

Image-enabled LAN OS offers interoperability

Client/server strategies power integrated imaging apps

BY MARK UNGERMAN AND
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Remember the TV ad with a bull slowly weaving his way through a china shop? When that ad first hit the airwaves in the '80s, PCs were just beginning to win corporate acceptance, and enterprise-wide imaging was only an engineering concept.

There are some interesting similarities between that ad and the current state of imaging. First, analysts are bullish on imaging, predicting faster market growth than for the computer industry as a whole.

The current domestic imaging market will almost triple to over \$6 billion in annual revenues by '97, with production systems accounting for two-thirds of sales, according to BIS Strategic Decisions' (Norwell, MA) predictions.

The bullish technology, however, must still weave through a fragile maze before it fulfills its destiny. Much of vendors' current growth is an initial burst of response to the acceptance of client/server-based networks as an optimum imaging and document management architecture.

This success comes, quite frankly, in spite of commonly incongruous, vendor-specific architectures that severely limit interoperability. We all agree that open systems provide additional functionality, but we have failed to reach consensus on a specific definition of "open."

The question is: *Does the imaging industry have the dexterity to navigate through this stage of its development? Can it thread its way through proprietary systems into open structures that promote the seamless integration of imaging into mainstream computing environments and applications?*

Most observers agree that imaging technology is at a crossroads. New computer advances are gaining popularity and point the way toward improved productivity on networked systems. In turn, these

developments will open markets for imaging as it becomes easier to image-enable both new and legacy applications.

These advances promise to provide line-of-business users with significantly more value at dramatically reduced costs. Feature-rich imaging systems

gration is becoming easier with recent programming advances such as DDE, OLE, and OpenDoc.

These new conventions offer improved interoperability among applications and make it easier to link data between programs.

MARKET EVOLUTION

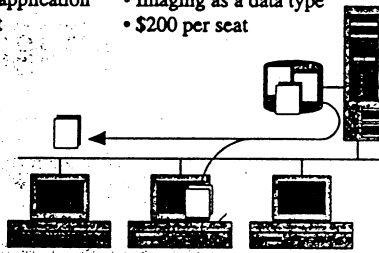
Now:

- Customized applications
- Proprietary implementations
- Specialists
- Imaging as an application
- \$2,000 per seat

2-5 Years:

- "Shrink wrapped" applications
- Open implementations
- Customer installable
- Imaging as a data type
- \$200 per seat

Image Enabled NetWare



- *Non-programmer APIs*—Graphical application development languages, like AppWare, Visual Basic, and PowerBuilder, are simplifying applications design and lowering customization costs;
- *LAN-based services*—Imaging services are migrating to enabled network operating systems.

with production-level capabilities such as high-speed, high-performance scanning, recognition, indexing, and competent workflow software will become common elements in an enterprises' overall networked computing strategy.

Several recognizable trends define this market:

- *Re-engineering*—Users are downsizing and rightsizing their organizations, and streamlining work processes, thus creating new opportunities;
- *Integration*—Systems inte-

While the first three trends add value and productivity to imaging, the last is crucial to the continued growth and expansion of the industry. Of necessity, every system developer since imaging's inception has created its own basic imaging services; in effect re-inventing the wheel with each new imaging system.

Implementing common services in the network OS allows imaging to evolve as a component of mainstream computing

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systems and as a cost-effective alternative to paper processing.

Image-enabled networks promise to streamline development efforts by replacing proprietary file and image services with a common client/server platform. Such open architectures also promote interoperability among various vendors' imaging applications.

Applications software modules which incorporate robust, production-level features will complete the picture, opening the door to high-end, process-oriented imaging on networked platforms.

Consequently, resellers will be able to customize solutions for clients without requiring costly re-writes to basic code. Developers will someday be able to build a complete imaging system simply by integrating off-the-shelf capture, view, database, and workflow management packages in conjunction with the standard services embedded in image-enabled LANs.

It will be similarly easy to image-enable standard business applications with basic imaging software modules, a graphical application development language such as PowerBuilder, and a terminal emulation program. The increased openness and interoperability inherent in these modules will also allow users to upgrade specific components of their systems, such as scanning or workflow, without waiting for new software releases from their original imaging vendor.

Image-enabled networks are poised to become the foundation of a healthier, more cohesive industry. With standard imaging services embedded in the network OS, cost-efficient imaging will become an economically viable productivity solution.

At the same time, basic imaging software modules will bring production-level features to this platform, making process imaging accessible to a wider range of user organizations. Enterprising VARs and integrators will take advantage of these capabilities to differentiate themselves by concentrating on solutions to users' specific applications, rather than devoting resources to the fundamentals of developing an imaging system. ♦

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