Dear COMMON Colleague,

For the past year, COMMON North America has had the great honor of holding the chair of the International User Group Council (IUGC). And since participation in the IUGC traditionally is a responsibility of the COMMON President, by extension, I have been the face of that chair over this term.

The IUGC is a consortium of IBM user groups. It does not have a formal, legal organization. It does not assess a subscription fee or dues to its member organizations. It does not offer any services to the members of its member organizations. It does not produce any publications.

So what the heck **is** the IUGC and why does it matter to the typical member of COMMON?

The IUGC is a key vehicle for your user group to interact, communicate, and maintain a relationship with the absolute upper levels of the IBM Company. The IUGC also is a key vehicle for your user group to interact, communicate, and maintain a relationship with COMMON's peer organizations.

The IUGC matters to COMMON because we (and our peers) need to constantly remind the upper levels of IBM of the importance of user groups and the value that those communities bring to IBM.

The IUGC matters to COMMON because we need to learn from our peers how we can better serve you as a member. As an organization we learn a lot from the things we do. Our sister organizations learn a lot from the things they do. By sharing those experiences, we all can avoid the sorts of mistakes we might make on our own—mistakes that can cost our organizations, and ultimately the membership, valuable resources.

The IUGC matters to you as a member of COMMON because you, as an IBM customer, do not live and work in a space bounded only by i5/OS. You use a variety of different IBM products and COMMON needs to understand the relationship between those products and the broader IBM strategy. That understanding is key to providing you with the most relevant offerings and services.

Traditionally IUGC membership consisted of user groups representing products from what is now IBM's Systems and Technology Group (STG). Those products are the servers, the operating systems that run on them, and IBM's storage systems. If you have been around the user group community for a while, you may recognize the origins of those groups as Share, Guide, and of course, COMMON. Over time a number of the names have changed, but, for the most part, their heritage comes from the three groups that started up some 50 years ago.

A key initiative for the IUGC, both this year and into the future, is to ask other user communities within the IBM product realm to join. Many of those groups focus on particular software products and many operate somewhat differently than COMMON and the other STG groups; however should they choose to become part of the IUGC the voice of the IBM technology user will be stronger than ever.

Remember that through the IUGC, COMMON gets to develop stronger relationships with the other member groups. Those relationships are beginning to result in joint initiatives, and you will have the opportunity to interact with members from other organizations in the technology and product areas where we both have needs and interests.

Also as a result of these relationships our ability to advocate for our members is stronger than ever. There absolutely is strength in numbers.

The IBM Company is changing. The IT market continues to change, and many of the traditional, highly focused lines of distinction within the industry are becoming increasingly blurred. So you would expect IBM to adapt. Through the IUGC, COMMON is able to quickly adjust and continue to meet your ever changing needs. This is, of course, what your user group is supposed to do for you.

Sincerely,

Randy Dufault
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