INFORMATION MANAGEMENT
SPRING/SUMMER 1986

TELEPUTERS ENABLE GM'S DEALERS TO REACH PARTS OTHER SYSTEMS CAN'T

SCOOP is General Motors Service Parts Operations' computer-based Stock Control Ordering and Operating Procedure system designed by their in-house systems group.

SCOOP started off in the early 70s, when it looked to many people as though only large companies could afford to use computers. At that time Vauxhall-Bedford decided to provide a computer service to its dealers that would allow them to place parts orders directly. This it did and the service was called SCOOP.

Dealer stock files were set up and every week they sent in sales information which was keyed into the system to produce an up-to-date stock report for the dealers to act on. It worked very well and there were some improvements along the way – the original postal communication, for example, was replaced by paper tape terminals.

As, first, the minicomputer and, then, the microcomputer began to make inroads into the market towards the end of the 70s, however, dealers began to look at alternatives and many of them found that they could do the straightforward stock information job for themselves. And a lot of them went that route.

It was clear that it was the way in which SCOOP was communicating with the dealers that had got behind. There was nothing wrong with the mainframe software or the application itself with its progressive stock updates. There had just been such a shift in technology and the one thing that stuck out above all else was the need for a different and more modern means for communicating with the dealers. Communication by paper tape was just not satisfactory.

It was decided early on that some form of electronic communication was required – driven by a couple of considerations. The first was that whatever new method of communication was introduced it would have to work with the existing application of SCOOP; which was well known and proven.

Second, while attracted from the outset by videotex, it had been concluded that videotex on its own in the Prestel sense was not sufficient. GMSPO knew they would have to work with someone who could handle bulk data transmission. In addition, the team wanted something that would work in 1985 and not necessarily a total solution that looked out into the future.

The bulk data requirements, of course, reflected the size of the GMSPO dealer application which covers all parts and accessories for the Vauxhall-Opel cars and Bedford commercial vehicles. In the case of cars, this covers all current vehicle parts and those that have not been

seven years. In the case of Bedford vehicles, it's all current vehicle parts and those out of production for less than ten years.

This accords with guidelines agreed within the SMMT in the 70s and there are particular cases where parts servicing continues beyond the seven and ten-year limits.

The visitor to the Dunstable offices gets some idea of the size of the GMSPO operation, with over one million sq. ft. of warehousing just a few miles away beside the M1 motorway.

The parts that are stocked include over 100,000 line items with more than 37 million individual parts at any one time. The trend, moreover, is for the number of parts to go up as new models are launched.

From their warehouse, GMSPO services nearly 700 dealers in the UK and anywhere in the world for Bedford Trucks.

All the same, not all dealers are yet into computers. In this context, the ease of use of videotex, its 'user-friendliness' as a communications device, had a particular attraction to the GMSPO team. The GM group as a whole has also been attracted to videotex and its EDS worldwide subsidiary is developing a mainframe videotex system with assistance from the CAP Gemini Sogeti group to cover vehicle ordering and a whole range of passenger car applications.

It was important to develop SCOOP to fit in with the whole thrust of GM's communications strategy. This strategy is coalescing around videotex and the developments to SCOOP illustrate some of the reaosns why this is so.

Having looked at a range of different solutions in the market, GMSPO opted to base SCOOP communications on ROCC Computers' Teleputer 3 terminal that combined videotex with data communications and that also offered a range of applications software that some dealers would find useful.

In the event, GMSPO went to its dealers with a recommendation that they should replace paper tape communication with the ROCC package, including an integral modem which proved to be an important selling point. The dealer would buy the equipment from ROCC and GMSPO undertook to market the service and support it internally.

The new service went live in March 1985 and, at the latest count, has built up to a point where over 80 dealers are now using Teleputer 3s on the system.

What they get is online communication, direct ordering, overnight confirmation of what has been ordered, and recommended ordering from GMSPO. It is understood that even some very large dealers who have bought very expensive computer systems for their own use have concluded that, when it comes to communications with GMSPO, it's still cost-effective to use the Teleputer 3.

"There's no doubt that any dealer who has got the new SCOOP facility has got a head start on competition."

It was unrealistic to expect all dealers to sign up for the new system, but GMSPO was predicting that the numbers could easily double and perhaps get up to 200-250 users before long, bringing transaction rates up to between 40,000 and 60,000 transactions a day.

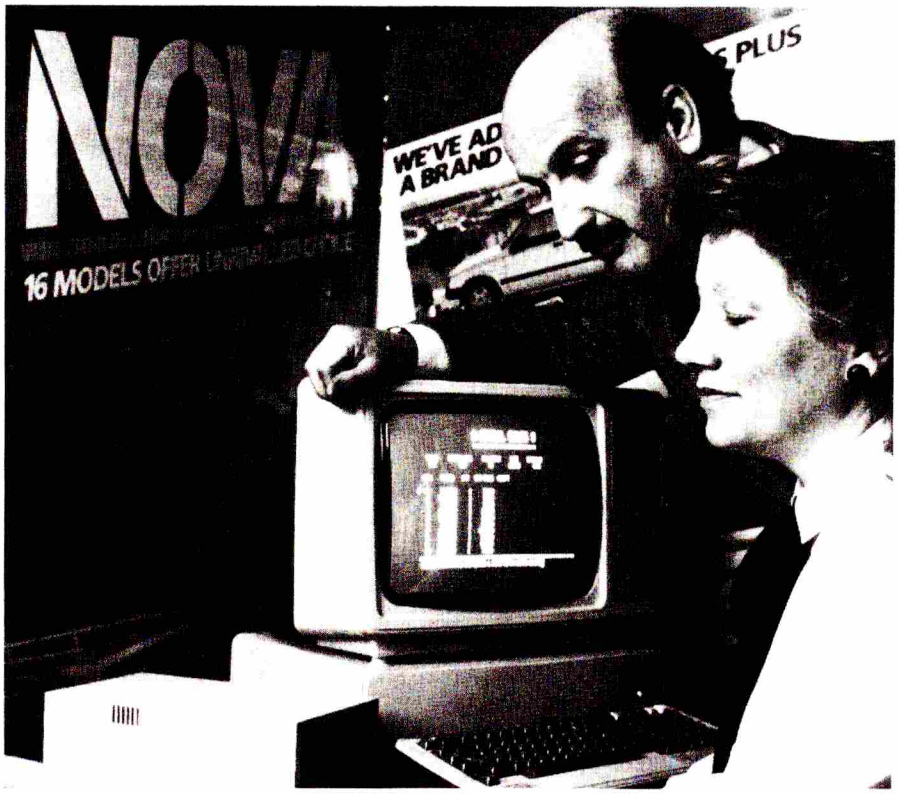
There's no doubt that any dealer who has got the new SCOOP facility has got a head start on competition.

Interestingly, the system is beginning to attract attention from outside the dealer community. Bedford Trucks, for example, does a great deal of business with the Ministry of Defence and the Teleputer 3 has been installed in the MoD to allow it to go directly into the GMSPO computer system for its extensive parts ordering.

It was a prerequisite that the Teleputer 3 could communicate with the wider GM computer network, including the EDS videotex network. Currently, the Teleputer 3 communicates with an HP3000 minicomputer system, but it also needed the ability to communicate directly into the EDS-NAS mainframe computers for enquiry purposes.

ROCC had a few technical problems along the way, since to get to the mainframe had meant going through equipment from some 14 different suppliers, but ROCC picked their way through the problems and got it working.

Modern communications methods between GMSPO and their customers are definitely high on the list of priorities.



Over 80 GM dealers are now using ROCC's Teleputer 3s. These are linked into SCOOP, GMSPO's Stock Control and Operating Procedure system, with dealers using the terminals for online communication, direct ordering and overnight confirmation of what has been ordered. They also receive from GMSPO, recommended ordering.

Pictured are John Ensco – group parts manager of Evans Halshaw, the Crawley-based GM dealer and Pamela Murray – computer operator.