

The REINFORCER

Spring 2002

1.800.CALL.ASA • www.asaHQ.com

Vol. 9 No. 2



Introducing aSa^{e^x}

aSa unveils new name & look for Windows software

When software designers begin work on a new project, they often give it a code name. For example, when Microsoft engineers were developing Windows XP, they called it "Whistler." Here at aSa, we code-named our Windows-based product line "Ultra." The moniker caught on, and we even promoted our software using the tag "Ultra." Pretty soon, the code name became more than a code. Until now, that is.

With the official release of our Windows products underway and installations happening worldwide, we

have decided to promote the newest generation of aSa software with its new and official name: aSa e^x.

We've also changed our letterhead, business cards, and marketing materials to better reflect the new look. The new logo represents innovation and creativity. The e^x — e to the x power — conveys technological expertise and experience.

The real changes at aSa, though, are more than just cosmetic. aSa e^x contains new features and reports, plus an improved, more intuitive menu.

We've also rearranged the very structure of our staff to make better use of our talents to improve products and services for our customers. For details, check out "Structured to Serve" on page 6.

Are you ready to upgrade to aSa e^x?

Contact Frank Zambotti or complete and return the "Getting Ready for aSa" form available at: www.asarebar.com/support/documents/documents.htm. ☐

Letter from the President - 2

Upcoming Events - 3

Spotlight on IT Services - 4

Structured to Serve - 6

Reinforcing Alaska - 8

A Change for the Better

Letter from the President

Change. Alter. Modify. Vary. Transform. Revolutionize. Adjust. All of these words could be used to describe what's been going on at aSa.

Last year, we built an addition to our corporate headquarters and added new staff for quality assurance, software development, multimedia applications, IT services, and administration.

In November, during a two-day meeting in the Laurel Mountains of Pennsylvania, the aSa management team worked with Solutions 21, Inc., of Pittsburgh to begin the development of a three-year strategic plan for the company. The theme of the plan is RESULTS, an acronym for:

- Reliable Products
- Effective Organizational Structure
- Sales
- Utilization of Resources
- Leadership
- Technology and Training
- Service and Support

The outcomes of the strategic plan included clearly defined software development procedures, the standardization of certain aSa in-house practices, mechanisms to improve communication with aSa staff and clients, technology plans, and a clear focus on service. Within the plan document, specific goals were established, deadlines were set, and responsibilities were assigned. In addition, there were some aSa staff promotions and the formation of new departments (see "Structured to Serve," page 6).

aSa is closely following the plans and goals laid out in the final strategic plan document. As a result, we have incorporated numerous changes in our Ultra software and renamed it aSa e^x. While the new e^x name has appeared on our software for the last month, the new version with all of its enhancements will be released at the end of June. The changes go beyond the name. Based on a tremendous amount of user feedback, we have added important features, functions, and reports that make the product easier to use and more valuable. We have also reorganized the menu structure to be more intuitive.

I want to thank all of the companies that have provided us with feedback on aSa Ultra. Your ideas and suggestions have helped us to improve the products that you use to run your business. I'm sure you will find that our e^x products are a change for the better.



Scott D. Leib
President

aSa is closely following the plans and goals laid out in the (three-year company) strategic plan. As a result, we have incorporated numerous changes in our Ultra software and renamed it aSa e^x.... The changes go beyond the name. Based on a tremendous amount of user feedback, we have added important features, functions, and reports that make the product easier to use and more valuable.

— aSa President Scott Leib

Applied Systems Associates, Inc.
5270 Logan Ferry Road
Murrysville, Pennsylvania 15668
1.800.CALL.ASA
724.733.8700
724.325.5553 Fax
www.asaHQ.com
www.asarebar.com
asa@asaHQ.com

© Copyright 2002.
All rights reserved. aSa is a registered trademark and service mark of Applied Systems Associates, Inc. All other names and company names are the property and/or trademarks of their respective owners.

Estimating e^x

Development underway; task groups forming

Design and development for aSa Estimating e^x are underway. Currently, we're assembling client task groups to get feedback on prototyped system components and to gather ideas for new functionality. Members will meet via online conference/demos. We plan to create groups for each of the following:

- Estimate Input Screen
- Estimate Report
- Placing Labor Input and Reporting

If you are interested in becoming a member of one of these task groups, contact Mitch Leib at mitch.leib@asaHQ.com.

Distribution dates for beta testing and general installation of Estimating e^x have not yet been determined.

Watch future *Reinforcers* and *Reinforcer Expresses* for updated information. ☐

With our other core modules currently in distribution, Estimating e^x development is proceeding full-speed ahead.

Streamlining Support

With issue-tracking software tools, quick solutions are often only a mouse-click away

The next time you call aSa for support, you may want to have a pencil and paper handy so you can jot down your issue number. An issue number is simply a way to track support communication. It becomes especially important when aSa is helping a client with an ongoing or recurring issue, and when multiple members of our staff are involved. Here's how it works:

- At aSa, each support call is logged into a database as an "issue" using BridgeTrak™ software. Using Bridge, support personnel record important information, such as who took the call, client name and company, and the software or hardware involved. Also recorded is a summary of the question or problem and a description of the steps taken to troubleshoot or correct the issue.
- Bridge software generates a unique number for each issue. We'll give you this number for your records.

- If you call back about the same issue or a similar one, give the support person your issue number. Almost instantly, the consultant who is helping you can review the issue and the troubleshooting steps already taken. This eliminates the need for you to re-explain your question or problem multiple times.

Here are some other ways that we're using BridgeTrak software to serve our customers better:

- Reports tell us what issues clients are calling about the most. This helps us to pinpoint aspects of our system that can be improved and also helps us to provide better support for those particular issues.
- Powerful search capabilities allow our consultants to easily look through past Bridge issues and find answers quickly.
- Because the status of each issue is recorded, we can better coordinate efforts to help answer or fix unresolved issues. ☐

On the Horizon ...

Software Forum 2003

The 2003 aSa Software Forum will be at the Sheraton Station Square in Pittsburgh March 20-23. The Sheraton, where we held the forum in 1999, has been newly renovated. More information about the forum will be available in future issues of *The Reinforcer* and *Reinforcer Express* and on www.asarebar.com. We plan to dedicate a web page to the software forum that will allow clients to register for the meeting online.

At a Glance

Holidays – aSa Office Closed:

- **Memorial Day**
May 27
- **Independence Day**
July 4 and 5
- **Labor Day**
September 2

Upcoming Events:

- **World of Concrete 2003**
February 4-7
Las Vegas, Nevada
- **2003 aSa Software Forum**
March 20-23
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

aSa Support ...

Office Hours

8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Eastern
Monday – Friday

Extended Support Hours

724.263.8778

Evenings until 9 p.m. (Eastern)

Weekends 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. (Eastern)

After-hours support is for emergencies only.

Online Support

Main Support Page:

www.asarebar.com/support

KnowledgeBase of Common Issues:

www.asarebar.com/support/webhelp/knowledgebase.htm

aSa Information Technology Team at Your Service

Technology can be fascinating, frustrating, exciting, or just plain confusing. Meet aSa's IT Consultants. Led by Manager Victor Choltco, it's their job to make sure technology works for you.



Victor Choltco
aSa Manager of IT Services
Read the quotes below to find out what Vic has to say about each member of the IT team.

Then and Now

When Victor Choltco was in grade school, he used to take apart his parents' computer to see how it worked. Since then, his fascination with technology has led him a long way ... most recently to his current position as Manager of aSa's Information Technology Department.

When Vic was hired as a Technical Support Specialist five and a half years ago, he was only six months out of school at Computer Tech of Pittsburgh. Back then, the entire department consisted of Manager Frank Zambotti, Vic, and one other technician. "When I started, we were just beginning to supply Windows 95 computers, and we were operating on a simple LANtastic network," Vic notes. "The changes have been like night and day. Now we have a department of five IT consultants working with Windows 2000, Microsoft networking, and Sequel Server databases," he says, adding, "the complexity level of what we do has quadrupled."

IT Services

From his original entry-level position at aSa, Vic has been promoted several times, first to Senior Technical Specialist, then to Assistant Manager of IT Services, and finally to his current role as head of the IT Department. Several years ago, Vic was instrumental in changing the name of the department from "Technical Support" to "Information Technology Services." He notes, "I really pushed to have the name changed to 'IT' because when people hear 'tech support,' they

think of a help desk employee parroting answers to a client on the telephone. What we do is so much more ... 'Information Technology Services' better covers the broad scope of our responsibilities."

The "broad scope" of responsibilities that Vic mentions includes PC setup and configuration; network installations and maintenance; and research into new hardware and software solutions. This, in addition to on-site and phone assistance for aSa clients. Vic points out that his department supports hardware-oriented issues *and* provides help with installing and using aSa software. Plus, his staff is responsible for maintaining all of aSa's 11 in-house servers and 60+ workstations, which house numerous databases, web and e-mail services, and dozens of different software applications.

Vic notes that although more companies are hiring in-house IT personnel to maintain their computer systems than in the past, many clients still consider aSa the IT branch of their own company. Vic says that a majority of aSa's clients use at least some aSa-supplied equipment, while several customers use aSa network systems exclusively.

Goal: Excellent Service

"Our number one goal is to provide excellent customer service, whether that be on-site, on the phone, or behind

José Amayo

"José is our anchor for support issues. A Microsoft Certified Professional, he specializes in helping customers with hardware and software questions on the phone. José also keeps busy with PC setup, in-house workstation maintenance, and organizing IT documentation."

Mark Brossman

"Mark is our primary setup guy for building PCs and loading system software. He also plays a dual role: he is an active member of the IT team, plus he answers CAD/Detailing support calls."

Joanne Connelly

"Joanne is the installation coordinator for most new e' systems going out the door. She has a great handle on the big picture of what we do. She is also very active "behind the scenes" helping the newer consultants handle support issues."



Left: aSa's PC Setup Lab

This is where IT consultants like Mark Brossman, pictured, custom-build and configure hardware, so that aSa can provide turn-key solutions to our customers.

Far left, center: IT Support

aSa IT Consultant Joanne Connelly assists a customer via telephone. The IT Department handles over 500 support calls each month.

Far left, bottom: aSa's Network Operations Center

aSa's in-house network contains 11 file servers and over 60 workstations. The IT team is responsible for the entire system's setup and maintenance.

Below: The IT Workspace

The IT area of aSa Headquarters has short walls so consultants can easily communicate with each other and get answers quickly.



the scenes," Vic says. "We do it all," he continues. "By providing all the hardware — plus setup, installation, and support services — we really can offer our clients complete turn-key solutions for all of their computing needs."

Vic points out that while his department has grown the past few years, so has the workload. Currently, the IT Department custom-builds or configures about 250 PCs annually, and

handles over 500 support phone calls each month. With a wide variety of tasks to accomplish each day, Vic says teamwork is crucial. One of the ways open communication is encouraged is the work environment itself. Vic points out that while most of the aSa Headquarters building utilizes traditional office space, the IT area is a large open room with short walls. This way, the entire IT staff can easily see and talk to each other. He notes that this is especially beneficial on support calls, when a consultant can quickly get an answer simply by asking a colleague across the room.

Specialization

"Specialization is also important to our team," Vic adds. "Each IT consultant has a unique role that best complements that person's experience and talents," he says. "For example, some team members specialize in organizing and documenting IT procedures, others in coordinating installations, and others in handling support calls," he continues. (Read the quotes below for more.)

In addition to overseeing the day-to-day operations of his department, Vic is the network administrator for aSa's in-house computer system. He says he likes this role because it gives him the opportunity to have hands-on experience with new hardware and software technology. Plus, every once in awhile, he gets to take a computer apart, just like he did when he was a kid. ☐

The department's name was changed from "Tech Support" to "IT Services" to better reflect the group's broad range of responsibilities, which includes PC setup, networking, and research, plus phone and on-site support services.

Jack Lucot

"Jack is unique because he has a background in information technology, but is currently doing a lot of aSa e' software installation, training, and support. His hardware and network know-how makes him a valuable person to have on-site at customer locations."

Michael Rathburn

"Michael does all of the purchasing of aSa computer-related products. In addition to helping with support calls, he's also our main guy for researching new hardware and software. Plus, he's MCP certified."

Structured to Serve

Organizational changes to benefit aSa customers

A change in departmental organization, several promotions to vice president, and a new level of management highlight recent changes to aSa's corporate structure.

Perhaps the most radical change is the way that software departments are organized. Prior to the changes, which became effective in November of 2001, software developers belonged to one of three departments: CAD/Detailing, Reinforcing Systems, or Business Applications. Now, all developers — no matter what their specialty — belong to the Software Development Group. Quality Assurance — the branch of aSa responsible for software testing processes — also became its own independent

Our goal is to make the best use of our diverse talent pool

group within aSa's corporate structure.

"In this new scenario, we have removed the barrier of product-line departments and can instead use our pool of

talent to address specific projects on an as needed basis," says aSa President Scott Leib.

The restructuring also included two promotions to vice president:

- Cathy Friend, Vice President of Software Development. Cathy oversees the overall development and distribution of aSa software.
- Dave Grundler, Vice President of Research and Design. Dave is responsible for researching new product avenues that will benefit aSa customers. He also remains active in software design, as well as installation, training, and support services.

Dave and Cathy join the following staff members at the vice president level: Mitch Leib, VP of Operations; Tim Berg, VP of Customer Development; and Elliot Greenman, VP of Industrial Controls.

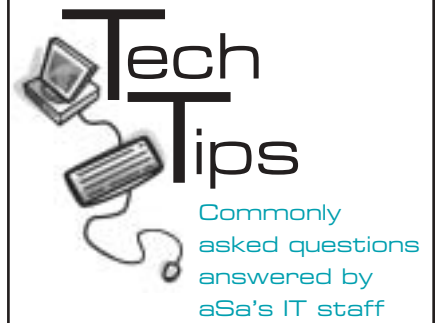
The new structure also includes a new level of management called "Directors":

- Michele Albert, Director of Software Integration. Michele is responsible for integrating software design requirements and QA testing efforts.
- Jeff Cochrane, Director of Software Design. Jeff is a senior-level programmer who works on the design and development of specialized aSa software applications.
- Vince Schmidt, Director of Software Development. Vince's primary role is to coordinate and oversee the efforts of aSa's programming staff, while maintaining his involvement with CAD-related products.
- Frank Zambotti, Director of Systems Integration. As the main person responsible for system integration for aSa clients, Frank coordinates the efforts of aSa's Sales and IT staff; handles orders for aSa products and services; and oversees hardware setup and software installations.

aSa Managers include:

- Victor Choltco, Manager of IT Services. See the story on page 4 for more information about Vic and his department.
- Sue Ellis, Manager of Multimedia. Sue is responsible for the development of multimedia sales and training applications. She also oversees publications and graphic design projects.
- Lisa Moyer, CPA, Manager of Business Applications Consulting. Lisa coordinates installation, training, and support services for Rebar Financials and Best software products.

Dave Grundler summarizes the intent of the changes, "Our goal in this restructuring is to make the best use of our diverse talent pool so that we can provide better consistency across all of our product lines." He adds, "The new organization also makes communication among our staff easier, which will result in increased product knowledge and more efficiency at every level of the company." □



What is a "terminal server," and what are its benefits?

In a terminal server environment, a powerful server runs executable programs for the entire network. Workstations act as "dumb terminals" that simply send commands to the server where all the action takes place. Upgrades are easy because they only need to be loaded onto the terminal server, not onto every computer. Plus, because workstations don't actually run the applications, they can be less powerful PCs, allowing hardware upgrades to be spread out over time.

I'm planning to upgrade my operating system to Windows 2000. Is there anything special I need to know?

Yes. In almost all cases, it is better (and easier in the long run) to back up your data, format your hard drive, and install the new operating system from scratch. Microsoft's Windows "upgrades" will install the new operating system, but don't always clean up remnants of the original OS. This leaves you with pieces of two operating systems on your PC, which can cause problems.

Another important note: If you are running the DOS version of aSa software, special steps are required for Windows 2000 PCs. Complete instructions are available at: www.asarebar.com/support/Documents/documents.htm

After loading aSa e', I get a "Run-Time Error 429 - Unable to create Active X object" trying to access the program. How can I fix this?

We improved the installation, so this error will not occur with updates created after April 15, 2002. If you're loading software created prior to April 15, fixing the problem is simply a matter of registering two dynamic linked library (DLL) files. Contact aSa and we'll be glad to help.

W E L C O M E

NEW CLIENTS

Fabricators

Allstar Rebar Ltd.
Bedford, Nova Scotia

Builders Choice USA
Pompano Beach, FL

ES Steel
Easton, MD

South Metro Rebar
Atlanta, GA

West Texas Culverts, Inc.
Seymour, TX

Material Supplier

Ready Cable, Inc.
Roanoke, TX

Installation

Coleman Steel, Inc.
Windsor, CA

Contract Estimators/Detailers

Eagle Drafting Service

John L. House

Terry L. Misner

Technic Projects, Inc.

Roger Vandebroek

New Hardware Option

aSa now offering Dell PCs with 3 years on-site service

Clients now have the opportunity to purchase Dell computers from aSa.

The most significant advantage to buying Dell through aSa is the fact that each PC includes three years

of on-site service. This means that if any hardware-related problems arise, they will be handled at your office



by a Dell technician; the computer would not need to be shipped to aSa for hardware repair work. aSa still custom-builds its own line of affordable desktop PCs; clients have the option to buy aSa computers, Dell computers, or any combination of the two. aSa-supplied notebook PCs are now exclusively

Dell. Contact IT Services for more information about aSa hardware and networking solutions.

Express Distribution

Each month, aSa e-mails *The Reinforcer Express* newsletter to licensed, supported clients. The *Express* contains up-to-date information about aSa products and services, including links to the latest aSa e^x software updates. To get on the *Express* distribution list, send your name, company, and e-mail address to reinforcer@asaHQ.com



Reinforcing Alaska

Dimond Fabricators gets up to speed with aSa Software during slow winter season

With an average temperature of 15 degrees and sunrise after 10 a.m., Alaska in January is cold and dark — not a good time for fabricating steel. But it *is* a good time to get up to speed with aSa Rebar Software. Dimond Fabricators in Anchorage made good use of their slow season this winter by adding aSa CAD/Detailing, Bar List, and Production licenses to their system.

The company also took advantage of aSa setup and training services.

Two aSa trainers — Jennifer Bates and Robert Diana — were on-site at Dimond for a total of eight days. Jennifer installed software and trained in Bar List and Production. Bob Diana taught the aSa Rebar CAD/Detailing Training Course to Dimond's two detailers. Prior to the new licenses, Dimond had been using aSa Estimating for about a year.

Spring Thaw

"Right now, we're just starting to thaw out," says Dimond Manager Bob Davison of springtime in Alaska. He adds, "It gets pretty slow around here in the winter." According to Bob, rebar work in Anchorage begins to fade in October and November and picks up again in May. He says Dimond's detailers were able to gain some valuable experience practicing with aSa Software during the winter months before they had to use it for live jobs. So far, they've used aSa reinforcing and CAD modules for 7 or 8 jobs, says Bob.




Dimond Fabricators' office and shop against the backdrop of Alaska's Chugach Mountain Range

Though Dimond has used aSa Estimating for about a year, this spring will be the company's first busy season using aSa's CAD and Reinforcing products.

Bob notes that spring is also prime bidding season, and that he's excited about this year's upcoming jobs, especially one larger project that Dimond won very recently: an addition to the Consortium Library. He explains that the large library is used jointly by Alaska Pacific University and the University of Alaska Anchorage. Cornerstone Construction is the contractor, and the structure will require 130 tons of reinforcing steel. He says that Dimond has saved a lot of time using aSa Estimating for this job and for others, and that the library addition will be their biggest aSa CAD project to date.

aSa On-site

Though Bob admits his staff is still learning how to best use all the features of aSa programs, he says the on-site training provided by Jennifer and Bob (Diana) was "absolutely beneficial." He adds, "In fact, I wish we could have had them here longer." 

Interesting Facts

- ◆ With 275,000 people, Anchorage contains roughly half of the population of the entire state of Alaska.
- ◆ Population and economic growth in Anchorage is fueled largely by the oil industry and by a significant military presence.
- ◆ Dimond Fabricators has shipped reinforcing steel to jobsites as far away as Prudhoe Bay. That's over 700 miles.
- ◆ Remote locations like "Red Dog Mine" require that rebar be flown to the jobsite; the cost of air freight exceeds the cost of material.
- ◆ Employees at Dimond Fab report to work year-round, even though fabrication slows down drastically during winter months.

Quotes

- “ Alaska has friendly people, incredible scenery, fine art, and fascinating history. I can't wait to go back and experience more of the state's many treasures. ”
- Jennifer Bates
- “ Surprisingly, when I got off the plane in Anchorage, it was actually warmer than when I boarded back in Pittsburgh. ”
- Robert Diana