

IAPetus



**Quarterly Bulletin For the Institution of
Analysts & Programmers**

Issue 2 July '92

IAP on CIX

By Alex Robertson, CmpnIAP

The Institution now has its own conference on Compulink Information Exchange (CIX).

CIX is an electronic conferencing system based in South London and can be accessed by use of a modem and terminal. If you are already a registered user of CIX, all you need to do is to type JOIN IAP at a cix prompt and you will be joined into the conference area.

If you are not already a CIX user, CIX can be accessed on 081 399 5252 at up to 2400 baud, or on 081 390 1255 at up to 9600 baud (V32) or

14400 baud with a Miracom Courier HST Modem (All lines are 8 data bits, one stop bit, no parity.).

Besides the cost of the telephone call there is a charge for using the system. This consists of a one-off "registration fee" of £15.00 and a minimum monthly subscription of £6.75 for payment by credit card or £15.00 per month for payment by invoice.

As well as our area, CIX has many conferences on a wide range of subjects. Many of the major vendors either have their

own conference, or have a user group running a conference. These vendors include Sage plc (Accounting Software), Borland, Novell and Windows.

As a bonus, CIX is hooked up to the Internet e-mail system, so that you can also have an internationally accessible e-mail address. This means that letters or articles for the Editor can be sent to arobertson@cix.compulink.co.uk or can be left in the 'iapetus' topic in our conference.

We look forward to "seeing" you there!

Conference

Due to delays in publication of the first edition of IAPetus – inevitably there were some teething problems – some people did not have time to take advantage of the low rate £55 Conference tickets that were on offer up to 18th May.

For this reason, and to encourage many more of you to book your places now, we are extending this offer right

through the holiday season until the end of August.

If you think you can come on 23rd October, don't delay but send your £55 now. Our speakers are working on their papers, our committee is planning the menu. We want to encourage them by guaranteeing a really good audience. Help us make it a good day for everyone.

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Well, here we are – Issue 2! From the letters both Michael Ryan and I have received, you enjoyed the first IAPetus. Even better, some contributions arrived, keep them coming! Don't worry if you have never written an article before – it is not hard and it's very nice to see your name and your words in print.

The Conference looks good – I hope you all will be able to come along. I shall be there, so maybe I will get to meet you. Note that the special £55 offer is extended until the end of August, so get your booking in now! As well as the summaries given here, which the speakers have provided, and my follow-up report afterwards, would you like the papers published? Let me know if you would (or if you think that's a waste of time).

With this, you will have received the 1992 IAP Directory, including the Register of Consultants. I hope to publish any changes in IAPetus, so let me know. I do not have a crystal ball! There also is a book catalogue from Wiley's – if you decide to buy tell them where you heard about it. The same goes for all the others who advertise...if they know their ads are working they will take out more!

Did you know that if you are MIAP, FIAP or a Companion, you are entitled to wear a special

academic dress? I hope to have some pictures and further information for the next issue. While many of you have no need of such a thing, those who work in education at any level, for example, may wish to have something to wear at the next Speech Day/Graduation Ceremony.

The Director General is hoping to set up a group to establish a list of "approved" institutions and courses which will satisfy the academic requirements for membership of the IAP. If you can help – maybe you are in education, or work in recruitment/ personnel or have a particular interest in how formal training can meet the needs of the "real world" – why not volunteer your services.

Finally, anyone in the Crewe area...or who can get there of an evening....is welcome to join the Editor and other IAP members at the fortnightly meetings of what we would like to become an IAP branch. We meet every second Monday 8pm to closing, in the Imperial pub in Crewe. If you send me an SAE, I'll send you a map and details of the next gathering. It's a time and a place for computer enthusiasts of all ages and abilities to meet, talk and drink beer. See you?

Megan C. Robertson

Technology Inflation

by Adrian D. Bailey

In recent years the power of desktop machine regarded as the useful minimum has grown enormously. Only two years ago an IBM clone with a '286 processor and 2Mbyte of memory and a 20Mbyte hard disk was ample. Now a '386SX with 4Mbyte/40Mbyte is barely enough, and if you want to "future proof" your investments you should go for a '486 with 8Mbyte/100Mbyte.

Has the computer that has sat on your desk for the last four or five years suddenly shrunk? Has it suddenly started going more slowly? Of course not.

I believe the software houses have a lot to answer for. Commercial pressures demand the rapid development of new software, and this means that ever larger teams work on each product. It is inevitable that there will be multiple copies of compiler libraries, almost duplicated subroutines and so on. Gone are the days of hand-crafted assembly language. As a result, each new version of a product seems to be twice the size of its predecessor. Take for example the relative sizes of Windows2, Windows3 and Windows3.1 or Winword 1.1 and Winword 2.0. Do the newer products have twice the performance (using whatever measure of performance

you choose)? I think not. Furthermore the demands placed upon hardware by these packages are increasing. Excel3 for example demands at least a '286 processor and a megabyte of RAM whereas Excel2 works well enough with less. Now there are packages coming along that insist on '386 as a minimum.

I believe our American cousins have a saying "If it ain't broke don't fix it." Should we not apply the same philosophy to our software purchases? If your current software does the job properly, stick with it. Will that extra flashing light or ringing bell which the upgrade offers increase your productivity that much?

Unfortunately (or fortunately dependent upon your livelihood and point of view) the pressure to upgrade is enormous. The consequences of not conforming can be dire, rapidly working their way up to a form of isolation when your disks cannot be read by anyone that you work with. Can anyone see an end to this inflationary spiral?

The author is Systems Manager in the Department of Human Sciences at Loughborough University of Technology.

(The Editor must confess to a '386, but still uses fountain pens and a pocket watch with hands!)

From the Director General – Michael C. Ryan

Subscription Arrears

Since Christmas we have written to a number of members who pay their subscriptions by standing order, but who have slipped into arrears because they have not increased payments since 1988.

These members form a significant, if not large, minority. Generally they are paying about a third of the current subscription rate and are thus making very little contribution to the Institution's essential running costs.

The Institution itself must accept some responsibility for allowing this situation to develop following the death of Mr. Charles. At the time, chasing arrears did not seem to

merit the highest priority. For that reason, we are writing somewhat belatedly to all those members still paying £16 or less, largely offering to write off their arrears provided that they will pay in future by direct debit.

Unfortunately some people are failing to accept this offer, and very soon we shall have no option but to cut them off the mailing list and cancel their membership of the Institution. The Institution does not want to lose members, but what these people are paying does not cover the direct cost of printing and mailing, let alone contribute to the Institution's essential overheads. It is unfair to the majority of members for

us to continue subsidising a minority in this way.

We cannot afford to keep writing to people individually, so if you are one of those who has received a copy of our letter AR-1, can I make one further appeal. We are losing money by keeping you on the roll of the Institution. Because the Institution is non profit-making, the money we lose on you has to be made up by somebody else. It would be easy to cut you off, but that is not what we want, and as you have been a member for at least four years, presumably you don't want it either. Please dig out our letter and take up the sensible offer we have made, then everybody will be happy.

Educational Matters

The Institution continues to receive representations from colleges, both at home and overseas, who wish to be recognised by the Institution and included in the Accreditation Scheme.

We are anxious to be able to make a positive response in suitable cases, as this would boost the prestige both of the colleges and of the Institution. Our problem is that we need to spell out exactly what standard the Institution expects college courses to reach.

This problem is bound up with the overhaul of the grading structure which is currently taking place. But it seems clear that the Institution should define its educational standards at two levels; the present Graduate level (holders of qualifications of this standard will continue to enjoy accelerated access to full Membership), and the new Associate Member level. Broadly speaking, the Graduate level equates with a degree, but on a narrower front due to the

specialised nature of the Institution. The Associate Member is anticipated to be at ONC or BTEC level. It must be emphasised that while holders of approved formal qualifications will continue to enjoy the possibility of more rapid progress through the grades, the Council has no plans to make the holding of such qualifications mandatory.

It has been felt that the existing rules for election, particularly those requiring members aspiring to progress in the IAP to first demonstrate that they had achieved corporate status in some quite different organisation, are less than helpful. The proposed changes will ensure that there is nothing to stop any member becoming a Fellow, provided he can demonstrate to the Council that he is a highly competent, experienced and professional programmer or analyst.

The Institution is proposing to set up a working party of senior members with experience and

contacts in education, to establish a comprehensive schedule of mainstream UK qualifications which are deemed to meet the Institution's standards, and to draw up a core syllabus to guide private colleges at home and overseas who wish to be Accredited by the Institution. We would be glad to hear from any member who feels he is qualified to contribute to this task, and has the time and the motivation to do so. Even if you are not sure, please call the DG for an informal discussion.

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Dear IAPetus,

Thank you for my first copy of IAPetus. I am sure it will become a useful forum for debate as well as an effective medium for the distribution of news.

Does the IAPetus office have an email address? I am sure that a significant proportion of members would find that a convenient way to submit contributions, and it could also save you some copy typing since text would already be in electronic form.

The feature about Computer Copying brought to mind a problem that I have encountered recently. I manage a network of IBM clone computers intended for student use at a University. The software was supplied by a British company that has negotiated special deals with Microsoft so that that company's excellent software can be mounted on the network for a special "educational" price. Also, tutors are allowed to copy certain items onto their desktop standalone machines, provided that it is for use in conjunction with teaching etc. Such an enlight-

ened policy is helpful, and mutually beneficial.

Sadly, however, it seems that the policy does not extend to documentation. I received one copy of a user guide with the network server's copy of the software, and I wished to purchase additional copies of this book for my students to refer to as they worked at the terminals. I was somewhat taken aback when I was told I could only get an extra book by purchasing another copy of the software. As I have a 32 station licence for the software, shouldn't I be allowed to buy up to 32 copies of the books? Photocopying is illegal, so I have to either write my own document or look for a book written by a third party, neither of which is as satisfactory as having the "real" book to hand.

Yours sincerely,

A.D. Bailey,

Dept. of Human Sciences,

Loughborough University of Technology.

The Editor replies: Email can be sent to arobertson@cix.co.uk – see Alex Robertson's article on "IAP on CIX" on the front page.

Dear IAPetus,

I am delighted to see a newsletter for the IAP at last, and my congratulations on a good first issue. Let's hope the membership fully support your efforts.

The changes in structure are a point I had written to Mr. Charles about in the past [Mr. Charles was Michael Ryan's predecessor as Director General – Ed], and should, I hope, give us a better chance of being recognised as a truly professional organisation with recognised standards of qualification. In particular, I strongly approve of the use of nationally recognised external examinations and work experience for initial entry.

An advice panel on BS5750 would be useful to the members, even if it only distributed the requirement documents and a translation/advice document. I suppose Part 1 needs it most, but even the customer support/QA aspects covered in Part 2 can be very complex.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Preston BSc FIAP,

Whitworth, Lancs.

The Editor replies: Thanks for the congratulations....and thanks to everybody who wrote either to me or to Michael Ryan. Anything about BS5750 would be very welcome, if anyone would like to write about it.

On a personal note – Mark is an old friend I'd lost touch with. The hidden benefits of editing magazines.....!

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THE WORD IS QUALITY

The First IAP Conference

A2 – Brian Crook

Brian will be examining the impact on development staff of working in a strict contractual manner where quality is paramount, and will look at how CASE tools can help. His example is drawn from his own working experience, a project which was undertaken under BS5750 require-

ments, and he will be showing how the quality approach became "a way of life" for the people involved. The CASE system used was ORACLE CASE, and the advantages of using such a tool not just for ensuring the quality of the product but also for increasing efficiency in administering the quality system will be discussed.

B1 – Guy Martin

Guy is the Language Product Manager of Borland UK. He is going to talk about C++, a major Borland language; and he will examine the principles of Object Oriented Programming (OOP) and its relationship to windowing and GUIs (Graphical User Interfaces...or what the Editor calls gooey little pictures).

B2 – Joe Pritchard

Joe will be looking at how important user-led development is in systems design and implementation. He sees a need for a move from a systems department outlook to that of a provider of systems services, and feels that both internal and external consultants must change their attitudes from the traditional analysis approach to a more user-oriented one. Some of the ways to achieve this include user consultation and involvement in the design process, and participation in project groups and quality circles.

C1 – Jim Bates

Jim is an internationally-consulted expert on computer viruses, who like most of us in the computing profession has wandered far and wide (via the RAF and servicing 10-pin bowling machines amongst other things) before arriving where he is now. Originally a spare-time occupation, Jim's interest in taking virus programs apart has led to his present role. He will be talking about the exact nature of the threat posed by computer viruses, and how those in the computer industry can best meet and deal with it.

Programme

- A1 Keynote Speaker – to be arranged.
- A2 Brian Crook: What's In A Contract Anyway?
- B1 Guy Martin: New Programming Language Developments.
- B2 Joe Pritchard: Consultancy By Walking About.
- C1 Jim Bates: PC Computer Viruses.
- C2 Derek Oliver: Contingency Planning – The Need & The Method.
- D1 Richard Pearn: The Role of the Analyst/Programmer in the Biological Sciences.
- D2 Brian Lehany and Ian Ridley: Reducing Holding Costs – A Case Study in Computer Simulation.

C2 – Derek Oliver

Derek's career has included working as a travel agent, an accountant and as a Customs Officer before turning to computer audit work. Away from computers he enjoys folk singing, Morris dancing, traditional street theatre and drinking beer. His paper will look at what threats exist and how to plan your

recovery from a potential disaster...before it happens. He will describe some incidents of system loss, identify the natural threats to your system and the need for expert assistance in preparing contingency plans, and look at how to create and test a plan suited to individual needs.

D1 – Richard Pearn

Richard lectures about information processing and researches the role of computers in learning, when not star-gazing and taking photos. Previously employed in the Health Service, and being a biologist, has led him to simulate biological processes with a special interest in the biological basis of human computer interaction. He will be talking about current research such as that into AIDS, cancer and drugs involving analysts and programmers. Does this give us any new information on how the natural systems actually work, he asks, and can we apply natural mechanisms and processes to programs designed for use elsewhere?

D2 – Brian Lehany and Ian Ridley

Brian lectures at Luton College of Higher Education and Ian is a Financial Analyst at Hayward Tyler Fluid Dynamics. Together they will examine how a computer simulation can help reduce costs by modelling various policy alternatives, using work done in the analysis of stock control for Hayward Tyler as their example. The company holds stock for both its own manufacturing needs and for sale, and has to balance the cost of holding stock against the need to meet demand, and the penalties – both financially and in good will – of failing to meet it. They find that traditional stock control theory is limited in complex stochastic systems, and have developed an icon-driven computer simulation to help in the verification and validation of a model, which can then be used as a tool to aid in policy-making.

Computerised

by Simon Chapman MIAP

Debt recovery has for a long time been considered something of a dirty word, both from the view of the general public and by large companies who are often reluctant to be associated with the task.

However, in the light of the recent recession, companies are now faced with the task of recovering delinquent accounts or risk showing a marked decrease in profits. To this end, many companies have attempted to develop software in-house to cope with the debt-recovery problem; and there are now a number of companies which provide debt-recovery software – as well as many who actually do the job for you.

While a company in-house system is often adept at sending out reminder letters and arrears letters, it often fails when it becomes necessary to resort to litigation – i.e. recovering the debt through either the County or High Courts (in this article, I shall concentrate on the County Court, although it is possible to recover larger amounts via the High Court).

For organisations who do wish to recover their delinquent accounts there are two options available. They can either pass them to a solicitor or an agent, or they can attempt the task themselves using a software package. As far as the software packages themselves are concerned, one can either purchase a stand-alone package to run on one's own computer or connect to a system

A WARRANT OF EXECUTION CAN BE QUITE EFFECTIVE



No...No.... I'M pay, I'M pay

maintained by a third party on a remote machine. The link used can be e.g. BT Kilostream, dial-up modem or connection to a country-wide X25 packet switched network.

Whichever option the user chooses, computerised debt recovery has a number of advantages over a manual system. Firstly, it saves on staff resources. It is not uncommon to find one clerk administering as many as eight or nine thousand individual matters on a computerised system. Account details can be recalled on-screen in a few seconds without recourse to a mass of paper filing.

With the aid of such a system, much of the day-to-day administrative work such as the production of Court documents, reminder letters and receipt letters can be generated automatically with little manual intervention from the user.

Secondly, the computer system can monitor the frequency of payments on agreed offers, and take the necessary action should the payments fall into arrears. That action may be the production of a Summons, the production of an arrears reminder or even a request to the Court to enter Judgment against

the debtor.

For the most persistent defaulters, the system should also be capable of initiating enforcement processes such as a Warrant of Execution or an Attachment of Earnings, for example. In the case of a Warrant for Execution, a County Court bailiff will visit the debtor's premises in an attempt to recover money from them directly, while in the case of an Attachment of Earnings, the Court draws up an order instructing the debtor's employer to deduct the money due directly from the debtor's pay and pass it via the Court to the creditor. Neither of these can be done until a judgment has been obtained against the debtor.

So what facilities should a debt recovery package offer? The most important thing is that the system should progress an account as rapidly as possible through the system ensuring that at no time it is left idle or arrears allowed to build up. The longer an account remains uncollected the more uncollectable it becomes. When the systems issues an arrears letter threatening

"computerised debt recovery has a number of advantages over a manual system"

debt collection

legal action within seven days if arrears are not cleared, the system should only wait seven days and then take legal action. In the case of most companies, by the time a debt goes to litigation a number of reminders will have been sent. Any further letters are usually ignored.

Obviously, issuing proceedings in the County Court costs money, and the computer system should be able to calculate the fixed fees required by the Court whenever a Summons or any enforcement proceedings are issued. These fees are charged to the debtor's account, however this does not mean that you will necessarily recover them!

So what of solicitors – can we do without them? The vast majority of debt recovery matters can be dealt with without the need of one, although there will be times when, for example, an account is defended in Court or bankruptcy proceedings need to be instigated. In these less common cases it is sometimes advisable to retain a solicitor.

The advantage, as well as having access to his professional knowledge, is that he can claim fixed costs on each account, and within a large organisation that may have its own in-house practice, these costs can be used (subject to an agreement with the solicitor!) to offset the departmental running costs. These costs should also be calculated by the computer and charged to the debtor in the same way as Court fees. A successful debt recovery department could be

considered self-financing – maybe even a profit-centre – rather than an administrative overhead.

Obviously a computerised litigation system can only be as good as the Court system on which it depends. In addition to this the recent controversy over the admissibility of computerised evidence in the Magistrates' Court, it may seem that the legal system is not

even months to produce a Summons.

The Lord Chancellor's Department plans to further computerise and centralise the County Court issuing process with the advent of the County Court Bulk Centre (CCBC), also based at Northampton. The CCBC will not only centralise Summons production but also that of Judgments and subsequent Enforcement processes.

Now that the limelight shines directly on the credit controllers and finance departments of industry, effective credit control and recovery systems are becoming more prominent and more crucial to the success of businesses large and small. The nature of

the computer systems behind the scenes will also have to change almost constantly to keep up with the pace of change in the legal system.

A computer system that does not comply exactly with a change in the law, on the very day it comes into force, will not be effective. The recovery process will be severely compromised and valuable time may be lost – the case may even be thrown out of Court! It is only by careful software design that these increasingly complex and important systems will remain effective. But that's another story.

The author is Senior Analyst at Computer Collection Systems Limited, which provides an on-line remote system which clients link into. If your company is interested, he may be reached on 061 236 9326.

"The longer an account remains uncollected the more uncollectable it becomes"

geared towards computerised debt collection. However, all is not lost (at least as far as the County Court system is concerned) as the Lord Chancellor's Department is now committed to computerisation.

The first phase of this computerisation was the Summons Production Centre (SPC) based in Northampton. The SPC accepts tapes in either half-inch nine track or quarter-inch QIC formats, prints the Summonses directly from these tapes and dispatches them directly to the appropriate County Courts throughout England and Wales.

This system ensures that the Summonses are processed and issued within 24 hours of the SPC receiving the tapes. This is a vast improvement over the some of the more busy Courts (particularly those in London) which could take weeks or

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