Editors' Corner

John Pugh   Paul White

W E'VE DONE A fair bit of "globetrotting" over the past month or so, and two observations we've been claiming (in chorus with others) for a long time have been very visible. One is the claim that the adoption of objects is further ahead in North America than in the rest of the world. This is not to say that object technology is not in use in quite a number of places. We know of a number of organizations "abroad" that have been building sophisticated, mission-critical systems using Smalltalk for a long time. And we know that our travels as a training organization have brought us to roughly 20 countries in just the last year alone. But individual examples aside, there just doesn't appear to be the widespread use of objects, and, in particular, Smalltalk, outside of the US, and to a lesser extent Canada.

This begs the obvious question of why not, for which there is probably no right answer and certainly not a simple one. Some comments we've heard lately is that the sales force for the Smalltalk vendors has been relatively small and has not had the reach to penetrate large organizations. This is certainly changing with IBM now utilizing its full worldwide sales and marketing force. But also, ParcPlace-Digitalk has been partnering with a variety of distributors throughout the world over the past few years, which has allowed them to make local connections with high-profile companies. Perhaps a second reason for the relatively smaller market size outside North America is the very nature of Smalltalk's class library. As it is written in a style that is very "English-like," and to a great extent American-English, perhaps learning the language is that much more difficult in countries where this style of language is not used. Certainly the grammatical style used with the language and library could be described as colloquial and would be foreign to most developers in, say, Asia or Eastern Europe. I doubt there is an easy way for this issue to be addressed. A third comment, made to us by a few of our clients, is that the style of development used in North America differs from that used elsewhere. Without generalizing too much, we in North America seem more eager to adopt this new iterative, incremental lifecycle than our counterparts in other parts of the world, where a more formal lifecycle, which is documented religiously, is much more the

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norm. We know that changing to this more rapid and free-wheeling development approach has often been very difficult to accept in US corporations—it must be even more so in many places elsewhere.

The second observation that has been confirmed is simply that we have a long, long way to go before those of us responsible for delivering systems rapidly and effectively will ever catch up to the demands of business. For example, the improvements made by many of the airlines with respect to their reservation systems is enormous, but they still don't meet the demands of the current airline business. With rapidly changing schedules and new partnerships and alignments between carriers appearing each month, it is difficult to imagine how systems will ever keep up. An even better example was seen on a recent trip to a major theme park in the US. Just a quick glance at the variety in their holiday packages would bring a tear to the eye of someone imagining what their CIO must go through. They listed roughly a dozen "new" packages, each with different pricing, scheduling, and restrictions listed, some of which were intertwined as "packages of packages." From a consumer point of view it was wonderful, but watching the poor lady behind the counter spend 90 minutes trying to figure out how to register us for two of these packages was heartbreaking. She had the two-inch manual, which contained the step-by-step instructions, which had ink written all over it with recent amendments and corrections to it. The saddest part of course was the 25 minutes it took her to recover from entering an invalid date in just one field! An "undo" button would have been very useful for her.

As a final note, we wish to formally offer Kent Beck our most sincere thanks for the contributions he has made within these pages over the past five years. As one of the very first people we contacted after being asked to act as editors of this publication, it is sad that we must finally bid him adieu. He has been our most prolific contributor, and I know many of you have benefited from the ideas and musings in his columns. We know he's not disappearing, just taking an extended sabbatical from writing here, and it is with our deepest gratitude we say thanks.

Happy New Year everyone!