



CROSSTALK

SPONSOR	<i>Lt. Col. Joe Jarzombek</i>
PUBLISHER	<i>Reuel S. Alder</i>
ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER	<i>Tracy Stauder</i>
MANAGING EDITOR	<i>Kathy Gurchiek</i>
ASSOCIATE EDITOR/LAYOUT	<i>Heather L. King</i>
ASSOCIATE EDITOR/FEATURES	<i>Heather Winward</i>
VOICE	801-775-5555 DSN 775-5555
FAX	801-777-8069 DSN 777-8069
E-MAIL	crosstalk.staff@hill.af.mil
STSC ONLINE	http://www.stsc.hill.af.mil
CROSSTALK ONLINE	http://www.stsc.hill.af.mil/ Crosstalk/crosstalk.html
ESIP ONLINE	http://www.esip.hill.af.mil

Subscriptions: Send correspondence concerning subscriptions and changes of address to the following address:

Ogden ALC/TISE
7278 Fourth Street
Hill AFB, Utah 84056-5205
E-mail: stsc.custserv@hill.af.mil
Voice: 801-775-5555
Fax: 801-777-8069 DSN 777-8069

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The Software Technology Support Center was established at Ogden Air Logistics Center (AFMC) by Headquarters U.S. Air Force to help Air Force software organizations identify, evaluate, and adopt technologies that will improve the quality of their software products, their efficiency in producing them, and their ability to accurately predict the cost and schedule of their delivery. *CROSSTALK* is assembled, printed, and distributed by the Defense Automated Printing Service, Hill AFB, Utah 84056. *CROSSTALK* is distributed without charge to individuals actively involved in the defense software development process.

How Far Have We Come?

To put the evolution of software in perspective, you need to understand the typical mentality of new programmers and coders fresh from college and technical school. It will really make you feel “mature” and “experienced” — both euphemisms for “old” — to understand that today’s new programmers . . .

- Think that seven- and nine-track tapes were variations of eight-track tapes. Somehow, the “Beach Boys” come to mind when you mention them.
- Think that Core Memory has to do with business values.
- Have never used a punch card, cannot tell you how many columns are on a punch card, and do not understand what a keypunch machine is.
- Have never saved the confetti-like bits of paper from a keypunch to use later. Of course, the correct use was to trash a friend’s desk or car. (The bits of paper were called chaff or chad. If you want to know why it was called chad, e-mail me at david.cook@hill.af.mil).
- Vaguely remember when floppy drives were floppy. If they remember “real” floppies, they think they were always 5¼ inches (remember 8-inch floppies?).
- Do not feel fear and revulsion when they hear the acronym JCL. They do not even know it means Job Control Language.
- Think that loading a word processor that consumes 40-plus megabytes of memory is no big deal.
- Think that leasing a machine means going to CompUSA and spending under \$100 per month.
- Cannot remember not having a hard drive to copy files to. Remember copying files on a one-floppy machine? It was like playing the accordion to copy multiple files.
- Cannot comprehend editing a file without using a mouse — and if they have Unix experience, never used VI (visual information) and probably like EMACS!
- Have never coded in a language that required segmentation or overlays of code.
- Never used a calculator — or heaven forbid, a slide rule — to check the correctness of a FORTRAN program.
- Have never read — or probably even seen — a core dump, and have never had to calculate a physical vs. virtual address to debug.
- Think that ASCII (the American National Standard Code for Information Interchange) is the only character set, and have never heard of EBCDIC (Extended Binary Coded Decimal Interchange Code). (Remember? Nonsequential character sequences, multiple versions, and important characters missing).
- Have never waited hours — or days — for the results of a compile. (Because of this, they have never understood the importance of desk-checking code prior to a compile.)
- Cannot remember when compile-link-load-execute were separate steps in running a program. (Each step took a separate deck of JCL cards!)
- Think that “booting” a machine only requires one to turn on the power.
- Have always used WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) word processors. If you did not already know that acronym, you are the youngster this column is aimed at.
- Never sweet-talked an operator into upping the priority of a job to get a quicker compile. (They probably do not understand what a computer operator really does.)
- Have become accustomed to using an operating system that crashes or hangs routinely, sometimes multiple times per day.

— *David Cook, Software Technology Support Center*

Got an idea for *BACKTALK*? Send an e-mail to crosstalk.staff@hill.af.mil