



InputOutput

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Much ado about Networks

High-level networking has become a major pressure point in the building-controls industry.

Recent publicity from Key has caused some rumblings in the marketplace, even though it's not exactly a new message. At the same time, network suppliers North Communications are pushing the same concepts with products like Compass. There is also speculation that the new Infa Communications network has much to complement the networking position.

But why all the excitement? High-level networking is not a ground-breaking concept. Using a transport network for carrying 3rd-party data about has been around practically for as long as computer-based systems have existed.

At the top end of the 3-layer model, it has always been the obvious way forward. Mainframes, modems and networked PCs all use the same principles. It's the *modus operandii* for Hayes modems as well as all IT network standards.

At the bottom end, linking controllers to sensors, detectors and actuators, it is the solution for those manufacturers jumping on the EcheLON, BatiBus or BacNet bandwagons. It is a cornerstone in the design of all these fieldbus networks that they need to carry other people's data around.

The big issue is that the same concepts are being thrown at the network layer between these two layers, where there is the greatest potential to improve system performance and provide facilities traditionally cornered by the PC display system software.

For Apex, it's no big deal. Apex can do integration and provide inter-system data. But it is fundamentally an engineer-configurable display system, giving end users what they want to see, whether there's a high-level network connected or not. It doesn't need a network and the networks don't need it.

With North, Infa and others around, you can be sure that network power will increase, intelligence will continue to become part of the high-level network layer, and costs will become ever more competitive.

High-level networking is here to stay. Whether you like it or not.

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Apex v2

You will be pleased to know that Apex v2 is in the final testing phase and will be released to Apex Developers at the end of December. It will have the powerful new **ADV (Advanced Driver)** communications system built in, with all the features and advantages covered in the last issue of **InputOutput**.

Apex Developers will receive a complete suite of Apex v2 software and upgrades to Apex System documentation. There will also be a supplemental guide to ADV. The new software, of course, will also be available via **The Shelf**, your very own on-line autodial support service.

And to cap it all, there will be no cost implications at all. Such are the benefits of being an Apex Developer.

Driver update

A number of new drivers have recently been made available for the Apex System. These can all be uploaded from **The Shelf** at your convenience.

There is a driver for the **Dunham-Bush** chiller control system, and for the **BT MessageMaster** pager system. To complement the existing building management system drivers supported by **York International**, there is now a Key-written driver available for the **YorkTalk** chiller management system.

In the pipeline, there are drivers emerging for the **Honeywell Excel** building management system, **ADAM** input/output system, **Protec** fire system, **Thyssen** lift management system, **Cotag** access system and **Eltek** power monitoring system.

EZ-C upgrade

This almost mind-bogglingly capable sample Apex application continues to accumulate features. Over the last few weeks, several enhancements have been made, including :

- **Logging** - EZ-C can now store data from historical archives in controllers as well as 'snapshot' values. This is in response to customers needing to get long-term readings from BMS controllers like Trend. The system is intelligent, requesting archives only when necessary. The 'instant log' special button now uses the same 'logger-style' window as the historical logs. The log windows can now print to the local printer and the 'export to text' feature is now a menu item.
- **Timeplan** - the Timeplan system has been upgraded to allow EZ-C to send to controllers the actual times for on and off, rather than the on/off value.
- **Group mimics** - in response to customers needing to get instant access to mimics without having to wade through a hierarchical page structure, the 'Control Window' now has optional selection boxes for every mimic on the system, collected into groups of mimics.
- **Transfers** - the highly effective Transfer system has been enhanced to allow EZ-C to perform simple mathematical and logical operations on up to 2 values before sending to another controller. By performing these operations sequentially, EZ-C gains the ability to behave as a controller as well as a monitoring system.
- **Variables** - often mimics are generated which have a great deal of commonality, with the only difference between them being - say - an address of a controller. To allow easier engineering in these instances, EZ-C now has a Systems Variables list, with a number of named variables set against values. Wherever the named variable is used, EZ-C uses the value instead.

- **Alarms** - a new type of alarm process has been added. EZ-C can now check for a significant
- **Alarm retransmission** - EZ-C can now retransmit alarms to up to 3 controller addresses.
- **Debug** - the debug system has been much improved, creating a series of time-stamped debug files for easy analysis in commissioning. The debug window has also been improved in style.

All in all, EZ-C is now a very capable display system, competing with the very best. EZ-C works with all current Apex-compatible systems and networks, and will be further enhanced in the next few weeks to accommodate the new ADV system emerging with Apex v2.

Ask the Doctor

The bold Mortido is taking a well-earned breather from his very own 'Question Time' surgery. He'll be back in the chair next issue.

SYSOP Bulletin

This month there's a special from our SYSOP, BBS whizzkid James 'the Frames' Freeman, giving you all the very latest on *The Shelf*.

Hiya Pals!

Well it's now over a year since *The Shelf* came onto the PSTN, and practically all our Apex Developers use it. For software upgrades, mail and help, it really seems to have hit the mark.

Shelf fact 1 - Did you know that *The Shelf* can handle practically all Hayes-compatible modems, running at autodial speeds of up to 38Kbaud?

One of the things that people have asked us is what we do with the end-user leads we seem to get direct from your customers. As you know, we don't work with end users at all, so we now put any appropriate leads, including names, addresses and nature of the enquiry on *The Shelf*. There's a natty new icon on the top icon page, so get your salesman onto it straight away!

Shelf fact 2 - the famous 'whirling Apex triangles' activity icon (as well as the progress indicator icon) can both be changed in the SHELF.INI file. A 'dancing raisin' icon file (RAISIN.ICL) is uploaded with the latest version of *The Shelf* for you to experiment with.

There have always been some useful sample Apex applications in the *applications* area of *The Shelf*, but I've recently tried my hand at a rather jolly sample app called the *Random Cliché Generator* which you'll find down there. This will produce clichés - by turns both technically feasible and comically believable - randomly from a series of text files. It really is worth a whirl to brighten up those dull Wednesday evenings.

Shelf fact 3 - all files on *The Shelf* are compressed by up to 90% in order to reduce on-line upload times. The files are de-compressed when they reach your PC.

I'm always available for comments and so on - please call if you feel *The Shelf* can be improved in any way.

Ciao, chums!

S Y S O P

By the way, if you want to reach James on the InterNet - you can't. It's so much easier (and a darned sight cheaper) to use the mailbox on *The Shelf*.

Success breeds..

It would appear that Apex is now installed in every continent of the world, from Dubai to Darwin, from New York to Moscow. Sources close to the sales front tell us that Apex will be featured in many of the UK's premier late 90's developments.

The 'Case Studies' document which was put together a few years ago needs updating. If you have an interesting case study for an Apex application, and could go for some cheap publicity, contact Paul Price.

Showing off

I bet you didn't know that Apex is on exhibition right across the land most of the year around - HoTec, NEMEX, H&V Show, Firex, and many more. Even more curiously, Key don't even do exhibitions! Outrageously, you may never know Apex is there!

It's all part of our commitment to remain industry suppliers, giving you the tools you need so you can make the impact you want to.

Next time you're out and about in exhibition land, try playing 'Spot the App'. There are no prizes because it's almost impossible to guess!

Pearls of wisdom

When swimming, don't dive into shallow, murky water.

Cost-effectively remould your Doc Marten air-filled soles by standing on a pre-heated Breville toasted sandwich maker.

Make your neighbours think you have an expensive car alarm by sitting in your car all night and blasting the horn at 15 minute intervals.

Achieve that foppish 'Hugh Grant' youth by constantly smiling coyly, acting like a wooden turkey and getting caught in provocative situations with dubious young 'ladies'.

Try not to run whilst carrying scissors or hot things.

1996 Price Guide

In line with our normal policy, prices for 1996 are remaining static or coming down. This means there have been no price increases at all since the launch of the Apex System in 1991.

The 'Special Build Service' (traditionally performed only by Key) is now available for you too. It allows you to use the ultra low-cost LRTM licences and makes a lot of sense for our high-volume RTM users. Ask for details.

A site licensing scheme will be coming into operation for multiple use on the same site. Essentially it means that the first RTM is normal cost and any others ordered for the same site at the same time are half price. Another good reason for using the best display system money can buy.

Coffee time - solution

Our winner from the last issue was Johnny Thrunge from Pipebenders International. Well done, Johnny. A jiffy bag full of cash is on it's way to you.

Across	Down
1. Development	1. Dial-up modem
7. Air	2. Version
8. Diagram	3. LED
9. Unite	4. Plans
10. Pie	5. Ear
11. Min	6. Temperature
13. Henna	10. Panacea
14. Decoded	12. Ladle
17. CPU	15. Car
18. Market share	16. DOS

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