

Spring 2010

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The new *STATE OF THE ART*

What is "state of the art"? Webster's defines it as:

"state of the art" *the most recent stage in the development of a product, incorporating the newest ideas and the most up-to-date features*

That definition certainly seems rather generic and, given that definition, wouldn't most technology products in use today be categorized as state-of-the-art? In other words, state-of-the-art doesn't necessarily seem to imply *innovative* but only *up-to-date*. Perhaps the definition is stale and no longer relevant as the world has changed rapidly over the past 15 years. That is, while the definition might have been relevant 20+ years ago, in today's world of technology-rich products, almost everybody offers a state-of-the-art product (based on the dictionary definition).

Today's expectation is that we will have the latest and greatest and no longer have to wait (or wish) for it. The purpose of this article is to question the traditional definition and our expectations of "state of the art" products. Perhaps the definition is still valid; or, perhaps the definition of *product*, particularly a technology product, might need to be expanded from the traditional sense.

With Internet speed, products over the last decade and a half have improved dramatically simply because of the Internet. The Internet has become a world wide collaboration infrastructure where product developers/engineers can collaborate easily and quickly, therefore sharing ideas across continents, resulting in faster (and better?) product development. But the Internet also provides a *virtual* and almost endless supply of the "newest ideas" which are available to all. Companies no longer have to rely on large R&D departments because the Internet provides a virtual R&D center. Developers and engineers can use the Internet to mine for new ideas, theories and even tools/products. The concept of open source is based on this notion of freely sharing ideas and having others improve on your idea, tool or product. Because of the open source caveat that you must share your improvements, the "newest ideas" and "up-to-date" features are rapidly being shared and distributed across a wide audience.

By this point in the article, you might be asking yourself what this has to do with Versaterm and the Versadex products. The concept of state-of-the-art actually does relate to Versaterm but you have to think outside of the traditional norms that are often attributed to that phrase. In marketing literature, many vendors like to use "state-of-the-art" in describing their product, whether that be a Records Management System or a new smart phone.

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The argument to call the Apple iPad or even the iPhone state-of-the-art is very compelling; Apple has demonstrated that they can introduce a new and innovative product that, more often than not, seems to change the marketplace – what we refer to as a “*game changer*”. But is the Apple iPhone “state of the art” product different from RIM, Motorola and Google products? In the public safety system space, can a Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system, Records Management System (RMS) or Mobile Workstation (MWS), made up of lines of software code really be called state-of-the-art or more state-of-the-art than another vendor’s products?

The expression “state-of-the-art” has unfortunately become a marketing buzzword, abused like “market leader” and many other phrases that advertising types like to endlessly throw at us. Consequently, the state-of-the-art statement seldom has any real basis as it can’t be measured objectively and, more often than not, is simply not true or accurate.

If the iPhone is considered state-of-the-art, one might argue that it is because of the innovative nature of the human interface; but its true game changing aspect is not the touch screen but rather the endless supply of *apps* contained in the Apple “App Store”. Would the iPhone have been as successful without the *apps*? Would the iPod be successful without iTunes? Lately, it has become apparent that Apple has the knack of delivering a “solution” rather than simply a new piece of hardware – they create an experience. Their solution approach changes the game and can be considered the “new state-of-the-art” because of the innovative solution (iPhone + Apps) which is far more than just the product with the *newest ideas and up-to-date features*. Only time will tell if the iPad will be seen in the same light once the “herd mentality” and “me too” sales euphoria comes to an end.

So back to how state-of-the-art might relate to public safety systems and thoughts on how, in today’s technology-rich world, you might measure state-of-the-art. In other words, can someone credibly call a Records Management System state of the art? Given the Webster’s definition, almost every RMS on the market today would satisfy the requirements of state-of-the-art. But if we are to consider using our *new definition* when judging whether a RMS or CAD is state-of-the-art, I think we have to look beyond the “newness” of the lines of software code.

In today’s Internet world, we could use Apple as the measuring stick when comparing a product to a “state-of-the-art” solution. When comparing Apple to the realm of public safety off-the-shelf software, you have look at the entire solution, because the RMS is part of an enterprise-wide system. And as with the iPhone and the Apps, in the world of today’s public safety systems, the consumer (public safety agency) needs to be aware of the entire solution; and that has to be more than the technology itself. Just like using the iPhone simply as a telephone (and not taking advantage of the Apps) doesn’t make the iPhone a state-of-the-art solution, just having the RMS software doesn’t make it a state-of-the-art RMS in your agency. The hypothesis is then that the technology alone is not state of the art; but having the *solution* and using the solution to its fullest - that is what really makes it state of the art.

In other words, it is the “use of the newest ideas and up-to-date features” that makes it state-of-the-art, not the technology or the product itself. In today’s Internet world, this is the new definition of the state-of-the-art for software. When applying this *new definition* to public safety software, no vendor can claim that their system *alone* is state-of-the-art. It is its ability to *enable* the effective and efficient use of the RMS, where its actual use delivers measurable benefits to the agency, *its ability to be a “game changer”* – that is the difference between a state-of-the-art RMS and a software system.

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2



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How does an agency reach the 'state-of-the-art' level? This article argues that the software alone can't be considered state-of-the-art; so how does an agency maximize its use to reach this highest level? At Versaterm, we believe the technology can't succeed without the expertise and experience of the vendor nor can it succeed without the commitment and vision of the agency. These, among others, are important ingredients to make any enterprise class system (the new) state-of-the-art.

At Versaterm, we aren't just giving you the technology; our goal is to make you better by using the technology as a foundation. Our job isn't done when you implement the system; our job is to help you in evolving over the years so that your *solution* remains state-of-the-art. Our approach certainly differs from others but it is precisely that innovative approach to our partner-centric relationship, along with the perpetual re-engineering and evergreening, that provides our customers with the foundation and support to achieve and remain *state-of-the-art*.

We strive to provide and maintain a state-of-the-art public safety system that fits the **new** definition – a system that lets you change your game.



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