THE EXPERT’S OPINION

An interview with
Jack Pendray
Executive in Residence and Visiting Professor
George Mason University

JGIM: Could you describe CBIS as an organization and its global business activities?

Pendray: CBIS is an operating subsidiary of the Cincinnati Bell Group, which is a result of the break-up of AT&T. CBIS grew through acquisition and is now in excess of 400 million dollars a year of business. CBIS’s main business is the processing, on an outsourcing basis, of bills for cellular telephone subscribers. They produce almost 50% of these bills in the USA and they are moving into the PCS market. They also do all of the processing for Cincinnati Bell which includes local service and long distance billing. In the international part of CBIS, they also develop network management software for telephone companies. CBIS is not in that line of business within the U.S. due to the dominance of Bellcore, but overseas this is an attractive market.

In the US, CBIS has major operations in Cincinnati, Orlando, and Chicago. CBIS also has two operating units in the UK, one in Bern, Switzerland, based around a project with the Swiss PTT, and another in Utrecht in the Netherlands where they are working with the Dutch PTT on a network management project. CBIS had operations in Melbourne, Australia tied to a large project there which was successfully completed. So basically it’s the classical multi-step approach for an American company going first to Europe, well, first to the UK, then to the rest of Europe, then to Australia, and then to the rest of the world.

JGIM: Which phase of globalization is CBIS in, would you say?

Pendray: There are four phases as a company goes from being a domestic to a global company. The first phase is export. In the international phase, they have distributor relationships, alliances and partners. In the multi-national phase, they have operating subsidiaries in the major countries and maybe even have some regional orientations such as European and Asian headquarters. In the global phase, the company operates with a minimum of differences from country to country. Managers move fluidly through the organization from country to country and career paths are based upon global experience, not just domestic experience. CBIS was moving from the international phase and is now well in the multi-national phase. It has organizations in different parts of the world, well-coordinated with headquarters, and is moving in the direction of a global orientation. The international organization per se could very well disappear as the company organizes around product lines or functional areas, or however they choose to organize it.

JGIM: Could you describe the role of information technology in the operation of CBIS as a multi-national company?

Pendray: Right. Being a communications company and a member of the Cincinnati Bell Group, the whole infrastructure is information technology based. In the international group, Lotus Notes and tools such as Microsoft Office are the vehicles by
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