



Electrolux finds a Solution

It may come as a surprise to learn that Electrolux, long associated with the Swedish home of its parent company, is currently Britain's largest cleaner manufacturer, and the UK's largest exporter of domestic appliances overall. The company has, since the 1920s, built up a UK manufacturing base sufficient to meet not only most of its UK market requirements but large parts of neighbouring markets as well.

What the company cannot export, of course, is its responsibility for customer service. All of its many domestic and commercial product lines, including vacuum cleaners, fridges, freezers, washing machines and dryers, cookers, dishwashers, oil-filled radiators, polishers and commercial laundry products have to be maintained and put right in case of any fault. Managing this service operation is a mammoth task, yet one which must be both efficient and reliable.

Aware that its tried and tested manual systems nevertheless lacked the increasing degree of control and statistics reporting required for today's

market conditions, the company in mid-1981 set up a project team chaired by Mike Hackney, management services manager. It comprised representatives from service management, accounting, spares and data processing departments, with a brief to determine how best to improve the productivity and financial controls within the service operation.

"Apart from wanting to improve our systems for internal reasons, we were also keen to be seen to meet our responsibilities as members of our industry body, AMDEA (the Association of Manufacturers of Domestic Electrical Appliances). Its code of practice requires customer service calls to be arranged within three days of any reported fault, a repair success rate of 80 per cent on the first service call and a repeat call, if needed, within 15 days maximum," Hackney says.

"We realised that our existing manual systems simply didn't provide



Electrolux

Mike Hackney — management services manager is pictured at the Luton headquarters of Electrolux Ltd

us with the statistics reporting we needed to measure our performance against these yardsticks accurately, even less to build our own improved internal productivity measures." What Electrolux did know was that its service representatives were already spending approximately 10 per cent of their time on paperwork — a load they did not wish to increase. Dozens of different forms had to be filled out to cover each aspect of their work, yet the manual clerical routines of handling the completed forms provided only minimal control checks and management reporting. Fault analysis by model, for example, was only partially applied and inevitably out of date by the time reports were completed.

On the inventory side, management felt that money was being wasted in holding excessively high stocks, but there was too little up-to-date information on stock movements to take effective action. Inventory was being held in a central store, regional stores, in service shops and in each representative's van — but how much was being held where in relation to actual requirements was difficult to monitor.

"The project team decided to develop a computerised post-call system to tackle these problems,"

Hackney says. "We termed it 'postcall' because we were looking to computerise only those activities following on from the original customer call and appointment.

"We spent some months over it, and had developed a full mainframe system specification when we came across news of the Rediffusion service application package being supplied to Thorn-EMI. Electrolux has had good experiences with Rediffusion in the past (it was a trail blazer in the installation of the Redifon 'Seecheck' key-to-disk system in the early 70s) so we decided it was worth a close look."

The Electrolux team first approached Thorn ("Although we're competitors, on the service side we're pretty-friendly," Hackney says) and were impressed with what they saw and heard. Follow-up with Rediffusion soon resulted in an order for a complete hardware/software package.

"Apart from appearing to address our defined requirements, the package also offered us the automation of service reception activity," Hackney says. "Now, the girls have a terminal in front of them with a wide range of information on tap, instead of a huge wall chart carrying only outline details of each representative's availability."

Electrolux took the installation of the new system as an opportune time to reorganise its service centres as a further step towards improved efficiency. London and surrounding areas used to be split across two centres in Croydon and Luton, but London and Essex are now served by a

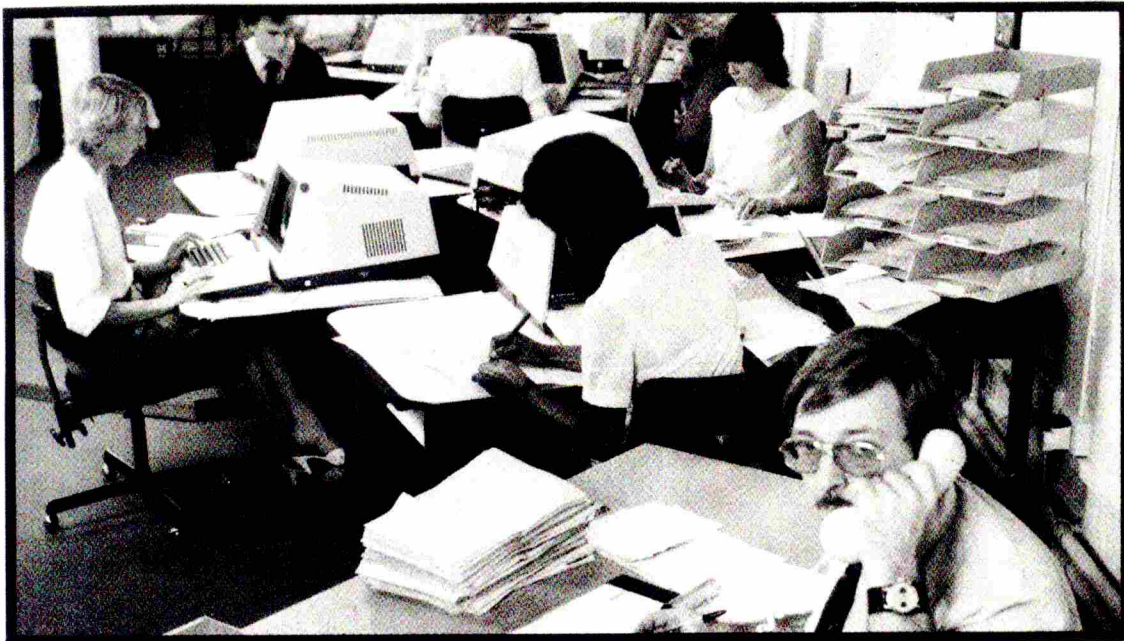
single unit in Wembley. It is one of five centres serving the entire UK, with increasing use of leased line arrangements to permit the majority of householders to contact Electrolux at local call rates.

The Wembley centre was the first to have the new system installed, in February of this year, with Birmingham following in the autumn. The Aldershot, Altham (near Blackburn) and Glasgow centres are all scheduled to be 'live' by the end of 1984. These plus a development system at Luton headquarters mean a total of six Rediffusion R2820s to be delivered under the £360,000 contract.

At Wembley, 10 Rediffusion reception terminals have been provided to handle incoming customer calls, resulting in hundreds of service appointments per day spread across the 57 area representatives controlled from the centre.

When a call comes in, the receptionist types in the customer's name, address and telephone number together with details of the product involved. The system automatically supplies her with full diary details of the representative for that area or, if he is ill or on holiday, an alternative who can cover. Once an appointment is arranged, all details together with any special messages (such as 'keys at No 28') are compiled into an appointment slip to be forwarded to the rep. Each is given an exclusive job number to assist with subsequent queries and to ensure that a confirmation call sheet is ultimately entered. If one isn't returned within the relevant time period, the

to serve its Customers Right



A Rediffusion R1800 60 is installed in the customer service centre at Electrolux Wembley which covers London and Essex. Pictured in the foreground is Roy Little — service office controller.

