# The Little (Blue) Boy Who Cried Wolf
*Observations by Alan Sadowsky*

Over the past few weeks, many TPF folks have heard or read about an online survey to help raise the profile of TPF. Between the postings on the Yahoo Groups TPF exchange, and the announcement on the Blackbeard.com website, there seems to be an admirable response to provide the International Technology Group (ITG) with the statistical data they're looking for as input to their report on TPF.

Prodded by a recent rash of TPF-bashing "technical" press, IBM has asked ITG to perform an analysis of TPF and its marketplace, hoping that the results will counter the negative press, and at the same time provide TPF with something it's never had before – tangible product exposure in the OS marketplace.

The following remarks were originally published on the Blackbeard.com website, and warrant repeating:

"The sad thing, of course, is that we have heard this posturing and pandering to a limited audience before, and more than once. In the past IBM have extolled the virtues of TPF to those of us attending the TPFUG but apparently seem unable to convincingly portray TPF as a 'strategic enterprise solution' to anyone that had not already discovered it on their own. This is marketing and salesmanship well below the level that made IBM what it is today. Let's face it; if you can't sell the fastest transaction processing system with the lowest cost-per-transaction over five years to an ever growing market for transaction processing you might as well spend the whole day on the golf course instead of just part of it. The truth, in the past, has been that IBM has not really tried very hard to market TPF and anyone that thinks differently hasn't been paying attention."

Truer words have never been spoken! You see, the real issue here is not damage control. It's much more serious than that, and goes well beyond the scope of a few slanted articles in the trade journals. Let me first say however, that I whole-heartedly applaud the ITG research, and I encourage ITG and anyone else to continue to do whatever they can to keep the technology alive. Any endeavor to establish and publicize the overwhelming accomplishments and advantages of TPF commands our unwavering support.

I have been personally involved in ACP and TPF since 1976. I have always been a proponent of the product, and proudly count myself as one of the "senior" champions of the best operating system ever developed. In fact, one of the main reasons I started publishing ACP/TPF Today in 1990 was to provide the industry with a voice and a vehicle to share information and experiences, not only between ourselves but with the rest of the "outside" technical and business communities. I've approached IBM on dozens of occasions, offering to work either with them, or independently (at my expense) to market TPF and to grow the customer base. Every effort was ignored.

In the 12 years I've been publishing the journal, I've written no less than 21 editorials about IBM's pathetic efforts to market TPF to a larger audience than its existing

customers. In almost every case, I've received positive, supportive feedback from the user community, and "unofficial" encouragement and even collaboration from people (who shall remain nameless) in the Development Lab itself. At the same time, the "official" response from IBM has always been the same. In some cases I've been ignored. In some cases I've been chastised. In some cases I've been shunned. In one case I was downright threatened.

Suffice to say, my popularity within IBM has diminished proportionally with my efforts to light a fire under them. I'm not happy with getting the cold shoulder from people I once considered friends, and there is no pleasure derived being labeled "the guy who's causing all the trouble." If I ultimately make some small contribution towards the acquisition of a new customer, or live to see the day when TPF is actually advertised in the Wall Street Journal, or Newsweek magazine, then it's a small price to pay in the name of progress.

The threat of losing any more TPF customers to the "web-farmers" hyping quicker time to market, streamlined maintenance, and leading-edge versus legacy technology seems to have struck a nerve. However, while I welcome and respect the work being done by ITG, I can't ignore the fact that IBM still refuses to confront their issues themselves.

If TPF is disparaged in Computerworld one week, why isn't IBM's response in the very next issue? If Compaq challenges TPF's capabilities, why isn't that challenge immediately met with a resounding and definitive rebuttal from the product managers in Connecticut and New York? If ITG needs specific customer configuration and availability information as input for its white paper, why doesn't IBM have this information at its own fingertips?

Twice a year at the TPF User Group Conference, we hear the same mantra from the IBM speaker during the opening session. Strategic initiatives (blah, blah, blah); new development (blah, blah, blah); potential new markets (blah, blah, blah); you have our commitment and our support, etc. So where are the newspaper ads? Where are the TV commercials and the glossy product mailings? Where are the affirmative articles in the trade journals? Most importantly; where are the new customers?

To add even more fuel to the fire, is the mysterious absence of the ITG report. Originally scheduled for publication by the end of May, that date was pushed back by ITG to the end of June. Yet here we are into the second half of July, and not only do we not have the ITG report, but my emails to ITG asking for a publication date have gone unanswered.

Certainly, the delay could be within ITG, but at the very least one would expect some feedback, if not from ITG then from IBM about where the report is. I won't speculate about what's going on, but it does make you wonder whether IBM is honestly interested in changing the way they do business.

I suspect that I'll find myself back at the top of IBM's hit list once I move this editorial to the web, but that's par for the course when anyone questions the truth in statements and

commitments made by any company. As a journalist I believe these issues warrant investigation, but it should be understood that while my interests may be viewed as being personal, they are also the interests of the entire TPF community.

As technicians and customers, these issues have a direct bearing on the financial health of our business. By responding to these concerns, IBM can demonstrate once and for all that there is real substance to their words, rather than rhetoric and window dressing.