

Taligent: What Went Wrong?



Jack D. Grimes

August, 2003, 10 years later....

6 minute video



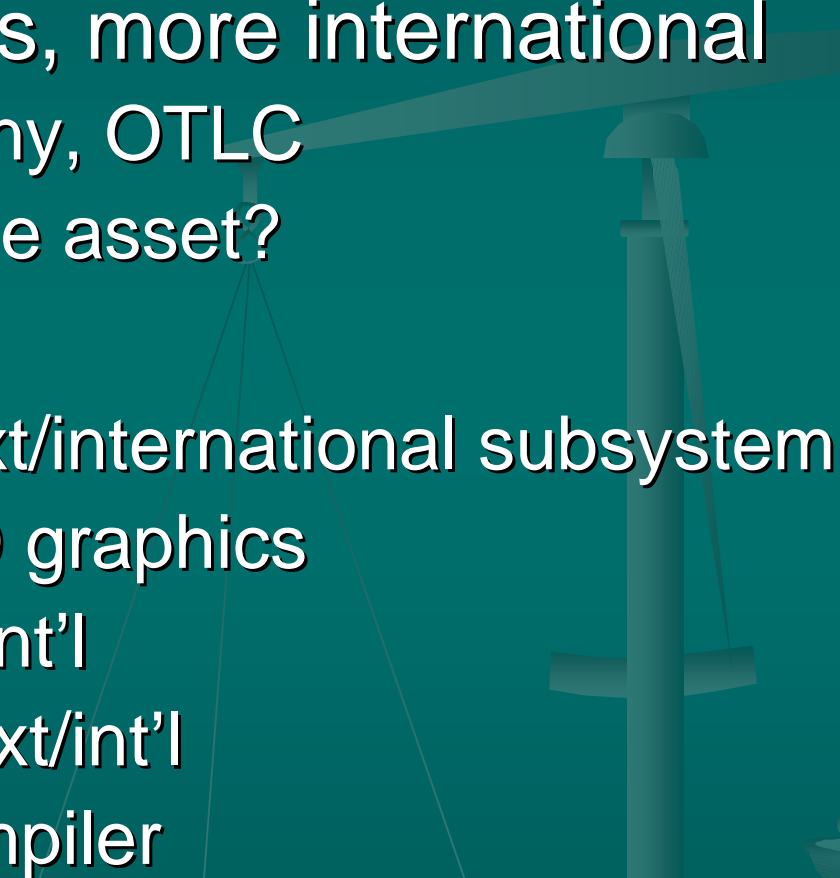
What is a “Taligent?”

- Similar to Java, cross-platform, write once run anywhere,
- 1700 classes, fully OO, but C++, 2 million LOC
- Similar to OS X, i.e., Mach OS, "classic" environment + new OO app environment running on same kernel;
- Similar to BeOS, interactive, multimedia, 3D, sound, animation

Well, we did *some* things right

- Demo of the text & i18n system is part of 3-4 hours of video on Taligent Technology
- Video created in 1993 by jdg, voice/demo by Tom Chavez, applications dude
- This capability is part of the Sun JDK, v1.1 and later (years ago)
- Saw a similar demo ~2 years ago at a Sun Headquarters Java Briefing

And ...

- 140+ US patents, more international
 - Holding company, OTLC
 - How to value the asset?
 - Licenses
 - Sun JDK for text/international subsystem
 - Sun JDK for 2D graphics
 - Oracle for text/int'l
 - Netscape for text/int'l
 - HP for C++ compiler
- 

What went wrong?

- In 1992, a “deal” was struck between John Sculley and Jim Cannavino, 50/50 JV Apple/IBM
- 170+ people when the doors opened
- 400+ high water mark (including contractors)
- Joe G appointed CEO of Taligent, 30yr IBM veteran, OS/2 champion
- Get even with Bill G for OS/2
- C++, needed for system development but wrong for target app developers
- Sum of everyone’s requirements = result was too big, slow, complex

Too many cooks



- Apple - didn't care that much
 - lost interest after Sculley left + Mac antibodies + wanted a client, media-rich OS
- IBM - strong interest, own agenda
 - really wanted technology farm for own products + expected to control the outcome while getting others to share costs + not committed to Apple partnership once Cannavino left + wanted a enterprise, client/server OS
- HP - seriously interested in technology
 - worried about missing the OO boat + Sun and HP due diligence for about a year, HP bought in, Sun didn't => HP lost interest
- Taligent - make a standalone business and unseat Microsoft with a new OS

The “Big Switch”

- Had a functioning stand-alone OS, got redirected to Mach, then redirected to drop OS altogether (claiming “no one wants a new OS,” even though subsequently there was NT, OS X, Linux, Java, etc.)
- Apple and IBM engineers started, and failed at, their own efforts like Open Doc to do the “same” thing (frameworks) for their existing OS’s

Taligent misc

- Too many smart CS people, not product savvy
- Run like a big company, not a start-up
- Performance bonuses, but no stock options
- Business model problem (from too many cooks)
- Spent \$250 Million in 4 years of JV, too much money
 - \$7-8 Million for furnishing of main building on De Anza
- Patent portfolio could stop existing companies
- Joe G bails, Dick Guarino comes in with new direction and new biz model, but he dies, and so does Taligent.
- Taligent acquired by IBM, wholly owned subsidiary, then absorbed, logo gone. :-)