

IC Managers swap 'know-how' at eighth Forum

Information Centre Managers from some fifty IBM customer enterprises gathered for the two-day Forum held at IBM North Harbour, Portsmouth, earlier this year.

In his welcoming address, **David Livermore**, IBM Marketing Staff Director, recalled a visit he made to Armonk in 1969, when terminals had been installed on the desk of each IBM Vice-President in a pioneer effort to establish an in-house Information Centre. 'In fact,' David continued, 'we had no really viable online systems for management information until the nineteen-seventies; and for me, the Information Centre concept was the most exciting one to emerge in that decade'.

Pointing out that he had driven this concept home as much as possible when he was DP Sales Director, David remarked that, although terminals on managerial desks may have seemed an innovation some years ago, 'we are living in a transitional age — a new generation is growing up who will use terminals as easily as our generation uses pens'.

'How can the proliferation of user-computing within an enterprise be managed?' Posing this as an important question for IBM customers, David compared the typical company board meeting of 1973 — when half the time was spent debating the validity of the information presented — with today's typical board meeting, in which the directors of the company could spend half their time in debating the validity of the data bases.

Clearly, better control of the use of data is needed.

Real value

As another example, with the advent of the personal computer, we can expect to see a major increase of users 'doing their own thing'. If *real* value from personal computers is to be achieved then users will probably need, and can reasonably expect, assistance from their own Information Centre (IC).

David concluded that use of data and use of personal computers are just two areas where the IC can save time and money by introducing and expanding user-computing in a controlled way whilst working

towards the provision of an integrated user-computing facility as the longer term enterprise goal.

Exchange of ideas

The Forum Chairman, **Keith Callaghan** of *LOLA, formally opened the meeting and welcomed all new members. For their benefit, he expressed again that the purpose of every meeting was an exchange of ideas and experiences relating to the chosen theme, which, in this instance, was new technology areas of graphics, videotex, telecommunications, and office automation.

Switching systems

Ian Stoker, of the IBM Line Switching Systems Marketing Centre kicked off with a lively review of the progress made by stored-program control telephone exchanges since 1959. In a brief history of telecommunications since 1959, Ian made particular reference to the IBM 3750 and 1750 Switching Systems. These units allow users to record, store, answer, and distribute messages using the telephone, and incorporate a low function multi-frequency telephone, fully linked to an SNA network. This link is achieved via a software link-up between an IBM host computer and IBM telephone exchange.

Members discussed the possible implications for the future in this year of telecommunications 'liberalisation'. Future developments seem, in the main, to focus on software and applications enhancements.

IBM's Personal Computer was the next agenda-item, presenting a topic many were keen to discuss.

Personal Computer

Ian Chapman, Marketing Manager for the IBM Personal Computer introduced **Viv Kelvin**, one of his group, who focused on aspects of the Personal Computer's hardware, software, and communications facilities.

Members expressed particular interest in the communications facilities of the Personal Computer, calling on Viv to produce a summary reference sheet. This covered:

- The Personal Computer as a teletype
- 3101 Emulation by the Personal Computer

- IBM SNA 3270 Emulation by the Personal Computer.

Returning, Ian discussed aspects relating to marketing proposals for the Personal Computer, his role as marketing manager, and how an Information Centre might best utilise the Personal Computer.

Adding value

Members seemed most interested to discuss Ian's role, which he perceived to be one of *adding value* to the Personal Computer by offering advice and guidance on, for example:

- Integration of the Personal Computer into a master DP strategy
- Local IBM branch commitment
- National coverage/co-operation
- An Information Centre programme
- Education.

Neville Carmichael, an IBM Videotex Marketing Specialist, followed with a demonstration of Prestel as the centre of his talk on videotex. He covered, in general terms, how videotex works, where to use it, and the UK videotex environment.

Neville used visual aids to illustrate points, but left discussion for **Keith Harpam** of Datasolve to manage.

Keith, General Manager of Commercial Products, recounted his experiences with videotex, gained from a recent project undertaken to provide videotex facilities to Holiday Club International. Keith covered:

- The background and objectives of the decision to market Viewdata facilities
- The selection process undertaken before settling on IBM products
- The actual project including pitfalls, number of man-hours used in programming and telecommunications work, and problem areas
- Advice to those contemplating similar projects.

Members will receive a synopsis of Keith's talk, written by Keith, as a permanent reference.

The first day closed with a series of informal workshops where ideas, problems, and proposals were thrashed out.

Workshop feedback

Feedback from the workshops was the first item on the agenda for the second day.

In 'User Education and Training', chaired by **John Miller** of Rolls-Royce, two major areas of need were discovered:

- More general training for use of services should exist, the objective being user self-sufficiency
- An overview of personal computing and the Information Centre should be provided for users.

'Communications', chaired by **Faez Tuma** of IMI, centred on the two themes of hardware and software, concluding that this area represented a weak link in end-user computing.

Linking

Hardware concerns centred on the expense of physically linking one device to another and/or to a main-frame, either on-site or via public wires. Some facilities are available, but members felt a lack of awareness as to what is available, what it does, what it costs, and so on. The group called for members to pool the knowledge of the Forum to produce a reference guide.

Software

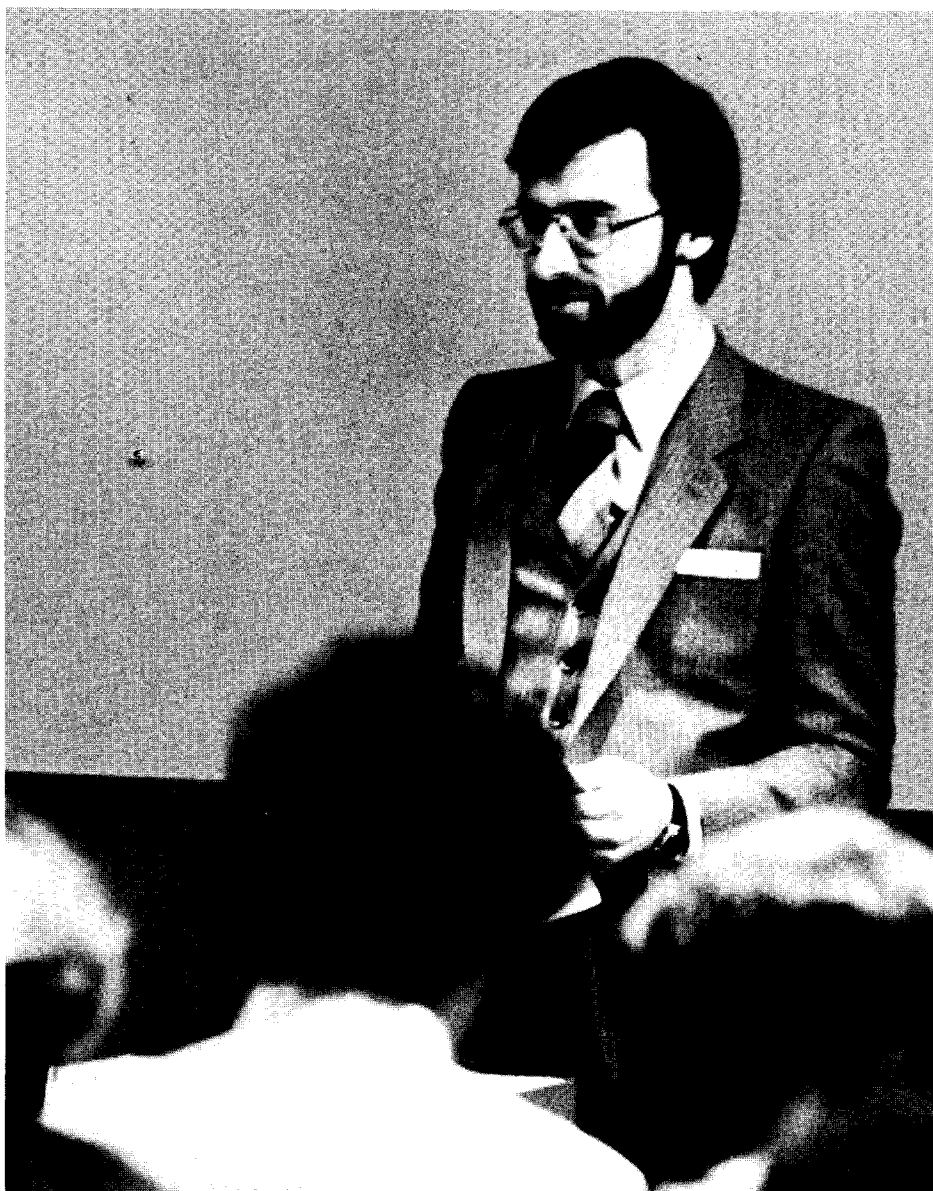
Software discussion centred on the protocol emulation area and application software. The group felt that a general purpose application is needed and that the Forum should pressurise companies for such a product.

'Experience with IBM's IC products', chaired by **Bill Dew** of IMI, called for a resolution by the Forum to set up a 'technicians' sub-group' to discuss, offer advice, and act as a reference for specific software and product problems.

The group recommended that the sub-group should cover all main-frame Personal Computer software and the IBM Personal Computer, and that a questionnaire should be used to feed information back to IBM.

The final presentations of the day related to Business Graphics, the first being given by **Gordon Scarlett**, of IBM and the second by **Frank Clements** of Esso Petroleum.

The talks covered the offerings of IBM in this area, the educational support an IC should give users, the IBM courses available, the advantages of presenting business cases with visuals, and finally, a summary by Frank Clements of the pros and cons of Graphpak and ICU, discovered as a result of their use in his organisation. Summaries of these presentations were provided for members.



Keith Callaghan of LOLA, the Forum Chairman, opens the meetings

Lastly, demonstrations were given of the following products:

- Displaywriter
- System/23
- RCS — Viewdata and AS
- The Personal Computer
- PROFS.

The IC managers who attended this two-day Forum appeared pleased at what they had achieved. We hope that this brief report of the Forum illustrates the sort of useful exchange possible with a highly interactive user community.

Editorial Note: On page 15 there are details of a new IBM course on what it takes to train the people who will staff an Information Centre.

Circle 02