

# News & Review

THE INTERNATIONAL MONTHLY NEWSPAPER for PICK and PICK/UNIX/DOS COMPUTER USERS

## Cutting Bait Without Losing the Lure

by Chuck Thomas, President, The Apris Corp.

Pick has been a very efficient and effective systems environment for small business for a long time. Times and technologies change. Most of us have lived through the pain and the gain... the pain of implementing an application, making it the lifeblood of the organization; the gain of having it settle in and work well.

Now the organization has grown and technologies have, indeed, changed. Many of us have islands of personal computers doing planning, word processing and publications. People are more familiar with computers and have experienced the wonders of "point and click" graphical applications. The organization is more dispersed and tying remote information together has been difficult. Perhaps the software vendor which originally installed and kept the system running has "moved on". You know that there are alternatives like UNIX, but just can't risk spending a lot of money making unnecessary changes to get benefits that seem marginal. After all, our mainstays applications are getting the job done.

UNIX isn't a winner because it is good; it is good because it is a winner. Huge dollars are being spent world-wide to implement and market extremely powerful and cost-effective UNIX boxes and UNIX-based software. The good news is, we can take full advantage of the benefits of UNIX without impacting our Pick applications. And we can have the best of both worlds for less money than we are spending to support our systems today without negatively impacting our users. How? By implementing low cost RISC technology, which provides more than twice the performance of our "native" Pick systems at less than half the cost.

We can support twice as many users on systems which grow to well over half a gigabyte of memory and dozens of gigabytes of disk. We can run unattended backups on one \$7 8 mm video cartridge. We can implement such technologies as virtually fail-safe data storage and seamless integration of our PC islands. And our Pick users will notice nothing other than better performance on their screens!

For example, we have a "low-end" Data General Aviiion 4020 in our office, on which we run both Advanced Pick and VMark UniVerse. The base model 4020 comes with 32 MB of memory, 1GB disk, 524MB cartridge tape, LAN controller and 2 async ports and 1 parallel port. It has a list price of less than \$33,000. But it comes standard with two RISC processors providing 38 MIP of horsepower. It can support up to 128MB memory, 256 ports, and 6GB of disk. Yet it is hardly bigger than a PC/AT, consuming

about that much power and generating about that much heat. For \$5,000 more, its horsepower increments to 46 MIPS.

That base system can be loaded with whichever flavor Pick one prefers... VMark, Advanced Pick or UniData. The cost of those licenses increments the hardware price. The 4020 with 64 ports and both UNIX and Advanced Pick for 64 users, plus a 2GB 8mm cartridge drive, is about \$98,600. Note that the license for either VMark or Advanced Pick is about \$30,000 for 64 users, and UNIX is about \$9,000. This means that about 40% of the total system price is for operating software licenses. Hardware upgrades are commodity priced: DG sells 8MB of add-in memory for the Aviiion 4020 for \$3,000. An additional 1GB disk drive is priced at \$9,400, and since it uses a standardized SCSI interface, it can be mail-ordered from third party magazine advertisers at less than that. Since we are talking open systems philosophies, the primary vendor won't squawk about third party add-ins.

If that system were to be leased for, say, \$2,000/month, and we added in monthly maintenance of about \$2,000, the total monthly outlay would be \$4,000. We can each compare this to our current costs. For those of us spending \$4,000/month or more to support Prime/Ultimate/Reality/etc. Pick systems (perhaps supporting more modest configurations), we can replace them at the same cost or less, including maintenance, with RISC UNIX-based systems.

In our office, we have a LAN installed...on 4 wire twisted pair cabling...supporting Ethernet at 10 mb/sec. We use the DG Aviiion 4020 four ways:

- As a "file server" to PC's;
- As a "database server" for our 4GL, relational DB applications;
- As a Pick engine; and
- As a UNIX engine.

Each of our desktops has either a 386 PC running Windows 3 or a UNIX workstation. Some of the desktops are diskless, using only the server's hard disk...this is whether they are PC's or UNIX workstations. We all share one of three laser printers, and nobody has to do file-saves on their local hard disk...the server saves everything onto one 8 mm cartridge. On the Compaq at my desk, I can run multiple, independent Pick applications in various windows, while running a graphical spreadsheet with a relational DB link, WordPerfect, PageMaker and other Office Automation software as well as new UNIX applications.

The UNIX workstations, which cost \$3995 each (total), typically have five to ten active windows running all kinds of things. Every-

thing is integrated...we can export Pick to relational database through SQL; we can access Pick data in DOS, or vice versa; we can access Pick data in UNIX, or vice versa; we can access DOS data in UNIX, or vice versa. For our clients who are in transition, we integrate their current Pick machine with the new UNIX/Pick machine, so that users don't need to know which machine they are using for a given application, switching among machines as applications demand.

Our new applications are all written so that they can run as DOS, UNIX, Mac, or OS/2 applications, and all data is stored relational. We use the Informix relational engine and 4GL tools, and we use a graphical front-end. We can define a new relational table (like a "file & dictionary"), create a data entry and query form, and a report in just a few minutes. Just by answering prompts, we can extract and flatten a Pick file, and SQL update it into a relational database. We can do the same with Apple Mac and OS/2, but we don't happen to have them in our office. Our applications are all "point and click", graphical, color, and operating system-independent. We have released the bonds of "old think", and our traditional Pick software developers think they are in development Nirvana.

Our first new application is a business planning system that can pull in data from Pick, DOS (eg. Lotus 1-2-3), mainframe, and UNIX files, and provide a comprehensive look at the enterprise at whatever level of detail desired. The application runs on the desktop (386, UNIX workstation or APPLE MAC) and is highly visual. Data is served over the LAN as needed, from its source. We feel this application serves to unify the enterprise, providing a level of corporate, product and location planning that was previously unattainable.

What all this means is that Pick applications definitely can be migrated to newer technologies, that users need not suffer from the change-over, that the benefits of the new technologies are not mutually exclusive to the Pick applications, and that "seamless" integration can be accomplished. The bad news is that this doesn't come "out of the box" to the new user, even the technology sophisticated. There is a learning curve for the integration...both the possibilities and the how-to's. We have spent the past two years building the capability to achieve high-quality integration. The good news, once again, is that we have achieved it. You can attain it, too!

Open Systems and Pick—the best is yet to come.

For information call: (215) 647-9540.

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We can support twice as many users on systems which grow to well over half a gigabyte of memory and dozens of gigabytes of disk. We can run unattended backups on one 5.78 mm video cartridge. We can implement such technologies as virtually fail-safe data storage and seamless integration of our PC islands. And our Pick users will notice nothing other than better performance on their screens!

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