

# ROCC

PRESS INFORMATION

M. J. ALDRICH

PRESS CUTTINGS

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# Videotex firms urge a change

dustry's development," says Aldrich, who is also managing director of Rocc Computers. Aldrich says the private sector and local government are already aware of the potential of videotex. However, he criticises central government for failing to fund applications for the technology. For example he says videotex could be used in DRSS and Inland Revenue PAYE computerisation projects.

Apart from effective government purchasing policies, the VIA wants government to co-ordinate export policies. Aldrich estimates that the industry had £5 million of exports last year, and could manage £10 million in 1990. "With a co-ordinated export policy, there is much greater potential," he says. The VIA's statistics show there are about 100,000 videotex terminals and 500 private videotex services in the UK.

With videotex there is still time to avert the recurring scenario of UK inventions being exploited by our competitors says Mike Aldrich, vice-chairman of the industry's pressure group, the Videotex Industry Association (VIA). The VIA published a positioning paper on the state of UK videotex last week.

This coincided with first ever Videotex User Show, which was witness to a thriving UK videotex industry. More than 50 companies were at the show, which also supported a three-day conference programme.

"Videotex is a new industry which is relatively small and highly fragmented. We are not looking for handouts but asking the government to make moves to foster the in-

themselves as a Bradford company and wanted very much to be involved in a community scheme of this sort.

**Videotex** — a UK concept Speaking at the opening ceremony, Mr M.H. Aldrich, chief executive of Rocc Computers Ltd., said that for the last five years, ROCC has been installing videotex industrial teleshopping and messaging systems in British industry, so that one company could buy for another and people within an organisation could communicate with each other. "Videotex was designed, developed and is manufactured in this country," said Mr Aldrich; "just as the UK was the first to produce the technology, we were the first to put it to work."

**The Gateshead service** The Gateshead Shopping and Information Service for disadvantaged sections of the community in the north-east, which served as a model for Bradford Centrepoint, was established in 1980 as a joint venture between public and private sector concerns. It encompasses a computerised teleshopping service introduced as a solution to problems highlighted in a study commissioned by Tesco from the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The study revealed that a great number of people in South Tyneside, mainly elderly and disabled, had difficulty in getting to supermarkets, and were therefore largely deprived of the choice and price benefits that this type of shopping has to offer. (RDM, July/August 1984, p.57).

The main sponsors — Tesco, Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council and the University of Newcastle — were joined by a number of retailers, including C&A, Kays Mail Order, and Greggs Bakers. To this service was added the potential to include a mass of community information, such as lists of council services, late night chemists' opening times and councillors' ward surgeries.

ROCC colour videotex televisions have been placed in individual homes as well as in community points such as sheltered housing sites. The TVs can be used to order goods directly from the retailers, or local street wardens can order goods on behalf of their charges ■

## TELESHOPPING

doorstep. There is no charge for using the system.

The intention is to expand the scheme quickly and it is expected to process around 1,000 orders per week. Profits from sales through the scheme will be donated by Morrisons to Centrepoint. Further participation on this basis by other retailers would be welcomed by Centrepoint according to its manager, Paul Nicholls. Several companies had expressed an interest in doing so, he said.

The Bradford district has problems of its own which make it ideal for such a scheme. It is large, hilly, and geographically diverse; around one third of the sheltered housing is in Keighley in the north, where a combination of steep inclines and severe winter conditions has often resulted in isolation for the elderly, disabled and housebound.

The scheme employs 34 people as well as a centre manager, three supervisors and a clerk, with a number of the Centrepoint staff having firsthand experience of the problems of being disabled.

Wm Morrison Supermarkets is a well-established group with 33 branches in west and north Yorkshire, Lancashire, Lincolnshire and north Derbyshire. Ken Morrison, chairperson and managing director, told RDM that Morrisons have always regarded

# Bradford's new teleshopping service

known as Bradford Centrepoint, a teleshopping service aimed primarily at helping elderly and disabled people in the Bradford area has been recently set up. It has much in common with the Gateshead teleshopping scheme, not least the fact that the terminals have been provided by ROCC Computers Ltd.

Bradford has followed the example set by Gateshead and started a teleshopping service aimed at helping disabled and elderly people. Known as Bradford Centrepoint, the system has been set up using advanced information technology to bring superstore shopping and a wide range of community information within reach of people who up to now have been denied these things because of their limited mobility.

Centrepoint is operated by Bradford Council's Unemployment Unit in co-operation with Morrisons superstores, and functions through the Manpower Services Commission Community Programme. The heart of the system is a British ROCC R800/70 videotex computer linked to ROCC Tandata 1400 ordering terminals.

The terminals are located at shopping and information outlets at selected sites such as libraries, community centres, centres for the disabled and church halls. In this way, a number of people can be served in one place while community interaction is encouraged. At the touch of a button, the consumer can order from a selection of over 4,000 food items stocked at Morrisons superstores. S/he can either enter an order directly from a shopping list or, before choosing, browse



Operating the Bradford teleshopping system — l. to r. Fred Thwaites, Paul Nicholls, and Harjinder Singh

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ROCC Computers of Crawley in Sussex is promoting its 2890 Telecentre 96-port system which supports typically 1,000 videotex terminals; the 2890 connects the terminals to as many as eight different mainframes at one time, using proprietary 4Mb processors and up to nine dedicated task processors.