NEWS SHORTS

Mercedes out of Timeplex deal

The $207 million sale of Unisys Corp.'s networking subsidiary, Timeplex, Inc., went through late Friday minus one purchasing partner. Original South African-based joint venture partner Mercedes Information Technologies reportedly withdrew, leaving Swiss firm Ascom Holding AG the sole new owner.

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IBM and Thinking Machines in pact

IBM allied itself last week with Thinking Machines Corp. in a move analysts said will help boost the scientific niche field of massively parallel supercomputing. Few details of the agreement were released, and no joint products or marketing are planned. IBM will supply Thinking Machines with access to its mainframe Enterprise System/9000 semiconductor and disk technologies while the smaller vendor offers its expertise in creating massively parallel supercomputers with up to 64,000 microprocessors.

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FCC steps up to Caller ID issues

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) said last week that it will establish federal policies on interstate calling-number identification (Caller ID) and asked for public comments on the controversial new telephone service. The FCC said calling parties should be allowed to block the display of their telephone numbers to called parties, and it sought comments on the merits, costs and feasibility of requiring an option allowing callers to block Caller ID on a per-call basis as well as comments on whether that option should be automatic or operator-assisted.

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Epson to show color notebook

Epson America, Inc. will announce three upgradable notebook computers at Comdex/Fall '91 next month, including a battery-powered color notebook. In a separate announcement, Sharp Corp. in Osaka, Japan, said it will begin selling an 8.4-in. Thin Film Transistor LCD to vendors of notebook computers. Epson will preannounce its new notebooks prior to Intel Corp.'s release of the 25-MHz 80386SL chip. All three products will feature an Epson power management program the company claims is the first that will turn off the CPU when it is not in use.

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Wang rolls out new PCs

Wang Laboratories, Inc. introduced seven personal computers last week. The PC Series line ranges from entry-level desktop models to systems capable of functioning as local-area network servers. Included in the announcement are four Intel 80386SX- and I486SX-based models using industry-standard architecture and three Micro Channel Architecture products sourced from IBM's Personal System/2 product line under the IBM/Wang alliance announced last June. Pricing ranges from $1,580 to $17,195. All of the products are scheduled to be available in October.

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Shareholders OK merger

The planned merger of Borland International, Inc. and Ashton-Tate Corp. gained the approval of shareholders last week. Borland is in the midst of acquiring Ashton-Tate in a stock swap that is valued at $440 million. The acquisition remains subject to other conditions, including the expiration of the waiting period under federal antitrust laws that is scheduled to end Oct. 11.

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User telecomm coalition forms

Citicorp, IBM, Electronic Data Systems Corp. and General Electric Co. have formed an informal "network" called the Coalition of International Telecommunications Users to speak out and lobby on issues of concern to companies with significant overseas telecommunications needs. In its first formal action, the group filed a petition Friday with the Federal Communications Commission opposing an FCC proposal that would require disclosure of private user information in international private-line arrangements.

Cost pressure spurs data center controls

BY JEAN S. BOZMAN
CW STAFF

SAN FRANCISCO — In an attempt to shave operating expenses in a recessionary era, data centers across the country are installing console-automation software that literally removes the need for operator intervention.

Data center managers are learning how to restart their IBM mainframes from home — if need be — and are wondering what to do about veteran operators whose jobs have been automated out of existence.

Console-automation software, which has been trickling onto the market for the past three years, has finally come online at more than 40% of the 400 sites surveyed by the Association for Computer Operations Management (AFCOM).

Tremendous growth

"In the last year, console-automation growth has been tremendous," said Leonard Eckhaus, president of AFCOM, which held its annual conference here last week. "More than 40% of the data sites we surveyed have automated console systems [that were] installed this year, and 61% of the ones who don't have it expect to install some of it in the next two years." By contrast, AFCOM's 1990 survey showed that only 28% of surveyed sites were using console-automation software.

Studies by Gartner Group, Inc., in Stamford, Conn., have shown a similar trend. By 1995, the data center will be staffed by fewer, more highly paid workers, with job responsibilities similar to those of a systems programmer. "We're moving into the era of the dim data center," said Jeff Schulman, vice president of Gartner Group's Software Management Strategies Service. "Users are looking to console-automation software to make a big impact on the bottom line. In several years, you will find many large data centers that have gone to lights-out, with absolutely no operators around. The job of computer operator is going away," he said.

"The recession has caused an urgency about cost-cutting at many user sites," explained AFCOM keynote speaker Jim Woodhill, vice president of marketing at Mission Critical Software, Inc. in Houston.

Among the sites that have taken an automated-systems strategy, AFCOM members reported, were Bankers Trust Co. in New York, McDonnell Douglas Information Systems Co. in St. Louis and Rolm Systems in Santa Clara, Calif.

"We have 50 consoles in the room and only one or two operators," said Desi Dossantos, manager of data processing operations at Rolm, which uses Candle Corp.'s AFOperator automation products. A personal computer-based "outboard" system monitor, made by Votek Systems Ltd. in Toronto, combines system alerts that can be viewed by operators and by managers who have a Votek PC console at home.

Some operations managers at the AFCOM meeting wondered aloud whether their move toward unattended operations would spell the end of careers for data center employees with 15 to 20 years of experience. Many companies have tried to retain their operators through retraining programs, but other organizations are prepared to let their operators go, users said.

Taking control

Popular data center automation tools have found a home in more than one-third of surveyed data centers

1991 survey of 400 data centers in North America

	Percent of sites that have product installed
Tape management software	68.3%
Automatic scheduling software	65.6%
Console automation software	42.0%
Report management system	37.5%
Automated problem/Change management	37.5%
Environmental monitoring systems	36.0%
Network automation software	32.4%
On-line documentation	22.4%
Automatic account balancing	12.4%
Robotic tape library	5.1%

Source: AFCOM   CW Chart: Janell Genovese

Vendors, users choose SNMP over OSI

BY ELISABETH HORWITT
CW STAFF

Long criticized for being a generic protocol that lacks functionality to manage specialized network systems, Simple Network Management Protocol (SNMP) is due to get some beef, with upcoming introductions and demonstrations at next week's Interop '91 show.

The "de facto" SNMP has gained far more vendor and user support than the "official" standard, Open Systems Interconnect (OSI), several sources said.

Approximately 15% to 20% of Fortune 1,000 companies are either testing or actively using SNMP to manage part of their internetwork installations, said Todd Dagres, a director at The Yankee Group. By 1993, that number will reach 50%, he estimated. Fewer than 150 network management installations use OSI, according to CIMI Corp. in Haddonfield, N.J. Now, SNMP may go beyond its bridge/hub/router niche to all of the equipment and services that make up an enterprise network.

Several industry leaders have committed to supporting Remote Network Monitoring, an emerging SNMP protocol that defines how local-area network diagnostic and monitoring devices communicate with central management systems.

Last week, Hewlett-Packard Co. announced implementations of the Remote Network Monitoring protocol on its Lanprobe monitor and Openview management platform. Protools, Inc. introduced a LAN monitoring system based on the protocol. Cabletron Systems, Inc. promised the protocol for its Spectrum platform by first-quarter 1992. Digital Equipment Corp. said it will ship the protocol with the next version of Management Station for Ultrix.

Wide support of the protocol will help users "mix and match" one vendor's LAN diagnostic device with another's management platform, said Andrew Bach, director of communications engineering at Securities Industry Automation Corp., which would like to integrate HP's Lanprobe with DEC's network management system, he added.

SNMP is gaining support in other industry segments, with Network Equipment Technologies, Inc. announcing an SNMP-based management system for its T1 multiplexers this week and Banyan Systems, Inc. having done the same for its LANs last week. And at Interop, vendors will demonstrate new SNMP protocols for managing Fiber Distributed Data Interface LANs and Switched Multimegabit Data Service offerings.