

Enter Sandman

Whil Hentzen

Want to get depressed really quickly? The next time you're around a group of your peers, ask everyone to name the supergroups of the '90's. By "supergroup" I mean the true superstar bands - the Beatles, the Stones, Zeppelin, The Who, Cream, CSN&Y, you get my drift.

Yeah, I know. It's currently chic to deride Mick, Keith, et al. It was also chic to rip on Cream. But you can still hear Badge being played at 110 decibels at the McKinley Marina on Milwaukee's Lakefront any summer weekend - until the police show up. I don't hear Boy George or Vanilla Ice ("I'm going to be the next Elvis Presley") much, and Green Day and Jane's Addiction aren't going to warrant a footnote in Rolling Stones' Seventy Five Years of Rock 'N' Roll retrospective.

But my point is that there have been no new supergroups since about the mid-80's. U-2 is about the last one I can think of. Yeah, Hanson and The Spice Girls can fill a stadium in 3 hours now. But so could The Babies and Bananarama. These days, it's crank out a couple of albums and disband. Make your ten million dollars and bail. "These youngsters - they don't know good music anymore." I yearn for the days of good old-fashioned rock and roll when singers danced with live pythons on stage or bit the heads off of doves.

Bands today lack staying power.

And so does today's software.

I have a friend who runs the MIS department of a Fortune 200 company, and he's getting ready to pull the plug on a bunch of boxes that have been collecting shop data (time clock type of info) since 1984. Same boxes, same software. None of this "upgrade of the month" business. None of this "make the chassis easily opened so you can replace broken parts in 30 seconds" rot. He's replaced one fixed disk in 14 years. He's not had to upgrade the boxes or change the software even once. And the best part? At the time he got these boxes - they had been around for nearly a decade. (The equipment in question is the IBM Series 1, in case you were curious. And he's going to replace them with Windows 95, er, Windows NT, uh, Windows 98, no, wait, make that NT 5 - or...)

I'll bet you're still doing a lot of the same stuff now that you were 10 years ago. Writing memos and technical documents. Calculating budgets and making cost estimates. Writing quote tracking, health care claim management and accounting database applications. How much of the same software from ten years ago are you still using? On the same machines?

Boy, I wish it would stop. Or at least slow down a bit. I bet you do too. But despite our most fervent wishes, it's not going to. Why? It's all these young kids in the industry who don't have any perspective. "It can be done, so let's do it. I mean, wouldn't it be *cooooool!*?" Who gives a rip if it **should** be done? They've got the business in a perpetual death grip of one-up-man-ship. Their processor runs at 410 MHz. Let's make ours run at 450 - and we'll price it lower!

I'm not saying I want to go back to dBASE II. We've had some wonderful advances that are a joy to work with. Visual FoxPro is still a thrill a minute (including the thrills you get when Dr. Watson comes to visit. <sigh>) And the rumour is that Office will be using a single code-base world wide next year. That'll be a nice change, don't you think?

If you're going to follow bands these days, you have to be nimble. This month's hot news is next month's history. I'm reminded of the scene in Clueless where several teenage girls are checking out a jacket in the mall. One derides the jacket as "so five minutes ago." The other decides not to buy. Two days later, the first girl is spotted by the second wearing the jacket in question. "What's with the jacket? You said it was so dated..." "I know, isn't it bitching? It's so.... *Retro!*" Fashionable today, boring tomorrow. Who knows about next week?

So you're going to have to be just as nimble to follow the software trends. Yesterday's big news is today's yawn. Don't you feel a little cheated if you've made a big investment in last year's alphabet soup of database access acronyms, and then did it again this year, only to find out it doesn't all really work yet, and you're going to have to do the learning curve again next year?

Where I'm heading with this, though, is that the next couple of years are going to be decision time for a lot of us. People in my user group complain because we want to send out meeting notices via email. "Sure I have email. But I only check it about once a month." Com'on! As a friend of mine said (and I've echoed in

this column before), "If you're not willing to make a professional investment in your career here, then run, don't walk, to the exit of this industry."

I'm tired. Time to go home. I'm going to pull a cold one from the frig, turn off all the lights, and listen to one of the all-time greats in heavy metal. Classics never go out of style, and neither will Enter Sandman. I'll have more energy tomorrow. I'll need it, to stay up with these young whippersnappers...