TV paves the way for Information Brokerage

Impact on trading

After threatening the all-singing, all-dancing computer system for years, the computer industry has finally done it for real. An integrated office system which marries the intelligent colour TV set with the minicomputer — and which processes handwritten input — is the latest offering from Redifon Computers. Here we examine the system and just why Redifon expects a whole new industry to emerge — Information Brokerage.

Redifon calls this implementation 'Viewdata Plus' and it enables the system to receive output from Ceefax, Oracle or Prestel as well as providing real-time transaction processing, file updating and computing, multi-level access security and file management.

Another interesting feature of the R1800 system is that it includes the 'Writaway' terminal for the transmission and processing of hand-printed information in real time.

First model in the series is the R1800/50 which can support up to 64 Viewdata terminals, up to 32 alphanumeric VDU screens and up to 32 Writaway hand-printing terminals. Storage is up to 600 megabytes with 4 tape drives, two floppy disc drives and up to 33 printers.

This model is based on the Redifon-designed micro-coded processor, the R5000, which drives terminals, intelligent television sets, peripherals and communications. The R5000 is a 16-bit processor with a cycle time of 400 nanoseconds with up to half a megabyte of main memory and up to 8 megabytes of virtual memory. This processor is three times faster than the firm's previous processor design — the R3000A.

The Viewdata terminals are 20-inch or 26-inch intelligent colour televisions that are switchable between the Post Office Prestel system and the R1800. Full colour, graphics and various keyboards are available. The Viewdata Plus protocol enables other viewdata services to be received as well as all broadcast television, and up to 64 concurrent Viewdata job executions are permitted.

The Writaway hand-print terminals are designed for use in offices or factories and are microprocessor controlled, enabling 32 characters of hand printing to be written per line on a document and simultaneously automatically capture and processed by the R1800/50.

Quite apart from the technical capabilities of the new system — modestly dubbed 'The Office Revolution' by its British designers — Redifon forecasts that its R1800 will have a major impact on working methods, and even
The importance of information...
Entertainment and promotional games will also be common. While the customer is playing games on your system, he can be learning about your products and services. A new subculture will develop of incentives to make the customer hook into one system rather than another. Perhaps we will see the intelligent TV equivalent of the cross-word or chess-game.

"The opportunities to succeed in the use of these new systems," says Redifon, "are limited only by the imagination of the people using them. The risks are very small, the rewards are potentially enormous."

Timing is vital

"Timing is of vital importance. Redifon is the first supplier with this type of system. Manufacturing capacity over the next 12 months is substantial but finite. Other manufacturers must follow but could take up to 18 months to catch up with Redifon's current position. Above all, Redifon has a close involvement with the development of the television through its associate manufacturing company Rediffusion Consumer Electronics. The development of the television is key to the development of information handling systems."

The number of computer companies in the world who make Viewdata televisions is extremely small.

During 1981 the price of the Viewdata sets will start to fall as production moves through the 100,000 per annum level. The UK manufacturing capability is around two million sets per annum.
Redifon flies its office system

Latest company to enter the integrated office systems market is Redifon Computers — better known for its flight simulation equipment.

The company's office information and communications system is based on its own computer and, unlike some of the competition, employs big screen colour receivers with built-in viewdata chips rather than conventional monochrome visual display units.

The sets, which will receive the Post Office's Prestel service, will be made by Redifon's parent company Rediffusion at Bishop Auckland plant. Data entry can be either by keyboard or the Micropad handwriting terminal made in Dorset by Quest. This is an interactive system that is able to convert hand-written characters into data signals.

The first of the systems use Redifon's R5000 computer and can handle up to 64 viewdata type terminals and 32 hand print devices or keyboards. These will be available soon — some selected customers are already testing them — and later larger and smaller versions will be introduced.

John Walko

Redifon launch new system  April 11 1980

Extract from
Financial Times, London

Laurence Scott, Sales Director, has ordered a new £50,000 computer system from Redifon Computers Limited. The system, which has been ordered for his Swansea office, will house 12,000 files on hard disc. Earlier this year, Mr Scott flew to the United States to see the equipment in action.

Pictured from left to right, Roger Newman, Technical Director, Norman Watling, Manufacturing Director and Michael Aldrich, Managing Director of Redifon Computers Limited are answering questions at a recent Press Conference at Quaglino's Hotel, London, where the release of Redifon's new revolutionary R1800/50 integrated office system was announced.

The integrated office system embodies Viewdata Plus, a real-time interactive full colour intelligent television set, real-time handprint data processing, file update and interrogation, as well as multi-function visual display terminals and associated peripherals.

This is the first system in the world to incorporate all of these unique devices. With its associated people orientated software, the R1800/50 integrated office system can enhance productivity within an organisation and improve relationships and communications outside an organisation.
Into the office with Redifon

Redifon Computers, the second largest UK-owned computer firm after ICL, has made its first move into the office system market with the launch of the R1800/50. According to MD Michael Aldrich, the system is only the first of a long stream due to be unveiled over the next twelve months in what the company calls its “Office Revolution”.

The R1800/50 combines various technologies into a complete system offering viewdata, word and data processing, distributed processing, image processing, and data entry. This integrated approach to office computing is the coming thing, with workstations able to handle any office functions, and internal viewdata networks also becoming popular.

Redifon has built the R1800/50 around the 16-bit R5000 micro-coded processor, which offers a 400ms cycle time and can handle up to 512K bytes of main memory and up to 8M bytes of virtual memory. The R5000 was designed in-house, and is three times faster than its predecessor. Up to four 150M byte storage modules can be added, controlled by a separate processor.

The new system can support 64 viewdata ports, 32 alphanumeric CRTs, 32 Writaway hand-print terminals, 33 printers, and numerous communications protocols. Like ICL's recently announced ME29 system, Redifon's Viewdata Plus on the R1800/50 is compatible with Prestel and users can switch between Prestel and the internal service. The Writaway terminals recognise up to 32 handwritten characters, and send the captured data to the central processor.

Also new from Redifon are the R800/70 distributed data processing system and the R871 DDP IV software. The combination of these is said to give up to 60 percent more throughput for 5 percent more cost. The R800/70 supports 24 local or remote CRT terminals, up to 25 printers, up to 264M bytes of disc storage, and other peripherals including OCR wands; in addition, it supports eight viewdata intelligent colour TV ports and up to eight Writaway terminals.

The VM II software provided in the R871 DDP IV supports many of the facilities found on the R1800/50, with the addition of real-time transaction processing and virtual terminal pass-through.

For further information circle 420

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Extract from
Data Link, London

Redifon bids for share of office market

UK mini specialist Redifon has thrown its hat into the ever expanding ring of the office equipment market.

The company has launched a new range of office products that is intended to fill the growing word and text processing fields.

The Redifon R1800 Series will connect activities within a central office or be linked to remote terminals at branches throughout the company. The series uses a variety of input devices including hand-held keypads, alphanumeric keyboards, and a link to the Post Office viewdata system Prestel through a TV set.

Systems start at around £30,000 according to Redifon, which is making its first move into the field. The Redifon announcement follows hard on the heels of a number of other companies declaring their intentions to break into the office market. Apart from the NBE-owned Nexos, the major players are GEC, Angel, and Aregon (a spin-off from the NBE company Insac) have both announced office systems.

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21 APR 1980

Gather for the revolution...

The Redifon press handout announcing its new office systems begins with an extract from the Oxford dictionary defining ‘revolution’.

Nice to know that there are still some people in the world who want to get things right.

Fifty Redifon didn't continue using the dictionary for the rest of its release.

For the release continues: “Redifon's Office Revolution impacts a company’s trading position...” When used as a transition verb, ‘impact’ means ‘to press firmly to gather.’

We know of three pubs called The World Turned Upside Down. Is this an example of a public house revolution impacting a boozers drinking position?

As for a ‘companies trading position’, need we say more?

No indeed, but we will in any case.

Redifon being a UK company through and through, we call upon it to drop its revolution American disregard for the language of whoever it was that ever used it properly, like.

This leaves only ICL, Digiton and the rest as guardians of the mother tongue. It's in good hands.
Humble approach to the electronic office

The sales potential for the electronic office (office of the future, call it what you will) is driving a host of manufacturers to announce plans and a few to announce products.

Latest of the latter is Redifon whose ‘office revolution’, based on intelligent television sets and data entry devices which accept handwriting, was announced last week in Computing.

The situation is now so confused that there are at least as many definitions of the electronic office as there are of distributed data processing. The range of hardware spans everything from the humble word processor to the fully integrated, multi-function workstation which is unrealised as yet. In current thinking this represents the acme, the height of convergence of computing, telecommunications and office practice. The workstation replaces the desk, telephone, typewriter, filing cabinet, paper tray.

Whether this concept represents what people who work in offices really want is still an unanswered question — just as unanswered as the question who really wants to shop by calling up a list of products from a viewdata file.

Redifon has taken one sensible step in using humble, approachable televisions in its system — it may be the best stepping stone to a fully integrated approach. Such visions of the office of the future include screens which picture all the contents of an executive’s desk — but in 100 years time those contents may be as obsolete as the quill pen.

REDIFON BRINGS T.V. TO THE OFFICE

Redifon has stolen a march in the race for the electronic Office by building on its membership of the Redifusion Group, who manufacture colour televisions, to produce a new television based system for the Office of the future. Called the R1800 it is built around the R5000 processor and can handle up to 64 intelligent T.V.s.

While other companies are providing the ability to link Viewdata with their new systems in order to access inhouse data bases, as well as Ceefax and Oracle, Redifon appears to be the first to base their system on the ordinary domestic Television set.

In presenting the system Mike Aldridge, Redifon Computer’s new Managing Director, made great play of the acceptability of the T.V. as an instrument by which ordinary people can communicate with computers. He may have over-stated its claims in this regard in relation to a remote VDU but there was no denying the arithmetic when he demonstrated that a T.V. with built-in modem and including a keypad would be far less expensive than a remote VDU for the same job and of course it can also access the Post Office’s press-tel service.

Redifon want us to really look into the future and imagine not only inhouse use of the T.V. sets but also their use by customers. Customers would use them to check stock availability, prices etc., and to place orders. They could also signal via the system if they required voice to voice communication with a salesman. Taking the concept even further they see the housewife ordering from her local supermarket via the T.V. set and, in indeed, that idea so frequently talked about in the past now seems fractionally closer with the launch of Redifon’s new R1800 system.

REDIFON’S OFFICE REVOLUTION

Redifon is the latest of many companies to claim a first in the Electronic Office Field, in this case their claims for the new R1800/50 are more justified than many we have heard about. It is also a move of some importance for Redifon as it breaks them out of the data entry field onto a much wider market and together with new data entry and large DDP systems considerably increases the spread of the company without taking them into the quick sands of mainframe computer marketing.