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IBM changes



IBM faces a tough agenda for change over the next six months. It is meeting unprecedented levels of competition in telecommunications and big processors while branching out into new marketing ventures at the low end. Ernie Cochran (above) manages the direct marketing centre with responsibility for bulk sales. *Computing's* 10 page Special Report on IBM and the market-place it creates starts on Page 18, editorial comment Page 13

Texas beats Vic in stores race

By Shirley Fawcett

Texas Instruments is set to score a lead over Commodore by signing up three High Street chains to sell its TI 99/4 personal computer.

Boots, Argos and Rumbelows are to test market the Texas machine while Commodore, hit by production problems, is to concentrate on specialist computer shops for its Vic 20 until next year.

In the wake of W H Smith's decision to sell the Sinclair ZX81 in over 100 of its stores, Boots has decided to try out the 99/4 in six city-centre shops throughout the country from the end of this month.

Rumbelows will be trying out the same machine in 17 Hertfordshire shops starting this week. Argos is selling the machine at two warehouses, one city-centre and one suburban.

Both Boots and Rumbelows originally planned to have the 99/4 and the Vic 20 on the shelves at the same time, but now it looks as though Commodore will be delayed until next year.

John Baxter, Commodore's marketing manager, told *Computing* that the production line in West Germany will at first not be able to handle the predicted demand from com-



Commodore's marketing manager John Baxter has a problem with a lack of software for the Vic 20

puter stores as well as High Street outlets.

The micro is already running behind its original launch date of the end of August, and is now due to appear at the end of this month.

Another problem is the lack of software for the Vic 20. 'For retail sales, we will need at least 20 or 30 packages,' said Baxter, 'which we certainly shall not have available until October or November.'

The Texas machine is being relaunched on the UK market. It first appeared 18 months ago, but needed a US standard tv set. Now it can be connected to any UK set, and the price has been halved to £299.

The Vic 20, when it appears, will be sold for under £200 giving it a considerable price advantage over the Texas machine. And Commodore is aware of the need to get it into the High Street. Boots plans to

stock the machine early next year.

'But going retail is quite a risk,' said Baxter. 'You have to test the market. It is not like bringing out a new toothbrush.'

Mike Lunch, Texas' home computer marketing manager, said that Texas believes home computing will only succeed via High Street distributors.

• More on W H Smith's plans Page 8, News analysis Page 12.

SE Labs to operate in oem market

By Peter White

SE Labs is on the verge of becoming a major disk and tape supplier to the micro and minicomputer market.

The Thorn-EMI subsidiary has long been operating on the fringe of the computer industry with ranges of modems and tape drives, but is now expected to push into the oem business proper.

The first products out of the stable are to be a range of Japanese 8 inch Winchester disk drives and a set of tape drives for disk back-up. Both lines are to be announced in two weeks.

Duke Ebenezer, digital development manager at SE Labs, confirmed the existence of the new products, but could not give details of the price structure of either.

But he said: 'These products will give the best price performance of any disk and tape products on the market.'

SE Labs is rumoured to have put together a team of peripherals experts from traditional suppliers such as Control Data.

Some of the largest disk drive suppliers in the world have grown out of the tape drive supply market.

The Japanese machines, though, are likely to be supplied by Fujitsu which supplies the company with some of its modem technology.

If SE Labs takes the Fujitsu range of disk drives it would offer a range between 10 megabytes and 80 megabytes.

SE Labs is believed to have landed several European deals with this equipment.

Centronics' loss

Centronics, the US-based printer manufacturer, put a brave face on \$24.5 million losses and a cut turnover which were announced this week for the 12 months ending June 28. It is unlikely to earn any profits for the next 12 months as well. Page 5

Air safety

The US air traffic controllers' strike has drawn attention to defects in the computer systems used to maintain air traffic safety. Page 33

Ada debate

The Ada debate continued to rage this week as experts involved in the development of the new language hit back at the criticism that it is potentially unsafe. Martin Thomas of the South West Universities Regional Computer Centre and the professor of York University department of computer science defend Ada Page 9

ICL videotex

ICL has clinched a prestigious order for what it believes is the first videotex gateway service in Europe. ICL Bulletin software will be run on an ME29 by a Dutch publishing house in a contract worth around £13,000. Page 4

Video disks to get major investment

By Caroline Shaw

The dp industry is about to undertake a massive investment in optical video disk memory systems. By 1990 over a third of all new electromechanical memory will use the new technology.

According to a new survey on memories by Mackintosh Consultants, 'the low cost achieved in the manufacture of video disks will spur their use by the dp industry, despite performance limitations'.

Optical systems are already capable of 10 times higher packing density than magnetic disks, says the group.

In terms of storage capacity shipped, Mackintosh predicts that optical storage will account for 38% of worldwide shipments of electromechanical memory in 1990 but only 25% in terms of value.

'During the next decade increasing use will be made of the optical video disk which will be applied to the data storage problems associated with archival databases, electronic document storage and online information systems as well as distribution of pre-recorded program material,' it says.

The report, *Memories, Worldwide Products, Applications and Market Opportunities 1980-1985*, is in five volumes from Mackintosh Consultants and costs \$20,000. A one-volume executive summary costs \$5,000.

• Full details, Page 6.

IAL poised for aviation deal

IAL, the British Airways computer and communications subsidiary, is expected to announce today that it has beaten off competition to win a prestigious Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) order.

The order is for the first phase of the re-equipping of the London Air Traffic Control Centre in West Drayton with a computerised radio switch.

The job was put out to international tender last year and the CAA has a government guideline to take the offer giving best value for money.

When the CAA applied the same criteria to a radar contract last year and awarded the deal to a subsidiary of the Dutch group Philips, UK radar

manufacturers objected on the grounds that part of the criteria for CAA business should be the UK content of the bid.

IAL's bid for the Traffic Control Centre radio switch was the UK-designed and built Stratus, a microprocessor-based system which is assembled in IAL's plant at Southall, London.

International competition came from Amecom, a subsidiary of the Litton US conglomerate.

Neither IAL nor the CAA would confirm that IAL had the order earlier this week and Amecom officers in charge of international marketing were not available for comment.

IAL and CAA are making a

joint announcement today but neither would confirm or deny that it involved the Air Traffic Centre order.

The expected announcement today covers only one part of a large re-equipping of the West Drayton centre. This second phase, which has not yet been put out to tender, includes boosting the capacity of the West Drayton centre so that it becomes the single control point for all civilian aircraft in UK airspace.

Although the re-equipment programme is being taken in two parts, the winner of the first phase is expected to be well placed for a major proportion of the work to be carried out in phase two.