

Networking Groups Join Forces



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The major industry in Canberra, Australia's capital city, is overseeing Australia's national and local governments. And where there is government, there must be computers and technical professionals to maintain those computers. With such a large pool of potential members, the Canberra NetWare User Group (CNUG) has never had a problem recruiting members during the eight years of its existence. Never, that is, until recently.

UNCERTAIN TIMES

During recent months, Canberra has witnessed massive government downsizing, funding freezes, privatization, and indecision about how remaining networks should be run. CNUG has felt the effect of these changes in the form of dwindling numbers. Some CNUG members have left the area, and potential members were hesitant to join CNUG because they didn't know how long they would be employed or in which direction their job was heading.

CNUG officials quickly realized that the group would have to evolve in order to survive. CNUG committee members began searching for solutions. One CNUG member attended a Network Professional Association (NPA) meeting to learn more about that group's membership, objectives, and procedures. This CNUG member was surprised to learn that the NPA group was suffering problems similar to CNUG. After a brief meeting, CNUG and NPA officers soon realized that the two groups had much in common. To ensure each group's survival, the groups resolved to join forces.

COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

Even though the idea of legally merging the two groups was very attractive, the groups decided not to rush into anything. Many questions needed to be answered. For example, each group had made certain

alliances, and members did not want to lose any benefits or jeopardize any business relationships by merging with another group. I also wondered how a merger was perceived by other professional networking organizations and by potential members of the combined group.

Despite these concerns, CNUG and NPA began to hold combined monthly meetings. The number of members in attendance at group meetings immediately doubled. Combining the meetings also reduced the cost required of each group to hold the meetings. Committee members from each group also began meeting together to work out the details of a merger.

As president of CNUG, I was particularly concerned about how a merger would affect our relationship with NetWare Users International (NUI) and with Novell. At the February 1998 NUI Leadership Summit, I casually suggested the idea of a merger to various NUI representatives to see their reaction. I was pleasantly surprised to find that the responses were positive. Simon Woods, president of the local NPA group, proposed the merger to NPA officials and received similar feedback.

With these reassurances, we decided to take the plunge and legally merge the two groups. CNUG and NPA group officers met to select a new name for the group, to elect an organizing committee, and to set forth a mission statement and a set of objectives. The committee then presented this information to both groups. Members approved the merger, and the new group was soon under way.

However, our work was not done yet; we still had some issues to resolve. For example, CNUG was a registered corporation, and NPA was a non-profit organization. Merging the groups turned out to be

a significant legal undertaking. As a result, we had to change our corporate name to something neutral, and we had to combine our assets and establish new bank accounts to reflect our new name. The name we ultimately chose for our group is Australia Capital Territory Network Association (ACTNA).

A NEW DIRECTION

Although ACTNA is just a few months old, we have already seen great benefits from our merger. For example, we no longer compete as two separate groups. Not only is the number of members increasing, but the membership is also becoming much more diverse: The group now includes students, sales people, administrators, engineers, Novell instructors, and Microsoft instructors. Each member brings a unique set of skills and knowledge to the group, making group meetings lively and informative.

Because ACTNA members automatically receive membership in both NUI and NPA, members enjoy even more benefits. For example, former NPA members are thrilled with the benefits associated with being a member of NUI—benefits such as receiving Novell software, Novell support, and a subscription to *NetWare Connection*. In addition, by pooling our groups' financial and physical resources, we bear less financial burden and have more funds to provide services to group members. These benefits, in turn, attract even more members to join ACTNA. As a result, ACTNA is becoming an important part of the networking community in Canberra and in the surrounding regions.

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