

# Honeywell fails to convince Multics users

## Skeptical of pledges, group considers other vendors' alternatives

By Rosemary Hamilton

DETROIT — Users of Honeywell, Inc.'s Multics reacted skeptically to the company's pledge last week to ease its withdrawal of support from the operating system. Company officials declined to provide specific details about Multics-like features that they say will be incorporated into a new product line.

The first component of the new line is scheduled for a prerelease showing at the National Computer Conference in June, Honeywell officials said. But users are skeptical of migrating from the 36-bit Honeywell systems they now use to 32-bit systems they know little about.

Some users of Multics, which has developed a small but dedicated base of large-user sites, met with Honeywell representatives during the annual spring meeting of the Honeywell Large Systems User Association (HLSUA), the group's first meeting since Honeywell announced the decision at a January meeting [CW, Jan. 13]. Some of the users said they still felt betrayed by the company's decision earlier this year to terminate future support of Multics.

According to a tape recording of the session given to *Computerworld* by a Multics user, Honeywell officials made repeated attempts to foster a cooperative environment, stressing that they would retain as many Multics-like features as they could.

### 'Not kindly disposed'

One user said he had difficulty believing what Honeywell said because the vendor has changed its plans before. He cited the Flower project, which would have been a follow-on to Multics, as one example. "We are not kindly disposed toward Honeywell," he said. "It's an issue of betrayal."

The Multics users, including Ford Motor Co., are a small but potent group of Honeywell customers. "It's far more a reputational thing than a financial thing," Eugene Manno, group vice-president of small computers and office systems, noted in a

post-conference interview. "There are only a few Multics user sites. That's the good news. But they are extremely visible users. If they walked, it would not do our business any good."

But Manno was confronted by users, wearing black arm bands to mourn the death of their operating system, who did not voice a willingness to go along with Honeywell's strategy of migrating to its new systems. Instead, they challenged the project's deadline and continued to raise the issue of a third-party vendor taking over the operating system.

Manno expressed bewilderment over the users' resistance to Honeywell's strategy. "I guess I'm having trouble understanding what the problem is with looking at this viable migration path because all the other choices I saw were infinitely more complex and more expensive," Manno told the gathering. Manno was one of three Honeywell officials at the Multics session.

The first system in the new 32-bit product line will be shipping by late September, Manno said, and will incorporate some basic Multics-like features such as security. The vendor does not expect to have its most-Multics-like system until sometime in 1988.

The Multics issue has been battered around for almost a year now. In January 1986, Honeywell officially told users that Multics would be phased out after months of hinting in that direction. This came as a crushing blow to its small group of loyal users.

Multics, although 16 years old, is considered a very eloquent operating system. It has built-in features, such as a relational data base, dynamic linking and security, which put it a cut above many other operating systems. But it was also designed to run on outdated, 36-bit hardware. Honeywell said last week it could not justify continued development of hardware that was unlikely to sell beyond Multics users.

Manno's efforts last week to promote a spirit of cooperation were hindered by his inability to provide concrete answers to some of the users' questions. Suspicions were heightened when Manno would not give a specific list of the Multics-like features that will be incorporated into

the new system.

Manno also said no tools are available yet to assist users in their migration. He added that he is not going to give users information until it is fact and that work on the Multics-like system is still in progress. Because of this, he said, "I would like very much to get with every Multics user site and at least have our technical people talk to you about where we're going and what our choices are."

### 'Questioning integrity'

At the session, Greg Clark, a Multics user from Ford, challenged the 1988 date for the release of the most-Multics-like system, saying that the company has a far too ambitious project ahead of it to meet that deadline. Manno said that remark was "questioning my integrity."

Clark also said that Manno's commitment to Multics features was news to him because the vendor had not been giving users any such indication in the past few months. Manno insisted that it had not been a change of heart. The commitment had been there all along, he said; it was just a matter of communicating it.

"The party line was exactly what we expected," said a session attendee who requested anonymity. "They tried to appear more cooperative, but there's been no shift in their intentions."

However, Manno stressed that Honeywell would do whatever possible to make the transition easy and urged users not to switch to another vendor. The users have been reviewing this option for months now. At last week's conference, some of the group held a private session to discuss this option. Control Data Corp. and AT&T made presentations, according to one user, but apparently no clear solution emerged.

## TOP OF THE NEWS

NEWS from page 1

volumes of software to corporate users — a type of site licensing plan. First Software is reportedly second to Softsel Computer Products, Inc. of Inglewood, Calif., in revenue from distribution to retailers.

Ashton-Tate is seriously considering removing its highly unpopular copy protection from its software, said Ron Posner, Ashton-Tate executive vice-president, sales and international. "We feel the need for copy protection in the future is less critical, and it will probably, in our opinion, go away. We are evaluating it right now. We don't have any specific time we are going to do it," Posner said.

Compaq Computer Corp. made the Fortune 500 list in record time, coming in as the 463rd-largest industrial company less than four years after start-up. Last week the Houston firm also announced it had shipped its 500,000th personal computer. Also making the Fortune 500 ranking for the first time was Dataproducts Corp., at number 479. Meanwhile, Rolm was dropped from the ranking as it

Second-class postage paid at Framingham, Mass., and additional mailing offices.

*Computerworld* (ISSN-0010-4841) is published weekly, except: January (5 issues), February (5 issues), March (6 issues), April (5 issues), May (5 issues), July (5 issues), August (5 issues), September (6 issues), October (5 issues), November (5 issues), and a single combined issue for the last week in December and the first week in January by CW Communications/Inc., 375 Cochituate Road, Box 9171, Framingham, Mass. 01701-9171.

Copyright 1986 by CW Communications/Inc. All rights reserved.

*Computerworld* can be purchased on 35 mm microfilm through University Microfilm Int. Periodical Entry Dept., 300 Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106. *Computerworld* is indexed: write to Circulation Dept. for subscription information.

**PHOTOCOPY RIGHTS:** permission to photocopy for internal or personal use or the internal or personal use of specific clients is granted by CW Communications/Inc. for libraries and other users registered with the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC), provided that the base fee of \$3.00 per copy of the article, plus \$.50 per page is paid directly to Copyright Clearance Center, 21 Congress Street, Salem, Mass. 01970.

Permission to photocopy does not extend to contributed articles followed by this symbol. ‡

Special requests for reprints and permissions only should be addressed to Nancy M. Shannon, CW Communications/Inc., 375 Cochituate Road, Box 9171, Framingham, Mass. 01701-9171. Subscriptions call toll free (800) 544-3712 or (215) 768-0388 in Pennsylvania.

Subscriber rates: \$2.00 a copy; U.S. — \$44 a year; Canada, Central & So. America — \$110 a year; Europe — \$165 a year. All other countries — \$245 a year (airmail service). Four weeks notice is required for change of address. Allow six weeks for new subscription service to begin.

