Editor's Notes

By Amy Petré Hill

The world has been assimilated.

Every second, millions of facts, from the completely irrelevant to the incredibly intimate, are spun into the silicon web of cyberspace. If humankind hasn't completely translated every single factoid of human knowledge into bytes, it's getting very close. Should this claim seem a little grandiose, a quick tour through the World Wide Web confirms the massive amount of data that can be obtained through a modem in minutes--today's stock prices, last year's Oscar nominations, Elizabeth Taylor's shoe size, the current rate of deforestation in Brazil, photos from the last Mars landing, and a list of the best sushi places in New Mexico. At no time in human history has so much information been so readily available to so many.

Putting aside for the moment the immense philosophical questions this worldwide electronic assimilation raises, the amazing glut of information has serious business implications. This is not news to most business people. For the last decade, the corporate world has been chanting one, unrelenting corporate mantra--the company with the most data ultimately wins. Companies didn't need to have the best product (just think of some of the products that rained down upon us from Redmond); they didn't need to have the most sophisticated data access and analysis tools. The secret to success was a company's ability to collect more data in a particular market than any of its competitors.

Today, however, almost any company can use the Web to collect more product and customer information than can ever be used. And vast improvements in microprocessor speed, combined with a drop in the price of memory, has made it easy and cost-effective for companies to save every scrap of corporate information. Even smaller companies that can't afford original research or huge data warehouses can now purchase information from information vendors like Lexis/Nexis.

As a result, just having information is no longer enough to keep a company on the competitive edge. To get ahead, a firm must be able to access, analyze, and manipulate data faster than anyone else. For a large company with a sizable Information Technology budget, serious data mining and data analysis have always been possible, but many Fortune 500 companies and government organizations are struggling to accurately retrieve and use older data.

This challenge of data retrieval can be even greater for small to mid-sized firms that don't have millions to spend on in-house experts or sophisticated software suites. These companies look to their value added resellers and independent software vendors to provide solutions that get the important data to employees when and how it is needed. For many businesses, that means being able to access years of information from a variety of off-the-shelf software products such as Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Access, and Seagate Crystal Reports. In addition, companies are looking for ways to broaden access to their information sources even further by connecting them to corporate intranets or the World Wide Web.

Because the Business Basic language is very popular with these small to mid-sized companies, the pressure from end users to make Business Basic data more easily available through new tools is especially intense. They want the CFO to be able to see the same information through his or her extensive Excel spreadsheets that the warehouse manager accesses and generates using an existing PRO/5® distribution application.

BASIS' solution to the data access challenge is the BASIS ODBC Driver®. Acting as a thin layer of connectivity between a BBx® or PRO/5 database and an ODBC-aware Windows application, the BASIS ODBC Driver is a quick and cost-effective way to make data available to a wide variety of users. In September, the next generation BASIS ODBC product--the BASIS ODBC Driver 2.0--made its way to customers. This issue of *The BASIS Advantage Magazine* examines version 2.0, showing how developers can use it to give their customers the data access they need. The *Advantage*'s new Associate Editor, Don Andersen, and software engineer, Jeff Ash, cover the new features in version 2.0 in "Take A Ride With The BASIS ODBC Driver 2.0." Ernie Longmire then takes the ODBC Driver online and reports on how BASIS' own Technical Support department uses the ODBC Driver and the Internet to access customer data in "Untangle Webs of Data With The BASIS ODBC Driver." There is even a special Tid Bytes article from Jennifer Mills that covers the most commonly asked questions about the BASIS ODBC Driver 2.0.

With the imminent assimilation of this world into the alternate, electronic world of cyberspace, comes a change in the value of information. Information is no longer inherently valuable in itself; it must instead be enhanced with sophisticated methods for accessing and manipulating data. The variety of articles included in this issue offers some solid facts on how Business Basic developers can use BASIS technology to give their customers both the facts and the ability to get at them.