NEWS ANALYSIS

IBM's Beefed-Up MCA Takes Different Approach Than EISA

By Ron Copeland

With IBM having at last delivered on its promise of a beefed-up Micro Channel Architecture, the EISA/MCA bus war is looking less like a direct shoot-out and more like a disagreement over world views.

The announcements during the last two weeks of IBM's RISC System/6000 and ES/9370 families demonstrate that IBM is moving MCA in a different direction than Compaq Computer and other PC vendors are taking EISA. The new systems implement enhancements to the Micro Channel that IBM promised last fall. (See "IBM Beefs Up Micro Channel Capabilities" October 2, 1989, Page 1.)

At a session on bus standards at last week's American Electronics Association's Systems/USA, OEM Subsystems Conference, disagreement between IBM and Compaq participants centered on the scope of "mainframe data processing" vs. "micro-desktops and LANs."

The "we'll give you peer-to-peer to every CPU in the known [read IBM] universe" vision was portrayed by Chet Heath, a senior engineer at IBM and MCA's chief architect. Heath painted an MCA landscape with desktop CPUs wired to networks, minis, and mainframes, with "any-to-any" systemwide sharing of processing power and resources. A great deal of headroom needs to be built into a bus, Heath said. "We want to allow intelligent subsystems to communicate as peers. In peer-to-peer operations, it is extremely important to move data fast," he said. "That's one of the things that we do with our streaming data mode which we run implemented to 80 megabytes per second."

Responding to Heath's "need for speed," Mike Perez, director of systems technology at Compaq, concentrated on EISA's capabilities to deal with intrasystem and workgroup-level multiprocessor tasks. Stressing that EISA systems can already achieve its 33-megabyte-per-second potential, Perez also suggested that higher EISA data transfer rates were possible and likely.

"I think that we are confusing megahertz with megabytes per second," Perez said. "It doesn't take a clock rate of 33 MHz to run at 33 megabytes per second, and it doesn't take a high-speed bus [like MCA] to get to the 80-megabyte-per-second step."

Reports of the death of the EISA consortium are greatly exaggerated, Perez added. Weekly meetings are still taking place concerning additions and extensions to the EISA specification.

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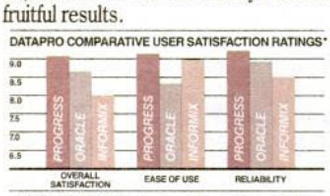

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AIX Display Postscript Raises Questions About IBM OS/2 Font Engine

By Kristi Coale

Adding to the speculation that it will use Adobe's technology as its default font engine for OS/2, IBM last week announced that it will include Adobe's Display Postscript in the new versions of its AIX Windows and AIX Next Step environments.

IBM said that it will release these new versions of the operating systems in May. The announcement puts IBM on the Adobe Display Postscript bandwagon already occupied by Next Inc., Digital Equipment Corp., and Scitex.

IBM had been expected to use Display Postscript with Next Step, as Next developed the product with Display Postscript in mind. It had not been clear, however, how IBM would implement its version of the Motif interface, now called AIX Windows.

This development brings users rich display capabilities consistent with the printer output they have had available to them for some time, according to IBM.

"We think that this is very important to users because it gives them a unified imaging model — offering them a true WYSIWYG environment," said Pat Marriott, director of marketing at Adobe.

Jonathan Seybold, publisher of *The Seybold Report on Desktop Publishing*, said this announcement paints IBM into a corner in terms of its impending decision on the font engine for OS/2, where it has said it will also support the Microsoft/Apple Royal technology.

The resolution to this dilemma will spell out a divergence on one of two fronts, Seybold said. "There's no way IBM can reconcile this difference without conflict. On the one hand, if they say that Adobe is for Unix products only, there will be an inconsistency between its Unix products and the rest of its line. But if they go with Adobe in OS/2, then they'll break away from Microsoft."

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