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Computer Dealer

THE MAGAZINE OF COMPUTER MARKETING

CAN YOU WIN THE GAME WITHOUT IBM?

HOW TO NAVIGATE
YOUR BUSINESS
INTO THE FUTURE

GIVING CREDIT
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A Little Preparation Can Go a Long Way

BY STEVEN RUSH

A career as a microcomputer salesperson can be anything from an albatross around your neck to the fulfillment of your life's ambitions. It is up to you, as an individual, whether or not you soar into the field with ease, or quickly become disenchanted with the occupation.

If you are willing to put out the extra effort required to succeed in this inchoate industry, you will excel. If you try to just "get by," you may end up wishing you had never heard of microcomputers. For all of the excitement and reward offered in our sunrise industry, there is a cost.

That cost is participation. You must become a "player" — constantly increasing your knowledge at every opportunity. The average computer buyer has read a few issues of a popular computing magazine, talked to a few friends who own one of the wizard like little machines, and visited a couple of computer stores.

The end-user is typically not computer literate, rather they have picked up bits and pieces of computer-eze. Someone has explained disk storage, or RAM memory, or any other of the myriad of potential limited areas of knowledge. They do not, however, have a good overall grasp on the field as a whole.

This makes the microcomputer retail salesperson's job a formidable task. Each new customer would like information by which to compare the machine you are recommending with the ABC Supercomputer they saw at the last store.

Not only do they want to compare your machine with those they have seen, but also several other computers they have read about — most of which won't be available to the public until three months after!

Of course, our goal is to turn the prospect's attention to the ways your computer will help the customer. Talk solutions to the client's problems, and software that will fill his or her needs.

ARE YOU THE EXPERT

The problem arises that most of these semi-computer-literate shoppers want you — the "computer-expert" salesperson — to compare the clock speed, or the microprocessor chips, or the number of high speed IEE 488 ports on the various units. Often all of the computers they have seen.

In fact, most have no idea what the dif-

ferent clock speeds, chips, or IEE 488 ports do; they want you to prove to them that you are the computer expert they are looking for.

When it happens that you must venture an "I don't know" in answer to one of your customer's interrogatories, and further plead that you have no way to find out, watch out. You may be branded as one of those "young kids at the computer store," who really doesn't know anything about them.

What has happened is that you were unable to meet the challenge thrown at you by a frightened client. Let's face it, the purchase of a microcomputer is one of the major decisions a consumer faces. Most families need a car and a home, so the choice becomes **which** car is right for them, or **which** house suits their needs.

Before anyone has reached the stage of deciding **which** computer to buy, they have already faced the question of **whether or not to get a microcomputer**. The customer has decided to spend from several hundred to several thousand dollars on something he or she knows nothing about. If you think back to the days before your involvement in the industry you can empathise with the client's position.

So our client ventures out into the world, reads whatever they can get their hands on, and visits the "computer experts" at the local retailer. They want to invest their money wisely, but are not armed with the information necessary to do so on their own. They quickly reach the decision that they need an expert whose advice they can rely on.

They really have not perceived the **depth** and complexity of the industry. They don't know that there are over 200 micros on the market right now. They have only heard of a handful. They still think that they have to know what goes on inside the little machine before they can make an intelligent decision. They don't realize that you, as the computer dealership representative, do not need to know all of the design features of every computer on the market, never mind software and printers, to advise them on the machines that will do the job for them.

Your job then, in effect, becomes a sort of lottery. Those customers who come in, and challenge you with questions you can answer about products you are familiar

with, quickly run out of questions that their limited knowledge will allow them to ask. Once he, or she has run out of questions, and you've passed their quiz, you can get down to determining the client's needs, and discussing the features and benefits of the computer you recommend.

COMPILING THE INFO

I have never found customers to be put off if you have to look the information up. The problem is that there is no central source or chart you can go to to quickly obtain the information.

When I first encountered the problem, I bought two large loose lead binders, and began collecting information on all major product lines. I created a tab for each manufacturer, and placed every piece of literature I could get my hands on under the appropriate one.

The books worked well, but most customers would think up another question or two during the time it took me to get through the literature under each manufacturer's heading. The major problem being that all of the manufacturer's present the information in a manner that best shows off their products. Understandable. But it makes their literature, in total, unusable for quick reference.

So, I started experimenting with different methods of compiling the information into a useful form. After typing numerous schemes of handling the many variable features of each product, I have settled on the chart shown in figure 1.

Across the top of the page are listed the manufacturer's name and model number of the product. Under "Operating System," I have listed the primary system, optional system, and have noted whether the machine is IBM software compatible.

Through the various columns I have listed most of the commonly asked for information in an easy to understand, logical format.

I have used a different page to compare the products in different categories; i.e. portables, home computers, small business computers, computers with graphics capabilities, IBM compatible computers, Apple clones and so on.

Whenever I refer to my charts for information on the machine the person is asking about, I have a ready reference to other products in the same class. This al-

lows me to easily point out the superior features of the machine I would like to sell to the prospect.

There are several reasons why we cannot simply provide you with completed charts, and hope to improve your sales. The major reason is that the charts, properly used, are only a reference tool.

By doing the research necessary to produce the charts, you will probably learn more about the industry than by any other method. Searching out the information gives you many clues as to how the information can be used.

If it is necessary for you to search several sources, or call the manufacturer for any particular feature beware. There is probably a reason you had to search to find it. If it was truly a benefit to that machine, the manufacturer would have made it easy to find. They would be showcasing it as a feature or a benefit.

It is never good policy to directly talk down a competitor's product, but the knowledge of the product's weaknesses can be used to great advantage. The most subtle method is to emphatically point out that your product has the feature, not mentioning the competition. You will plant the idea in the customer's mind that the feature is important, and this may become the challenge question for your competitor to answer.

Having conducted your own research for your chart, you will be able to utilize it most effectively in your presentation. Notations will act as reminders, keying your memory for the information.

I have found it most effective to use handwritten charts. The client almost always asks where the presentation came from. When I inform them that this is how I keep up with the industry, most have two reactions. One, they are impressed with

my dedication to my career, and are convinced that I know what I am talking about. It also brings an abrupt end to their challenging my credentials. The customer also finally realizes that the computer industry is very complex. Many have told me that they had no idea.

By quickly referencing the charts as soon as I've identified the challenging customer, I have found that I can painlessly create my credentials in the buyer's mind, dispose of the technical questions quickly, and get down to discussing the needs of my client.

The sale actually begins long before the customer walks in your door. If you hope to keep up with your customer's expectations so that you can develop the trust needed before the sale is made, you are going to have to put forth that special effort that makes superstars in any field. Good luck. □

Portables

| Manufacturer | Corona | Osborne | Osborne | Compaq | Kaypro | Otrona | Access |
|--|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Model Bits | PPC 16 | I 8 | Executive 8/16 | 16 | II 8 | Attache 8 | 8 |
| Op Syst (IBM Comp.) | MS-DOS (yes) CP/M 86 | | CP/MT or Enh: CP/M 86 | MS-DOS | CP/M 2.2 | CP/M | CP/M 2.2 |
| Processor (Co-processor) | | | Z-80A Enh 8088 Co-proc. | | | | |
| Size, weight | 20x20x8" | 20.5x14.5x8.5" | 20.5x13x9" | 20x16x8½" | 18x15½x8" | 13.6x12x5.75" | 16-18x 10-13/16x10" |
| No. of units | 30 lbs. | 26.7 lbs. | 28 lbs. | 28 lbs. | 26 lbs. | 18 lbs. | 33 lbs. |
| RAM Std.; optional; maximum | 128K expandable to 512K | 64K | 128K Enh:256K | 128K exp to 512K | 64K | 64K | 64K |
| Non Volatile Storage (F) Floppy (H) Hard disk (UF) Uniform Head | 1)Single 5¼ 2)Dual 5¼ 320K each 3)15¼ + 1 Hard 10M | 2 5¼ Floppy SSDD | 2 5¼ SSDD | 5¼ Floppy | 5¼ (Dual) Floppy | 2 5¼ DSDD | 2 5¼ (F) |
| Graphics Capability Std.; optional; Cost | Graphics included IBM graphics boards support | No | Std:Non + Enh: mono- graphics | IBM Compatible | | | |
| Display Columns/rows | 9" Green 80x25 integral | 5" diagonl 80x24 integral | 7" diagonal 80x24 enh: 80x25 Amber/Integral | 80x25 built-in | 9" diagonal 80x25 integral | 5" diag. 80x24 | 7" Amber Integ 80x24 + Status |
| Interface ports | 1 Serial 1 Parallel | 1 Serial 1 IEEE ext video batt port 1 modem port | 2 Serial 1 IEEE Video mon | 4 Parallel GB Color Monitor Composite 1EE488 8"disk color/B-W TV | 1RS 232C 1 Parallel | 1RS 232C 2 Full function 1 Parallel | built in acoustic modem + direct 2-RS232 inter- face |
| Keyboard detach; function; numeric pad... | detached, IBM style | detached | | detached-IBM copy | | | |
| Software included | graphics(GSX) MS-DOS GW Basic CP/M 86 multi-mate w/p | Wordstar Mailmerge SuperCalc C Basic | Wordstar Mailmerge SuperCalc M Basic Execu.Data manager | Basic | Perf. writer Perf. Speller Perf. Filer | Wordstar Plus C Basic Charton C Basic | Perf. writer Perf. Calc Perf. Speller Communica- tions |
| Add'l Features | | 220V-50Hz | | | tough-metal case | very small | Built-in Dot matrix printer |
| Pricing | List 1) \$2395 2) \$2795 3) \$5090 Comp Broker 1) \$2035 2) \$2375 3) \$4330 | dual SSDD \$1795 dual SSDD \$1995 | Z80 Version \$2494 Co-processor version \$3095 | 1 Disk \$2995 | \$1795 | \$3995 | \$2495 |