

Technology Corner: The Pursuit of Information Technology... Bringing PCs to the PSAP

by Jacqueline Hike

In the previous editions of the "Technology Corner" we focused on the types of intelligence being utilized at the PSAP with the introduction of Intelligent Workstations and Computer Telephony. This time let's take a look at the emergence of technology and the value added to the PSAP.

The emergence of Intelligent Computer/Telephone workstations and associated Local Area Networks (LANs) displace many of the 9-1-1 Call Center's existing customer premises equipment (CPE). By introducing the power of the personal computer into 9-1-1, the integration of data and voice telecommunications is made possible. Now there are software applications, networks, operating systems, and hardware to consider.

Computers are becoming the norm and are changing the way people do business. A nationwide survey sponsored by Intel Corp. and conducted by Yankelovich Partners, Inc. shows that the PC is becoming a "must have" technology and that the computer revolution is just beginning. In addition, over half indicate that they look to the computer to expand their capabilities and possibilities by helping them to accomplish new things rather than merely enabling them to do current things better. Three-quarters of Americans view technology as playing a major role in society and interest in technology generally outscores interest levels in sports, politics, and international news.

Contrary to some views that computers will replace workers or reduce skill levels, nine out of ten Americans feel strongly that computers play a positive role in improving job quality. Americans see enormous personal potential and benefit in the personal computer. When asked to choose from a pair of words the one that best describes their feelings about computers, a large majority opt for the positive choice. Nine out of ten choose "creates opportunities" over "denies chance." Almost the same number choose "engaging" over "dull," and "friend" over "enemy." Seven out of ten choose "tool" over "toy," "right of way" over "road block," "fundamental" instead of "trivial," "inviting" versus "scary." More than half choose "fulfilling" versus "frustrating," "affordable" not "unaffordable," and "easy" instead of "difficult."

What does the discovery of all of these new and innovative computer products and solutions mean to the public safety industry? What is gained by replacing desktop telephones with a computer and a graphical user interface? Or answering the phone by clicking a mouse? Does the personal computer really offer anything more than existing telephone equipment does today?

The answer is "YES." More and more, I think the Public Safety industry is evolving more into the standard IT (Information Technology) model. For the PSAP the benefits in technological advances are tremendous ... ease of use, future migration, reliability and integration.

In the majority of PASTS today, there exists what some of us like to refer to as "isolated islands of technology." There are telephone sets, radio equipment, CAD applications residing on mainframe computers and dumb terminal interfaces, ALI display screens, TTY devices. The advent of computers and the rapid advances in technology allow us to begin to integrate these "islands of technology." Utilizing open system architecture allows us to bring these isolated and proprietary "islands" together on

a common platform and begin to share information between applications, not to mention the addition of a whole new host of functions and features like faxing, e-mail, closed circuit TV, video, Internet, Intranet, and much more.

"Open" is key. By complementing open system architecture and Windows NT/NTM, you benefit from choice. Choice of hardware and choice of software. Systems become more reliable and secure. They provide a solid foundation on which to grow. There is greater accessibility and lower costs versus our mainframe predecessors, more upgrades and less customization. Every area within public safety benefits from the advances being made: call centers, dispatch, records, case management, and communications. And the future of technology allows us even greater advantages addressing the challenges of PBX and ACD integration, ISDN integration, cellular, data base issues, LAN administrative support, and more. Envision integrating these services along with digital recording devices, computer aided dispatch, and mapping on a single computer workstation. The possibilities for the future of 9-1-1 telecommunications are endless.

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