Personal Conferencing Working Group Initial Meeting 4/5-7/94

Charlie Sauer

In conjunction with Intel's focus on data and video conferencing, Intel has formed a "Personal Conferencing Working Group" of conferencing (CLI, VideoServer, VTEL), PC (Compaq, Intel), Telecom (AT&T, Northern Telecom, Ericsson) and software (Novell, WordPerfect, Software Publishing, Lotus) suppliers. PictureTel had announced that it would participate but withdrew. Intel is continuing to try to enlist Microsoft, but does not expect short term success.

Each company was asked to send exactly two people, a business/marketing person and an architecture/technical person. Danny served as the former and I the latter. As expected, Intel had Renee James and Michael Glancy in these roles, plus eight to ten additional marketing/technical people, plus the welcoming dinner hosted by Pat Gelsinger and Wednesday lunch hosted by Andy Grove. Some of the other companies also exceeded the two person limit, including AT&T with four, CLI with 3 (Dorsey/Stauffer/+1) and VideoServer with 3 (Castle, Gruber and James). Danny and I were quite vocal - I'd (modestly) claim that we had more impact then the CLI/VideoServer combined delegations.

Grove was very explicit during Wednesday lunch about Intel's motivation -- they can't grow their company without dramatically growing the demand for processing power, and they think this (developing/advocating conferencing) is the way to grow demand for processing power. Even some of the Intel people seem surprised at how much focused attention is being brought to their conferencing activities, clearly second only to the current processor business.

All things considered, the meetings went very well, and Intel seemed very happy, based on comments at the end and reports on Friday.

Intel has some very difficult strategic issues to resolve. They want PCWG to endorse the technical approaches they've planned and are building into products, but they want the other members to be active participants. They're "impatient" to get the specs done (multiple revisions, the first one done this year, the second well under way this year) and products shipping, but they want an open process with everyone buying in. At this meeting they tried to straddle the fence, and that needs to be handled differently in the future. My prediction is that they've set a precedent towards a more open process and they won't be able to reverse that direction. However, that will likely slow down the progress on the spec. I don't believe that they will allow this to slow down their product plans, they will continue with their current product plans and accept that the nominal first quarter products aren't full implementations of PCS 1.0.

The formal agenda was oriented toward explaining/selling what Intel had done so far in the draft PCS 1.0 spec. Though there was some heated discussion, e.g., on the adequacy of GSM and the System 200 audio quality overall, there wasn't a lot of controversy over the specifics of what was in the 1.0 draft. There was controversy over what was missing, to the extent of some (e.g., Lotus) challenging whether the existing content should be in 1.0. The main themes were

1. Why the exclusive focus on ISDN/switched digital communication when the dominant infrastructure is LAN/POTS?
2. How can PCS 1.0 provide LAN approaches that are interoperable with the ISDN/switched digital approaches? (One of the Lotus reps suggested dropping

audio/video in PCS 1.0 until this issue was resolved. He didn't get any public support, but I suspect that he wasn't alone in his thinking.)

3. What are the API's for PCS? (An early draft we saw in February had a very deficient chapter on API's. Intel dropped API discussion entirely from the 1.0 draft.)

What Intel has done so far has allowed very limited roles for the ISV's in the near term, and the ISV's want to fix this. Since Intel hasn't made much real provision for them, to do so now means significant new effort (which was nominally planned for PCS 2.0) and thus a likely several month delay in PCS 1.0 closure. However, this is relatively straightforward work.

The more problematic issue is trying to integrate LAN/switched digital in PCS 1.0. There is substantial question about how/whether this can be done for audio/video, so asserting it as a requirement for PCS 1.0 opens the schedule. The ending point of the discussions seemed to focus on data only integration, but there are still exposures to that, since the 1.0 draft doesn't address data only end points and since the non-PCWG naysayers might use this as a target for attacks.

Other discussions touched on demos for Telecon and Comdex, and on compliance testing.

Danny and I both have binders of all the charts, *reproducible* copies of the PCS 1.0 spec (as opposed to the Intel Restricted yellow covered versions we previously received) and miscellaneous additional material. Follow-up meetings on specific topics (above additions to 1.0 draft, demo plans, ...) need to be scheduled right away, and the next general meeting is tentatively planned for June. Lotus is going to set up a Notes server in Hillsboro dedicated to PCWG.