

IEEE Computer Society News

We in the database community perhaps are not fully aware of how our “prosperity” depends upon the surrounding technical society infrastructure and regulations. But this is surely true for us as it impacts on major conferences, whether they be VLDB, SIGMOD, or ICDE, the conference sponsored by the IEEE Computer Society. Our relationship to the Computer Society also impacts how the Technical Committee on Data Engineering (TCDE) can operate and what it might accomplish. So I will use part of this letter to provide news, some relatively good, some not so good, about our relationship with the Computer Society.

As I informed you earlier, a subcommittee of TC chairs, who constitute the membership of the Technical Activities Committee (TAC) within the Computer Society had suggested that TC chairs elect the TAC chair, who will represent the TC’s at “higher level” boards of the Computer Society. Sadly, that proposal has been rejected. The Computer Society is NOT an agile and flexible organization, and it struggles. This is a case of a self-inflicted and unnecessary wound, risking the disaffection of TC chairs and conference organizers.

Not all news is bad, however, and there is some evidence that the Computer Society door to change may be slightly ajar. A recent change in how the Computer Society sponsors and profits from conferences has shifted some money to conference organizers and hence to the benefit of conference attendees. Further, there are proposals, not yet approved, to permit TC’s to carry over, in a limited way, a fund balance from year to year. This is something they are not currently permitted to do. So change comes slowly. I will keep you posted.

The Current Issue

One of the exciting and unique characteristics of the database technical area is the flow of ideas between research and industry. This is due, in large part, to the huge role that databases play in the market and in society in general. Because money is at stake, technical work can move very rapidly from the idea stage to the “shipping” stage.

It would be hard to find an area where this is more true than with column store technology. More than 20 years ago, a small company, Expressway Technologies, introduced a column-based database product. Around the same time, research work on column-based databases began with the MonetDB project. The pioneering work was followed, after some delay, by an explosion of work, both in research and in industry. Major vendors and many researchers have explored the area and the impact has been enormous.

Peter Boncz, who with Martin Kersten, was among the early research pioneers in column-based databases is the editor for the current issue. What I particularly like about the issue is how it demonstrates that what may have once been considered a “fringe” technology has blossomed into a thriving industry. This issue includes articles on most commercial column-based databases, and gives both a great snapshot of current industrial practice and clues to where the industry is heading. I had hoped that Peter would “do” a column-store” issue when I appointed him an editor. Hence, I find the current issue very gratifying, and I want to thank Peter for the fine job he has done in organizing the issue.