Comparing the IS Needs of Small Firms and Large Companies

I am in the fortunate position of working not only with large corporate information systems professionals, but also with small business professionals. Part of my activities involve assisting small business with their information systems needs. Regardless of what people may think, there are many similarities between the needs of small firms and large companies.

A DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH

Recently, I visited a small, but rapidly expanding Detroit-based market research firm. I was asked to assist them in establishing a modern

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information systems framework suitable for their needs. After sitting in on a meeting which consisted of the owner, his project director (second-in-command), the data processing staff (one young, fresh out of college individual) and another valued employee, I left impressed with both their knowledge and their willingness to accept solutions (and the

changes which must accompany them). Everyone, including the owner, either has actual experience with personal computers and networking systems, or knows someone currently working in the information systems field who they can ask questions (the owner's son works in the MIS department of a major U.S. automaker).

Having a client like this is pure pleasure. Not only do they know why they need computer networks, but they are also able to ask tough, penetrating questions. PCs are an inherent part of small businesses and computer literacy is prevalent. We did not need to spend any time on initial education, instead we jumped directly into information systems philosophy, design and implementation.

TIME TO CHOOSE

The networking topology chosen for the new network is a hub-based twisted-pair (UTP) Ethernet. The reason for this is twofold: Ethernet is a commodity, and a hub-based system offers the most problem isolation possible for a Ethernet-based networking system.

Network topology suggestions are easy. What is more difficult is the network operating system decision. There are so many good network possibilities available which make decision making hard.

The clients themselves were aware of two networking possibilities: server-based and peer-to-peer. Of the server-based possibilities, the client has staff with Unix (NFS), NetWare and Windows for Workgroups experience. Needless to say, the network discussion was spirited. We discussed the pros and cons of each networking possibility.

Several of the clients' customers have chosen Microsoft's Office suite product line, therefore requiring data format compatibility, so the client also chose Office. With so much Microsoft knowledge in-house, I decided to include the Windows NT Advanced Server as a network operating solution possibility. The networking system decision has not yet been made, however I am confident they will select the best solution for their short- (and long-) term needs.

Whether your firm is a large corporation or a small business, there are two ways to satisfy your IS needs, either through in-house developed or outsourced products, or purchased package customization.

Many small-business professionals began their careers in the corporate environment. Regardless of the reasons for going independent, disdain for corporate data processing was normally not one of them. So, suggesting basic (for IS professionals) information systems rules and procedures was easy. These suggestions included:

■ file naming conventions;
■ data backup and security reasons and strategies; and
■ the need for uninterruptable power (UPS) systems on critical computers.

SMALL BUSINESSES ARE UNIQUE

Each small business I deal with is unique: some have installed systems, while others (most new firms) are considering using computer networks as an inherent part of their infrastructure.

Most clients are seriously looking at the product suite solutions rather than individual products. There are several reasons for this, one simply being ease of use. Another is some of my clients would rather invest in custom-developed solutions than packages. Unfortunately, these customized systems do not always solve the customer's needs, and modernizing (not to mention maintaining) these systems is a big headache for everyone.

Whether your firm is a large corporation or a small business, there are two ways to satisfy your IS needs, either through in-house, or outsourced developed software or purchased package customization. Each client has to weigh their needs, finances, lead-time and current workload before they can intelligently make these decisions. ∎

Was this column of value to you? If so, please let us know by circling Reader Response Card No. 19.

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Upcoming in the July Issue of
IN-DEPTH Report:
370/390 Operating Systems

MVS/ESA SP 4.3 TUNING: PART I - SMF SYNCHRONIZATION PREPARATION

This series describes some of the new options available in SP 4.3 and how to best use them. This month's article describes the areas to investigate before implementing SMF synchronization (interval recording, DD consolidation, CISIZE changes and buffersize changes).

VM/ESA TECHNICAL SMORGASBORD: PART I

This month's article, the first in a series of articles that will explore such topics as CP and CMS, examines the new CP feature of free storage message limit detection.

MAKING ISPF WORK: PART III

This concluding article examines techniques to build an ISPF table to store change logs.

COBOL SYNTAX STANDARDS

This article examines coding standards, how implementation of standards can reduce costs and increase productivity, and presents ways to establish standards at your site.

DB2 THREAD CREATION: THE START OF A NEW LIFE

This article reviews the phases and internal DB2 events that occur during thread creation and resource allocation.

The following topics will be covered in the August Issue of *IN-DEPTH Report: Computing Solutions*

■ Adding LANs and Telecommunications Recovery to an Existing Mainframe Recovery Plan
■ Selecting the Right Technical Book for You
■ On the Road to Removable Media Manager (RMM)
■ Connecting the Data Center to the Internet
■ Unix Facilities: C Shell, Korn Shell