Tech/Focus

Local software industry:
yet to overcome static friction

MIR NADIA NIVIN

It is a safe bet to assume that any idle educated observer may have noticed how the software industry of our country never kind of 'flourished'. Despite strong intentions, ambitions, government efforts, professional well-wishings, it seems that something is clogging its wheels, preventing this industry to overcome the initial friction and gain momentum.

In fact, yes. On a closer look it reveals that there indeed are some initial factors and problems at the core that are creating the sloth. It is a closed loop, these various drawbacks. Break the loop at one point and the country's software industry may finally get a break. And how or where to do it is a discussion for another day. For the moment let us look into those opposing forces holding back our software industry from taking off.

As might have been guessed, one of the key factors is Human Resources Development (HRD). As far as software development skills are concerned, we have some major missing links in HRD. For instance, for people like the Design Architects, Senior System Analysts, Senior Communication Designers, Senior Networking Designers, Transaction System Designers, Testing Designers and Communications Programmers, the skill level lie somewhere between 'Introductory' and 'Basic'.

As for Senior Software Engineers, Senior Database Designers, User Interface Designers, Project Managers, Senior Programmers, Programmers and Documentation Specialists, the skill level of these people are between 'Basic' and 'Intermediate'. In case of Database Programmers, their skill level lie in the 'Intermediate' domain in most cases while in some exceptional cases may even reach the 'Advanced' stage.

The point to note here is that the 'Advanced' skill level is next to absent and as for 'Expert' skills, the final level, it has not permeated yet in the software development hierarchy.

The causes behind this gross lack of HRD are manifold. Foremost is the fact that there is in most cases there is little or no on-the-job training programmes for employees. As a result the skill level does not improve. In technical jobs such as these, repeated or prolonged task of the same order do increase proficiency but not skill. To bring that about, training programmes containing both theory and practice is required. Then there is job rotation. Studies have shown that, for new employees job rotation is very effective in increasing efficiency. It also allows one to find one's niche in the organisation.

The most important drawback as far as HRD is concerned is probably the fact that in our country there is no industry-academy relationship. The Bachelors' degrees in IT at various universities, private and public, is for most part theory based and that too not pertaining much to the industry requirements. Whereas in other countries, the curriculums are designed with the current market trends and demands in mind and changes in design occurring according to trends, no such thing happens here. Moreover, lack of practical experience really cause students to be at sea when s/he finally graduates and gets to the job market.

So curriculums ought to be designed keeping in mind current market turns and the students should be allowed to have plenty of practical experiences through internships or other such programmes.

Next comes the various IT institutions or coaching centres or whatever they call themselves, that are spewing forth loads of 'professionals'. They should really take their tasks a bit more seriously. Being able to create or delete a few tables in Oracle and being able to manipulate those through simple SQL queries does not create database programmers. It requires more than that. Or being able to configure a LAN does make one the ultimate in networking. So these institutions really ought to train people so that they can take active parts in software development.

Finally comes the aspect of brain drain. Most IT graduates from the universities leave to persuade higher studies abroad. That is expectable to some extent. But what is of concern is, when experienced professionals leave because of low pay or lack of incentive after gaining considerable and albeit valuable experience. The software houses should really get their management policies revised, so that 'valuable' employees are recognized for their worth and proper incentives provided to keep them happy.

After the HRD problem comes the next big hurdle. And that is the lack of a local software market. The number of organisations or institutions that go for local custommade software is pitifully negligible.

Firstly, it should be kept in mind that software is just like any other consumer product -- the local market has to be studied to find out what kind of software is needed for the general populace, develop it and then market it with vigorous advertising to catch people's attention. Like any given consumer product.

But then, frankly speaking, we are not exactly in the habit of going software shopping local or otherwise. The concept of equating buying with software hasn't somehow evolved here. And why should it? You buy a PC and in it comes stocked with not only the OS but also loads of other stuff- courtesy, your dealer. Because of this use of pirated software, software is not something that we think about paying for. Unless these ideas are gotten rid off, it would be very difficult to find a local market.

So how does this lack of local market hamper? Well, in the practical scenario, when our software houses try to get foreign contracts, it is only natural that the foreign companies require that the local company have some experience in handling large projects. Now, in other developing countries, these experiences are usually obtained through local market or local organizations. Thus divide our chances.
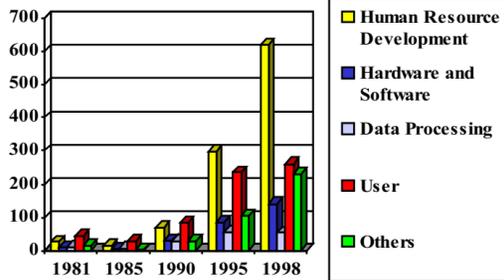
Active as the government is, encouraging the development of ICT, they should pay attention to initiating a local software market. This they can begin by floating tenders for developing custommade software for each ministry and other government organisations.

Last but not the least is our shortage in basic infrastructure. Lack of electricity is a prime bottleneck. Imagine you have done the work on a module of your projects and are getting it uploaded, so that 'they' can go through it to provide you the feedbacks. Just when you are through with uploading 68Mb of 70Mb the power fluctuates, or worse (if you don't have an IPS) the electricity goes off. Does that provide a glimpse of the problem?

Then there is the bandwidth problem. No matter which ISP you subscribe to, for uploading large voluminous stuff, or even downloading for that matter, a certain amount of bandwidth is needed. But with the overloaded ISP's that is not to be had. So what big software houses have to do is buy dedicated bandwidth for their purposes. Not all firms can afford that.

So Instant Power Supply (IPS), generators and dedicated bandwidth these all add up to extra overhead, not quite affordable by struggling firms.

The above are but a few of the causes contributing to the flattened condition of our software industry. There may be many more factors or many other sides to each factor.

However, let us not get all disappointed. There indeed are some success stories to derive inspiration from. 2D Cartoon Animation was recently awarded contract valued US$ 15 million. Then there are other projects like 3D Animation Cartoon Joint Venture Project with UK, B2B Portal for Swiss Electricity Company, B2B Portal for Apparel Manufacturers- Joint Venture with USA, Application Software Developed for USDA, Poster Design Software Developed for German Company, Application Software Developed for Chain Restaurant in USA, Groupware Applications used Globally by BAT, Add-on Product developed and marked with Accpac and several more.

So with these glimpses of success, let us hope that we may be able to overcome the hurdles and revive our software industry in as near future as possible.

Depicting IT growth

Bar chart showing IT growth for years 1981, 1985, 1990, 1995, 1998 with categories:
- Human Resource Development
- Hardware and Software
- Data Processing
- User
- Others

(Y-axis values: 100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600, 700)

Dr./Tech

Dear Dr Tech,
I have lost one of my windows system exe file named "DevCon32.DLL". For this file my window is not running properly and asks me to "press any key to continue " when I boot. How can I solve this problem?
Apu

Dear Apu,
DLL (Dynamic Link Library) files are basically "support" files for certain types of software. They are generally (but not always) found in your Windows System directory.

They work like this: Let's say a program needs to perform an operation. Rather than all the coding being built into the program, it uses a particular DLL file that, with a simple call, can perform the operation for it. Saves lots of programming time, especially since many of the common DLL files are already installed with Windows.

Your missing Devcon32.DLL is part of the Sound Blaster Live! Value driver set of your sound card, and to fix this problem, you will need to uninstall and reinstall the Sound Blaster Live! Value drivers and software.

I've also had lots of people ask about deleting these files. Well, the best advice is not to, since many of your DLL files are used by more than one program. If this doesn't work you may consider reinstalling your Windows.

dailystartech@yahoo.com

Tech/Toon

"My family thinks I bought a brand new high resolution monitor—but all I did was wipe off the dust and fingerprints."

— GLASBERGEN

Star Tech Quiz — 39

Check the box beside the correct answer

1. What does the "F" mean on the F1, F2, F3 etc. keyboard keys?
- [ ] File
- [ ] Find
- [ ] Format
- [ ] Function

2. Which peripheral connection is common laptop but uncommon on desktop systems?
- [ ] IEEE1394
- [ ] Parallel
- [ ] PCMCIA
- [ ] USB

Name: _____
Occupation: _____
Address: _____
Contact Number: _____
E-mail: _____

Last week's answers
1. Internet Relay Chat   2. No level 2 cache
Winner: Dhrubo Rahman
Flat-B4, House-35A, Road 16A, Dhanmondi, Dhaka 1209
Please fill this up and send your answers to Star Tech Quiz, The Daily Star, 19 Karwan Bazaar, Dhaka 1215 by May 19, 2003.

Tech/News

Sneaky virus spreading rapidly

BBC ONLINE

A new computer virus is spreading across the internet via e-mail and file-sharing programs, computer security experts have warned.

So many ways to get inside

The mass-mailing worm, dubbed Fizzer, is rapidly infecting computers using the Windows operating system in Asia, Europe and the US.

Experts say it is a complex virus which can disable anti-virus software, steal passwords typed on a keyboard and even open a back door to a computer.

People are advised to update their anti-virus software and be wary of e-mails from unknown sources.
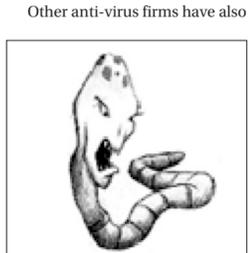
Multiplying virus
The Fizzer worm has been described by experts as a particularly unpleasant strain of a mass-mailing virus.

It was first detected by e-mail security company MessageLabs on 7 May but was considered to be of low risk to computer users.

Since then, the bug has used a variety of tricks to multiply across the internet. MessageLabs has recorded 17,765 cases in 24 hours in the UK alone.

"We've upgraded it to high-risk just for the fact that we've seen so many in the last day," said MessageLabs virus analyst Mark Toshack.

Other anti-virus firms have also

The sneaky Fizzer worm

issued similar warnings, with Finland's F-Secure classifying Fizzer on the same threat level as the Nimda bug.

Auto-updating
Fizzer spreads through file-sharing programs such as Kazaa as well as by e-mail containing a file attachment with a .exe, .pif, .com or .scr extension.
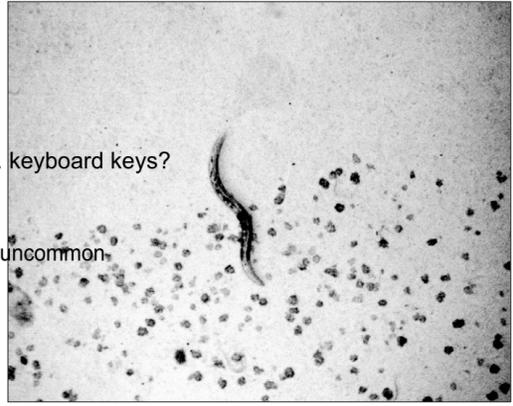
Once a computer is infected, the virus will scan the victim's address book and send out infected messages using different subjects, message texts and file attachment names.

It also installs a keylogging program to record every keystroke, as well as opening a way to access a victim's computer over Internet Relay Chat.

Additionally, the virus regularly connects with a web page to try to download an updated version.

MessageLabs said that although Fizzer was not, at the moment, as prevalent as other viruses like the Klez virus, it was likely to be around for a long while.

Remains From the Lost

PHOTO:AFP

This photo released by NASA on their website shows C. elegans nemotodes (round worms) undergoing examination by project scientists. These specimens were found in a Biological Research in Canisters container, a middeck experiment that was among the Columbia debris recovered in East Texas. The worms are descendants of those that were part of an experiment that flew on Columbia's last mission, STS-107. Scientists are now looking over the experiment at KSC to determine if it will yield any scientific results. The investigation into the cause of the Columbia accident 01 February is ongoing.

Tech/Snaps

Call Centre

A joint venture Call Center agreement was recently signed between eTechLogix Bangladesh Ltd, Daffodil Computers Ltd and the Lighthouse Group in collaboration with Improvement Inc of Arizona, USA. This was announced at a press conference on May 7. Sabur Khan, managing director, Daffodil Online Ltd and The President of Bangladesh Computer Samity, Akbaruddin Ahmad, president, Light House Group, S M Altaf Hussain, CEO of Daffodil Online Ltd, Md Abraruddin Ahmed, IT consultant, Call Center Project were present at the press conference. The initial operations of the centre is expected to commence mid June, 2003. With 10,000 calls a month being processed in the first phase of operations, this Call Center will provide telemarketing and customer support solutions to companies in the USA.

HP breaks backup speed record

On May 5, HP established a new world record in storage by achieving a sustained 3.6 terabyte per hour tape backup of an Oracle9i Database, exceeding previous industry performance metrics by nearly 40 per cent, says a press release.

Enterprise customers require easy and uninterrupted access to key data assets to support mission-critical applications, systems and business processes. HP focuses on that and try to provide them the best solutions.

Photo/Tech

PHOTO: AFP

Microsoft Chairman and Chief Software Architect Bill Gates, gives his keynote address at the annual Windows Hardware Engineering Conference on May6 in New Orleans. Gates said, "The hardware industry and Microsoft are leading the next wave of PC development by creating unprecedented levels of synergy between hardware and software."

Tech/Jobs

B&F Communications Ltd.
Post: Chief Operation Officer (C.O.O), Chief Technical Officer (C.T.O), Research & Development, Client Support
Last Date: May 25, 2003

Advance Computer Technology
Post: Hardware Engineer
Last Date: May 20, 2003

ORION PLUS
Post: Office Incharge
Last Date: May 20, 2003

IT Communication Ltd
Post: System Support Engineer, Office Assistant
Last Date: June 06, 2003

Link3 Technologies Ltd.
Post: Support Engineer
Last Date: May 18, 2003

Sonali Bank
Post: Asst. Programmer,

Asst. System Analyst, Programmer, Senior Programmer, System Analyst,
Last Date: June 10, 2003

Total Software Solution
Post: Network Administrator
Last Date: May 24, 2003

M2SYS Technology
Post: Senior .NET Engineer, SENIOR JAVA/J2EE ENGINEER
Last Date: June 01, 2003

UNDP
Post: Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Officer
Last Date: May 17, 2003

www.bdserver.com
Post: Web Developer
Last Date: May 30, 2003
source:

www.bdjobs.com