

News about information systems throughout



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A Prototype for Collaboration: Design Studio of the Future

Lee Ridgway

Design projects generally require the collaboration of many people with different areas of expertise. Further, members of a design team are often scattered geographically, in some cases around the world. One of the challenges in such a situation is to build a team that can overcome the barriers posed by distance and different disciplines. Computer and networking technology can play a key role in distance collaboration – the premise behind MIT's Design Studio of the Future (DSOF).

The DSOF is an interdisciplinary effort between the School of Architecture and Planning and the School of Engineering that focuses on geographically distributed electronic design and work group collaboration. Its concept comes from William Mitchell, Dean of Architecture and Planning, who serves as project leader, along with Woodie Flowers, Professor of Mechanical Engineering, and Professor John Williams of Civil Engineering.

The Virtual Design Studio

In brief, Mitchell's idea is that members of a design team connect with each other through an array of computer and network-based design, development, and prototyping equipment, including videoconferencing. As a design project moves along, aspects of the work can be shared, discussed,

changed, and implemented through electronic means. Costly and time-consuming travel and shipping of documents can be lessened, while still retaining most advantages of the face-to-face interaction that is necessary in creating a new building or product.

Collaboration by Design

The DSOF is a prototype of this new generation of design environments, where distance poses no barriers to collaboration, or to reaching out to colleagues, clients, and resources. MIT's DSOF is in Architecture and Planning's renovated facilities, as well as in studios in Mechanical Engineering and Civil Engineering. The studios are outfitted with CAD workstations on which students model, visualize, and analyze design proposals. In addition to working with on-site professors and collaborators, students can discuss their projects with academic and industrial design critics and distant collaborators via video and teleconferencing facilities. Through the Internet, students can access design-related databases, and make their files available to others. When it's time to build a prototype of what's on the screen, computer-integrated fabrication machinery converts the digital geometric models into a physical model.

Chairs and Pavilions

This past spring, an application of the DSOF was carried out in a collaboration between the Departments of Architecture, Civil Engineering, and

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DESIGN STUDIO OF THE FUTURE
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Mechanical Engineering. Each department represents a discipline with its own long-standing design tradition, culture, methods, and values. One goal of the studio was to bring the disciplines together, understand their different ways of thinking, and integrate architectural and engineering expertise throughout the design process.

Students formed interdisciplinary teams to tackle two design problems. The first focused on developing and prototyping a product, in this case a chair – a problem familiar in mechanical engineering industrial design courses (see the photos and caption below). The second, longer problem, that of designing and specifying a sports pavilion, was similar to the traditional design problems arising in architectural studios.

In designing their sports pavilions, the students broadened the studio work to include distance collaboration and critiquing with principal designers and engineers in three international firms: the architect Frank O. Gehry & Associates, Los Angeles, and the engineering firms of Ove Arup, New York,

and Fluor Daniel, Irvine, California. Through communications and data links the student designers engaged in frequent sessions – “virtual desk critiques” – with members of these firms. The firms were also involved in the Final Review, where students formally present their work to a jury. These presentations integrated the technical elements of the DSOF, from sharing computer-based images and files, to interactive videoconferencing where all participants could see, hear, and respond to each other.

As one of the early steps in exploring electronically mediated collaborative design, last spring’s studio brought forth several issues, among them the need for developing, in students and practitioners, the interpersonal skills necessary for effective team work. On

the technical side, the communications tools supporting collaborative design must continue to advance in terms of speed and quality so that all team members, no matter how distant, can be simultaneous participants in the work. Those involved see the DSOF and its underlying concepts as key in developing the models and methods that will ensure that design teams can function effectively in the environment of the “virtual studio.”

Sources of Information

Sources for this article, from the School of Architecture and Planning, were Associate Professor Andrew Scott, and graduate student and research associate, Dennis Shelden. For more on the DSOF, see the Web page at

<http://sap.mit.edu/dsof/> ☉



These photos illustrate some of the steps in the chair design, left to right: taking the customer’s measure; creating the design on the computer; the prototype built from parts cut by a machine controlled directly by the CAD/CAM design. Team members for this chair were: R. Johnson, A.M. Kilpatrick, S. Poolvorlaks, W. Ungerer.

Two Conferences on Computers and Work Come to Cambridge

We live in an era where technology and work life are inextricably meshed. Two back-to-back conferences in November will address issues related to computers in the workplace.

PDC '96

The Fourth Biennial Conference on Participatory Design (PDC '96) will be held November 13 to 15 at MIT. Sponsored by Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility, PDC '96 focuses on involving workers in the analysis, design, and implementation of technologies and work practices. Areas that will be explored include product development, long-term system maintenance and redesign, and settings in the developing world.

For more information, visit the PDC '96 Web page at

<http://www.cpsr.org/cpsr/conferences/pdc96/pdc96.html>

CSCW '96

From November 16 to 20, the Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW '96) will be held at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Cambridge. Sponsors are the ACM Special Interest Groups on Computer-Human Interaction and Office Information Systems. CSCW '96 addresses the technical, sociological, anthropological, and policy issues related to workplace technologies. These include electronic mail, workflow, video conferencing, decision support systems, and collaboration over the Web.

The theme of CSCW '96 is “Cooperating Communities.” Papers, panels, and demonstrations will cover new developments on the World Wide Web and in virtual worlds, including communities that form and are maintained in Internet-hosted 3D worlds.

To see the conference program, go to the CSCW '96 Web page at

<http://www.acm.org/sigchi/cscw96/> ☉



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Netscape Navigator 3.0 Brings New Power to Web Browsing

Albert Willis

Netscape Communications Corporation recently released Navigator 3.0, the latest version of their popular Web browser. It continues to push ahead, supporting the latest Web innovations in animation, video, and sound. Given Netscape's intensive development cycle (Navigator 4.0 is already well under way), this browser may well become the program you'll use for all network-based work.

Platforms/Requirements

Navigator 3.0 runs on the three platforms widely used at MIT: Macintosh, Windows, and Unix. It is the default browser on Athena, accessible from the Dash menu.

Minimum system requirements are as follows:

Macintosh

- A 68020 or better processor
- 6MB of hard drive space and 12MB of RAM

Windows

- A 386 or better processor
- *Windows 3.1* – 3MB of hard drive space and 4MB of RAM
- *Windows 95 and NT* – 6MB of hard drive space and 6MB of RAM

Unix

- 6MB of hard drive space and 16MB of RAM

Java and JavaScript

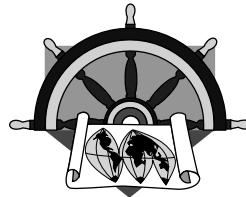
Navigator 3.0 supports Java (except in Windows 3.1). Java is the cross-platform programming language from Sun that lets developers create mini-applications (applets) that can run within a Java-enabled browser.

Navigator 3.0 also supports JavaScript, a lightweight programming language for adding interactivity to Web pages. For example, JavaScript can be used to change the appearance of a Web page on the fly.

Since Java and JavaScript are still relatively new, they may have security holes that could be exploited. If you want to play it safe, you can disable Java and JavaScript via a Navigator preferences setting.

Frames

Frames are separate "panes" within a window on your screen. Introduced in Navigator 2.0, they work better in 3.0. In 2.0, when you accessed a page with frames, pressing the Back button went to the previous page, not the previous frame. This has been corrected in 3.0.



Plug-ins

Plug-ins, which first appeared in Navigator 2.0, are more widely used in 3.0, marking a shift away from helper applications. Plug-ins are small programs that work within Navigator to extend its capabilities, usually by letting Navigator display or play nonstandard media types.

Multimedia

With its host of plug-ins, Navigator 3.0 can deliver authentic multimedia – video, audio, and 3D spaces – over the Web. (For some platforms, 3D capabilities are still under development).

Navigator 3.0 for Windows comes with LiveVideo, a plug-in for AVI movies. The Macintosh version doesn't support LiveVideo, but both Windows and Macintosh versions come with a plug-in for watching QuickTime movies via the Web. The QuickTime plug-in supports streaming – when enough of a movie is downloaded, it starts to play while the rest of the movie continues to download.

Macintosh and Windows versions come with LiveAudio, a plug-in that plays a variety of sound files, including AIFF, AU, MIDI, and WAV. It's very useful to have a plug-in that handles the most common sound formats on the Web.

Live3D is a plug-in that's available for the Windows and Power Macintosh versions of Navigator 3.0. Live3D lets you navigate 3D spaces created in Virtual Reality Modeling Language (VRML). Versions for Unix and 680x0 Macintoshes are under development.

Navigator will use Live3D as the basis for dealing with all things 3D on the Web. Walking or flying through 3D spaces is just the start: because of Live3D's integration with Java and

plug-ins, users will be able to interact in 3D spaces that offer animation, music, and video.

CoolTalk

The Windows version of Navigator 3.0 ships with CoolTalk, a plug-in that supports telephone-like communication over the Internet. CoolTalk makes it possible to speak to anybody in the world who's on the Internet without paying long-distance phone charges. CoolTalk requires a sound card and a microphone for PCs. CoolTalk even comes with an answering machine, to catch messages from callers when you're not around. A Macintosh version of CoolTalk should be ready soon.

E-mail and Newsgroups

Navigator has a built-in e-mail client that lets users send and receive e-mail. However, the client doesn't support Kerberos authentication and can't be used to receive e-mail in the MIT environment. Navigator's newsgroup client does work well in the MIT environment and is convenient to use, especially if you don't already have a favorite newsgroup reader.

More HTML Tags

New HTML tags in Navigator 3.0 extend what Web page creators can display. The new tags add multiple columns; provide pixel control over vertical and horizontal white space in a paragraph; place colors in table cells; allow manipulation of frame borders; and let creators specify preferred fonts.

Since these tags were developed by Netscape, other browsers don't support them, at least for now. If you use the new tags, keep in mind that a portion of your audience won't be able to view all parts of your pages. Netscape has pledged to support the HTML 3.2 specification from the World Wide Web Consortium once it's been finalized.

Availability and Support

Navigator 3.0 is free to students, faculty, and staff at educational institutions. At MIT, you can download the Navigator 3.0 installer package from the IS server, net-dist.mit.edu.

Navigator comes with online release notes and a handbook. If you need help downloading or using Navigator, call the Computing Help Desk at x3-4101 <net-help@mit.edu>. ☺

Using Attachments in the Eudora Pro E-Mail Program

Phyllis Galt

Eudora Pro is the preferred e-mail package at MIT for Macintosh and Windows users. One of the key benefits Eudora has over TechMail is that it lets you exchange formatted files – such as word processed documents, graphics, and spreadsheets – with users on either a Macintosh or PC. You can even exchange formatted files with colleagues who use some other commercial e-mail packages, such as CCmail.

Eudora lets you exchange these files by “attaching” them to an open e-mail message. This article steps you through how to send, store, and open attachments in Eudora.

Attaching Files

You can attach one or more files to a message by following a two-step procedure for each attachment.

1. Choose Attach Document (Macintosh) or Attach File (Windows) from the Message menu.

Result: A dialog box prompts you to locate the file you want to attach.

2. Navigate to the file you want to attach, select it, then click on Open.

Result: The file is attached to the message and will be sent with it. The Attachments: line in the header contains the name of the attached file.

Coming October 1: A Reorganization of net-dist.mit.edu

There's a lot of free network-related software for Macintoshes and PCs that you can download via MITnet. This software is stored on MIT's network software distribution site, net-dist.mit.edu. An upcoming reorganization of this ftp site will add an MIT-only folder, and at the same time should simplify finding software by establishing a consistent organizational hierarchy.

A common convention at ftp sites is to use the name “pub/” for the directory that contains publicly available software. The reorganized net-dist will continue to have a “pub/” folder; a new “mit/” folder will be added for software that IS wishes to make available only within the MIT community. Software in the “mit/” folder will be organized first by operating system (macos7, win3, win95, winnt); then by function (email, mitnet); then by application (eudora, netscape) and distribution type if applicable (installer or individual files, specific chip architecture); and finally by version (current, old, alpha/beta). For example, if you were looking for the Macintosh version of Eudora, the path would be: mit/macos7/email/eudora

If you have questions about how to download files from net-dist, call the Computing Help Desk at x3-4101 or send mail to <micro-help@mit.edu>.

Storing Attached Files

When you receive an attached file with a message, it is automatically stored in the Attachments folder in the Eudora folder in your System folder.

If you want, you can move attachments out of this folder and store them elsewhere. You can also specify a different folder to store attachments. To do this,

1. Choose Settings from the Special menu.
2. Click on the Attachments icon.
3. Click on the folder name button under Attachment Folder: (the default is blank).

Result: A dialog box appears that lets you choose a folder.

4. Navigate to the folder you want to use, then click on Use Folder (Macintosh) or Use Directory (Windows).

Opening Attached Files

To open an attached file, the program in which the attached file was created needs to be installed on your computer. There are two ways to open an attached file:

- Double-click anywhere on the Attachments: line in the header of the message and the program will start up and open the file. (If you double-click on an attachment for which you don't have the program, you'll be prompted to locate the program.)
- Start up a program to open the file, navigate to the folder where it's stored, and open it in the usual way.



This column presents news and tips from the consultants who staff the Computing Help Desk, x3-0001. Check out their Web home page at <http://computing-help.mit.edu/>

Q Not long ago, I upgraded to System 7.5.3 on my Macintosh. Recently I heard that System 7.5.4 was due to be released. Now a friend tells me that the right version number is System 7.5.5. What's the story here?

A Apple Computer planned to release System 7.5.4 Update on September 12. However, a few small glitches were discovered. Apple fixed these and decided to release a rebuilt version of the System Update (7.5.5). It should be available by the time you read this.

System 7.5.5 Update enhances reliability on all Macintoshes by eliminating some causes of system freezes and improving printer sharing over a network. It also provides performance and network-related improvements for specific systems. For details, see the ReadMe file that comes with the Update.

System 7.5.5 Update will only install on computers running System 7.5.3, including System 7.5.3 Revision 2. Once the update is installed, the system software version will be changed to System 7.5.5 as indicated in the “About this Macintosh” window.

With the release of System 7.5.5 Update, Apple is delivering its final system software release for the Macintosh Plus, SE, Classic, Portable, PowerBook 100, SE FDHD, SE/30, LC, II, IIX, and IICx. These computers were not designed to support 32-bit memory addressing. Future operating system releases will require 32-bit memory addressing, which is supported by all other Macintosh models.

You can download System 7.5.5 Update from Apple's ftp sites on the Internet at <ftp.info.apple.com> and <ftp.support.apple.com>. It will also be available from Apple's World Wide Web sites at

<http://www.info.apple.com>

and

<http://www.support.apple.com>

If you have questions about System 7.5.5 Update, call the Computing Help Desk at x3-0001. ☺



New at the MCC: Wacom Tablets and Apple Color OneScanner

Ginny Williams

The MIT Computer Connection has added several new products to its fall lineup. Of particular interest to people who use computers for graphics work are Wacom tablets and Apple's new Color OneScanner 1200/30.



Wacom Tablets

For the first time, the MCC is selling Wacom graphics tablets: both the smaller ArtPad II

and the ArtZ II series. All tablets are available in Macintosh and PC versions; the ArtZ II series is also available for SGIs. Each tablet comes with a pressure-sensitive, cordless, erasing UltraPen. While Wacom tablets are typically used by design professionals and illustrators, they can also be used as a mouse sub-

stitute, since they offer greater control and a more natural feel.

You can special order Wacom tablets through the MCC. Delivery takes 2 to 3 weeks. Educational pricing for Macintosh and PC versions is as follows:

- *ArtPad II* (4"x5") \$125
- *ArtZ II* (6"x8") \$285
- *ArtZ II* (12"x12") \$390
- *ArtZ II* (12"x18") \$630

SGI versions cost slightly more.

Apple Color OneScanner 1200/30

Apple's newest scanner offers 600x1200 resolution and 30-bit color depth. The Color OneScanner 1200/30 is also the first flatbed scanner for the Macintosh market to offer Optical Character Recognition (OCR) to HyperText Markup Language (HTML) conversion.

The OneScanner's Dispatcher 2.0 interface makes it easy to select functions, including scanning, image editing, OCR, printing, faxing, copying, and archiving/retrieval.

The OneScanner 1200/30 supports ColorSync 2.1 color matching, and comes with the following software:

- *Xerox TextBridge 3.0h*: This OCR application offers easy OCR-to-HTML conversion for streamlined Web authoring.
- *Kai's Power Tools 3.0 SE*: This set of Photoshop-compatible plug-in filters lets you apply gradients, textures, and pixel effects to images.
- *Convolver 1.0 SE*: These image manipulation tools generate effects such as blur, sharpen, emboss, edge detection, and unsharp masking.

Optional equipment adds to the OneScanner's functionality. The Transparent Media Adapter scans positive and negative film and converts negative images to positive. The Automatic Document Feeder processes up to 20 legal-size sheets of paper for scanning or OCR.

MCC pricing on these products is as follows:

- *Color OneScanner 1200/30* \$765
- *Transparent Media Adapter* \$425
- *Automatic Document Feeder* \$300

MIT Medical Sponsors Series on Repetitive Strain Injuries

Sally Ciampa

Repetitive strain injuries (RSI) stem from a combination of intensive computer work and improper posture and work habits. If you use a computer, you owe it to yourself to learn about RSI and techniques for its prevention.

A good resource on campus is the MIT Medical Department, which has been educating the MIT community about RSI for several years. This fall, their Health Education Office is sponsoring a series of free seminars on RSI. A fee-based course on Ergonomics (cosponsored by the Environmental Medical Service) will also be offered.

Free Seminars

The following seminars will be held in E25-111 from noon to 1pm.

- *Wrist and Relaxation: What is RSI?* October 18

An occupational medicine physician reviews the causes, symptoms, and current thinking on the treatment

of RSI. Topics include factors leading to increased incidence; warning signs; adjustment of workstations; and habits to minimize strain and manage the symptoms of RSI.

- *Proper Adjustment of a Computer Workstation*, October 25

This seminar shows you how to recognize computer and keyboard arrangements that can lead to RSI and how to correct them. Examples and case studies are used to illustrate key concepts.

- *Occupational Therapy and RSI: Prevention and Treatment*, November 1

This session reviews the definition of RSI, as well as its causes and prevention. It then focuses on proper body and hand positioning and prevention exercises.

- *Appropriate Adaptive Equipment and Workers' Compensation*, November 8

Discussion centers on procedures and policies for identifying appropriate adaptive equipment for those disabled by RSI. Workers' compensation issues are explained, including coverage and the compensation process.

Fee-Based Ergonomics Course

This course, led by Dr. John Kella, will be held in 11-206. There are two sections on the same day - from 9am to noon and from 1 to 4pm. The fee is \$120; to register, call x3-1316.

- *Computer and Office Ergonomics*, November 14

Emphasis is on typing techniques for safe, efficient computer use. Training includes individual videotaping of head and body movements at the computer, plus electronic myographic feedback or biofeedback, which focuses on muscle relaxation during computer use. Participants receive a book of photos and graphs, plus reference charts of stretches.

Related Publications

Two IS publications, *Repetitive Strain Injuries* (IS-13a) and *Computers and Health Resources at MIT* (IS-13b), address RSI issues. To view them, click on the "Computers and Health" link at

<http://web.mit.edu/is/pubs/pubs.html>

To request paper copies, call x3-5150 or send mail to <sendpubs@mit.edu>. ☉



Publishing FileMaker Data on the World Wide Web

Debi Fuchs

For years, MIT departments have used FileMaker databases to maintain contact lists, room reservations, and event schedules. Now there's interest in publishing this type of data on the World Wide Web. This article discusses two approaches to getting FileMaker data on the Web, each with its own advantages and disadvantages.

Approach 1: A Snapshot

You can export your FileMaker data into HTML files (HTML is a format recognized by the World Wide Web), and then upload them to your Athena locker. This results in a snapshot (static file) of the data at the time you did the export; it does not update automatically as you update your database. Periodically (depending on how current you want your Web pages to be), you need to export and upload the data again.

This method is by far the easiest and least expensive way to publish FileMaker data on the Web. Even so, be prepared to spend a lot of time learning more about FileMaker. The box to the right offers a glimpse of how you publish data using this approach.

Approach 2: Live Access

The second approach is to publish your FileMaker data so that it is live – that is, always up-to-date and searchable. To do this, you set up a Macintosh as a Web server (with a connection to MITnet) and buy and configure software that provides a gateway to your FileMaker database. **Note:** For now, there are no software solutions for publishing live FileMaker data from a Windows computer.

If searching is a necessity, this more complex approach may be your only option. Be aware that it requires a significant amount of expertise, programming, equipment, and software, and that Information Systems cannot provide you with support.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Keep the following points in mind if you are considering publishing FileMaker data on the Web:

- If the data you publish needs to be updated less than once a week and

doesn't require searching, a static solution should be sufficient. You can write a script to regenerate your Web pages on a regular basis so that the data on the Web is current or close to current.

- It is faster to access FileMaker data exported as a snapshot, since it can be viewed as quickly as any other Web page. In contrast, when users search and retrieve live data, the database has to be queried and the HTML files created on the fly.
- Publishing a live database requires significant resources in terms of equipment, programming, and maintenance.

You need a Web server and properly configured gateway software. IS does not offer support for this kind of configuration, so if your department opts for this approach, it will have to do its own troubleshooting.

For More Information

To find out more about publishing live FileMaker data on the Web, check out the Web page at

<http://www2.claris.com/filemaker/cgi.html>

If you have questions about the snapshot approach, contact CWIS Support at <cwis-help@mit.edu>. ☺

Publishing a Snapshot of FileMaker Data Using Calculation Fields

The following procedure is a simple example of how to export data from a room reservations database into an HTML document, in this case in table format. The database contains the following fields: Date, Time, Room, and Contact.

Roo	Con_c
9-233	J. Basil
9-445	S. Estevez
9-444	M. Andrews

1. Define a calculation field called html row with the following text:
`"<tr><td>" & DateToText(Date) & "<td>" & TimeToText(Time) & "<td>" & Room & "<td>" & Contact`
2. Define a calculation field called html header with the following text:
`If(Status(CurrentRecordNumber)=1,"<html><head><title>Room Reservations</title></head> <body> <h1>Room Reservations</h1> <table border=1> <tr><th>Date<th>Time<th>Room<th>Contact", "")`
3. Define a calculation field called html footer with the following text:
`If(Status(CurrentRecordNumber)=Status(CurrentFoundCount), "</table></body></html>", "")`
4. Use the Export Records command to export the data into a file:
 - a. In the dialog box, choose Tab-Separated Text as the Type and name the file reservations.html
 - b. In the Export Field Order dialog box, click the Clear All button, move html header, html row, and html footer (in that order), then click on Export.
5. Transfer reservations.html to the Athena locker where you store Web pages.

Note: Repeat steps 4 and 5 whenever you want to update the data on the Web.

Date	Time	Room	Contact
8/8/96	12:15:00	E79-233	J. Basil
8/12/96	11:00:00	E79-445	S. Estevez
8/13/96	14:00:00	E79-444	M. Andrews

Discovery Process Improves Use of Technology at MIT

Janet Littell

Do you have an idea about how an MIT academic or administrative service can be performed more effectively using information technology (I/T)? A Discovery team can collaborate with your department, lab, or center in the reengineered I/T environment to explore options and identify paths toward a solution.

Discovery is the one of five inter-related processes for managing I/T projects at MIT (the other processes are Integration, Delivery, Service, and Support). Discovery identifies a need or promising idea, then brings I/T and business partners together to quickly evaluate the impact, return, costs, and risks. If the Institute approves the Discovery report, work begins on delivering the recommendations.

Inside Discovery

The Discovery process welcomes ideas from any member of the MIT community. (Contact information is given at the end of the article.) Dis-

covery ideas can also come from re-engineering efforts, vendors, other schools, government, or the business community at large.

If an idea looks promising and is likely to have an impact, the Discovery Process Leader checks that the idea has a strong sponsor – the senior academic or administrative officer in the area of proposed change. The Discovery Process Leader collaborates with the sponsor and other key stakeholders to write a charter that describes the opportunity and a stakeholder view of the improved process.

The Discovery Process Leader then staffs a project team of I/T and business partners. For 5 to 8 weeks, the team focuses on understanding the current process and desired outcome. After setting up an I/T conceptual design for realizing the improved process, the team compiles a cost and resource estimate and identifies issues and possible roadblocks. In cases where there are significant drawbacks, the recommendation might be an explicit “no go” – but this can still result in a better understanding of future options.

While a Discovery team works together to develop recommendations,

the sponsor is the project’s business advocate – in collaboration with IS. The sponsor is committed to supporting the Discovery team’s recommendations, and works with IS to persuade the Institute to allocate needed resources.

Recent Discovery Projects

Three recently completed Discovery projects are

- *Electronic Proposal Submission*: a design for creating and managing MIT’s research proposals
- *Writing Requirement*: a plan to upgrade the technology for administering the program
- *Alumni Network Services*: recommendations for electronic services for MIT alumni all over the world.

Delivery work has begun on all three.

Contact Information

The I/T Discovery Process maintains a home page at

<http://web.mit.edu/is/discovery/>

Visit this site for information about Discovery projects or to submit your ideas. You can also reach Greg Anderson, the Discovery Process Leader, at <ganderso@mit.edu>. ☺

On the Web: Documentation for the SAP Financial System

Robert Murray

Users of MIT’s new financial software, SAP, can now take advantage of World-Wide-Web-based documentation, known as *MIT SAP Online Support* (MIT SOS), to guide them through the system. Developed for the Management Reporting/Financial Operations (MR/FO) Project by the DA Consulting Group, this documentation is accessible to anyone at the Institute with a computer connected to MITnet and a Web browser such as Netscape.

To open the MIT SOS Home Page, go to

<http://web.mit.edu/sapr3/>

This home page has documentation for both the Windows and Macintosh SAP Graphical User Interface. It also has links to the SAP1HELP Desk, the *SneAk Preview* newsletter, and MR/FO Project bulletins.

System Tasks, Business Processes

MIT SOS integrates SAP system tasks within the framework of MIT’s business processes, which combine electronic tasks with manual and paper-based steps.

Each business process document in MIT SOS contains an overview, followed by a step-by-step procedure for completing the process. Each system task document consists of

- An overview of the task
- The menu path and command-line transaction codes needed to access the system task
- Graphics of all transaction screens
- Key field definitions
- Type of data entry expected
- User options
- Steps needed to complete the task

Contextual hypertext links throughout the MIT SOS documentation take you to the appropriate next steps or to related information.

You can choose particular business processes or system tasks by looking

them up in the online table of contents, entering a transaction code, or using a search engine.

As with any Web-based publication, MIT SOS documents can be printed by users on their local printers.

Distribution

The use of online documentation is not new – Windows and Macintosh users will be familiar with the online help systems built into Microsoft Word and Excel. MIT SOS goes one step further. Instead of having the online documentation reside on each user’s computer, it resides on a central file server. This approach saves the cost of distributing a 1000-page manual to each user, and removes the need to distribute documentation updates as new system tasks are added or old ones are updated.

Feedback

If you have comments about the Web-based documentation for SAP, send e-mail to <mr-train@mit.edu> or use the Comments link at the bottom of the MIT SOS Home Page. ☺



If you don't know where to get help for your computer, network, or telephone problems, call the IS Help Line, x3-2001 – or direct dial one of the help lines listed to the right.

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