



InputOutput

Standard - deliver!

What is the problem with communications standards for building services? For years there have been consultative bodies, numerous 'steering groups', papers on all sorts of options and manufacturers initiatives. Where has it all got us? Is the industry really any closer to having a series of common hardware and software formats for controls integration than it was over 10 years ago when the idea was first suggested?

The simple answer is no.

Some manufacturers continue to drag their heels over the issues, seeing the tangible benefits standardisation brings only in the light of fear over lost revenue from 'safe' sites bringing in high-profit maintenance contracts.

It will be customer pressure which will break the grip of the manufacturers. Although only just starting to occur, end users are beginning to turn the screw on suppliers - "you have been saying you are committed to standards for the last decade - let me see some results. Deliver".

Products like Apex continue to accelerate this process. Apex doesn't need standards to provide appropriate compatibility for end users.

If standards came through, they would simply reduce the number of communications systems Apex would need to support. Key already has a number of standard network communications drivers available.

The clever money is on organisations like Key to give end users what they want in the timescales required, with built-in 'future-proof' techniques to take full advantage of standards when - and if - they ever emerge.

Have a Happy Christmas and here's to a successful 1995!

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Software update

There's a whole heap of new drivers available for Apex Development Engineers. These are all now ready for upload via **The Shelf** at no cost. For the BEMS developers, there are drivers for the **York International** 'ISN' (or 'Fax') system, the current **Andover** 'Infinity' system and the now-redundant 'Nucleus' system.

If you're into CCTV, there are now drivers for the **Dedicated Micros** 'Uniplex 2' multiplexer and the **BBV** and **Videmech** camera control systems.

For fire systems, the **Notifier** ID1000 system is now Apex-compatible.

A driver for the **EIControl** Electricity Meter has been released, compatible with the badged **Trend** EM/MPO and the **Dorman-Smith** LoadModule.

The powerful terminal driver continues to be used whenever a bespoke comms driver is not really necessary. It has recently been used to communicate with telephone exchanges from **GPT**, card readers from **MR**, the **Fermax** access system, the **Invertomatic** UPS control system, the **Aritech** intruder system and many others.

A new driver is now available which links Apex applications seamlessly into the Windows Mail system. It can be used to send alarms or messages to any Windows Mail-compatible software package. Because Windows Mail covers e-mail across faxes, it is now possible to send data automatically from Apex to fax machines, world-wide if necessary.

If you don't have quite enough inputs or outputs, a driver for the **PCLabs** hardware system is now available, bringing cost-effective I/O right into the PC itself.

Finally, a new driver allows multimedia PCs to 'speak' text messages and alarms through pre-recorded sound snippets. It's very useful for annunciating alarms without having to record a full message for every single alarm action.

STOP PRESS!

In the near future, we hope to have drivers available for the **Allen-Martin** BMS, the **JVC** serial-controlled VCR, **PAC International** and **Fermax** access systems and a few others we can't yet reveal!

The Shelf

The auto-dial support service with a difference is making waves in the industry, and has been welcomed by Apex Developers tired of traditional 'bulletin board systems'.

The Shelf is now the standard method for distributing new software and drivers to existing Apex Developers, **The Shelf** has fast-moving news items, documents for upload, sample Apex applications and much more. Apex Developers can send and receive mail messages and files of data, including Apex applications, programs and so on.

Get used to **The Shelf** - you'll wonder how you ever got by without it!

Apex DRTM

Recognising the need for Apex Developers to generate low-cost demonstration systems to their users and for their in-house sales staff, Key have now released a demo version of the Apex Run-Time Module (RTM) which runs only for an hour at a time. This makes it ideal for evaluation and demonstration versions of Developers applications. Available at £350.00 each, these Apex DRTMs have all the other functions of the normal RTMs and can be ordered in any quantity.

The Apex DRTM is part of a slightly modified Apex System - only the APEX.EXE is affected and it has been revised to Apex 1.41. This version is on *The Shelf*.

RS232 Tutorial

One of the problems with a standard like RS232 is that it can be implemented in a number of different ways. Some Developers have commented on the lack of a simple introductory guide to the 'whys and wherefores' of RS232 so Key have produced a booklet - **RS232 Tutorial** - which details what RS232 is, how it is supposed to operate and how some implementations have got around some of the limitations. Call for more details.

Pearls of wisdom

Extend the Christmas pantomime spirit by dressing up in women's clothing all year round.

Tea drinkers. Save on tiresome cup washing by popping a tea bag in your mouth and gargling with boiling water. Remember to add a little milk if you take your tea white.

Constantly blowing fuse? A small section of 4" nail makes an ideal, long-lasting alternative.

Keep up with the Joneses by changing your surname to Jones and simply keeping up with yourself.

False fire alarms? Simply disconnect any 'rogue' detectors and pop in from time to time to see if a fire has broken out.

By simply not going to work you can prevent expensive Inland Revenue demands.

Summer moss? Re-surfacing your garden with a thick layer of concrete normally stops future growth.

Security guards. Operate your systems a lot better simply by running software designed to control the CCTV rather than Doom or Solitaire.

Save money on expensive safety goggles by securing cling film to a simple 'coat-hanger'-based frame arrangement.

Ask the Doctor

Dr Mortido is here to ease your difficult problems. If you've got any questions on displays, comms or Coronation Chicken, write to the good doctor at the address below. There's £20 worth of crisp fivers for any of your questions the Doctor thinks is worth answering.

Dear Dr Mortido

I can't find the fire system I want to talk to on your list of drivers. How do I get my Apex application to communicate with it?

M. Media, Hounslow

There are 2 ways to solve your problem - the first is to let Key contact the system manufacturer, and generate a driver - remember there's no charge for this. Secondly, the chances are that you could also use the existing TERMINAL driver very easily without Key developing a bespoke driver, as fire alarm systems tend to send simple output to printers anyway.

Dear Dr Mortido

My PC only has 2 free serial ports but I need 4 links for an Apex project I'm doing. Can I just add some extra serial ports? Does Windows support 4 ports?

M.C.A. Architecture, Walthamstow

The limitation on the number of comms ports is nothing to do with Windows really. The first PC design only allowed 'interrupts' for 2 serial ports and a mouse regardless of the software used. Newer design PCs (like EISA or MCA) allow for more serial connections or clever serial port cards allow other 'interrupts' to be used on standard PCs. The Windows operating system supplied as standard normally allows for up to 4 serial ports for Windows applications in the software. Other Windows driver software allows more ports to be accessed. Having said all this, I'd still recommend 'high-level networking' techniques for most applications. There's a booklet called ***Communications*** which covers this and much more. Write or call for details.

Dear Dr Mortido

What is that yellow stuff they put in Coronation Chicken?

V.G.A. Screen, Leighton Buzzard

That rather interesting shade is caused by the copious quantities of turmeric so popular in today's curry-based dishes.

Dear Dr Mortido

When I get my Apex applications finished, can I get extra copies of the Apex Editor manual to send to the customer?

C.D. Romdrive, Wootton Bassett

Well what you have to bear in mind is that the Apex application is actually something you need to support. Like any engineerable product, Apex relies upon applications documentation to help the user, so the Apex Editor manual isn't the right thing to give to the customer. Of course, if you write or call I'd be delighted to provide sample documentation for Apex applications.

Mortido

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