By John Olson, Editor-in-Chief

Now and Then
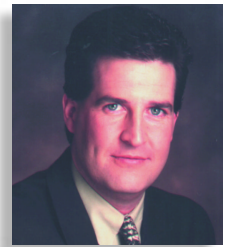
A Look Ahead

"Time flies when you're having fun,"… or so they say. I think a better saying would be, "Time flies when you're busy." Can you believe 1998 has come and gone? The ever foreboding Year 2000 is fast approaching. What does that mean for this magazine? Next year will be an exciting year, characterized by challenging and timely topics as well as an abundance of Sybase insider information. We'll start the year with an issue dedicated to Sybase's new Web Deployment Kit. The January issue, scheduled to hit the newsstands soon after the release of the kit, will contain a review of the WDK,including comparisons to similar tools, a WDK success story, a how-to article for using the WDK and lots of tricks and tips for Web development.

The February issue will be exciting because it will focus on the Year 2000 problem. That year holds special meaning for us in the software industry because most of the software we've created will stop working. The end result will be panic, mayhem and lots of work for software consultants. I won't go into that topic now; I'll save it for my February editorial. In that issue we'll report on the Year 2000 compliance of Sybase products (especially PowerBuilder and the PFC), review a Year 2000 software analysis product and give you solutions to your Year 2000 problems. Don't miss it!

Following those two issues we have several other exciting topics lined up. For a full year of topics go to the SYS-CON Web site and see the **PBDJ** 1999 editorial calendar. The mission of this magazine is to help you, the reader, become more proficient in your knowledge of software design and development, more skilled at using PowerBuilder and related tools and more valuable to your employer. The new year will be a banner year for accomplishing that mission.

A Look Back

Traditionally, in the January issue the editor is supposed to make predictions and look ahead to the coming year. In December the editor is supposed to look back at past predictions and pat himself on the back for the accurate ones he made, avoiding mention of the predictions that turned out to be totally ridiculous. It is my good fortune not to have made any public predictions at the beginning of 1998. Thus, I can claim not to be wrong on a single prediction for this year. I suppose I could review the previous editors' (Sean Rhody and Steve Benfield) predictions for 1998…but it would take far more space to correct all the errors than I've allotted for this column. Instead I'll look back at some of the interesting highlights of 1998.

One common sentiment communicated in articles and editorials during the last quarter is that PowerBuilder consultants are as busy as ever. David McClanahan expressed this in his September editorial, my colleagues have echoed this and I am personally experiencing it. Why are we suddenly so busy when many in the PowerBuilder industry continue to predict its demise? While reports that PowerBuilder is dead have been greatly exaggerated, Sybase did have a rocky year. Web development products touted by Sybase to be "best of breed" didn't attract droves of buyers. Early in the year Sybase laid off nearly 1,000 employees worldwide. Most came from the database development group, but the Powersoft tools division was also impacted. A steady parade of managers, visionaries and technical staff left Sybase for greener pastures. The defectors included David Litwack, the former president of Powersoft, and Mitchell Kertzman, the former CEO of both Powersoft and Sybase. Though PowerBuilder continues to be the leading tool in its niche, Sybase stock continues to decline. *Plummet* is probably a better term. SYBS started the year at an anemic $10 and has dipped as low as $4.50. This is a stock that was as high as $56 in 1994.

Is PowerBuilder dead? Contrary to popular belief, PowerBuilder continues to hold its market position as the industry's preferred tool in its niche. It isn't losing market share. But it isn't gaining any either. In the world of stocks and investments it isn't sufficient for a company to maintain its position. If the company's products aren't gaining ground and showing 20% profits, the stock is going to decline. That might sound crazy, but it's true. Technology stocks are very risky because the longevity of technology is months or years rather than decades; competition is ferocious and the investors' expectations are absurdly high.

Though stock price is an indicator of the health of a company, more is going on at Sybase than can be seen by watching the price steadily drop. John Chen, the new CEO of Sybase, is attempting to bring the company back to profitability. After attempting to streamline the company by reorganizing divisions, repackaging products and laying off many employees, Sybase has shown profit for two consecutive quarters.

Next month I'll make my predictions about where Sybase and its products are headed in 1999 and the coming millennium.Stay tuned.

Back to my original question: If things are looking so bleak, why are the PowerBuilder consultants so busy? The answer is simply that PowerBuilder continues to be the development tool of choice for its multibillion-dollar industry niche. The growth in the niche continues to outpace the supply of new developers. This translates into more work than can possibly be performed by all the PowerBuilder developers in the world.

I remember back in the '60s looking forward to the year 2000 and thinking it would never come. It's here. Where have the last 30 years gone? Time flies when you're having fun. ◆