Software AG in the news



A periodic compilation of clippings and information.

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Industry leader speaks out

Software AG exec tackles relational, pricing issues

As chairman of Software AG, John Maguire is a key player in two of the most rapidly growing software markets — mar-

kets tinged with controversy. Software AG, which Maguire founded in 1972, is a leader in the data base management system field with its widely installed Adabas and in the fourth-generation language mart with Natural Outspoken and candid, Maguire recently spoke with Computerworld Senior Editor, Software, John Gallant, on the continuing relational DBMS debate, the state of fourth-generation languages vs. Cobol and functional pricing of software.



John Maguire, chairman of Software AG

The controversy over relational DBMS shows no signs of abating. Why?

John Cullinane went way out on a limb in response to the Computerworld articles by E. F. Codd [CW, Oct. 14; Oct. 21]. Cullinane was dismissing Codd as just an interesting academic. But you can't dismiss Codd; he is a man of great vision. But Codd

is also a mathematician and a purist, and those of us trying to solve practical problems still have to do the payrolls and all that stuff. We have to sell software that solves problems in a reasonable manner.

Relational systems have been horrible on performance. But as we move forward technically with Adabas, we will have the

relational view for those people who need it. But we are not beating the band claiming to be relational. That is what happened to Cullinet Software, Inc. and Applied Data Research, Inc. Relational was a buzzword, so they put big ads everywhere saying, 'We are relational.' Software AG did not say that. We said we have got something that looks relational.

How do you feel about the statements Codd has made

about vendors' failure to live up to his rules?

It is the vendors' fault; they are the ones who claimed they were relational. It is not Codd's fault. He has provided the definition of a pure relational model. We are not purely relational, we don't claim to be. But the other guys wanted a free ride

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(from above)

on the bandwagon, even though it will be years before you see a pure relational system that is reasonably effective and efficient for bread-andbutter processing.

How does Adabas match up with Codd's rules?

Largely, it goes beyond them. For example, Adabas can handle repeating groups and repeating fields within repeating groups, because that is what is needed in reality. Codd says you can't have that, and we won't ar-

gue with him. In the next version of Natural we will support the Join verb. Slowly but surely, we will achieve a system that embodies the major relational features that users want and use.

is it your goal as a relational DBMS vendor to evolve toward full compliance?

Yes, but it will take years. We will put in the features that our market researchers and planners tell us have the most value in the real world. Codd is a beautiful theoretician, and he is absolutely right about the characteristics of a relational system. Cullinet and ADR got trapped trying to get on the bandwagon and claim relational. The whole thing has blown up.

Recently, we've been hearing a lot about IBM's SQL as an emerging standard program interface. Analysts say users should not ask whether a system is relational but whether it is compatible with SQL. How would you answer that question as it regards Adabas?

We have tried to broaden the ways we can get into a site now. We have a Cincom Systems, Inc. Total bridge, a DL/1 bridge, a VSAM bridge, and we have under development a Natural/DB2 bridge. In the next version of Natural we will support SQL. You'll be able to embed SQL commands in Natural programs. SQL is not going to go away, and if somebody wants to program in it, that's fine.

Many people are coming to the conclusion that fourth-generation languages are not the answer to the productivity crisis. How do you respond to that criticism?

I violently disagree. Our first version of Natural in 1979 was not a great system. But we cleaned it up. In a couple of years we had users who converted high-volume production programs to Natural to save machine time. I must violently disagree with that assessment.

The demise of Cobol is still possible?

It is inevitable. As each of the companies improves the performance and functionality of its fourth-generation language products, it will roll over Cobol just as we are now.

(over)

To what do you attribute Software AG's continued success?

We had internal problems three or four years ago, and we set about to fix them. We experienced rapid growth, and after we went public in 1981, the first major problem was instituting internal planning and control systems. We went on-line with a planning system so our expenditures would be consistent with our anticipated revenue. We tried it the other way, and it didn't work. That is combined with the quality of our products. We don't have any blemishes like the Applied Data Research and the New Jersey Department of Motor Vehicles' problem [CW, Sept. 30]. We don't have any failures, and we just recently passed 2,000 installations worldwide of Adabas, 1,850 of Natural

is a distributed data base possible or practical?

We've been quietly working since 1980 on a distributed data base concept called Adanet and have been implementing - slowly but surely aspects of that. The full capability will be out this year under central data dictionary control. We are very close. In the three largest cities of Alaska, for example, there are three separate data bases, and they are talking to each other. There is logic in the programs; they know where the files are:

True distributed data processing will allow physical files to reside in different locations, even though it is one logical system. The data dictionary will know this and understand. The Alaska setup, which is a portion of the Adanet system, doesn't have the dictionary control yet. We are not quite there, but we are within shooting distance.

As DB2's performance improves and IBM begins to address the system's lack of tools, how will relational vendors like you continue to increase sales of their products?

We have been improving the efficiency of Adabas for 15 years. DB2. granting it five years, is where Adabas was 10 years ago. We're not standing still; we're improving our efficiency too. The next version of Adabas will have a continous processing option; it will be the only DBMS on IBM mainframes with a nonstop capability. That took us a little while to develop, I assure you. Even when DB2 cleans up its performance act there will still be other things that the market demands that we will have already implemented.

Do you think the recent ADR/Ameritech deal is a sign that consolidation is under way in the mainframe software industry?

No. that was just an attempt by the phone company to get into the computer industry. It was a special

circumstance. If you look at the history of the phone companies' trying to gain entry into the computer industry, every single one has been a disaster. What will be different about ADR? I think you will see ADR go straight downhill. There will be no stock options for the key peo-

What is your feeling about functional pricing?

My dream has always been to use value pricing. I am a value pricing guy. I would love to sell software on a pertransaction basis, but it is pretty impractical.

Right now, we price by operating system; that is a crude measure. We are ready to jump into functional pric-

ing.