

The Newsletter

An occasional publication for Acorn staff – January 1988

INTRODUCING YOUR NEW MANAGING DIRECTOR

Did you spot Harvey Coleman during his brief moment of glory in the pantomime at the Christmas party? If not, cut out this snap and pin it on your board. It shows Mr Coleman with his fingers on the button of an ARCHIMEDES; the Chairman, Bruno Soggiu, is giving advice.

And now for the rest of his personal details. As you can see, he is good-looking, inspires confidence, and can even make the Chairman smile. He took his place at the head of the company on 4 January, exchanging the pleasures of northern Italy – he and his family lived in the foothills of the Alps while he headed the market strategy group at Olivetti's international headquarters – for the cold, windswept flatness of the countryside around Cambridge.



The Colemans are house-hunting in the centre of town, to gain as much protection from the wind as possible.

The challenge of the education markets

Roger Broadie, Education Adviser to the Marketing Department, discusses how he sees the ARCHIMEDES systems fitting into the educational scene.

This is an interesting time to be involved in the education market, at all levels from school to tertiary and beyond. Computer awareness is growing and consequently the needs of users are changing. Now many people, and not just the 'experts', are asking probing questions before deciding which computer they need.



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Users in schools will continue to use Master 128s and Compacts alongside their faithful Model Bs for some years to come. They cannot afford to throw out the old machines and replace them with newer ones, and they need to maximise the number of keyboards available to students. Moreover, there are still many effective uses in schools for machines of this power.

More power

ARCHIMEDES comes into its own for jobs which need more power. Its base provisions must be its **document preparation, data handling and communication network** facilities – these are essential for nearly all users. The areas over and above these for which schools will buy the machines are **image processing, sound processing, fast control** and, lastly, **programming and computer studies**. The growing range of software tools available – sprite editors, window editors, fourth generation languages and suchlike – will also have considerable impact on its uptake.

Acorn
The choice of experience.

In the tertiary sector many existing PC users are running out of power and they and the even larger group of potential computer users are looking at the new 'fast micros'. Many manufacturers, including ourselves, are coming into this market by enhancing the power of relatively inexpensive micros; others are reducing the prices of already powerful workstations to edge them into the market from the top end.

Ease of writing

The 'fast micro' market is almost entirely application driven. Buyers will look first for the fundamental base they are coming to expect from all machines – document preparation, data handling, IBM compatibility and network capability; only then will they search for the appropriate power and consider the ease of writing or porting the applications they need.

I think that, naturally, ARCHIMEDES will be used most in those areas of application that exploit the capabilities of the machine. They include image processing, perhaps the preparation of video graphics, use as a graphics terminal, for sound processing in all its forms, and for fast control – all, of course, at a higher level than in the schools. Task management and planning may also be a developing area.

Main challenge

My main challenge is to ensure that we get double benefit from the hardware and applications we develop to support markets outside education. Naturally, there is plenty of work to be done to support the education market directly; but since education mirrors the 'real world', there is also a great deal of scope for spin-offs from our work in other markets.

Software designed for education uses the power of the computer to provide ease of access to learners and to clarify the underlying ideas. Familiar users, on the other hand, require speed of operation and the handling of large amounts of data. Occasionally the same package can be used to satisfy both needs, and this is likely to be increasingly true of well designed window-driven packages. In any event, accessible examples from the world of work are always a help in education.

The education and commercial markets are constantly changing, and we must survey them carefully and constantly to discover even more uses for ARCHIMEDES systems.

Snaps and snippets

INCREASING THE MASTERY OF THE JAPANESE

Acorn Computers, working in conjunction with the British Council, has won a prestigious open tender in Japan. The Foreign Service Training Institute in Tokyo, part of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has ordered a 38-station network of Master 128s, including three file-stores and a complete Domesday system. They will be used to train Japanese diplomats to use the English language during their overseas postings.

SPECIAL OFFER FOR LIMITED SEASON ONLY

Universities, polytechnics and colleges of higher education throughout the UK are being given the chance to buy three ARCHIMEDES 440s at the never-to-be-repeated discount of 30%. The only condition attached to the offer is that each machine must be installed in a different department. Let's hope the machines don't get torn apart as the departmental heads fight over them.

ACORN SPONSORS RUGBY TOUR

The First Fifteen from Westlake Boys High School in New Zealand are playing eight matches against teams in England and Wales over the Christmas vacation. The tour is sponsored jointly by Acorn and Barson Computers, Acorn's NZ dealers, and we wish them a rip-roaring success. Barsons has recently sold a network of BBCs to Westlake Boys, and is hoping to provide a similar service to Westlake Girls High School. A girls' rugby tour next year perhaps?

ARCHIMEDES GIVEN AUSTRALIAN SEAL OF APPROVAL

In a forward-looking decision, the Western Australian Education Department has nominated the BBC ARCHIMEDES 300 Series for use in Australian schools.

Customer

Services:

who,

what and

where?

Fighting my way into the depths of Unit 3, I eventually discovered Bob Rogers behind his desk in an overflowing, windowless office. I asked him bluntly what he was doing there.

'I am in charge of Acorn's after-sales operations,' he explained. 'My brief covers two separate fields. I have to provide customer support and answer technical enquiries from dealers; I am also responsible for the training courses run in Unit 5. Although the aim of the two is the same – to provide a more comprehensive and friendly service to all those who buy or sell our equipment, the techniques they draw on are quite different.'

No close down

'The enquiry desk is manned continuously from 9 in the morning to 4.30 in the afternoon. We used to close down from 12 to 2, so that there was a set time when written enquiries were answered, but there are so many teachers who only have access to the phone in their lunch break that I decided to extend the hours to accommodate them.'

'Each of the four people on the desk deals with upwards of 100 calls and letters each day – they are really busy. The team consists mainly of young, enthusiastic techies, perhaps with a special interest in networking or high-level languages; some of the company's university intake sit here! Their main function is to help the dealers and educational users; all other callers are asked to send their queries to us in writing. We aim to answer all letters within 24 hours.'

'The team is also on the lookout for any problems that show up consistently. These might indicate a gap in the training we have given the dealers or point to an improvement we could make to one of our products.'

Videotex database

'We've recently set up a videotex database so that we can provide technical and general information on a 24-hour basis. It is commonly known as SID, more properly the "Support Information Database". Anyone may subscribe to it, and there is a reduced rate for dealers and educational users. When SID is fully established, callers who log onto it will quickly get hold of the answers to the more frequently asked queries, so the enquiry team will be free to deal with the highly technical problems.'

Maintenance agreements

'In January we're starting what for us is a new venture in after-sales service – we'll

arrange third-party on-site maintenance agreements for ARCHIMEDES systems. Maintenance companies belonging to the scheme, whose engineers will be trained in the luxurious surroundings of Unit 5, guarantee to provide a maximum response time of eight hours. Granada Microcare is the first to get the go-ahead; it has a good track record and can provide nationwide coverage straight away.'

'So, as you can see, Customer Services is the department that, directly or indirectly, spreads the flavour of the company to the outside world. By being as helpful and encouraging as possible to the dealers, and convincing end users that we care about their problems, we'll make sure that more and more people use more and more of our products.'



... Available now ... ArcWriter ... Available now ... ArcWriter ... Available now ...

The basic word processor for ARCHIMEDES

ArcWriter is a basic word processor that has been designed to meet the demands of personal correspondence, notices and short articles, and so can also be used as an introduction to the concepts involved when processing words. ArcWriter makes no claims to belong in the world of desk-top publishing, but there are possibilities for its enhancement in the future.

The program emphasises the most sympathetic features of ARCHIMEDES – it is window-driven and makes extensive use of menus and pointer operations. ArcWriter has been developed with one crucial consideration in mind –

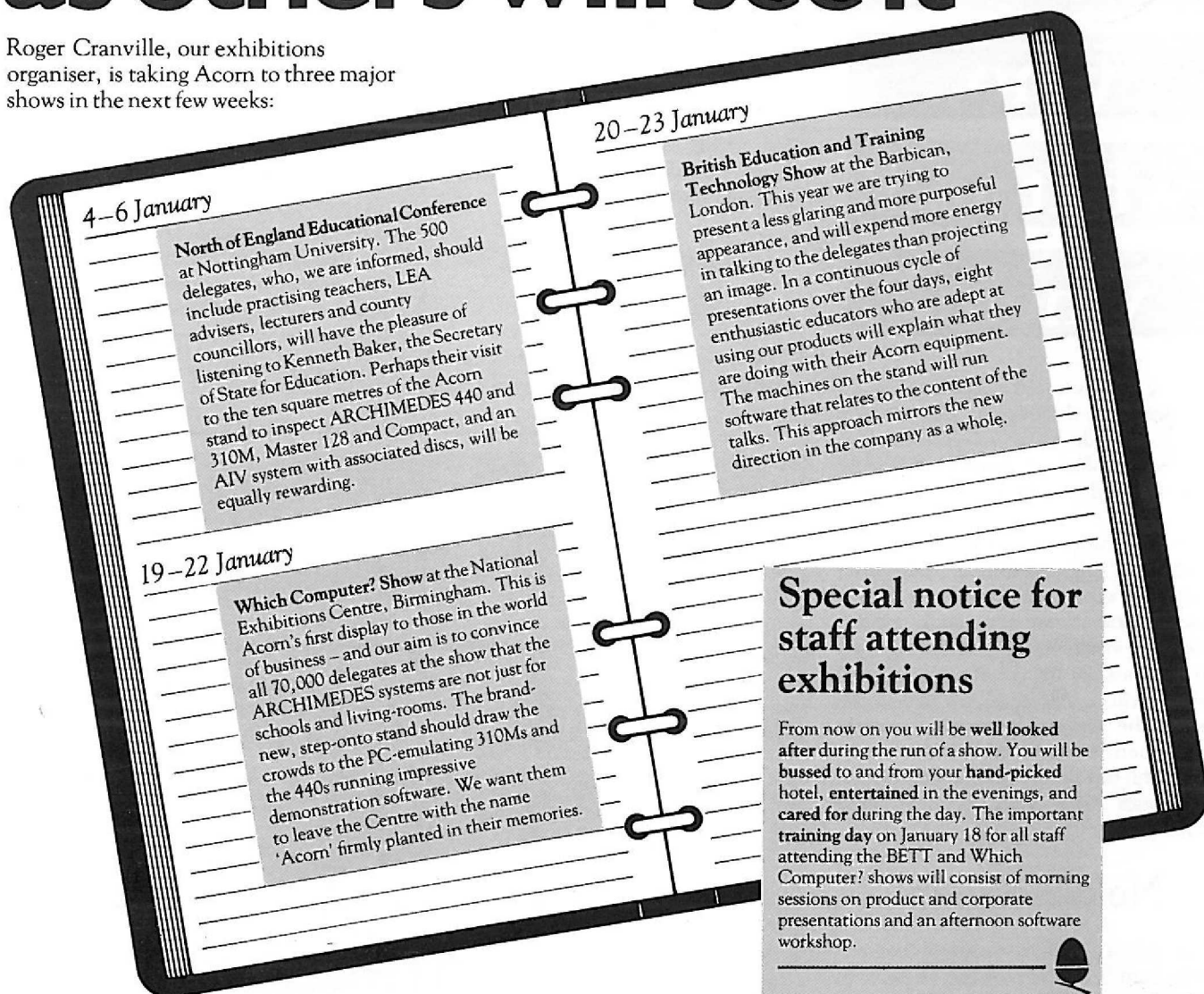
it must be able to work with the equipment that is currently available to most users. This means, in effect, that its fonts must be delivered quickly by bottom-of-the-range dot-matrix printers. There is no point in including a fancy font if it takes the printer several minutes to print one page of text.

ArcWriter is being sent out free of charge to all purchasers of ARCHIMEDES systems with OS 0.2 or 0.3 (or, rather, to all purchasers who returned their registration cards). It will also be given to everyone who buys a system in the next few months.



The face of Acorn-as others will see it

Roger Cranville, our exhibitions organiser, is taking Acorn to three major shows in the next few weeks:



Star Trek-the panto

Donations from the Acorn Staff Christmas Party, held in the Corn Exchange, will this year be divided between the Children's Hospice in Milton and the Special Care Baby Unit at Addenbrooke's Hospital. Sincere thanks are due to Mr Cockburn and his belly for their



solid performance in the pantomime; to Roger Wilson (the well-known author of *The Acorn RISC Machine - an Architectural View*) who, as Nurse Chapple, helped cure a fever in sheer black



stockings and platform heels; to Arthur, who came to give a hand and lent an ARM; and to all those Acorn Trekkies who boldly go where no man has gone before.