objects. In other words, to ensure that objects from one object model will be able to be viewed as if they existed in another, and key object functionality will be visible to the clients even if they are using the other model.

Part A of the ActiveX/CORBA Interworking Specification was adopted by OMG in March 1996. It details a comprehensive, flexible approach supporting the interaction of today's OLE/COM portion of ActiveX, with CORBA.

OMG member companies including Digital, Expersoft, VisualEdge, HP and IONA Technologies are shipping ActiveX/CORBA Interworking capabilities within their products. Part B of the specification, which was on hold for a short time as OMG members awaited availability of Microsoft's DCOM specification, is now well under way. Initial submissions to Request For Proposal (RFP) are due on November 1, 1996.

Anthony Kaiser, tel +44 181 570 2182, fax +44 181 572 3163, email: elm@omg.org, web http://www.omg.org

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LETTER FROM RUSSIA, By Leonid Ototsky and Anatoly Savin, Project Manager of Compek Systems.

Implementing modern information technology (IT) in Russian enterprises represents an opportunity as well as a challenge. The opportunity lies in the acceptance of enlightened managers in Russia that they need to move directly to the state-of-the-art technologies, rather than follow the same evolution process that took place in the West. The challenge, is in understanding the needs, as well as the constraints, of Russian enterprises, see Letters From Russia in the April and May 1996 issues of the Engineering Data Newsletter.

Implementors of IT therefore need to have practical first hand experience in Russian business and its culture. In this Letter from Russia we give one example of the way such experience was acquired.

Compek Systems is a member of the association "Autometprom[1]" sponsored by the State Committee of Metallurgy (Russia). One of the main aims of the association is to implement 'standard' IT from the West.

In 1988 the Ministry of Metallurgy launched a 3 year modernisation programme for the 20 largest metallurgical enterprises of the former USSR. The aim was to implement infrastructure technologies such as UNIX, TCP/IP and client/server (see Letter From Russia in the July/August issue).

We who were involved on this programme, and later formed Compek Systems, had a good experience in tailoring hardware, system software, back-end and front-end tools for the Russian market.

Based on this experience we adopted the strategy of building on standards and standardised functions where ever possible. We believes this approach is better suited to the Russian conditions as it reduces dependence on foreign suppliers both in the implementation and support areas.

In 1992 we began to build expertise in 'standardisation' at the application level, by:

- using MRP/ERP approach to standardise the description of business processes and functions, and,
- using CASE tools to provide unified environment for application development and maintenance.

To achieve maximum vendor independence, we avoided products that used their own proprietary development tools even though they may have had good functional features. A notable example for this approach was the experience of adapting the ERP product from the Swedish firm IFS for the Russian market. The system began to "speak" Russian only after six months, and this was achieved with very little help from the vendor. The system is now is being used as a tool for training managers on the new technologies.

The main features that made the IFS product easy to adapt were;

- standard SQL based back-end and front-end tools (Oracle)
- 'Message Oriented Middleware' for connection between own modules and with other products including legacy systems
- easy to adapt for different languages
- flexible pricing policy

Sometimes we were forced to modify software to cater for the old style and business culture particularly in finance related features to conform to Russian Accounting practices. However, thanks to the "standard" tools, we are now doing this without help of vendor. As for the future, we look to standards such as STEP and the new generation of more open PDM systems. We believe these will provide a "solid foundation" for IT, and will help us "adapt" the engineers - and later, the managers - to the new technologies.

For further information contact Leonid Ototsky, email: leo@magmk.chel.su, or Anatoly Savin, email: savin@navigator.mgn.chel.su

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[1] "Autometprom" is an association, or group, of independent companies that share common resources such as hardware, networking and MRP/ERP systems.