiS, or more specifically AMSU, records to consider what was happening in the IT world in 1993 when EDS were awarded what was perceived then as the plum Government IT services contract. Ed Wilson, who was Chief Architect for the Inland Revenue's Information Technology Office, was a key speaker at our Autumn Conference in York that year. He was responsible for development and maintenance of an architecture which had to deliver effective and efficient IT and Information Services to meet the business needs of Inland Revenue then and sustain a business vision through to 2000. And this in the role of 'intelligent customer' overseeing an incoming contractor who would deliver the required IT services.

Ed commented at that time on the difficulty of planning and purchasing products and services in the context of a turbulent IT industry, with a fragmented marketplace. Which chip, which PC, which database, should be chosen? A key battleground was the office environment. Would Microsoft deliver the commodity office when they had no experience of the issues of scale? The Unix world at that time was still divided by self-interest, with each player wanting to add value despite the underlying push for open system standardisation. Ed perceived the end-user as king, seeking value for money, through re-use of existing technical infrastructure and re-use of existing applications. Keep IT simple - was Ed's final message.

It would be interesting to hear from Ed now - ten years on. How well did EDS live up to their early promise.

AXiS News

The company came under close scrutiny from MPs and politicians for its record on government contracts, most recently with problems surrounding the rollout of the new tax credit system for the Revenue. The government has been looking to increase competition for public sector IT contracts following a track record of high-profile failures.



For the Inland Revenue transition to the new supplier will begin on 5 January. The new contract will actually start on 1st July 2004 and is valued at £300m per year. Fujitsu estimates that its business under the contract could deliver revenues of approximately £1 billion. It involves development of the future technology platform for the department in addition to the support and maintenance of over 70,000 desktops, 177 IBM and Hewlett Packard Unix servers and 200 ICL mainframes. The decision to change from EDS to CGEY could not have been easy considering the many handover issues involved, not least personnel and presumably the implications of TUPE.

The business objective for the Inland Revenue is to improve the rate of change necessary for interacting with the UK public, at the same time retaining or improving IT service quality, cost of ownership and service delivery responsiveness. The ASPIRE systems will process over 150 million transactions per year and will be key to the collection and management of some £212 billion of UK Government funds.

Continued on Page 3

In this Issue

Focus Group News
Disability test for Web Sites
Fujitsu News
Spam News

Executive Committee

Chairman

Harold Cloult

Tel: 01424 838829

Email: harold.cloult@axis.org.uk

Secretary/Newsletter Editor

Don Folland

Tel 01603 279402 Fax 0870 0524293

Email dfolland@axis.org.uk

Treasurer & Membership Secretary

Harry Barnes

Tel 01305 833242 Fax 01305 834456

Email harry.barnes@axis.org.uk

Vice Chairman/Trimetra

Ian Myatt

Tel: 02920 366529

Email: ian.myatt@axis.org.uk

Cross Platform Group

Harold Cloult

(See above)

Fujitsu Liaison

Malcolm Earnshaw

Tel: 0870 325 2335

Email: Malcolm.Earnshaw@services.fujitsu.com

Committee Members

Emma Campbell, Email: emma.campbell@axis.org.uk

Alan Frost, Email: alan.frost@axis.org.uk

AXiS News: PO Box 384, Buxton, Norwich, NR10 5RS

Dates for the Diary 2004

27/28th April **Spring Conference**

Watch the Events page on the AXiS web site: <http://www.axis.org.uk>

**Get the latest news
about AXiS from our
very own Web site:**

**Visit at:
<http://www.axis.org.uk>**

Editorial

A number of things including a seasonal cold have conspired to delay production of the last issue of AXiS News for 2003 but I am determined that there will be something to publish on the web by 31st December to keep within the proper calendar year. I suspected that I might tempt providence if I should await reports from the Trimetra and Web Services Focus Groups. Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today - my grandmother's words echoing in my ears as I write.

Throughout this year AXiS News has been reporting on the dreaded Spam issue. My email in-tray has suffered so much during the year that I have been keen to give a good airing to the issue. By the end of the year it became so bad that I decided to subscribe to a US filtering organisation, SpamArrest (<http://www.spamarrest.com>). After a successful trial period I decided to pay a subscription which works out at just under £2 per month to have all my email examined. Only 'approved' email reaches me. This approval is achieved by me establishing a 'white' list of addresses from whom I might expect email, or by the senders approving themselves as a result of a special dialogue generated by SpamArrest, or individually approved by me from the list of unauthorised email which I can view on the SpamArrest server. Unauthorised emails are automatically deleted from the server at a time threshold which I can set. My daily email delivery has reduced from over 100 to less than 10 on average. This is most welcome. I understand that my ISP, Demon Internet Services, will be introducing a spam filtration service in the New Year, at no charge to the user. I shall watch with interest how well this works and if successful I may be able to suspend my subscription with SpamArrest.

Best wishes for 2004 from the AXiS News team.

Don Folland

Chairman's Column

You will probably be reading this newsletter after the Christmas and New Year break. I just wonder how many Spam emails your company will have had to process over this period. I have just processed the 20 that I received today on one of my personal accounts – and that is after the Spam filter used by my service provider had identified the majority. My service provider suggested that I report any emails that are not caught by the filter – so I have done this. In reality if all their customers send them 20 unidentified Spams a day how are they going to do anything about it? If email is going to be a useful as it should be a solution has to be found. I just wonder how many genuine emails are being filtered out!

2003 was another successful year for AXiS. Following on from the conference at Bletchley Park – two Focus Group meetings were held, both of which are reported on in this issue. Our thanks go to all those who spoke at these meetings.

As is announced elsewhere in this newsletter, planning has started in earnest for our Spring conference which this year will be held at the Earth Centre near Doncaster. We will be following a similar format to the event at Bletchley Park. We have had several enquiries from exhibitors already.

Harold Clouff

Continued from the Front Page

There are reports that EDS has suggested that vital tax credit payments could be delayed by the handover though there is every hope that they will co-operate fully with the incoming contractor. It is understood that staff will have a period of grace before having to decide whether to move to CGEY or to stay with EDS.

Fujitsu Services will provide the operational infrastructure services that will underpin the running of the Inland Revenue business across the UK, including Data Centres, application, file & print servers and input and output facilities which support taxation processing.

Fujitsu Services will also support 78,000 Inland Revenue users at 600 locations and will provide disaster recovery facilities. As part of this contract, Fujitsu expect to adopt around 900 staff from the incumbent suppliers EDS and Accenture.

CGEY's role as prime contractor embraces responsibility for the overall ASPIRE services including managing, supporting and developing the Inland Revenue systems. The company will work with the Inland Revenue in their desire for technology-led change. BT will be sub-contracted to carry out the WAN and Voice Support services.

Focus Group News

Trimetra Focus Group

Miracle GA Solutions Ltd kindly hosted a meeting of the Group at their Aintree offices on 25th November under the heading of the Management of Moveable Media. There was a good attendance and some excellent presentations. Copies of each presentation except the first one are available to AXiS members from our web site.

(<http://www.axis.org.uk/members/tugrep03.htm>)

50 years of Magnetic tape

In this session Semar Majid, Imation UK Ltd, following a brief reminder of Imations' experience as a media manufacturer, talked about the changing culture as far as magnetic tape is concerned. He compared tape capacity and performance in 1952 and 2002. Backup windows steadily decrease for businesses requiring even faster data transfer rates and techniques to minimise disturbance for the user whilst protecting essential data and facilitating recovery should a disaster occur. He provided a glimpse into the future touching on holographic storage and the O-Mass magnetic optical hybrid. A copy of the Powerpoint presentation is available but at 19.8Mb it is too large for storage and downloading from the AXiS web site. If you would like a copy on CD please e-mail AXiS Secretary (contact info on page 2).

Current Solutions and Future Directions

Martin Warren, StorageTek, discussed Automated Tape Solutions from StorageTek, looking at systems currently available and also identifying some products coming soon. New developments are aimed at providing 100% availability through several levels of redundancy and offering higher performance that should be able to deal with unexpected peak workloads. He talked about EchoView, a Data Protection Appliance that enhances backup systems by eliminating the backup window and providing rapid intuitive recovery.

Storage and Data Centre Management

Stuart Sawle, Sysop Group, was an early member of our ancestor group, the 2900 User Group and we continue to welcome his contribution to our Group activities. His presentation looked at Sysop's PADUA, a Library Control Interface which enables connection of industry standard libraries to VME and reviewed low cost libraries, the subject of Storage Area Networks and Sysop Training facilities.

TCP/IP in OVME4 and beyond

In the final session Derek Harrison, Fujitsu Services, looked at IP in Open VME4 and Open VME5. He reprised the facilities provided and discussed how to get working features such as RFC, FTP, LPR, INET, Loadsharing, adding DNS and security and access control. He also looked at Troubleshooting.

Web Services Focus Group

It was a select group who on 3rd December 2003 found their way via the British Computer Society to a meeting room at the Royal College of Midwives for a valuable Web Services workshop. A last minute change of venue looked very much as if it had been associated with the subject of internet security - one of the issues on the agenda. The building proved tricky to access. Was this because the Colombian Consulate occupies one of the floors in the building? I wonder what passers-by thought of the sign "AXiS" in one of the ground floor windows?

This workshop centred around questions raised by members, particularly Guernsey Electricity. Dr Steve Hilditch, Fujitsu Services, led the first part of the workshop covering Internet Security. This was very well received. He reviewed server architectures and the best disposition of firewalls to most effectively protect customer and personal data. He identified recent developments in tools to assist with intrusion detection. A brief look at content management identified a topic which AXiS will consider for more detailed discussion at a future workshop.

Don Folland had a brief one-to-one session with Philip Pragnell to discuss some specific HTML issues highlighted by a Bobby analysis of a page from the Guernsey Electricity web site. Bobby is a tool freely available at <http://bobby.watchfire.com> for singleton page analysis to validate a web page for level of accessibility. A page which passes the Bobby test can carry an "Approved Page" logo. See the AXiS home page (<http://www.axis.org.uk>) for an example. Don then led a brief discussion on key aspects of web design referring to IEEE Std 2001-2002 IEEE Recommended Practice for the Internet - Web Site Engineering, Web Site Management, and Web Site Life Cycle.

Copies of both presentations are available to AXiS members from our web site:

(<http://www.axis.org.uk/members/wsfgrp03.htm>)

Will your website pass the disability test?

This year has seen the first formal investigations by the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) into website access for Britain's 8.5 million disabled people. Websites that fail to comply will not face prosecution. The objective is to encourage good practice rather than force legal compliance. In fact, the DRC, which is funded by the Department of Works and Pensions, does not have enforcement powers.

Initial research into 1,000 sites is being conducted in collaboration with a team from the Centre for Human Computer Interaction Design at City University, London. In addition, 50 disabled people will be involved in in-depth testing of a representative sample of these sites for usability.

The investigators are not specifically testing sites for World Wide Web Consortium(W3C)'s disability standards, but rather, guided by a panel are covering

practical applications, such as ecommerce, e-shopping, and ebanking.

Whilst the RNIB has been promoting web accessibility for the past three years including running seminars, some on company premises where there is sufficient demand, the DRC investigation has wider reach covering a wider range of impairment.

The DRC findings are expected shortly. In the meantime web site designers can take several measures to make sure their sites are accessible to users with disabilities, ranging from using large clear fonts to having text alternatives for images and avoiding the need for "subtle" mouse movements.

For more information visit the DRC web site:
<http://www.drc-gb.org>

Fujitsu News

Help for West Midlands Co-op

West Midlands Co-op recently signed a £1 million contract with Fujitsu Services to assist with a radical modernisation of its 35 supermarkets and convenience stores. The objective is to give customers a faster and more efficient service, reduce in-store queues and allow the supermarkets to re-stock more rapidly and effectively.

The contract will introduce a modernised store system incorporating high-tech cash tills in all stores, allowing faster scanning and transactions, and improving displays at the checkouts to give customers greater information on their purchases. In selected stores customers will also have the option of the latest technology for self-scanning their purchases. This should improve shopping times.

The retail system is compatible with the Chip and PIN technologies that are being introduced from 1 January 2005. Shoppers paying by credit or debit card will have to use a PIN number to complete the transaction. The system is also Euro compatible.

Back office systems will also be modernised, with improved automatic stocking to allow stores to significantly reduce stock in the supply chain while improving product availability for customers. The new

technologies will also reduce staff workloads on routine tasks, allowing more time to deal with customers and improving the level of service.

An advanced radio network in the new system will enable more tills to be added more easily during peak seasons, such as Christmas and Easter, improving customer service at these busy times.

The network will also allow the store to deploy hand held terminals, giving employees direct access to all product information, enabling greater accuracy of pricing, stock control and improved customer service.

Fujitsu Services will fully manage the implementation of the new technology, including training and technical support. They will also provide comprehensive business consultancy support to help the Co-op manage the changes resulting from the new solution and maximising the ensuing business benefits.

The new systems will be phased in over 11 months, completing in November 2004 to ensure that West Midlands Co-op is fully prepared for the commencement of the new Chip & Pin payments starting in January 2005.

The National Business Award for Fujitsu Services

Fujitsu Services was presented with the best customer service strategy award at the prestigious National Business Awards 2003, held on 11th November 2003.

The award sponsored by Orange was achieved for Fujitsu's Sense-and-Respond strategy, which has led to its customers reporting a 20% rise in satisfaction. The innovative Sense-and-Respond management technique was initiated four years ago, designed to put the needs of the customer at the centre of business and simultaneously improve employee satisfaction.

Sense-and-Respond calls for a radical shift in thinking where the real needs of the customer are considered. One important aspect of this strategy is designing out

failure demand, or problems that should never occur, and shifting power from management to front-line staff. This enables Fujitsu to understand and manage critical customer business issues more effectively.

Due to the success of Sense-and-Respond, it has become the subject of research by the Centre for Economic Performance, Aston Business School and Cranfield Business School. In addition, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Boston are currently planning a case study on the subject.

The runners-up for customer service strategy of the year award were: alldayPA, Liverpool City Council, OyezStraker Office Supplies Limited and Telewest Broadband.

Spam News

European Privacy Directive

A new EU privacy directive aimed at tackling the rising tide of spam emails came into force on 11 December 2003. The 1998 Data Protection Act aimed to safeguard everyone's personal data, but technological evolution has quickly outpaced legislation. The EC's latest directive is designed to put control of digital identity back into the individual's hands.

The Privacy in Electronic Communications directive should give businesses across the European Union a clear code of practice when it comes to dealing with consumers' data – and, more importantly, draws a distinction between spam and legitimate marketing.

The directive enshrines consumers' rights to privacy in a legal framework and forces businesses to provide an opt-out mechanism every time they contact an individual with a marketing message – even in a 160 character SMS.

The directive applies to all electronic communications - from phone and fax to email and SMS. It remains to be seen whether this is the answer to the prayers of those of us who suffer at the hands of spammers.

Now instead of using opt-out mechanisms – 'tick this box if you do not wish to receive marketing material from us' - companies will have to show that the people on their mailing lists chose to opt-in – 'tick this box if you do want to receive marketing material from us'.

Mailing lists compiled before the 11 December operative date will be excluded from the opt-in clause, as will business email addresses which apparently can be spammed quite legitimately, and also any consumers where a company can show it has a 'prior relationship'. What is a prior relationship? This is a subject of debate. Does this mean where products have been bought from a company previously or a brochure has been requested in the past? Possibly.

It appears that those who drafted the directive have deliberately left it open to interpretation. They have taken into account the rate at which technology evolves and, rather than legislate for all existing IT and watch new technology evading the laws, have left descriptions sufficiently open to encompass whatever future developers might devise.

It remains to be seen whether this Directive can control or influence the vast army of spammers resident outside the European Union.

From the Archives

20 years ago the end of 1983 saw the formation of the Large Systems User Group from the merger of the 2900 User Group, the George 3 User Group and the Medium Systems User Group. The Autumn Conference at York saw the formalities of the merger take place. This might have been sufficient to make that particular conference notable but there is perhaps another aspect which vies for distinction in the memories of those who attended. In the Newsletter report of the event the cabaret at the Conference dinner was described as 'something else', or 'something different', or something, depending on one's taste in popular music. It was of course the Dooleys who filled the hall with song and their presence. There was a competition afterwards to see who could remember how many changes of clothes the girls made. Each time they went to 'slip into something cooler' the temperature seemed to rise a little higher and the applause become louder.

The plenary session at Conference was presented by Ninian Eadie, Director of Product Marketing Division, the man who had launched the 2900. He described the key issues for ICL in the coming year: professional systems, productivity aids, application development aids, industry applications, management and decision support, consultancy, partnerships, aggressive promotion, and CAFS with everything.

Reviewing the list of Executive Committee members appointed for 1983-1984 under the chairmanship of Brian Parlett, who famously joined the BBC as a 'small erections boy', we find several names still involved with AXiS today: Harry Barnes from Dorset County Council as Treasurer (and still is), Dr Roger Mackenzie from Glasgow University as Chairman of the VME Technical Committee (now our President) and Don Folland from CCTA as Newsletter Editor (and also Secretary now). The long list of office holders at the time indicates the many activities on the go: besides the VME Technical Committee there was a DME Technical Committee, Operations Management Special Interest Group, Comms and Networking SIG, Direct Machine SIG, Superstructure and Development SIG, VME SIG, Scientific User Group Liaison.

Tailpiece

T'was the night before.....a variation from the Internet of a seasonal poem

T 'was the night before implementation and all through
the house,
Not a program was working, not even a browse.

The programmers hung by their tubes in despair,
With hopes that a miracle soon would be there.

The users were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of inquiries danced in their heads.

When out in the machine room there arose such a
clatter,
I sprang from my desk to see what was the matter.

And what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a super programmer (with a six-pack of beer).

Her resume glowed with experience so rare,
She turned out great code with a bit-pusher's flair.

More rapid than eagles, her programs they came,
And she cursed and muttered and called them by name.

On Update! On Add! On Inquiry! On Delete!
On Batch Jobs! On Closings! On Functions Complete!

Her eyes were glazed over, fingers nimble and lean,
From weekends and nights in front of a screen.

A wink of her eye and a twitch of her head,
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread.

She spoke not a word, but went straight to her work,
Turning specs into code; then turned with a jerk.

And laying her finger upon the "ENTER" key,
The system came up and worked perfectly.

The updates updated; the deletes, they deleted;
The inquiries inquired, and closings completed.

She tested each whistle, and tested each bell,
With nary a bomb, and all had gone well.

The system was finished, the tests were concluded,
The users' last changes were even included.

And the user exclaimed with a snarl and a taunt,
"It's just what I asked for, but not what I want!"



AXiS @ THE EARTH CENTRE

The AXIS Conference has become a key event in the calendar of every VME technician and IT Manager. The 2004 Conference is at the Earth Centre near Doncaster on April 27th and 28th 2004.

You need to come to the conference for the following reasons:

- To receive a VME strategy update from Fujitsu Services.
- To hear a major announcement from a senior representative of Fujitsu Services.
- To learn about VME Open Release 5.
- To obtain user experiences of LPR & FTP – how is IP on VME being used? The good, the bad and the down to EARTH!
- To attend useful, user-orientated workshops
- To obtain product and service updates from our partner suppliers – there will be an extensive exhibition.

So put the following in your diary:

MAIN CONFERENCE DAY – APRIL 28th 2004
Pre-conference, workshops and dinner – April 27th 2004
Venue – Earth Centre, Denaby Main, Doncaster DN12 4EA

Comment from Fujitsu Services:

'Since the last AXIS conference at Bletchley Park, many of our customers have made a renewed commitment in VME for the long term. VME has again become a "strategic" operating environment to many organisations. Fujitsu Services has again further increased development spends and made some significant additions to the VME roadmap - these will be unveiled at the next AXiS conference in Doncaster.'

AXiS

Use the form overleaf for early registration.