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Editorial Pointers

IT really doesn't require a turn of the century to get computing professionals to address the enigma of system integration. It's been an ongoing practice—complete with professional and financial headaches—since organizations realized the rich benefits of building, layering, and evolving their own unique information systems and application domains.

Considering the critical role system integration plays in most organizations, it is not surprising that SI challenges are addressed by an array of computing communities, including software engineering, database management, and AI. This month's special section marks the progress and practices now promising smoother SI transitions. Guest editor Wilhelm Hasselbring, working with Associate Editor Robert Fox, galvanized an impressive group of experts to evaluate the information SI problems and solutions from three different perspectives—business, application, and technology. We hope you find their experiences insightful and inspiring.

TECHNOLOGICAL mobility and the independence it offers is a running thread throughout several features this month. Varshney and Vetter analyze "the next wave in networking," namely, emerging mobile and wireless networks. Conversely, Schoder and Eymann wonder if wireless technology is all it (dis)appears to be.

Telemedicine is enjoying newfound appeal as a result of the upheaval in managed health care, according to Huston and Huston. And Watson, Zinkhan, and Pitt argue that companies should learn to use the Web to its fullest potential before establishing an online presence. The resulting Web site will, after all, be your firm's defining image.

Passion reigns through our commentaries this month, taking on everything from the local school district to the federal government to basic human freedoms. Brock Meeks contends we should all be wary of the fine print in the prenuptial agreements of these high-profile corporate marriages. In "Electronic Frontier," he predicts the AOL-Time Warner merger may prove anything but blissful. The power of words on the Internet is the focus of "Legally Speaking," where Townsend, Allberts, and Gibson ponder the validity of existing libel and slander laws in a digital forum. And in "Log on Education," Soloway, Becker, Norris, and Topp explore the dire need to ease grade school teachers into the age of networked computers.

Finally, I point you to two diverse, yet poignant, "Viewpoints" that implore the industry to a call for action. Richard Stallman presents an ardent plea for computing professionals to work feverishly to defeat the Uniform Computer Information Transaction Act; while Tim O'Reilly takes on Amazon.com and the contention that the current patent system is choking innovation out of the Internet software sector.

Diane Crawford

Editor

COMING NEXT MONTH: A special section on physically based computer animation. Also, learn about interacting with computers via hand gestures, a conceptual investigation of the e-commerce industry, and preparing your mind for creativity.

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