

THE OFFICE

IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

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(Inc. GST)

HOW OPTICAL CHARACTER RECOGNITION EFFECTS WP.

WHAT HAPPENED TO FLEXTIME?

Anglo American Insurance makes it
work.

IN-HOUSE PRINTING. Damelin
learns the benefits of modernization.

**MOVING OFFICE CAN BE
COSTLY.** Alfa Laval comes through
with flying colours.

**R1-BILLION NEW DEAL FOR
OFFICE STAFF.** How good is
Ellispark?

**INTERCOM SAVES TIME AND
TEMPERS.** Shell explains how.

THE TENDER TRAP. Barlows
boosts important paperwork sixfold
with word processing.

**WHATS NEW, AND BUYERS'
GUIDES TO WORD PROCESSING
AND COPIERS • WP AGONY
COLUMN • FOR THE OFFICE**

OCR

Just as converts to word processing enthusiastically spread the good news along comes OCR. These three letters, for optical character recognition, are virtually sure to drive a contentious wedge into the office electronics market. OCR units have been hovering on the fringe of modern office text editing and reproduction systems for several years but now, with units technologically much improved, compatible and priced to slot into a target sector, they can be expected to make significant inroads soon into the local market.

OCR promises a cost-cutting and time-saving shortcut for correspondence and reports, even in companies already converted from typewriters to word processing, and it adds the prospect of many an office upset if installation and running costs are pitched right.

OCR can be regarded like a left-handed boxer, either as a spoiler or something that adds spice to the fight. In this impending local bout the market stakes will be high as OCR is promoted as a vital aid to word processing while, at the same time, possibly putting a damper on the hitherto natural expansion of WP systems.

*Much more than a
convenience for
checking frustration*

Not long ago a typical financial manager would compile a report for his secretary to type. Then it would be corrected and retyped two, three or four times till they got it right. Late insertion of a paragraph probably meant starting virtually the whole process over again.

WP, with its ability to store texts in memory and be used for editing without having to retype whole

works, is a vast improvement.

OCR takes the art forward yet another step. The financial manager's report is turned by a typist into a rough draft which he edits with a felt pen. The rough is then fed sheet by sheet into an OCR, which literally reads each character optically and transmits the document to a WP unit where corrections, and any further editing, are done.

At first sight OCR looks like a luxurious embellishment for WP systems. Suppliers are, however, sure to concentrate on the economics of these machines when making their sales pitch.

New Hampshire-based Hendrix points out, for example, that even in companies that have WP systems 80% of copy is still done on typewriters first for keyboarding later on the WP. Reasons the US company gives for this include inability and reluctance of executives or their secretaries to input copy themselves.

Whatever the reasons, OCR eliminates this time-wasting problem by adapting a secretary's rough draft and feeding it into the WP system without any more keyboarding.

Very handy and very clever but OCR is much more than a convenience for checking frustration. By its ability to process relatively rough documents the bulk of work can be done on ordinary typewriters, with probably the simple adaptation of a typing element, to free communal WP units from long periods of inputting so that operators can concentrate on final corrections or major revisions.

The first salvoes of the WP-OCR confrontation are sure to be at the bulk end of the market — banks, insurance companies, building societies — where 100 typewriters

could be replaced by, say, 30 word processors. The imminent advent of OCR (Burroughs Business Machines also seems to be priming the local market) throws the typewriter-WP equation right out of kilter.

Those 100 typewriters, which Hendrix contends do not disappear when word processing is introduced, now have an OCR to process their work for, presumably, many fewer WP units once most of the keyboarding is already done.

OCR comes into its own by relieving pressure on WP systems.

Suppose, for example, an attorney's secretary has to input a 40-page litigation document. Using the law practice's WP is a treat after years of typing and retyping but, as she is unlikely to have a personal WP, all her other work — filing, phones, dictation; appointments and generally looking after the lawyer — goes by the board while she is inputting on the WP.

OCR, on the other hand, allows her to remain at her post while rough-drafting the 40-page document that she types between phone calls and filing, just like the

old days. The difference now, however, is that she feeds the 40 typed pages into an OCR which throws it onto a WP screen for correction and final editing only.

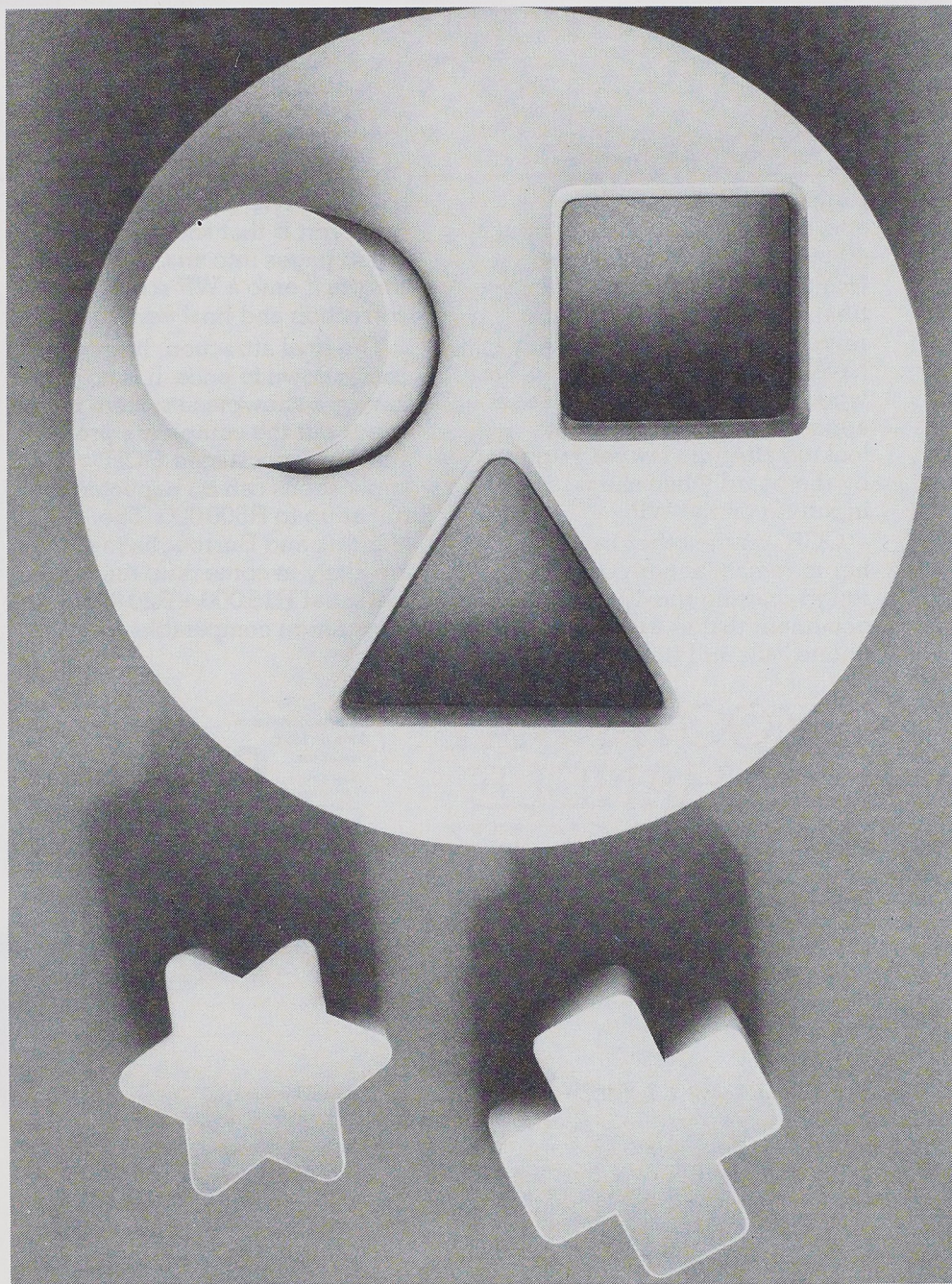
The final attraction, however, comes down to price. It is no good having a showpiece system if it wipes out the company's profits and very specialized OCR applications can be expected to run at up to R500 000. The Hendrix and Burroughs machines are likely to come onto the local market at R15 000—R20 000 — a price range comparable with WP units.

Circle inquiry No. 105

SMOOTH WAY TO HANDLE ROUGH COPY



It's simple. Either we find your shape, or we don't shape.

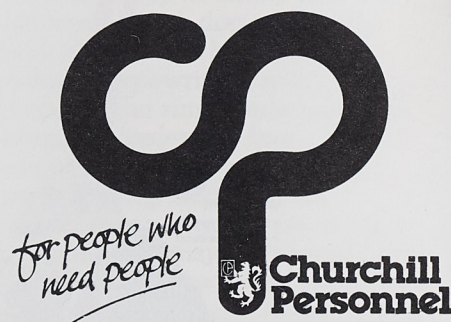


With every person we place, our reputation is on the line.

So we don't take chances. Our staff are trained to screen each applicant till we are satisfied your requirement is met.

By the time the likely candidates get to you, you're going to have a tough task choosing between them. There may only be two. But each could be the round peg for the round hole.

So if you've got the place, we've got the time. And the person. You have only to ask.



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WORD PROCESSING

work will be done on time makes the bosses a lot less agitated."

Burroughs Redactron models, like almost all of the word processors, can call up instantly from memory banks standard clauses, sentences, paragraphs, pages or whole works. Any words or sections within the text can be deleted, amended or transposed as quickly as the operator can key in instructions. Visual checking on a video screen quashes any excuses for spelling mistakes or bad typing before the work is transmitted to a high-speed printer. Further

revision and printing is just as quick.

Pratt admits that a little luck, or feminine intuition, influenced her initial appraisal of word processing systems. She says: "I just had a feeling that we should start with cassette memory tapes rather than magnetic cards. I knew, somehow, there would be disadvantages with cards. Now we've converted easily to floppy discs."

Rudd adds: "If we hadn't started with cassettes we'd now have to have somebody else just to file the cards."

inflexible. "When selling to an organization, one must take cognizance of the different interests of the various levels of personnel. Secretarial staff, for example, need to be shown facilities that will make their jobs easier. Middle management needs to know the benefits in increased production or time saving, and top management needs to go into overall questions such as cost-justification. In fact, only one representative instinctively altered his approach to meet these different needs. All the other demonstrations ran down the rails," says Shields.

Demonstrating teams did not trouble to inquire into her background nor position in the company. "I do not type but, because I am a woman, it was taken for granted that all I would take an interest in operating the machine." Another company addressed its correspondence with Shields to 'Gentlemen

"Only one representative inquired into our needs. I had assumed we would require three work stations. This was, however, questioned by only one rep who, after talking to the secretaries alone, told us we would need only two. Although I am aware that this approach is part of a sales pitch, it is a responsible approach and I was impressed by it," says Shields. "All other reps extolled only the virtues of their own products. This rep admitted his product would not do more than others, but assured us that before- and after-sales service would be the best."

It is not surprising that, provided certain technical requirements can be met relating to optical scanning, which will enable information to be sent transcontinentally, Perry & Associates will opt for the WP of this least abrasive salesman.

Salesmen bewilder buyer with technical jargon

Perry & Associates found it no mean task to decide on the word processor most suited to its operations. "Our paper needs are very broad," says Jennifer Shields, manageress of the company's *Trade Opinion Panel*.

"We produce correspondence, a publication for the retail trade, proposals and reports for clients who need approximately six copies. Reports of the panel are syndicated to many organisations and often run to more than 200 pages.

After investigation showed that word processing equipment would be cost justified, Shields was given the task of investigating the market place.

"I was surprised by the sales approaches in the industry," she says.

Shields asked five leading suppliers for demonstrations. "Not being an engineer, I was confused by the complex technical sales pitch one representative offered me. Talk of bytes, global search, replacements and ergonomic systems was offered with no explanations and was not very

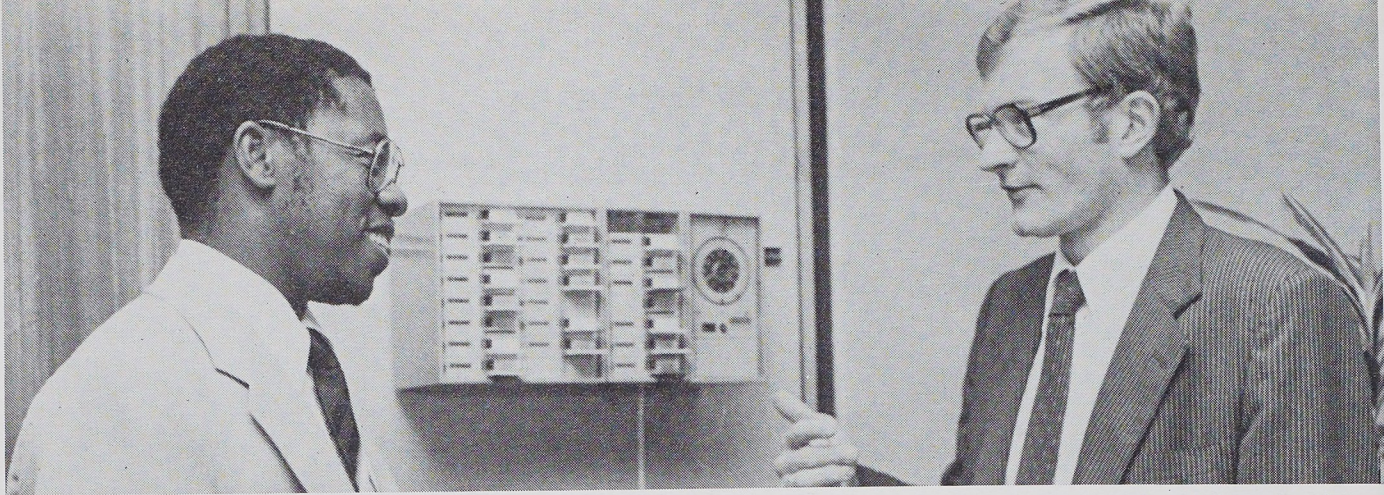
helpful to me. At first it sounded like something out of *Star Trek*."

Shields feels this approach is intended to browbeat rather than educate a prospective buyer. The representative of another company, having heard from an acquaintance on Perry & Associates' staff that it was in the market for WP, simply arrived without an appointment, asked to see a senior executive and began hauling out brochures while launching into his sales spiel.

"The only gain he made was to irritate the executive, who did not wish to be concerned at this stage. "It was most irritating to be monotonously told: This is the machine of the '80s. I took it for granted I was not going to be offered an obsolete machine of a decade ago," says Shields.

She lays the blame for the poor marketing approach squarely on the shoulders of suppliers. "It is not the ineptitude of individual salespeople, but the marketing strategy of the companies that I found wanting."

Demonstrations and explanations were invariably



FLEXTIME: A FINE LINE BETWEEN HONOUR AND ABUSE

Whatever happened to flexitime? After a decade in South Africa the idea of people starting and finishing work as they please, within reasonable limits, is still regarded as a novelty operated by only a handful of pioneering organizations. Many others experiment enthusiastically with flexitime only to return disillusioned to rigid hours.

Why so much reluctance to institute or maintain a way of working that outwardly holds many benefits for both company and employee? Where did flexitime, enjoyed widely in several other western industrialized countries, go wrong in South Africa?

Anglo American Insurance Holdings recently again refined its system for 800 head office staff over persevering with flexitime for six years. Group personnel manager Arie van der Zwan says: "To make flexitime work the staff must be fair and responsible."

Control Instruments product manager Ralf Morgenroth adds: "This is still an honour system though new electronic equipment will make cheating much more difficult."

Worker abuse and lax control at department level seem to be the main reasons why flexitime is avoided or abandoned by many companies. Keeping the employees happy, by allowing

them to come and go at will, is a high price to pay by managements if staff cheat into the bargain by clocking each other in and out or disappearing when the work pressure builds up.

Morgenroth points out that in West Germany and Switzerland, for example, 40% of the workforce eligible to be on flexitime (which is difficult for process or assembly line employees) operate the system with few problems. Van der Zwan says the Germans and Swiss have a much more disciplined and responsible attitude towards their work. He adds: "They are much more involved through their unions with things like flexitime. What usually happens in South Africa is that a management decides something and presents it to the workers."

Morgenroth submits that flexitime began as a sop to European employees when times were so good that they could squeeze better working hours out of their companies. Having worked so well, employers turned the revolutionary system to their own benefit. Van der Zwan, however, says flexitime in South Africa is virtually always a staff perk.

A great pity, if he is right, because flexibility in working hours should benefit both sides. Advantages include, for the employee, avoiding rush hours, shopping at leisure, afternoons for sport, accumulating free days, time off for hairdressers, dentists or tending to children without having to account to anybody where you've been or why you were off.

Advantages for companies include a happier staff, better productivity (people work harder when they want to work) and a drastic drop in absenteeism.

Flexitime, like most things that

are logical, civilized, beneficial and pleasing, doesn't quite work like that here. Somewhere between Bonn, Basle and Benoni the rules were bent. Overseas office workers must, for example, fit 140 hours a month into 22 days between 06h00 and 18h00. The only rules are that they must be at their desks during the core — or busy — times between, say 09h00-12h00 and 14h00-16h00 with a compulsory 30-minute lunchbreak anywhere between noon and 14h00.

Theoretically, a man or woman could work 06h00-18h00 every day to accumulate enough extra hours for 10 working days off the following month. What happens in reality, however, is that an extra 30 minutes or an hour spent each day at the desk means an afternoon free for golf, provided that there is someone left to cover back at the office, or using the credit hours to enjoy a long weekend trip.

Sounds an ideal arrangement, as long as the work doesn't suffer, but Van der Zwan says it is wide open to abuse. He adds: "Without tighter control there is nothing to stop a young fellow coming in at six o'clock, reading the paper for two hours till somebody else turns up, and by noon he has already done almost his full day's quota of hours."

Flexitime began in 1974 at African Eagle (subsequently acquired by the Anglo American Corporation) with its employees free to come and go between 06h00-18h00.

Van der Zwan says: "Top management has intervened twice to pull back the hours. Now they are 08h00 to 17h30 with at least 30 minutes for lunch between noon and 14h15. Staff can accumulate a credit of up to 10 hours a month, which they take later, and we tolerate some debit hours if the

Low-cost addressing by computer printout

*Speed, versatility and flexibility
are all strong points with the*

AM 8065 Labeller

The advantages of computer addressing are impressive, whether you use a bureau, buy time, or own a computer. Data processing people take for granted the virtually unlimited selection features and high speed printout on to continuous stationery, but converting this output into labelled material, ready for mailing, requires sophisticated equipment. AM International offers a range of such equipment to meet both high and low volume applications.

Designed and built to precision standards, the AM8065 Labeller is a compact machine that can operate on a table top. It's easy to use and easy to change from one mode to another, without tools.

The labelling head takes in computer-generated continuous stationery and perforates it between each column of addresses, then cuts it into a complete horizontal strip of addresses, separates them into individual labels, gums them and applies them to the mailing pieces in any desired position on the envelope.

The AM8065 Labeller is completely foolproof, so there's no danger of missed addresses.

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FLEXTIME

employee works them off over a few weeks."

He adds: "Absenteeism over one or two days has almost disappeared. Few people ring in with excuses about sudden colds or not feeling well. They don't have to. People who want to see dentists or hairdressers go and come back as they like."

Nobody, however, just disappears from his post long enough to cause stoppages or chaos. Department heads are expected to ensure that there is adequate back-up for anyone taking off an afternoon or accumulated days.

In spite of recent tightening up the 800 staff still have enough room to manoeuvre the average 7,75 hours of work a day advantageously into the allotted time. Van der Zwan says: "Most arrive between 08h00-08h30, to catch a lull in the morning rush, and the office is noticeably empty by 16h30."

Flexitime works at Anglo American Insurance Holdings, after some early abuses and modifications, but what would Van der Zwan do if the company were launching the scheme now?"

"Firstly, I'd involve the staff fully in drawing up the rules and

arrive at an agreement enforced by a representative committee. Secondly, I'd make each manager responsible for making flexitime work in his department "

Morgenroth says a new generation of electronic flexitime equipment will soon eliminate cheating as well as tightening security. Credit card-type keys allow access only to the holder as well as monitoring, among other things, his or her working time.

With better economic conditions causing much greater manpower mobility the time could be right for giving flexitime another chance.