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pearlstine, ny
steiger, ny

gents. this is a short, subjective report on where our personal computer
project stands as the year begins and what we should do in the year ahead.

as you've seen from the reactions of the bureau chiefs to the pcs and some
of the stuff i've shown you, the pc route is the correct way to go to
improve reporters' skills and broaden the information we make available to
our readers. thus the target we've set for ourselves is the correct one.

unfortunately, how we're going about getting there is screwed up. we've
run smack into typical dow jones foulups in working with csf and the
operating services groups. some of the problems are shakedown ones that
will disappear as time goes on. however that they're happening at all
indicates that the news department may have to mull a new way of doing
things.

a few quick examples of what is going wrong.....
    1-- the itt pc's we bought were new off-the-shelf models. itt service
personnel in the field weren't aware of how to fix them. the result is that
of 60 computers now out in the field, 10% of them are down after less than
three months of use. itt's service has been shoddy from the start, and
only now are we getting promises from them that they'll clean up their act.
    2-- although we've needed them from the start, csf still hasn't
recommended to us which tape backups we should use. as a result, reporters
are losing their data from their computers, which isn't endearing them to
the machines. csf, which says our request is in their work queue, promises
that we should have their recommendation by the end of this month.
    3-- attempts to further upgrade the software package for the itt pcs
has been stopped by csf. they cite austerity and say the software package
as it is now will have to suffice. as far as software support for the
itt's goes, we have to go with the csf list of approved software.

the above problems are an outgrowth of how the pc project was set up. no
one was in charge. since it was a committee project there was no direct
accountability. participants can get away with saying "that's what the
news department wanted" or "csf promised ". the minutes of the meetings
boggle the mind.

that things came to such a pass shouldn't be surprising. the news
department long ago ceded autonomy over their computer needs to csf. the
problem has been compounded by the news department's failure to set
priorities or keep tabs on what csf has been asked to do. thus csf can put
news requests into a queue behind accounting or personnel or dj books.

the attitude at csf, for the most part, has evolved into an "us versus them" approach. sometimes it goes so far as to give the impression that csf knows better what the news department wants than the news department does. in fact, some csf employes have told me that they've been berated for their efforts to help the news department and told they are accountable to csf, not news.

unfortunately, i don't think there is a lot we can do to improve our relationship with csf. the news department's growing needs in the future are bound to put more strains on the relationship. just consider these three factors.

1-- speed. csf never seems to respond to our requests with the dispatch we need. our requests are put in a queue. what we need tomorrow may end up coming a week from tomorrow. hence the remarkably floating deadlines for watchdog and newsdog. pc related problems for the news department are relegated to the business support group that takes care of billings.

2-- expertise. csf has too wide a brief. dealing with billing processing and electronic typesetting doesn't develop the expertise for writing software to help reporters find out information faster or how to improve the statistics for the paper. then too they often lack expertise they claim they have -- they had told us that they could repair imos problems, but they still can't.

3-- accountability. because csf regards us as just another client and the fact that we don't pay enough attention to what we want, problems will continue. that means that our ability to capitalize on the new tools we're giving our reporters will be limited.

in the next five years, the news departments' competitive edge will be considerably enhanced if we learn to use pc's effectively. by tapping quickly into various data bases we should be able to bring our readers more graphics, better statistics and more breadth to our reporter's stories.

to do that, we need to be masters in our own house. that means developing our our training, some of our own software and our own expertise in using computers. to do that i think we need our own computer group within the news department.

i would propose the following. the news department should take overall responsibility for the pc project. in the future, all personal computer related projects should generally be under the supervision of the news department. when help is needed the operating services group would be contacted. other larger news department projects -- typography, newsdog, watchdog and the like would remain with csf with tighter coordination/monitoring by the news department.

the above-mentioned division would be a boon in the following ways.
   1-- financial. by evaluating software, usage of data bases and the like,
individual purchases of useless software or overusage of data bases could
be monitored.
   2-- expertise. we'd be developing our own expertise in house on how to
use pc's more effectively. writing our own software and being responsive
to reporters in finding the answers to the questions like "what would you
like your computer to do" would allow the focus to be on helping the
reporters and readers.
   3-- speed. working for the news department the group would only be
responsible to the news department. there would be no standing in queues.

such a group wouldn't cost dow jones anything more than it is paying now.
rather the proposal would call for a redeployment of assets.   moving
people from within the news department and about 5 people from csf into
this new group. by doing this, we're taking some of the workload from csf
and thus their need for staffing should be reduced.

i know that i'm not the first one proposing this. but i think the time is
right. to get the maximum bang for our buck, it is better to get a group
set up within the news department and operating before all the reporters
have screens. austerity shouldn't mean delaying steps that will save us
money and time in the future.

regards,

geddes, new york