

# The Integrated Office: Tough Decisions Ahead

## Many feet in the door

The promises come thick and fast. Your carpet is probably wearing thin from the stream of equipment vendors, consultants and office automation specialists, eager to show – and sell – the latest products or systems.

Everyone claims to have *the* solution for your needs. And if by now you've developed a tinge of skepticism about the whole business, you're not the first, and you're hardly to blame.

There are enough horror stories making the circuit to cause even the most sanguine executive to think twice: systems that end up not doing the job they were intended to do; cost overruns; disgruntled staff; incompatibilities; or systems which don't allow for expansion and future evolution as needs and technology change. We all have our favorites.

Nevertheless, office automation is here. And decisions will have to be made, if not now, then very soon, in most offices. The reason, in one word: *productivity*.

## The sorry state of office productivity

Studies show that office costs have risen precipitously over the past few years. Currently, "knowledge workers" outnumber production workers by about three to one. And while production has been steadily automated over time, the office has remained largely unaffected by technological change – at least until very recently.

Office productivity is difficult to measure, for it deals with information flow, decision making, efficiency, and, for lack of a better phrase, human synthesis – the way in which people work and communicate together. It's less tangible to pin down than, say, factory productivity, where costs and resources can be measured against the number of widgets coming off the line. Yet we all know, even if

only intuitively, that the business of offices – information – is becoming more complex as time goes on. Workloads increase relentlessly. Decision making rests on an ever increasing number and complexity of factors.

Some say that ultimately, the only good measure of productivity is the quality and timeliness of the information itself.

## Demand pull, technology push

Office automation specialists – and there are many now who have been through the ropes – see two major forces at work in today's office: demand pull, and technology push.

Demand pull is the search – no, let's make that the *need* – for better, more efficient ways to get on with the job of the office. Your competitors sense it. Your accountants know it. Your bottom line demands it.

At the same time, technological change is forging the productivity tools. It now becomes possible to vastly improve office productivity with the help of the new technologies. The microcomputer, the chip, innovations in systems and software, new telecommunications technology, and other advancements have given us a whole new productivity arsenal. Initially, these tools were directed toward

improving efficiency at the support level – secretaries, clerks, administrative assistants. And until recently, equipment spawned by the new technologies generally performed a single function: word processing; communications; financial services, and so on.

## Converging technologies

Now, however, we are witnessing a convergence of three technologies, which have, until now, been separate:

- office equipment
- computers
- telecommunications.

The convergence of these three technologies is the engine which is now driving the rapid developments toward the integrated office. One dramatic result is that we now have the ability to apply technology at the managerial level. And, in perhaps the most significant development of all, we now have the ability to integrate, cost-effectively, many major office functions in one system, accessible from a single workstation.



"Up to \$12 billion may be spent in the next 10 years to equip the nation's top executives with high-tech workstations."  
– Research report, International Resource Development, Inc.

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