

No man is an island

Picture a remote archipelago in the South Pacific. Palm trees. Isolated islands. In the past, office automation decisions have tended to take place as if people in the office were a series of these islands. Each island – person – had a function to perform and, if he or she were lucky, was given productivity tools to help. It may have been a word processor. Or a PC for personal productivity.

The trouble with isolated islands is that the mail boat only comes around once a month. And the trouble with the island metaphor is that it does not represent the way an office works. An office is a team. People sharing. Working together. Meeting. Brainstorming. Gathering information. Analysing. Making decisions. Communicating. The office is not just a collection of individuals. It's a *system*. Each office has developed unique ways of managing information and people – its own culture. And the newest trends in office automation point to the fact that technology must not only work to improve personal productivity, but, above all, to improve *system* productivity. And now, the technology has advanced to the state where it becomes possible to automate myriad functions designed to improve both personal and system productivity.

It is in precisely this area – system integration, based on powerful new computer communications technology – that many Canadian office automation companies have become recognized as leaders.

Converging technologies

Three traditional technologies are converging to provide the engine for the automated office.

Then

Office technology – Traditional offices included standard equipment such as typewriters, copy machines, paper-based systems, microfiche, as well as adding machines, dictating machines and others.

Telecommunications – At one time, telecommunication was restricted to the telephone, private branch exchange and telex machine.

Computers – Traditionally, computer technologies were comprised of data processing machines, mainframe computers, control systems, storage devices and output devices, such as printers.

Now

Computer and communications technologies have converged to produce distributed data processing, intelligent switching devices, local area networks, electronic mail, voice and data systems, videotex, and other systems.

Computer and office technologies have converged to provide calculators, word processors, office computers, and smart copiers.

And **office and communications** technologies have converged to provide smart telephones, communicating copiers, electronic filing, facsimile and teleconferencing.

Now, all three are converging to provide such tools as computer-based messaging systems, portable intelligent terminals, voice, text, image and data storage, external gateways, intelligent PBXs, "smart" LANs, and the integrated workstation.

