

Pc Coordination Is Aim of East Bloc — Datamation 1988-04-15 (p.11-12)

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ages' ability to curb the flow of the torrents of information. While there is plenty to aid the rise of a standardized SQL user interface, the disciplines needed to reassert control go well beyond aligning users and MIS managers behind SQL, others say.

Richard Stuckey, a partner in Arthur Andersen's Chicago technical services operation, says developing a friendly SQL isn't a panacea to controlling pcs. "It will help forge a common language between MIS and the end user, but unless there is enough discipline in MIS to exert control, it won't get it," says Stuckey.

Moreover, although SQL represents a common language, there are enough differences in the various implementations of it for applications developers to be concerned, according to Stuckey. "At present, SQL is barely able to handle four basic data types," he points out. The more powerful versions employ extensions that are not yet widely accepted.

Developers To Use Standard SQL

With a lack of specific knowledge of which extensions are supported, developers are likely to use garden variety SQL. The result, says Stuckey, "is probably fine to bring data into a spreadsheet, but if you try to write a transaction processing system on a pc, it won't be enough."

Interbase's Root also notes that standard SQL "doesn't say anything about what the system table looks like." The system table, also called the system catalogue in IBM's DB2, is an index of the information contained in the database. Lacking such detail, a database request could go unanswered, he says. Differences in the way various databases handle updates when several users are modifying a file also must be resolved, he says.

The three top micro software firms have embraced workstation-server database strategies, but their philosophies about differences in SQL and the effect on their servers result in their differing approaches (see "Different Vendors, Different Approaches to SQL").

A DB2 Lookalike from IBM

Then there is the issue of IBM's mainframe relational database, DB2. IBM's Database Manager is expected by many to be a DB2 lookalike.

"There are very few and minor differences between it [Database Manager] and DB2," says William W.D. Dowdell, director of research and development at McCormack & Dodge Corp., Natick, Mass. Dowdell, who has received advance information on the package, adds: "IBM will provide Presentation Manager and Data Manager; it will be up to companies like McCormack & Dodge to use those tools to bring the data to the user." He challenges the ability of micro software developers to provide a substantial user interface. Having no experience in building mainframe applications, they are unqualified to develop interfaces that business users will require, says Dowdell. "I don't know that they have the depth of knowledge of the business applications" to produce a robust interface, he maintains. "Any interface by nature makes an assumption about what it is the user wants to do. That's where companies like McCormack & Dodge can leverage their [applications] experience."

In the end, the workstation-server database looks as if it could provide one of many gates needed to maintain control over an existing flood of user data. "A common database," Arthur Andersen's Stuckey believes, "isn't going to be enough to turn back the tide."

EASTERN BLOC COMPUTING

Pc Coordination Is Aim of East Bloc

The coordination effort will take place at a time of unfulfilled Soviet expectations of trade with the West.

BY PAUL TATE

Next month, the chief architects of the Eastern Bloc's pc revolution will meet to decide how the socialist countries should coordinate pc production and the development of

Soviet Union, but still some organizations are going their own way," Naumov told DATAMATION when he headed a Soviet delegation to last month's CeBIT technology fair in Hannover, West Germany. "This is not the best way for



USSR'S NAUMOV: Trade barriers have eased from the Soviet side only.

32-bit machines.

They will have a lot to sort out. Despite the Bloc's well-publicized plans to develop hardware and software, progress is still slow in most countries, particularly in the USSR.

Chairing the meeting will be academician Boris N. Naumov, the head of the Institute for Informatics Problems (IPIAN) at the Soviet Academy of Sciences in Moscow. "We are trying to coordinate pc production activities in the

our country. It presents us with many difficult problems, but we are making progress."

No Joint Production Deals Yet

A year ago, during an exclusive interview with DATAMATION in Moscow (see "Opening Moves," March 15, 1987, p. 43), Naumov made an outspoken offer to link up with Western companies as a way of accelerating the use of pcs in the Soviet Union to help meet the nation's goal of 1.1 million machines installed

News in Perspective

by 1991. Despite proposals from 10 Western companies to set up joint pc production plants in the country and some approaches from Western software companies, nothing has come to fruition so far.

The only confirmed joint production line is a spin-off from a truck venture called Kamaz in the town of Naberezhnyye Chelny; the machines are destined for internal use only.

In Naumov's view, the fault for the slow progress in cooperation and in the expansion of East-West trade lies with the West. "Trade relations have become considerably easier," he says, "but unfortunately from one side only—and it is ours." Naumov argues that the independence of Soviet ministries and agencies to deal with foreign partners is much greater now.

Microsoft Disputes USSR View

Western firms do not agree. Microsoft has been focusing on the Eastern Bloc markets since 1985, and Christian Wedell, general manager for Microsoft in West Germany, objects strongly to such an accusation. "From our perspective this is wrong," he says. "We approached them and offered to license MS/DOS there [see Look Ahead, Feb. 1, p. 12]. It was our proposal. We have even offered to cooperate to localize the packages, and we have run a two-day seminar in Moscow to explain our windowing product. In terms of negotiations, very little has changed. I see an openness from their side but not much help in trying to put together a deal."

Microsoft has already finalized license deals in Poland, Rumania, and Yugoslavia, and is in negotiations with Robotron in East Germany and with enterprises in Czechoslovakia.

But Naumov is not alone

in his criticism of the West. Dieter Walter, deputy director general of East Germany's computer giant Robotron, complains that, "in my view, there has been no change in [East-West] trade relations. Between the ideal and the reality are still the Cocom rules." These rules, set down by the multinational Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (Cocom), cover the level of technology that can be transferred from the West to the socialist bloc. "There is no serious progress in removing these forced restrictions," Naumov adds.

In the meantime, the socialist countries are aiming to work together more closely to fill the production gap. Currently, there are around 12,000 imported Western pcs in the Soviet Union from the U.S., Japan, and Europe. In addition, a recent deal with Yamaha involved 15,000 micros based on the MSX operating system to be delivered over the next year.

The USSR has its own 8-bit and 16-bit machines in production and also imports systems from other socialist bloc countries. Robotron, for example, confirms that it is shipping around 20,000 machines a year to the Soviets.

Naumov is evasive about exactly how many machines are installed to date, although he admits there is a long way to go to reach the nation's goal of 1.1 million. He believes that by coordinating the activities of the socialist countries, pc production overall can be increased, formal standards can be agreed upon across the region, and any duplication of effort can be reduced to a minimum. This may give the USSR a better chance of meeting its target.

Half of all the pcs now are destined for education, a priority in the USSR. Naumov also explains, however, that "The changes in the econom-

ic mechanisms of the Soviet enterprises necessarily increase the demand for office and production automation. Considerable efforts are being made to meet this demand." He notes that a number of pcs are used in R&D and CAD for radio electronics, machinery, and construction.

Soviet Attention on Software

Of course, office and production automation is heavily software-based and this is where much of the USSR's attention is now being focused. Naumov explains that his institute is working hard on developing systems

we have much clearer directions and the market is developing quickly. All our countries are working with MS/DOS particularly."

That's good news for Microsoft. Even better news is that Naumov states he is "ready to consider software compatibility between Soviet pcs and OS/2, but such projects depend in many aspects on our Western partner's goodwill."

Microsoft Is Ready To Deal

Microsoft's Wedell replies that the U.S. company, "is willing to start negotiations on OS/2 as soon as possible. Whether the U.S. government allows us to export it is another question."

It also depends on the initial negotiations over MS/DOS, and Wedell is still uncertain that he can reach a worthwhile licensing agreement with the USSR.

"They always want a joint venture with us to sell Soviet software in the West," he says with little enthusiasm. Even so, Wedell notes, the USSR's pc industry still has a long way to go. "So far, I don't think there's been a real breakthrough in the USSR—[there has been] more [of a breakthrough] in Hungary, Poland, and perhaps Rumania," opines Wedell. "The Soviet Union is still a year behind the other Eastern Bloc countries."

That's one problem that next month's meeting of the Bloc's pc gurus may help to redress. It may also set standards for pc hardware, software, and production that can be depended upon by Western companies hoping to increase their business across the Eastern Bloc. For both the socialist and the Western countries, a more coordinated and effective pc strategy among the socialist nations may be the best thing to happen to East-West trade in years. ■

**THERE ARE
12,000
WESTERN PCS
IN THE USSR.**

and applications software.

"A considerable part of our work is taken up creating new programming and decision-making technologies," he says. "Of particular importance is the development of distributed databases and knowledge bases for integrated production and office systems." IPIAN also has an operating system under development that supports programs written in both CP/M and MS/DOS in a single-user, multi-tasking system called the Unified Operating System.

Nevertheless, the software industry as the West knows it doesn't really exist in the Eastern Bloc. "The software market in the socialist countries is just developing," says Robotron's Walter. "For a long time there was the opinion that software was not a product as such. Now

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