

**EDITORIAL**

In the last issue, I presented some criteria for selecting material for publication in AI Magazine. When I wrote that we look for interesting articles, I made an exception, namely that we will not accept articles that reviewed or promoted commercial products. I felt that promotional articles were likely to be biased, sales-oriented and/or lacking in technical content. Reviews (particularly unfavorable ones) were bound to be criticized by the vendors as biased, uninformed, cursory, incomplete, etc. I still believe that these would be the results, although I have no evidence to prove it. Such is my bias.

At our annual AAAI Publications Committee meeting in August, the Committee suggested that I back off from this policy a little bit. Technical product information is useful, and there ought to be a way to present it fairly and objectively. They recommended starting a new section of the Magazine, in which product announcements appeared. A product announcement would be either the description of a new AI product or a significant update to an existing product.

So let's give it a try. Starting with the Spring 1986 issue (Vol. 7, No. 1), we'll have a new section called Product Announcements, and I invite vendors to submit material for that section. In order to maximize technical content and to minimize sales hype, submissions to this section should follow a fixed format (which is likely to change over time as we get better at this). Here's the format:

1. Product name and name of vendor
2. New product or new release?
3. Product category: Expert System Shell, Natural Language Understanding Shell, Application Program, Software Tool, Workstation, Peripheral, Miscellaneous.
4. A brief (100 words maximum) description of the product, or, in the case of a new release, a brief description of the changes to the product since the last release. Items you might include here:
  - What differentiates this product from others in its class?
  - For software products, what are the hardware and operating system requirements? For example, what machines will it run on, what is the minimum amount of memory required to permit the product to run, and what is a desirable configuration?
5. Price for single copy. Are multiple copy and/or educational discounts available?
6. Name and phone number of person to contact.

Here's a farcical example of what I'm looking for:

**New Product: UR12**

**Vendor:** Cataclysmic Systems, Malibu Beach, Kansas

**Category:** Program Language Translator

**Description:**

UR12 converts Fortran programs into Common Lisp. Fortran IF statements are transformed into rule-based knowledge sources without user intervention. COMMON declarations create single or multiple blackboard architecture. Procedure calls can be translated into message passing formalism at user's option.

**System Requirements:**

Runs on all systems supporting Fortran and Common Lisp. Minimum memory requirement is 512K.

**Price:** \$99. No quantity or educational discounts.

**Contact:** Vanessa Virago, Product Manager  
(913) 555-4321.

Remember, this is an announcement, not an advertisement. The interested reader is expected to get more information by contacting the person or organization noted in the announcement. I realize that it's impossible to define the term "AI Product" with precision (*e.g.*, is a C compiler an AI product?) There is clearly a gray zone for which it's difficult to say, *a priori*, if the product announcement is appropriate for this magazine. We'll make editorial judgments on a case-by-case basis for a while, until we can establish some reasonably clear guidelines.

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The response to my plea for help in reviewing articles and books has been very gratifying. I intend to contact each volunteer individually, but please accept this note of thanks in the meantime. Publishing the list of books received turned out to be very helpful—those who volunteered to review books usually selected specific books from that list. We will continue this practice, in the following form. Every issue will contain a list of books received since the last issue. In addition, the first issue of each volume will contain a list of all books received the previous year.

—Bob Engelmore