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## Technology: Connect Or Die

Size may still matter, but  
geography won't, in the  
digital future

Richard Bassett is president  
of Bassett Computer  
Systems Inc. of North  
Haven, which provides  
computer solutions for  
clients with fewer than 100  
computers. Last month his  
company was cited by the  
Connecticut Technology  
Council as one of the 50  
fastest-growing technology  
firms in the state.

Your company mainly sells software solutions, but  
as everything gets smaller, faster and cheaper,  
where is the world of hardware going?

We think about it a lot. I don't think PCs are going  
to get too small, except for portable units, which  
need to be small and lightweight and easy to toss  
in a backpack or something. I think desktop  
computers, at least the monitors, are going to stay  
big, and keyboards are going to stay big, because  
people need the size in order to view things and  
interact with the computer system. The thing that  
I find interesting with the scaling down and the  
size of technology is that when you sell a file  
server, which we do, if it doesn't come in a big  
box, people think they haven't gotten their  
money's worth. [Smaller units] don't have the  
perceived value. So I think the issue of perceived  
value is something. People like paying for bricks  
and mortar. I think that will stay true for systems  
that people buy to be located in their own building  
or their own homes.

Business New  
Haven  
11/15/1999  
By: Michael C.  
Bingham

Of course, the servers won't necessarily have to be in the same facility as the users.

As the Internet becomes even bigger than it is, which surely it is going to do, if more and more clients have Web-based software applications, which is where things are going, they don't need to have the physical computer in the building. Instead, what they need is a keyboard, a screen, and a connection to the Internet. Let me type in, use the mouse or another pointer device. Let me see what I'm doing, but it doesn't really matter if it's in this building or if it's in Taiwan. It doesn't matter where the data or the applications are living.

Because everything will be connected anyway. The Internet's coming along, it really is. There are a lot of sections of the Internet that are very secure. For example, one of the packages we deal with is a package called Goldmine, a contact-management system. At the beginning of next year, they're going to be releasing their Web client for Goldmine. Now the thing that's cool about that is that a salesperson traveling around the country or around the world will be able to get access via the Internet to their company's information. They can access their sales, prospects, communications, they could send faxes, e-mails from anywhere in the world where they can get an Internet connection. And they don't even have to carry a laptop with them; you can go to one of these Internet cafés. There are a lot of places like that around. You can literally sit down and run applications off the Internet instead of carrying a piece of equipment with you. That's very cool. And a lot of companies are moving towards that, going to a Web client. Now, it doesn't really do anything for the little businesses with five or ten employees. But it's good for people with a workforce that's on the move.

Are keyboards going to become obsolete pretty quickly as voice recognition software improves?

I'd be surprised if keyboards went away sooner than the next five years or so. Voice recognition software really isn't that good right now. It probably will [get better]. To become really adopted, all the software applications are going to have to use it. It works okay with [Microsoft] Word and a few other programs, so you can sit there and you can talk, and if you've trained the computer properly, it will translate what you said into text, which is very nice and very cool. But if you try to use your accounting software, it doesn't know how to deal with that at all, because those kind of applications haven't even begun to become voice-ready yet. On the other side, the generic ones like word-processor, spreadsheet - that's



Not  
enough  
hours in  
the day  
to do  
your  
banking?



where they're doing it because there's a wide appeal. And if you think about who's using it now, lawyers are using it, doctors, professionals are using it. And these are people who typically wouldn't be doing their own typing anyway, but it's good for them to talk into a Dictaphone or a recorder and pass it off to someone who feeds it into a computer without having to type it. That's pretty cool.

There is a company making tiny wireless computers with voice recognition, the monitor in an eyepiece, and a processor the size of a pager. Do you think machines like this will change the nature of work?

I'm looking ahead all the time, but I'm always looking a few years out where we'll be making equipment, whether we'll still be selling equipment, whether we'll still be a Fast 50 this year or the following year. In ten years, who knows? Who would have thought the Internet would be as big as it is now, ten years ago? Nobody. Not Microsoft.

How about productivity? As Internet connections get faster, people spend more time online. Obviously, much of that time is productive, but some is not. Do you think about that?

Absolutely. That's an issue that we have to deal with with our clients. Everybody wants access to the Internet in businesses, but what we're finding our clients are saying is, 'You need to lock down access to the Internet because we can't have people sitting at their computers for three or four hours a day shopping, playing games or chatting.' Companies want to give employees the Internet as a tool, but they want to limit what [employees] are going to do with it.

How is that done?

Well, you can do it to some degree with certain programs like Proxy Server. Microsoft Proxy Server allows you to limit what Web sites people can go to and actually lock them out. Keep in mind that there are hundreds of thousands of web sites. You can't physically type them in and there are new ones every day. The other thing that you can do, though, is get management reports of where your employees have been on the Net so you can predict abuses and you can go to [an employee] and say, 'Look, I see you've spent eight hours at Excite. Don't do that.' You can take a little proactive management. You can do lock-downs and get management reports. They'll tell you what's going on with [with Internet usage]. You can't really do that on a single-user PC, but you can do it on a network where you've got a Proxy Server

running.

Will geography become less economically relevant as everybody is connected to everybody else and as video conferencing becomes more commonplace?

I think geography has already become less relevant. For a little company like us in Connecticut, we have clients all over the country and we have clients overseas. The Internet has made that possible. Five years ago it was unheard of.

In five years will people no longer travel for business, or will there still be value in that face-to-face handshake?

I think there's a lot to be said for face time and personal relationships. If we're not developing those in some fashion, why deal with us? Why not deal with some company in Guam or some company is Hong Kong? I think the personal part of it is the differentiator in business dealings, at least in establishing a relationship and nurturing it along. With video conferencing it will probably change, but bandwidth is going to have a lot to do with it. Right now, the biggest hang-up with video conferencing is that bandwidths are so bad in most places. It can't push a signal across that's usable - unless you're a large corporation and you have a T1 or a T3 [line] and connected to another large corporation that has it. Why hasn't bandwidth technology grown as fast as the Internet has?

Well, the real barriers are wires and where they are and the old-line phone companies. SNET's got an infrastructure and they're developing it, of course, but, they didn't foresee that people would want bandwidth. They didn't lay wires down on every street to every business and on every pole that would handle the kind of capacity that folks need in order to run high-speed connections.

But now their parent company [SBC Corp.] wants to wire 70 million homes for DSL [digital subscriber lines].

That's nice, because it will give people a fraction of T1. It will give them 384K or 256K, instead of the 56K. It's very fast. It's relatively cheap, but not as cheap as a phone line. For like \$300 a month you can have 384K. That's pretty powerful for a small to mid-sized business.

In ten years, will a person be able to survive if they're not online?

I would doubt it. I don't even think it would be that

long - three, maybe four years. We're dealing with a lot of companies now that for 100 years, they lived without computers. We're in an old, historic part of New England. There are companies have been using typewriters until a couple of years ago. They're going from a typewriter to the Internet because their customers and their suppliers are saying, 'You're not going to get purchase orders from us unless you get on the Internet.' So if you want to keep eating, you have to be connected.

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