

Market Roundup

October 4, 2002

Intel Introduces 3D Mapping Software

You Can't Fight City Hall, But You Can Email 'Em

Technology to the Rescue? This Time, Maybe

Symantec Attempts to Tie It All Together

IBM, Intel and Microsoft Announce Datacenter Initiative

Intel Introduces 3D Mapping Software

By Charles King

Intel has introduced software that allows developers to build interactive, 3D graphics that correctly model the way light reflects off of real objects and surfaces. Based on Light Field Mapping (LFM) technology Intel introduced last year, the new software is available at no cost through Intel's Open Source LFM toolkit (Open Light Fields) which consists of software for composition of 3D images from digital photos and code for playback of the LFM objects. Developers can use the code as is or modify it for use in their applications. In addition to working with graphics hardware suppliers to ensure LFM is compatible with their technologies, Intel is collaborating with Mitsubishi Electric Research Lab on future enhancements of LFM including the ability to visualize objects with complex geometries (such as those that occur in nature), and with Stanford University to develop technology for compressing and streaming light fields.

At one level, Intel's LFM announcement appears to be little more than a geekier-than-thou tidbit with limited appeal to anyone outside the 3D graphics community. But to our way of thinking, the story provides an example of how Intel is stepping strategically through the door of a high-profile and highly profitable market sector. By way of explanation, it should be pointed out that 3D graphics development has traditionally been the purview of RISC-focused vendors, with SGI leading the pack by a country mile. In fact, SGI's position as Hollywood's graphics hardware vendor of choice provided the company enormous PR and marketing value over time. But in the past three years, the terrain has been moving under the feet of SGI and other RISC-based graphics vendors as Intel-based technologies have become increasingly powerful and sophisticated. That tectonic shift became apparent in July when George Lucas's Industrial Light and Magic announced the replacement of 600 SGI workstations with Intel-based machines.

So how does Intel's LFM announcement fit into the bigger 3D picture? Light field mapping is a highly complex operation that typically requires costly proprietary software toolkits. In essence, by taking on the cost of developing Open Source LFM tools for their own platform and distributing them freely, Intel is giving graphics ISVs both an early Christmas present and a good reason to develop products for the Intel platform. This shows smart strategic thinking on Intel's part, and also demonstrates the inextricable synergies between hardware and software development. By making life easier for ISVs in a sector where they are beginning to develop traction, Intel is helping to make sure that the road ahead is smoother and more scenic than it might have been otherwise.

You Can't Fight City Hall, But You Can Email 'Em

By Clay Ryder

This week the Pew Internet Project announced the findings of its latest survey, which queried 520 randomly selected local elected officials from around the U.S. about their use of the Internet. This first-ever survey of mayors and city council members of the National League of Cities by the Pew Internet & American Life Project reveals a high level of online activity at the municipal level. According to the survey, 88% of respondents use the Internet in the course of their official duties, 90% use email in their official duties at least weekly, and 61% use it daily. Nearly four-fifths of those surveyed have received email from citizens/groups about civic issues and 25% receive email from constituents every day. In addition, 73% of online officials note that email to and from constituents help them better understand public opinion; 56% cited improved relations with community groups; and 54% say email has brought them into contact with citizens from whom they had not heard before. However, the study also noted that traditional communications with City Hall such as meetings (55%), phone calls (49%), and letters (27%) respectively carry the most constituent weight compared with only 14% of local officials who stated that they assign a significant amount of weight to emails received.

A common perception about governments of any kind is that they are inflexible, bureaucratic, and behind the times. Bureaucracies are often well entrenched, and laws, ordinances, regulations, etc. are inflexible by definition (they are laws after all), but this does not necessarily mean that government officials are the Luddites of the information age. Some simple math shows that just over half of local officials use email on a daily basis which, not too surprisingly, is about par for the use of email by the general public. So what is the big deal? Actually not too much, except for another reminder of the oft-repeated if seldom remembered lesson of technology deployment. The lines between worker and consumer are increasingly blurred, especially for remote and telecommuting workers. Technologies such as cell phones, email, etc., often mirror the progress of the early days of PCs. Formal organizations had nothing but disdain for these devices, so workers simply brought their own and, as a result, changed the workplace forever. Likewise, given the usage level of email by general population, it should not be a surprise that roughly the same proportion of government officials (who also are part of that general population) as citizens use email on a daily basis.

Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that email is still considered a "courtesy" communication as opposed to a definitive statement of the general masses. Showing up to public meetings still carries more weight, as does making a phone call or writing a letter, likely in part due to the relative level of effort required by the sender. As most wired users have experienced sometimes regretfully, whisking off a quick (and often negative) email is almost as easy as whining and is therefore as easily discounted, whereas making the effort to attend a meeting tends to separate the blowhards from committed civic (and likely voting) participants. Thus, while local government may be taking a measure of the community spirit via email as opposed to walking the streets or eavesdropping at the hair salon, at the end of the day, these opportunistic interchanges with the public remain just that. If one really wants to get attention, one personally engages City Hall in its natural setting — confirmation that people like to be courted in their roles on their turf. Thus, we are reminded yet again that for all that technology can deliver, people are still people, and for the most part continue to place more value on personal as opposed to technological interactions.

Technology to the Rescue? This Time, Maybe

By Jim Balderston

According to published news reports, IBM will release next month a new privacy management product under the umbrella of its Tivoli product line. The Tivoli Privacy Manager is designed to allow enterprises to classify information by privacy levels as determined or dictated by company policy or existing laws. The privacy manager is under development now, and is being tested in pilot programs with some of IBM's clients, notably Travelers Property Casualty Corp. and Marriot International Corp. Both companies sit on IBM's Privacy Manager Council, formed late last year. The Privacy Manager uses W3C's Platform for Privacy Preferences (P3P) to denote the privacy level on stored data. The privacy-labeled data is then screened by rules

enforcement and creates audit trails of the use of the data. IBM is hoping to develop the Privacy Manager to work with as many different systems as possible.

We have often seen technology rolled out with great fanfare only to wonder which specific problem this gleaming, muscular new piece of universal goodness was actually going to solve. We don't believe that there is a deficit in the need for this product; we suspect the need for it is going to make its full and complete development a bit of a challenge. There exists a strong possibility that states will begin to pass and enforce more stringent — and varied — privacy laws making the matrix of applicable law on any single piece of data ever more complex. That being said, the rising tide of privacy concerns on the consumer, legislative, and corporate front are going to make privacy management a key element of future data collection and distribution.

Essentially, we see IBM adding another classification to any piece of data, one that addresses not specifically technical issues but social and legal ones associated with the gathering and use of that data. As we already noted, such issues are only going to increase in the coming years, with enterprises facing growing legal liabilities as a result of inadvertent (or purposeful) misuse of sensitive information. While we think IBM is well positioned to move forward with this offering, especially as part of its Tivoli product line, we suspect the demand for such offerings in the present — and future — will draw other vendors into the fray. And in that sense we say the more the merrier, as we see one of those rare instances where technology can actually solve a real-world problem that predated the delivery of the technology itself.

Symantec Attempts to Tie It All Together

By Jim Balderston

Symantec has announced its Security Management System, designed to simplify the management of a broad array of multi-vendor security products. Key to the system are its Event and Incident Managers, which tie together security applications such as firewalls, anti-virus and intrusion detection that give detailed, but aggregated reports on security-threatening activity as it occurs. The Event and Incident Managers will measure the effectiveness of existing security, respond automatically to threats based on the severity of business impact, provide real-time alerts and incident monitoring, and report on metrics of the response to further tune response settings. Symantec indicated that its new offerings would interoperate with as wide a range of vendor offerings as needed.

With the drumbeat of “digital Pearl Harbors” and cyber-terrorism fresh in their heads, it would come as no surprise that many enterprise IT folks are scratching around looking for some way to bring down the complexity — and in many cases ineffectiveness — of their security environments and the management of the same. Why we are sure that the recent alarm bells sounded around new millennium threats have moved some IT folks to begin this search? We suspect that most have been looking for some way to improve their security deployment and its management for years, if not decades. This is an old problem, and one that grows harder to solve with each passing day (or new security technology deployment).

Enterprise IT managers have been fed a pretty steady diet of promises to simplify their security headaches over the years. In most cases this diet has had very few calories, indeed. While there is clearly a need for this type of offering, Symantec is going to have to overcome some significant, well-entrenched skepticism in the marketplace. If, however, they can demonstrate a real value proposition, it could be a real boost to IT managers and for Symantec itself, as it moves forward with its security consulting and implementation services initiative. This product will certainly open some doors for these service contracts, but the product itself will have to carry a good deal of the load. Enterprise IT's ability to endure (or pay for) never-ending implementation projects is as low as the NASDAQ these days; Symantec's ability to quickly show the value proposition of these new offerings will determine their ultimate success or failure.

IBM, Intel and Microsoft Announce Datacenter Initiative

By Charles King

IBM, Intel, and Microsoft have announced an initiative to speed the development of Intel Xeon MP and Microsoft Windows datacenter solutions. The firms are working with systems integrators and ISVs including J.D. Edwards, SAP AG, and SAS to provide a portfolio of business application solutions running on IBM's eServer xSeries 440 systems. The goal is to develop a solutions-based approach to high-end Intel-based servers that combines hardware, operating systems, software applications, and middleware with systems integration, marketing, and sales support. As part of the announcement, IBM unveiled a new customer solutions lab near Microsoft headquarters in Redmond, Washington that offers customers, ISVs and integrators access to IBM and Microsoft products and support.

To begin, the IBM/Intel/Microsoft initiative is essentially about increasing sales of high-end Intel-based products and solutions. By working closely together on the development end with integrators and ISVs, the Three IT Amigos hope to remove a bit of the sting customers might experience from deploying powerful, complex Intel/MS-based datacenter solutions. Fair enough, but while this is hardly the first such initiative IBM, Intel, and/or Microsoft have embarked upon, the effort does have a bit of an interesting twist that makes it worth further consideration.

Said interesting twist is the Intel Xeon MP, a high end 32-bit server processor enhanced for back end business solutions such as transaction processing. Despite a good deal of press and a great deal of push from Intel, the Xeon MP has been relegated to 2-way machines by vendors including HP and Dell, who prefer the Pentium III version Xeon in their multiple processor Intel servers, while IBM (via the x440's modular building block architecture) and Unisys have developed Xeon MP-based products that scale to 16-way configurations. Does this really matter? Well, no. Not unless said vendor claims to offer a range of back end business IT solutions. Dell's lack of interest is not surprising since the company tends to avoid markets until they mature, but HP's absence (given the company's very public embrace of the Intel platform) is curious. These vendors' decisions also have real world consequences for their customers. In the case of solutions from SAP, SAS, and the like, server scalability is critical to application scalability. In the case of back end deployments like enterprise datacenters, the 30% performance boost Xeon MP offers over Xeon PIII is more than a little significant. What does the Three Amigos' announcement mean in this context? While the current economy has inspired IT vendors of every kind to tighten their belts, the smart ones are keeping an eye on the future and actively partnering to extend their reach by developing powerful, flexible solutions that meet their customers' datacenter needs. Simply put, by working together today, IBM, Intel, and Microsoft are positioning themselves to reap future benefits.