

I saw a note a couple weeks ago marking the 15th anniversary of Lotus Notes going on sale. Now for most of you, that mean absolutely nothing. To those of us who were systems integrators back then, it was a big deal. To my company MicroSolutions, it was HUGE deal. It also marks, what I think was one of the greatest missed opportunities in the history of personal computing.

Lotus Notes should have been the front end and backend for the internet. It should have been the first WebServer. It should have been the first browser. It obviously wasn't.

It was the first collaborative computing application that could allow people around the world to share information. Touch informatin one time, make it available to everyone. Unfortunately, it was priced as if it were a proprietary mainframe application from an era when closed systems were considered a good idea. Prices started at \$62,000.

Even at that price, it was an amazing application that changed the way my and our customers businesses worked. It made us all dramatically more productive, and accelerated the acceptance of multimedia and email into corporate America. It set the precedent of connecting companies electronically with their customers.

Below, is an article that I wrote for Computer Reseller News. From 1992 through 1995, when AudioNet was really kicking in and I didn't have the time, I wrote a weekly article for them. This is the one I wrote about Notes. I thought i would bring it back in comemration of its birthday. Below the article, I also added my "resume" from back then. Talk about a blast from the past, but its funny to look at now. So enjoy the laugh !

Why You Should Be Selling Lotus Notes.

When did you decide to sell Local Area Networks ? Why ? Was it in 1983 or 1984, and you were convinced that LANs could be of value to your customers ? Or did you wait until 1988 because your customers didn't start asking you about them until then. Or was it 1989 because you had no choice, it was the only way to make any margin dollars on a sale ?

The dates will be different for most, but the point will remain the same for all; either you had the vision, or you followed the pack. Those with vision recognized the value of LANs to their customers and made the investment to learn ,understand, then master and sell the technology. The rest were dragged in. Some by customers, others by vendor requirements for authorizations, the rest probably out of desperation .

In my experience, the strongest competition I faced was from those with vision, the early adopters. Not only did they have a long list of references, and were financially stable, but because they knew the base technology well, they were easily able to adapt to new enhancements and operating systems. This enabled them to compete in new arenas of were margins were strongest, and competition was at a minimum. Places were there was plenty of business for the few resellers able to provide the technology.

What does this have to do with Lotus Notes ? LANs were the first way a company could share peripherals, and to a lesser extent, share data. Lotus Notes is the first application that allows those users to collaborate.

Where other applications provide quantitative information such as numbers, dates, times, Notes allow users to collaborate and provide qualitative information. Groupware and forms routing applications allow for emulation of the way a company has always done business. Lotus Notes helps companies to reinvent themselves and develop a competitive advantage.

If you have the chance to talk to a company that has fully implemented Notes, do it. The impact is phenomenal. Without exception I have seen success stories. New ways of doing business. Links to customers. Applications developed in hours. Reduced layers of management. Michael Dell in the New York Times said that he used Notes instead of holding meetings. Compaq is using it to communicate internally and with customers. Intel is using it in dozens of ways, and its Chairman Andy Grove has gone on record as saying that Collaboration software , beginning with Lotus Notes is the way of the future.

I'm not trying to sell you on Notes, I'll leave that to Lotus. The critical point is that Notes is the first of a genre of software that fosters collaboration. It will not be the last. Those resellers that make the investment to learn the software, and more importantly use the software internally, will find themselves in position to make sales and significant margins TODAY. Those that succeed with it, will be the leaders in selling a software technology that in 1990's will surpass the impact that LANs had in the 1980's.

Those of you who would like to discuss this column, your ideas, feel free to email me on CompuServe at 7004,216.

Mark Cuban

Resume

In 1982 I founded MicroSolutions Inc. in Dallas, Texas. MicroSolutions was a Systems Integrator that specialized in providing objective solutions to business problems. Our mission was to improve the productivity and profitability of each of our customers. We began as a systems house, developing database applications, and accounting systems. In 1983 we began our course into the Systems Integration market by becoming one of Novell's first Netware resellers. In 1984, we sold our first LAN, and by 1990 we had sold well over 500 networks, ranging in size from 2 to more than 1,000 users, and from not only Novell, but also, 3Com, IBM, Banyan, Apple and Sun.

Among our strengths were :

- Our ability to be objective with our customers. Our analysts were trained in all leading Network Operating Systems and were able to recommend the best solution rather than the most popular.

- Our Investment in Leading Edge Technology

We made significant investments in technology so our customers wouldn't have to. While our competitors waited for their customers to ask for a given technology, we made the effort to learn and demonstrate them so that when they became viable, we were ready to support them.

- Our dedication to our Customers.

More than 70% of our business was repeat business. We tried to keep our customers for life. We also invested in technology to improve our ability to support them. We were early adopters of online support systems such as Carbon Copy in the mid-1980's, and Lotus Notes and CompuServe in the late 1980's.

Among our projects and accomplishments are :

Neiman Marcus

Developed an EDI application that automatically routed shipping questions and requests from Neiman's Shipping Department to the UPS data center. This application reduced package tracing time from several days to several hours.

Perot Systems

In 1989, MicroSolutions installed what was at that time the largest Netware for Macintosh installation, more than 150 Macs on two Netware servers. We knew it was the largest, because its complexity required that the original developers of the code, Dayna Systems come to the client site and recompile modifications that enabled the server to handle the required number of workstations. These modifications were later added to the release version.

Mobil Oil

MicroSolutions has been recognized as the primary Network Support Organization for MEPUS since 1990. We have been responsible for their Banyan and IBM Lan Server installations supporting thousands for workstations around the country.

Zales Corporation

In 1988, Developed an imaging system that recorded images of jewelry and integrated them into a purchase order request system. This allowed the buyers of the organization to view jewelry as they were defining purchase orders, and dramatically reduced the multi-million dollar samples inventory required, as well as the time to complete a purchase order.

All of this allowed MicroSolutions to become a \$25mm company in 1990. Among the accolades we received were to be named to the Inc 500 three years in a row, ranking as high as # 39, the Lan Magazine Lan 100, ranking as high as # 19, and we recognized in the trade press as a leader in the industry many times.

In July of 1990, I sold the company to CompuServe Inc, a subsidiary of H&R Block. It has since been renamed CompuServe Systems Integration Group.

Lotus Notes Resume

In October of 1989, I saw Lotus Notes for the first time at Comdex. The potential of this software struck me immediately. Where software in the past allowed individuals to automate tasks, Notes allowed organizations to collaborate. Where software in the past processed quantitative information, Notes handled qualitative information.

The value to MicroSolutions customers would be immense, so I wrote a letter to Lotus senior management asking for the opportunity to become a VAR. At the time, Notes sold only by Lotus directly, and really had not been marketed to more than a few select customers.

I visited Lotus in November of 1989 and attempted to sell the Notes team on our value as part of their Strategic Alliance Program. Because of our extensive networking expertise in a variety of network operating systems, and our ability to test the product, we became a beta test site.

Our first step was to install Notes at MicroSolutions in early 1990, and begin our work as a beta site. We not only used the product internally, with well over 50 users, but

also developed quite a few applications in it. We began experimenting on ourselves. We held brainstorming sessions on Notes, reduced the number of meetings we held, implemented a Service Dispatch and Tracking System, a Technical Document Management Systems, a Service Request System and much more, all within the first 6 months.

From a technical standpoint, we were very active with Lotus in enabling Notes to run on Banyan networks. Initially, Lotus did not want to support Banyan because of Banyan's limited netbios support. Because of our experience with both Notes and Banyan, we were able to design enhancements to Banyan's NDIS driver, and contract Banyan to make the modifications required to allow Notes to run on Banyan. This change led to MicroSolutions signing up MCI as Lotus' first Banyan based Notes customer. Since then, Banyan has become such a popular platform for Notes, Lotus modified Notes so that Banyan is the only native protocol supported.

In February of 1991, MicroSolutions become one of Lotus' first VARs. Since then we have sold Notes to an every expanding lists of clients, including The Thomas Group, Mobil, Johnson & Johnson, Chevron, Coopers & Lybrand, Maxus Energy, Michaels Stores, Young Presidents Organization and many more.

Among the Notes services that we have provided are:

- Application Design and Development
- API Programming Services
- Implementation Planning Services
- On Line Support
- Customer Interface Applications