

**News from**

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**R-range**

P R E S S   C U T T I N G S

June 1980

# THE OFFICE OF THE EIGHTIES

By M. J. Aldrich

Director, Redifon Computers (Ireland) Ltd.

**THE** cost of running an office is growing at the rate of 14–18% per annum. Office productivity is rising at the rate of 2–3% per annum. Some 50% of the total workforce now works in an office. Unless the growth in office productivity can be brought into line with the growth in office costs, the future for many organisations is bleak.

Ten years ago, the advent of the mini-computer triggered the start of a revolution that has since made household names out of companies who were little known in 1970. Much the same can be expected with the office revolution. By 1990, the computer industry will have changed dramatically.

The convergence of multiple and previously discreet technologies into integrated systems will force users and potential users into a new learning cycle where, initially, there will be few experts. Common-sense and pragmatism will be the order of the day. A good place to start is at the beginning.

What is an office? We probably each have a perception of an office – our office, his office, their office, a branch office, a stores office, a production control office, a purchasing office, a sales office – ad infinitum. We need to define “an office” before we can automate it. There are, currently, no standard definitions so let us start by breaking new ground.

An office is an organisation of people. It is not an organisation of electronics. The key word is ‘people’ not ‘organisation’. The function of an office is to provide a service of communication and recording and to control assets. It is a service and control function. The objective of an office is to support teamwork by creating shared understandings both within an organisation and, where appropriate, between an organisation and the outside world so that assets may be better utilised.

Man is a social being – a compulsive communicator. Anyone who has examined formal information flows within an organisation will appreciate how inefficient they are compared with the informal information networks that co-exist and support the formal flows. In managing a business, the informal network is of the greatest interest because it shows the pulse of the organisation – its confidence, its morale and its commitment. The business is the people.

The biggest problem in business today is

getting the people to work as a highly co-ordinated team – innovative but interdependent, forceful but understanding, committed and yet caring. It can only be achieved through better communications.

The word “communication” is derived from the Latin verb ‘communicare’ which means ‘to make common’. Making a piece of paper ‘common’ is very expensive. Formatting and presenting a message to achieve a desired response is extremely difficult. We have a ‘communications industry’ because the task is complex.

In an office, people use a number of different types of communications media – data, text, voice, image and graphics – together with their natural attributes: eyes and body movements. The media can be automated and they can be integrated. Whether or not they can be used to create shared understandings depends primarily on the attitude of people to automation.

The installation of sophisticated electronic equipment in an environment and with a workforce unfamiliar with the concepts and techniques is bound to cause concern. The considerations are paramount. Firstly the equipment should be ‘non-threatening’ in the behavioural sense. Secondly the technology must be hidden and only a simple human interface should be visible.

The average VDU work-station for word processing or computer terminal usage is definitely not a ‘non-threatening’ device. On the other hand, a domestic colour television and a hand-print terminal are ‘non-threatening’ devices. A domestic TV is designed for operation by a four year-old. A hand-print terminal can be used by anyone who can write.

A domestic TV is a social device, designed for viewing by more than one person from a distance of 3–5 ft. or more. A VDU is an anti-social device designed for viewing by one person from 24”–28” eyeball distance from the screen.

A domestic TV with a calculator-style keyboard can do everything that a VDU

does but instead of being just in monochrome it has full colour capability. The communication possibilities with colour are enormous. Why do we have colour TVs at home?

With colour TVs and hand-print terminals for general purpose communication, backed-up by high-speed VDUs for high volume dedicated usage we have the basis for a recording and communication system for the office. Assume that the system can be plugged into any other information, computer or communication system that may already exist and that it can be easily used for data processing, text processing, distributed processing, electronic mail, data communications and data entry. Such a product already exists and it is currently being installed.

In our objective definition, we highlighted teamwork support through creating shared understandings both within the organisation and between the organisation and the outside world. Because the TVs and hand-print terminals can be used with minimal training by anyone, the organisation can plug its customers, clients, agents, suppliers and distributors directly into its internal communications systems, totally transforming the relationship between the organisation and the outside world.

The automation of voice handling is the great unknown in office automation. Voice input and response are relatively inexpensive and have a role to play. Voice store and forward is very expensive and much more demanding of behavioural change than any of the other technologies. At the end of the day, voice communication will probably be acknowledged to be less effective than visual communication, but visual communication must include pictures.

The “Office of the Eighties” will see many iterations over the decade. The new technologies are exciting, challenging and rewarding for those that implement them. Both suppliers and users have much to learn. Unless that learning begins quickly, organisations will be swamped with rising office overhead costs and will become increasingly difficult to manage because of deficiencies in communicating with the people it employs and the world in which it operates.

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Extract from SCAN  
— SPRING 1980.



M.J. Aldrich

P.R. Keyes has relinquished the managing directorship of Redifon Computers Limited in order to devote more time to his duties as managing director of Redifon CMC Europe (Redifon CMC Europe is now the trading name of the recently acquired "CMC Europe" group of companies). Mr Keyes remains on the board of Redifon Computers.

**M.J. Aldrich**, formerly marketing director of Redifon Computers, has been appointed managing director in succession to Mr Keyes.

Mr Aldrich joined the company in 1977 having spent his entire career in the computer industry in various senior marketing appointments.

**D.C. Strath**, financial controller of Redifon Computers, has been appointed financial controller of Redifon CMC Europe in addition to his present duties.

**Jim Kennear** has been appointed by RCL as field systems support manager for Poland/USSR/Hungary.

Mr Kennear joined the company in 1977 as a systems analyst for the Northern branch. In 1978 he became a senior systems analyst and in early 1979 he was promoted to systems support manager for the then newly formed North-West branch.

**Keith Girt** has now joined RCL as a territory manager for the Southern branch. Previously Mr Girt was with Burroughs Machines.

**Roy Luckett** has been appointed senior territory manager by RCL for their British Rail Branch. Mr Luckett joined the company in 1978 as territory manager for the Southern branch.

**Bill Hack** has been appointed by RCL as area sales manager for central accounts South-East. Mr Hack joined the company in 1974 as a territory manager, became a senior territory manager in 1977, was promoted to branch manager for the South-West in late 1977, and was appointed special accounts manager for Southern region in 1978.

Additionally, **Philip Warner** has been appointed RCL's area sales manager, South-East branch. Mr Warner joined the company in 1978 as South-East's territory manager.

**Carol Dickie** has joined RCL, as a systems analyst for the Scottish branch. Previously Carol was with the Scottish New Towns Computer Service.

**Linda Hall** has been appointed by RCL as a junior systems analyst for the Midlands branch. She joined the company in 1975 as an instructor for the same branch.



Linda Hall

**FRANCIS HARDIE** has been appointed by Redifon Computers Ltd as branch manager for the Midlands branch. He joined the company in 1978 as an area sales manager for the Southern branch.

Previously he was with Burroughs Machines Ltd, from 1975 to 1978, where his final position was zone sales manager, and Rolatruic from 1972 to 1975 as a sales executive.

**Michael Draper** has joined Redifon as an area sales manager for central accounts South of England branch.

Previously he was with Four Phase Systems from 1976 to 1980 as a regional sales manager and Honeywell Ltd as a branch manager from 1973 to 1976. From 1963 to 1973 he was employed by NCR Ltd as a salesman.

Extract from  
Wembley Observer, Midd

6 JUN 1980

## Kingsbury man joins computer company

Extract from  
Computing, London

12 JUN 1980

Redifon Computers has appointed **Reg Edward** as a senior territory manager for the financial branch. Edward was previously with Uni-Expert where he began as a



**Reg Edward** sales executive in 1974 rising eventually to export sales manager, the position he held until his new appointment. Edward has a BSc Honours in Physics from Exeter University.



Reg Edward

**MR REG Edward** of Salmon Street, Kingsbury, has joined Redifon Computers Limited, in Crawley, Sussex, as a senior territory manager for the firm's financial branch.

A physics graduate of Exeter University, Mr Edward had previously been employed by Uni-Expert Ltd for six years as a sales executive.