



Click here...



INFORMATIONWEEK.COM The Observer

October 16, 2000

Vote For Those Who Will See To It That We Can Make Change

By Lou Bertin

During a longer-than-expected foray away from the world of putting down words written in black against a white background, I had the extraordinary good fortune of working with one of the smartest and wisest (and they are two very different qualities) people I ever expect to meet.

Elias "Buck" Buchwald, erstwhile vice chairman at Burson-Marsteller, was my idol. Equal parts role model, mentor, and exemplar of the qualities I hoped to possess at some point in my life, he embodied in his late 60s everything that bespeaks a respected veteran: crustiness, worldliness, wisdom born of experience, confidence, enthusiasm. I, 35 years his junior, adored him and generally followed him around as a puppy would its master, trying to soak up as much of his intended or unintended guidance as my spongy brain was capable.

So it came to be that I worked closely with Buck on a team that worked closely with a team at IBM led by Irving Wladowsky-Berger in preparation for the launch of the System 390/ES-9000 product line.

I recall those days for two reasons. One, IBM's recent announcement that the System 390 is history.

The other and--true to Buck--far more lasting reason is the advent of the DoCoMo device. Where and what is the connection between the two? Bear with me and you'll find out.

Back to the System 390. One of its features was hiperbatch, a mechanism that sped file transfers, improved throughput, and remains one of the salient features preserved in the System 390's reincarnation as cServer. As one of the IBM representatives explained the doings of hiperbatch to Buck and me, I can recall Buck fidgeting in his seat, a sure sign that a brainstorm was coming.

Sure enough, Buck passionately--he never did anything in any other fashion, up to and including eating his raw vegetables for lunch--in a passionless place (a windowless conference room in Somers, N.Y.)

Recent columns

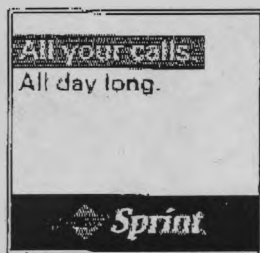
[In Praise of E-Bystanders](#)

[The FTC Hits A Home Run](#)

[Plugging The Skills Gap](#)

[Face The Music, Microsoft](#)

[More Observer archives...](#)



TechWeb Sites

argued that hiperbatch ought be named "metaserver," for that was its true function, acting as it did as a master agent for file transfer.

Not without a fight, Buck uncharacteristically lost that battle, but he's winning the nomenclature wars with the arrival of the metanet, and the DoCoMo device is the latest manifestation of said development.

If the Net is truly to become the ubiquitous "meta" presence that is foretold, the DoCoMo product is going to be the device that carries the Net from easy access to constant access. Part Palm Pilot, part wireless phone, part data-entry and-access device, the DoCoMo is a phenomenon in Japan, and it will be a matter of months before it becomes so in North America.

The size of a cell phone, the DoCoMo device is capable of allowing users to telephone, access and create E-mails, listen to music, play games, and generally do everything a pretty highly powered telephone/notebook combination would. It's a colossally high-powered, fully functional Net appliance in a formidably powerful form factor that's selling to the tune of 50,000 units a day in Japan. And my limited experience in fiddling with one demonstrated that it works as advertised.

So here we have what will perhaps be THE breakthrough device that will make the Internet truly ubiquitous, low-cost, and accessible to all, fulfilling the mission--for now--of the Internet. What could be wrong?

Merely the fact that there is afoot in the commercial world a significant percentage of people who don't have the slightest clue as to how to use such a device. Need proof? Herewith a small, admittedly anecdotal example.

Two Sundays ago, while on a shopping mission in the company of my bride, a visit was paid to a well-known women's clothing store that doesn't deal with discounted items. To complete a blessedly modest purchase, two \$20 bills were handed over, and change of \$9.43 was due.

I had wandered to a display counter adjacent to the cash register (a quaint term, that) and had full view of the computer display handling the transaction. After the store employee entered the amount of cash tendered against the purchase price, a window containing the following information appeared:

- Cash in \$40.00
- Change: \$9.43

Given To Customer:

- Five Dollars 1
- One Dollar 4
- Quarters 1

- Dimes 1
- Nickels 1
- Pennies 3

So here we are possessed of the metanet, and the people we hire to handle the simplest of cash transactions require, in at least enough cases to make it feasible, cheat sheets to make change for simple retail transactions. Bully for the technology economy and all who have led us to this point.

Of what possible good is technology if people aren't equipped with sufficient basic education to use it? Where do economies--indeed nations--stand if making change for a purchase is too daunting for individuals to handle unprompted? Are we as peoples ahead of the abacus or woefully behind its time?

From this perspective, it's utterly and completely horrifying to see that even some of the fruits of the educational system are so woefully equipped for life that not only must the amount of change for a purchase must be specified, but that how that change ought be constituted must also be specified. Woe unto the shopkeeper if the drawer containing \$5 bills is empty and five singles must be substituted.

Never has technology been applied in a more generally depressing way than that which I witnessed in that store.

In a couple of weeks most of us (I sincerely hope) will pull a curtain closed behind us and cast ballots. When you do, keep in mind what Tip O'Neill maintained was the rule of electoral law, namely that "all politics is local." Those at the top of the tickets set broad direction; Congress licks its fingers and sees which way the wind is blowing, the local school board lives somewhere around a few corners.

Vote for those who'll see to it that we can make change.

Lou Bertin is an industry consultant. He can be reached at Lou.Bertin@gte.net

Rusty Weston: Matter Of Fact

Rusty explores the facts and figures behind business technology.

Charles Pelton: Eye On IT

Charles explores IT management issues and strategies that business and technology managers face.

Jason Levitt: Internet Zone

Jason focuses on the strange, egregious, and the standard technologies of the intranet/Internet.

Stuart Johnston: Redmond Watch

As our eyes and ears in Redmond, Stuart gives his perspective on the latest events at Microsoft.