

NETWORK COMPUTING SKUNK GROUP

INITIAL THOUGHTS

General

MISYS have historically always left group companies to their own devices operationally: the only overall influences exerted being those of a financial nature. If budgets were agreed and profitability targets met, then all well and good.

However, an active acquisition program has provided MISYS with an impressive portfolio of services, spanning virtually all aspects of the IT industry. Admittedly this situation has been recognised and this has resulted in the formation of the Computer Services Division, as distinct from MISYS' other interests. Unfortunately, however, the negative aspects of traditional company thinking have thus far prevailed and ostensibly logical projects like TOTAL SUPPORT have failed to breakdown barriers.

In short, financially MISYS is one of the largest computer groups in the UK, but in marketing terms they are not a major player.

Looking to the future, things could become far brighter. There is a general awareness amongst senior management of group companies that, united, the computer Services Division can be a force to be reckoned with. To some extent this reawakening is due to joint networking ventures such as the Securicor Tender, and the opportunities highlighted by the Intelligent Networks Business Plan but equally the success of future projects, such as SUN, could hinge upon the ability of the division companies to take project mia onboard and adapt to the Network computing environment that is now the point of focus in the industry.

The basis of approach should be simply that:-

THE SUM OF THE DIVISION IS INFINITELY MORE POWERFUL THAN THE DISPARATE PARTS.

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EXISTING ACTIVITIES

The exact spread of talents/services across the division companies will be drawn up in the form of a matrix in the near future.

However, broadly speaking they are currently as follows:-

- MCL - Network H/W sales
- Network Design//Consultancy
- Network H/W maintenance/installation
- Cabling installation
- Network software sales/support
- Network training
- TIS - Unix H/W sales
- Operating systems sales/ support
- System design/consultancy
- OS/admin training
- MCM - Unix H/W maintenance/installations
- Network H/W maintenance/installation
- Network/systems services
- UPS sales/UPSman sales
- Operating system Support
- Disaster recovery/prevention
- Electrical PAT testing

As the list above shows, there are some areas of duplication but on the whole the services are complimentary.

In the new Network Computer regime, it should simply be a case of TIS supplying open systems and workstations, MCL supplying the network and cabling and MCM providing the maintenance and support. This will obviously rely on the already accepted premise that inter-company stone walling must be discouraged. To some extent rationalisation of duplicity of talents would produce a tighter ship. After all, there can be little sense in one group company struggling to provide a limited service of one aspect of a solution, whilst another member already exists as a market leader in that field.

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EXISTING ACTIVITIES (cont)

The people and skills certainly exist within the computer services division to provide a true "cradle to grave" service for the client, be they low end, mid range or corporate. However, at present these people do not work together in harmony to achieve a common aim. The overriding theme to be mindful of at all times with regard to the findings and requests of this project, must be that inter company losses and gains are secondary to the long term success of the MISYS Division as a whole.

This outlook would provide the climate for cross fertilisation at all levels; managerial, marketing, technical etc. In the likely outcome, one would envisage TIS supplying open systems and workstations for client server solutions where they currently do not, MCM maintaining intelligent network hubs where they currently do not and MCL gaining access to a far wider customer base and effective sales force.

In short, all sales personnel should find it easy to sell services provided within the division, all marketing personnel should have easy access to databases and discount agreements across the division and all technical personnel should be free to change information and again access to evaluation equipment etc.

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PROMOTION

The TOTAL SUPPORT project set out to collate divisional company services and present them in an appealing brochure. However, overall coordination was lacking and each company produced flysheets (sometimes on duplicate topics), which retained their own logos. The ambiguities increased and with no definition ever being made on which set of sheets comprised a standard portfolio, interest in their use rapidly waned. So, what started out as a promising idea, backed up by some snappy "minimalist" artwork, ended with large stocks of literature simply left to languish in darkened store rooms.

With a more optimistic approach, however, the provision and active use of well prepared "Network computing" literature, business cards etc, can only serve to bring home the "total service provider" image to the customer. The creation of a real new identity, certainly without the inclusion of old company logos, is of paramount importance.

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TRADING MECHANISMS

Efforts to prepare the response to the SecurIT tender ~~the~~ "on-the-fly", highlighted many difficulties with cross company trading: not least of these being the lack of a legal entity to act as prime contractor under the Network Computing banner. The only viable option was to state MCM as acting in this role. But this did rather spoil the otherwise united front, detailed in the management summary of the documentation.

It seems an unavoidable conclusion that the formation of MISYS Network Computing, by this or any other name, as a legal company is the only way to circumvent this crucial problem with the image presented to the customer. This new company would allow central ownership of all sales and delivery issues, whilst acting operationally as an umbrella to all other divisional companies and thus retaining their excellent trade records and statistical prowess.

The mechanisms for manipulation of the internal budgets and cross charging under this agreement would obviously require further thought but it seems clear from these early lessons that it's well worth any pain involved to achieve the company identity of a true "one stop shop" in the eyes of the client. However, it is surely a prime requirement that internal manoeuvring over profit margins is not allowed to price the united network computing solution out of contention for the sale.

This organisation would also easily accommodate any future rationalisation that may be recommended by project mia. *AIA*

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RAISING AWARENESS

Once the "scouting" phase of this group has been completed (probably in 3 months) and decisions on previous points have been jointly made, the overriding priority must be to advertise the new approach to the personnel of all divisional companies.

Hopefully, the group itself will have merged the various customer databases and telemarketing activities and will generate a full-time occupation in co-ordinating responses to sales leads/ tenders etc.

However the importance of promoting the new division-wide approach cannot be overstated. This could take the form of seminars to various groups, hopefully using new documentation and would mark a watershed in employee thinking from belonging to a "company" to a "division" .

The involvement of absolutely all personnel would seem essential if another "TOTAL SUPPORT" is to be avoided, The last thing an excellent, enthusiastic project like this needs, is the insidious, negative attitudes that breed from being kept uninformed. In a better world, a customer inquiring details of the Network Computing Initiative of any employee, would be encouraged to use MISYS as their preferred supplier.

John A. Clark (Nobby)