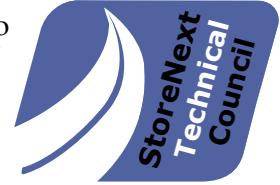


Update Bulletin

StoreNext Technical Council Notes, November 2004

November 16, 2004

The StoreNext Technical Council met in StoreNext's new Dallas/Plano Headquarters on November 3rd and 4th to discuss a broad agenda of technical issues and ideas with the charter to optimize the support, methods and communications between StoreNext and dealer technical resources. The Technical Council is made up of technical support and service representatives from the dealerships serving on the StoreNext Business Council, and, like the Business Council, the Technical Council is expected to formally meet twice a year.



StoreNext would like to thank David Christie (BMC), Mick Dalry (In-Store), Larry Haines (DSI), Bill Ryan (Dumac), Mike Willard (CRS Lubbock), Robert Williams (RMS) and Paul Willoughby (CRS Alabama) for their efforts on behalf of the Technical Council, and their taking this time out of the busiest install/upgrade seasons of the year.

Attending from StoreNext were Yair Govrin (Retailix StoreNext ISS45 Project Manager); Mike Lewis (Retailix Support); Randy Mans (StoreNext Field Systems Engineering); Yair Reznik (Retailix StoreNext ISS45 Project Manager); Cheryl Schroder (StoreNext Director of Customer Satisfaction); Tony van Seventer (StoreNext Marketing and Products) and Avi Yehezkel, Chief Retailix/StoreNext Technical Liaison.

The following topics were discussed – please feel free to contact any Technical Council StoreNext and Dealer members, who will be happy to discuss these topics in further detail.

Technical Support methods, requirements and issues:

- The dealers reviewed the recent changes in StoreNext support, with the general consensus that the addition of Retailix resources had significantly improved V8 support in particular.
- Dealers asked StoreNext to focus on call-avoidance methods, such as the implementation of an on-line knowledge base or a call lookup database. An ISS45 knowledge base had been distributed on CD-ROM, but several of the dealers were unaware of this tool and asked that new copies be redistributed – StoreNext agreed and provided these with the 7091 CD.
- Weakness in support for StoreNext's A/R add-on was described and StoreNext committed changes, tracking and improvements in this support.
- Dealers expressed frustration at "Works-As-Designed" (WAD) responses to issues they regard as faults, and that Enhancement Requests are required to address these. StoreNext agreed with the dealers to revise how these are considered:
 - An issue will be considered as a "fault" any time there is code in the system that does not do what it was designed to do.
 - "Works-As-Designed" will *not* mean that StoreNext will not address the issue. Further, this does not mean that StoreNext believes the design was correct, nor will it mean that StoreNext will charge the dealer to add to or redesign the software. So

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- long as StoreNext takes this attitude, dealers agreed that attempting to push software “missings” or “shortfalls” up as faults will be counterproductive.
- Dealers also (reluctantly) agreed that if new code is needed (to address the need for a new or redesigned feature or faulty design in a WAD) then properly defining what is needed in an ER was a necessary evil to ensure that StoreNext delivers what the dealers really need. StoreNext pledged to provide assistance in the ER process via StoreNext’s expanded Field Systems Engineers.
 - Enhancement Requests were discussed, and StoreNext described the streamlined process in order to get responses to ERs to the dealers faster:
 - ERs have been delayed in the past by excessive back-and-forth between development and dealers to understand the assumptions, details and “domino-effect” questions regarding the enhancements requested. Dealers and StoreNext both agreed that dealers cannot be expected to be engineering documentation experts, nor necessarily understand the complete impact across a system of a change that might be requested. StoreNext will therefore put StoreNext Systems Engineers in dealers’ service to ensure that the ERs contemplate the necessary information up-front and eliminate most of the wasted cycle time.
 - One problem delaying responses to ERs has been that StoreNext and Retalix at one time attempted to do a full engineering review of the request prior to providing a quotation. StoreNext now provides a much quicker “ballpark” response to an ER (if funding will be required) so that dealers can quickly get back with the customer with a +/- 30% estimate of the cost required. StoreNext will attempt to provide a ballpark estimate on an ER within 5-10 business days from receipt of the completed ER.
 - If a dealer and customer decide to go ahead, then a full quote with a firm/fixed cost, a release and a schedule will be provided. The dealer must approve this quote against an engineering document.
 - StoreNext agreed to consider posting ERs on the StoreNext site for general information for the dealer.
 - Third party hardware and their validation and certification were discussed. Dealers would prefer that StoreNext validate all industry hardware, but understood the physical limitations of certification bandwidth.
 - StoreNext agreed to continue to certify StoreNext software on relevant StoreNext-supplied hardware, and agreed also to continue the third-party certification program, whereby specific user hardware can be provided to StoreNext for one-time certification with the software.
 - Dealers expressed unhappiness at the way StoreNext has failed to “close the loop” on software issues, by closing incidents or faults without discussion with the dealer. StoreNext agreed that this area needed additional work and agreed that incidents will only be closed in the future after three attempts at resolution with the dealer and email notification to the StoreNext Dealer Manager. Dealers agreed that the current policy – a support call produces an “incident” which can either be resolved with information, a fault, or an Enhancement Request” – is reasonable if followed.
 - Dealers also brought up their concern that they feel that requests for files, logs and additional information has been used to push the ball unnecessarily back in their court. StoreNext and the dealers agreed that this information is often required to resolve an issue, and pledged to monitor dealer complaints where such requests appear superfluous. StoreNext and the dealers agreed that if such information is needed, StoreNext’s policy of three requests at one-week intervals prior to closing the incident (due to dealer non-response) is fair and reasonable.

- Dealers expressed frustration at some software faults that are long-standing. StoreNext described StoreNext's new policy ("Fix 'em All") in which all identified software faults will be assigned to a future release upon positive identification, as well as the clearing of current known faults in the next two major releases. StoreNext fault classifications were discussed, and the general prioritization of fault handling.
- Dealers expressed approval that StoreNext now provides the "Open RoadMap" of software release plans, and stated that this was valuable for both credibility and planning for the customers.
- Dealers further expressed the need for StoreNext to implement a search engine on the Web site. StoreNext explained that this engine had been purchased and would be implemented as soon as possible.

Installation and upgrade methods and requirements

- Dealers requested that software upgrades be made "inclusive" – that is, that a software upgrade from, say, level "A" to level "D" would not require the intermediate steps of upgrading first from "A" to "B", "B" to "C" and then finally from "C" to "D". At this point, ISS45 POS software is "inclusive" but not the controller/office software. StoreNext explained the reluctance to provide inclusive releases on the ISS45 office software has been due to the download file size from the Web. All dealers informed StoreNext that general broadband availability made file size not a serious issue, and they would prefer inclusive office releases regardless. StoreNext agreed that starting with the 7.10 and 8.10 releases that office releases would be made inclusive as requested.
- Dealers requested more input on "big" features that were being added to the software, and StoreNext agreed to implement more dealer participation wherever possible.
- Dealers asked whether V7 was "winding down" in favor of V8 due to such features as Fuel and ECC being added to V8 but not V7. StoreNext reconfirmed that there were no plans to discontinue V7 development and support (see large enhancement list for 7091 for example) and explained that StoreNext needed to maximize business benefit of development resources – developing all V8 features is not possible in V7 without limiting general software feature/function and quality, especially where a significant architecture (for example use of SQL to build the upcoming SRR/CWAR feature, or the Fuel or ECC architectures) made it impossible to move the software from V8 to V7. StoreNext pledged to continue to strengthen V7 wherever practical – especially on the POS side – by moving V8 features over.
- StoreNext agreed to investigate the use of USB software keys. Dealers agreed that the use of software keys in general was a "necessary evil" and that the email upgrade method had eliminated most of the issues with software keys.
- A fault regarding file truncation during upgrades was mentioned and an action taken by Cheryl Schroder at StoreNext to resolve as quickly as possible.
- Upgrading the POSMENU can be an issue. An action was taken by Randy Mans at StoreNext to work with Mike Willard (CRS Lubbock) to understand the issue and find the best resolution possible.

Software Releases, Frequency and Type

- Dealers expressed the general need to "flat-line" their installed base, that is, get their installed base to a consistent release for as long as possible. Success in this area requires quality software releases from StoreNext with reasonable spacings – releases that are too frequent cannot be distributed effectively. General agreement was reached that StoreNext will reduce the frequency of maintenance releases to about half the current rate – dealers felt that the reduction in "responsiveness" would be more than compensated for by the extra testing and quality.

- Dealers further agreed that two significant releases (on CD-ROM) per year is about right. In general, most of the features and fixes should go into these releases, while customer-funded enhancements (where practical) and/or those urgently required to drive business, plus urgent fixes would be put into maintenance releases.
- Dealers further agreed that StoreNext's Code Distribution would be extremely valuable – once proven – since it will make flat-lining a dealer's installed base a practical reality. In addition, selling software maintenance will be much easier for the dealers if they can point to upgrade activity and adding features (although it was still clear that many dealers would prefer to leave a working/no-complaint system alone). Dealers agreed that testing code distribution in their labs, then confirming its operation in a nearby store would lead to the required confidence that this tool can deliver on its promise.
- Dealers further described their feeling that fixing software faults, while well-meaning, has led to de-stabilizing software, and requested that fault-fixing be wherever possible limited to releases that would undergo a full regression. StoreNext agreed that in the past, software maintenance releases had introduced problems – although in the last V8 and V7 releases this issue had been dramatically reduced – and that where possible faults would be scheduled into one of the two annual major releases (per version).
- Dealers agreed that StoreNext's policy of supporting the current and previous feature release was fair and reasonable – dealers have to do the same with their own customers. However, dealers made it clear that this was practical only if StoreNext could provide good upgrade methods for earlier releases and that the ISS45 Code Distribution system would be critical to making this a reality: dealers do not currently cannot spare the resources available to update all existing stores to new software with current methods
- Dealers felt that a weekly technical recap would be useful – StoreNext agreed to immediately implement a "Technical" section of the StoreNext Wednesday Letter ("This Week at StoreNext") for this purpose.

Software Tools and Diagnostics

- Dealers received a live demonstration of Code Distribution and how it could be set up and executed via a simple process from the Web. Code Distribution operates properly in current V8 and V7 releases, and all further releases will be provided in "inclusive" Code Distribution packages.
- StoreNext agreed with the dealers that a V7→V8 migration tool was sorely needed and committed to deliver one for the 8.10 release. The parameters file conversion will be the most difficult aspect here, since V8 has a reported 2,500 parameters that do not exactly map to V7 parameters, and conflicts can arise. Intelligence may be required, so StoreNext cautioned against unrealistic expectations in automating this part of the process entirely.
- Dealers expressed the need for a Screen-Saver management tool. Paul Willoughby of CRS Alabama agreed to take an action item to work with StoreNext Systems Engineers to define the enhancement requirements for this feature.
- Dealers said that the MENUSYS.MAC creation was very difficult to learn and the limited documentation is poor. Most said dealers had now learned to deal with it anyway, however. StoreNext agreed to address this with a better tool and documentation in the future.
- The question of I.P. register limitations was raised – StoreNext took an action to provide an explanation of what can be done.

Documentation Issues

- Questions regarding the understanding of lane maintenance were raised. Dealers want to be able to understand what happened (or not), but there is no documentation on how to

read and interpret the lane maintenance logs. Avi Yehezkel took an action to provide this documentation.

- Documentation detailing batch file maintenance, general batches and the PLU file layouts are out of date. StoreNext took an action to provide this documentation.
- Operation of General Batches needs additional documentation, and StoreNext agreed to provide.
- The V8 installation manual is out of date. StoreNext took an action to provide this documentation.
- The documentation that details the files that are affected by maintenance are critical. StoreNext agreed to continue to provide this documentation.
- Dealers requested a V8 file layout reference that is similar to the old V7 "Files Reference Manual". StoreNext agreed to try to provide this information.

Software Problem Areas

- Dealers described the area of greatest difficulty was End-Of-Day. Dealers agreed that the fixes provided for EOD-type issues in the last few months had generally addressed the majority of these problems however. Dealers agreed to track these issues and report at the next meeting if stores with current software are confirmed as operating properly.
- Lack of a ScanMaster-style SRR was mentioned as ISS45's most significant "missing". StoreNext described the new SRR ("CWAR") report being developed for release in 8.10, and how it is taking the SRR concept to additional power by using the software architecture in V8.

StoreNext looks forward to the next Technical Council meeting in the spring. StoreNext will naturally continue to work with the group and other dealers as necessary to complete the actions resulting from this meeting and continue to build on the recent progress in the quality of software and support.

To Your Success,

Tony

Antony van Bever