THE EXPERT’S OPINION

An Interview with
Harold Chong, Chief Information Officer and Director of Information Management
Asia Pacific Division of Compaq Computers

Interview by Shailendra Palvia
Associate Editor, Journal of Global Information Management

JGIM: How important is information technology in the computer industry and in your organization in particular?

Chong: I think it is the lifeline of the company. We manufacture and market information technology (IT) products, and therefore, IT systems and hardware are very important here. We have to showcase the use of IT, otherwise, how do we market our products? We could not function throughout the world without IT systems.

On the manufacturing side, we use IT systems, such as normal production scheduling, MRP simulation, and Alternate Parts Systems (which tells you what alternate parts could be used if the normal part is depleted). Compaq in Singapore, where we have a major manufacturing facility, was the first manufacturing company in that country to receive the ISO Certification. ISO is a world organization that certifies companies meeting established quality standards in production. We attribute this to the people who are sufficiently skilled, with an excellent infrastructure and back up by farsighted government policies and incentives regarding foreign investments. With the excellent training already given to our people and the tremendous productivity gains as part of our work, the Singapore facility far outshines both the Houston and the European facilities in terms of productivity and cost.

JGIM: Who are your competitors?

Chong: IBM, Apple and all the PC clones and other competitors in terms of the network server market. In the marketing area, we have a number of strategic applications, e.g., competitor pricing database, price database, dealer information, and other applications that provide a competitive edge.

JGIM: Are these marketing intelligence systems?

Chong: Yes, but even more. For example, we can call the database to find out when to launch products and at what pricing. Whenever we have a product announcement, every Compaq office worldwide can tap the database to get standard information. We have FAME (field accounting management system) that allows our marketing support people to carry along a notebook and at the major account offices, tap into the major account history. Another example is the Configurator, which automatically provides a solution based on user requirements. For example, a major account may have a need for 20 workstations with three existing Apple computers and two IBM-clones, and they want to run specific applications. The Configurator system can receive all these requirements and recommend a server on a network and what interfaces would be needed.

JGIM: How will IT help in internationalizing your business?

Chong: Whenever we develop systems, we try to look at it as whether this system can be applied on a regional basis. We don’t want individual countries to invent their own solutions because it is a waste of effort. We want worldwide solutions. IT directors are the governing body deciding what are the standard applications for worldwide applications. From the international standpoint, we have a wide IT communication network linking all our offices worldwide. We communicate over the network, so our information is current and our reaction time is required to be fast-paced.

JGIM: What are your key international or global IT applications that are used worldwide?

Chong: The SMART System is one of them, i.e. a problem diagnosis and solution recommendation system using artificial intelligence to help our field engineers. The other is the configurator I mentioned earlier.

JGIM: What important information technology has
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