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FROM THE EDITOR

By John Olson, Editor-in-Chief

'99 Predictions



"Space 1999" was a British sci-fi series in the early '80s about a space station on the moon. Many of us Trekkers liked the show because of its futuristic technology. Well, it's 1999, and though we don't have a base on the moon, NASA and several foreign space agencies have begun building a space station in orbit above Earth. Futuristic science fiction, commonly considered to be unrealistic, has often acted as a glimpse of where real technology is leading. The advances in the last 50 years have been stunning. In fact, there have been more technological advances in the last 50 years than in the rest of mankind's entire history!

Each year the speed of these technological advances outpaces the previous year. New and unbelievable technologies are emerging at a frantic pace. The computer technologies are leading the world into a new era, far beyond the dreams of scientists during the turn of the last century. Will the world be so different in another 50 years that it's beyond the imagination of the greatest technological thinkers of today?

Though I'm not one of the greatest technological thinkers and I won't even attempt to think 50 – or even 10 – years ahead, I'll give you my best guess as to what will happen within the software industry in 1999. While I'll generalize about the entire software industry, my focus will be on the PowerBuilder industry niche, Sybase and its competitors.

Here are my predictions for 1999:

Sybase Will Communicate a Vision for Their Technology

That may sound obvious, but Sybase has, in fact, had a very difficult time communicating their vision over the last few years. With the incredible speed of technological growth, how is it possible for one company to stay at the forefront in a broad number of areas? That's a question Sybase faces as it battles to remain a leader in software technologies. Fortunately, John Chen (CEO) and Eric Miles (VP of all products) have made some changes in both product direction and organization in order to keep pace with the industry. Their goal is to provide the number one enterprise-wide software development and database tools in the world. That's a tall order and not easily achieved. (Watch for an upcoming interview with Eric Miles for details on their plans and the changes they made.) What they have achieved is a single cohesive and aggressive vision for their company and their customers. I believe they will have more success in 1999 communicating that vision.

Industry Fervor for Java Will Level Off

Don't get me wrong. Java is a great language with lots of potential. However, as with any new technology, it takes time to mature and be ready for consumption by the masses. There are currently hundreds of Java development tools out there and none of them are mature. Clearly, the future lies in systems that are platform independent and can be delivered via the Internet to a virtual machine. However, until Java performance improves, the market will continue to use existing technologies, rather than jumping on the Web bandwagon. Even the latest Java generation, Java 2 by Sun Microsystems, has already been dismissed by some as too slow for industry needs.

Market research has shown that a majority of companies are planning on developing Web-enabled applications within the next year. Those same companies have been saying this for the last two years, but haven't done it yet. As the tools mature, more companies will finally begin developing Web applications; however, most are unwilling to venture out onto the bleeding edge of these technologies. Because of this, both the potential market for Web development tools and the sales growth of those tools are high, while the current size of the market is not yet where many had forecasted. I believe that sufficient gains will be made in the Java and Web development tools arena by the end of 1999, that the market potential will start becoming market reality. Watch for a late 1999 surge in sales of Java-based and Web development tools (see my Y2K prediction for why this surge may be delayed until early to mid-2000).

Many Java and Web Development Tools Will Stop Being Produced While a Few Tools Will Rise Above the Fray to Take Control of the Market

A few years ago, Mitchell Kertzman, a former CEO of Sybase, told me that eventually each product niche ends up with only two or three competing products; all others perish. When new technologies emerge, dozens of competing products often fight for market share. Many competitors drop out early, three or four hang around for a few years, and finally only two remain. That can certainly be shown by the Excel versus Lotus battle, Word versus WordPerfect, Microsoft C versus Borland C++, and PowerBuilder versus SQLWindows. The battles raging today are by development tools that provide features necessary to create Web applications, serve and call distributed and OLE objects and create traditional client/server applications. Currently, hundreds of tools vie for leadership in these feature areas, and I believe that only those companies that can provide enterprise-wide integrated toolsets will survive. The exception to this will be those tools that are exceptionally good, but come from smaller companies. Typically, they end up being purchased by larger companies and included in the larger company's suite of tools.

As of the new year, fewer than 10 companies claim to have tools that can meet every need in an enter-