

ROCC

PRESS INFORMATION

M J ALDRICH

PRESS CUTTINGS

JANUARY 1987

WELCOME...

Welcome to the Videotex User Show on behalf of the Videotex Industry Association and all our member companies. You will find this an important opportunity to make decisions about the applications, products and services within the industry of value to your company.

VIA as a trade association is committed to promoting the benefits of Videotex in the widest market place. We believe that this event at the Barbican provides a unique opportunity to see the best of the technology first hand.

Why not participate in one of the many Conference Sessions running in parallel with the Exhibition? The Conference offers a review of the latest application of videotex in a wide range of vertical markets.

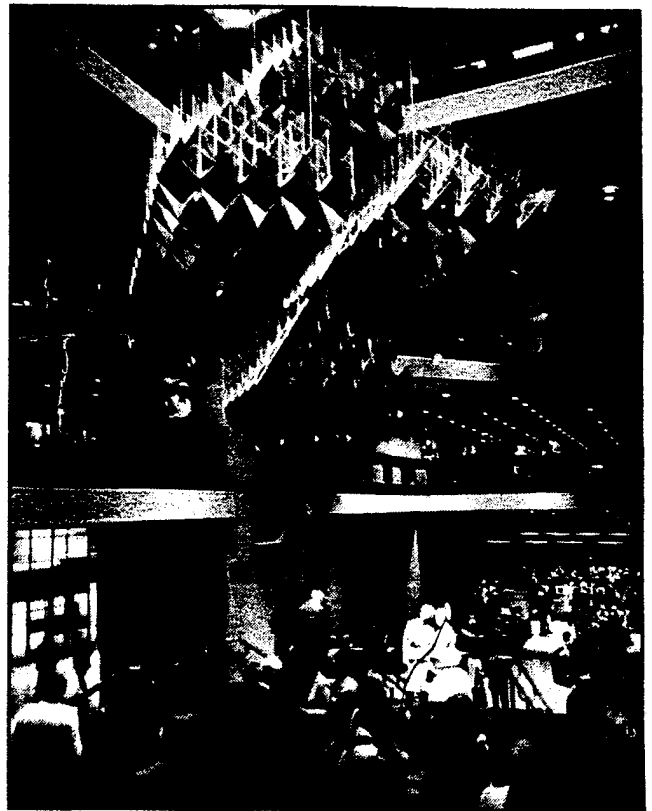
I am particularly grateful to the Minister for agreeing to launch this unique event which also enjoys the support of the Department of Trade and Industry.

The Videotex User Show is set to be a major annual event. We look forward to seeing you next year.

Mike Aldrich
Chairman
Videotex Industry Association

VIDEOTEX USER

VIDEOTEX USER SHOW GUIDE, January 1987



Stand A212

ROCC COMPUTERS

Kelvin Way, Crawley, West Sussex RH10 2LY
0293 31211

Sales Contacts: A. Shariff, Jim Hewett, Keith Allen

ROCC Computers is one of the major suppliers of private videotex systems to the UK market. It has always been a product innovator and at the Show will be demonstrating the newest addition to its range of videotex machines — the ROCC 2890. The ROCC 2890 will be demonstrated using our customers' applications — including the new secure terminal printing feature.

The ROCC 2890 is manufactured at the company's headquarters in Crawley, West Sussex and is completely compatible with ROCC's established videotex systems. The 96-port ROCC 2890 will be demonstrated with a selection of users' applications. All these applications are built around ROCC's Corporate Videotex System — an extensive suite of videotex programs and utilities.

In particular, ROCC will be showing Teleshopping, vehicle acquisition and loan finance, credit checking, point of sale, customer and account queries, management information for commercial organisations and public utilities, community and amenity information and an enquiry follow-up service.

New British bid to push dial-a-picture

THE WEEK

By Geoff Wheelwright

The UK moved last week to try to regain a lead in the computer videotex communications industry with the launch of a new photo-videotex system that allows TV-quality pictures to be incorporated into Prestel-style computer graphics transmitted by telephone.

The system — announced at a videotex show at the Barbican, London, — is a joint venture between British Telecom and Viewtext.

It allows instant image capture from live subjects, video, photographic prints or transparencies and high-speed transmission over the standard public telephone network.

But it was that phone network which almost let the videotex industry down last week as exhibitors at the show desperately tried to get demonstration phone lines installed in the midst of BT's industrial dispute.

Despite the difficulties, it is hoped that photo videotex will provide a boost to what was once a pioneering industry for Britain.

It invented both the Teletext and viewdata-based Prestel system just over five years ago but has since lost ground to some other implementations of it — notably the French system that has seen vast numbers of videotex terminals given away to French consumers as replacements for the directory inquiries system.

The French government decided a few years ago that, in the long term, it could be cheaper to put all the updated telephone numbers on a centralized computer database and give low-cost computer terminals to its users rather than to run an updated directory inquiries service and constantly print new phone books.

According to Mike Aldrich, chairman of the British Videotex In-

dustry Association, however, the French experience was successful because it was done in a very French way that could not be — and indeed would not be wise to — repeated in Britain.

He claims that the UK's viewdata standard is doing well enough in its own right — it is now installed in about 13 countries — though he admits that it has probably reached the limit of its international acceptance.

One particular black spot is the failure of the videotex industry to make any significant inroads into the United States. Mr Aldrich blames the American newspaper industry saying it expected too much too soon from the system.

"They put their arms round videotex and squeezed it to death," he suggests. Mr Aldrich is still quite optimistic, however, about the future of videotex as an information medium — even if it is not the current British implementation of it.

"Where the UK is gaining is in the development of a consumer-oriented service delivered by an electronic medium," he predicts. "It has given British service companies one hell of an advantage."

Aside from the limited international success of Prestel and the Prestel standard, Mr Aldrich also points to the much better record of the UK's teletext standard — a broadcast information service used by BBC's Ceefax and ITV's Oracle.

More than 16 million teletext TV sets have been sold, of which fewer than four million are in the UK.

The hope for viewdata now is that it will continue to be recognized as a good way of delivering text information to people who are not familiar with or educated about computer usage.

If the market remains heavily for the non-computer literate user, then there is more need for photographic and pictorial information to go with text.

Technically, however, the transmission speed of pictures over a single ordinary telephone line is still very slow; speed only comes from more advanced communications networks.

The vision of widespread computer information services that provide both photos and text to sell products to domestic customers via electronic shopping is still some years off.

Association, said sales in Britain were approaching £70 million a year. But he acknowledged that as desktop computers and computer networks spread wider, the separate rationale of videotex "is already blurring at the edges."

Opening the exhibition, Industry Minister, John Butcher said he had "every admiration for the French achievement, which is in keeping with their long-standing industrial policy." But that success was bought at a cost that "we would be unable to justify in the UK."

In fact, BT's phone books annually cost £14 million net to print and BT is spending 80 million to computerise directory inquiries—but not as a direct home service. Without the pressure from market forces, Mr Butcher said, Britain would not have developed the range of information products or exported as many videotex systems.

Mr Mike Aldrich, chairman of the Videotex Industry Association, said sales in Britain were approaching £70 million a year. But he acknowledged that as desktop computers and computer networks spread wider, the separate rationale of videotex "is already blurring at the edges."



Mike Aldrich... blurred edges

Smooth start for Videotex despite phone strike

By Peter Large, Technology Editor

The first hitech exhibition to open during the phone strike went smoothly into action yesterday with 100 phone and computer lines at work.

British Telecom said the lines had been installed by "loyal engineers," and no outside contractors had been used. But BT added "What standholders may have done on their own stands is another matter."

The exhibition—Videotex User 87 at the Barbican, London—celebrates a 14-year-old British invention which other nations have exploited better. Videotex links microchip-dipped TV sets to central computers down the

phone line to provide information and transaction services to home and office.

Although BT began the first service in 1979 there are still only 125,000 videotex screens at work in Britain. France has more than 2 million—all French and all provided free to the home as an electronic replacement of phone directories.

In Britain, the biggest supplier is Japanese—Sony claiming 29 per cent of the market, mainly in office use. Thus we have allowed the middleman trades that videotex can replace to get away with it. UK videotex is strong in the travel trade—not for home booking of hotels but for travel agents themselves.

Mr Mike Aldrich, chairman of the Videotex Industry

THE GUARDIAN THURSDAY 29 JANUARY 1987

COMMUNICATIONS

Mike Aldrich, chairman and chief executive of ROCC Computers, is chairman of the Videotex Industry Association. Here he gives a personal view of the role of videotex in computing.

AS with Archimedes when he discovered his famous principle in his bath, the essential truth about videotex was, for me, a Eureka-style experience.

I was working with Rediffusion who were supplying TV sets to the Post Office for the nascent Prestel service then under development. The truth suddenly dawned: here was a device that was familiar to everyone, that even a child could operate, that was cheap and that could be used to interface to computers. Here was something that the non-expert computer user could employ to overcome the seemingly in-built barriers to communication in the computer industry.

Nothing that has happened since has dimmed that first enthusiasm.

The three components of videotex — the telephone, the television and the computer — had existed side by side for years. Linking them together provided non-expert users with the most powerful means of accessing and processing information so far invented.

The focus of videotex was and is the specially adapted TV using the telephone (sometimes referred to as viewdata) or a broadcasting channel (teletext).

Running parallel with these developments, however, was that other revolution in making computers easier to use, the appearance of the personal computer.



PLUGGING THE GAP

The first PCs, like Prestel, were launched at the end of the '70s. With the addition of colour, an essential attraction of videotex, the PC introduced another dimension to the new communications medium.

The addition of a simple card adaptor at a cost of around £200 can turn an industry-standard PC into a videotex terminal, retaining all the intelligence of the PC to manipulate as well as display data.

The effect has been to open up the marketplace for completely new kinds of products and services. An intelligent-terminal-based videotex system operated by one of the major motor manufacturers to process hire purchase proposals while the prospective customer is in the dealer showroom, for example, is threatening to turn the world of the traditional finance houses upside down. The hire purchase proposal is completed off-line on the videotex terminal, the details transmitted on-line to underwriters for credit

checking, and the whole deal finalized before the customer leaves the showroom — a dramatic contrast to the two or three-day turnaround that is the best that the finance houses can offer at present.

The alliance of videotex and PCs is changing the whole way

With colour, the PC introduced a new aspect to the medium and opened up the market to completely new kinds of products and services; the PC-videotex alliance is changing business.

that companies and industries do business. It is no coincidence, moreover, that the companies that are demonstrably ahead of the game in their particular business sectors are the companies that have grasped the potential of videotex.

You can see it in the travel industry, as well as in the motor industry; and you can see it starting to happen in

insurance, in building societies, in pharmaceuticals and elsewhere.

Earlier this year the Videotex Industry Association published as report* on the state of the videotex market in the UK. This showed that the market at the end of 1985 was generating some £52 million. According to the report, there were some 100,000 interactive videotex terminals connected to 500 videotex services in the UK.

From a UK viewpoint, it is interesting to note furthermore that UK companies — some 40 altogether — constitute, in the words of the report, "the most broadly based, most competent, most experienced and most entrepreneurial videotex industry in the world at this time".

Notwithstanding the 1.5 million videotex terminals installed in developed markets around the world, the UK, which invented videotex, is hanging on to its lead. But only just, and not with the level of support from Government that has been received elsewhere.

In publishing its report, the VIA was seeking to draw attention to the age-old danger that British inventiveness could be followed by effective exploitation, not by Britain, but by other countries.

The industry can nonetheless hold its head up high. It has come a long way in a short time and the imaginative use of multi-function PCs in large corporate-wide networks is the way ahead for those companies most intent on getting competitive advantage from IT. ■

□ *The UK Videotex Market: Interactive Videotex* was published by the Videotex Industry Association, c/o ROCC Computers Ltd, 9/27 Kelvin Way, Crawley, West Sussex RH10 2LY. Tel: Crawley (0293) 511176. Price £25.