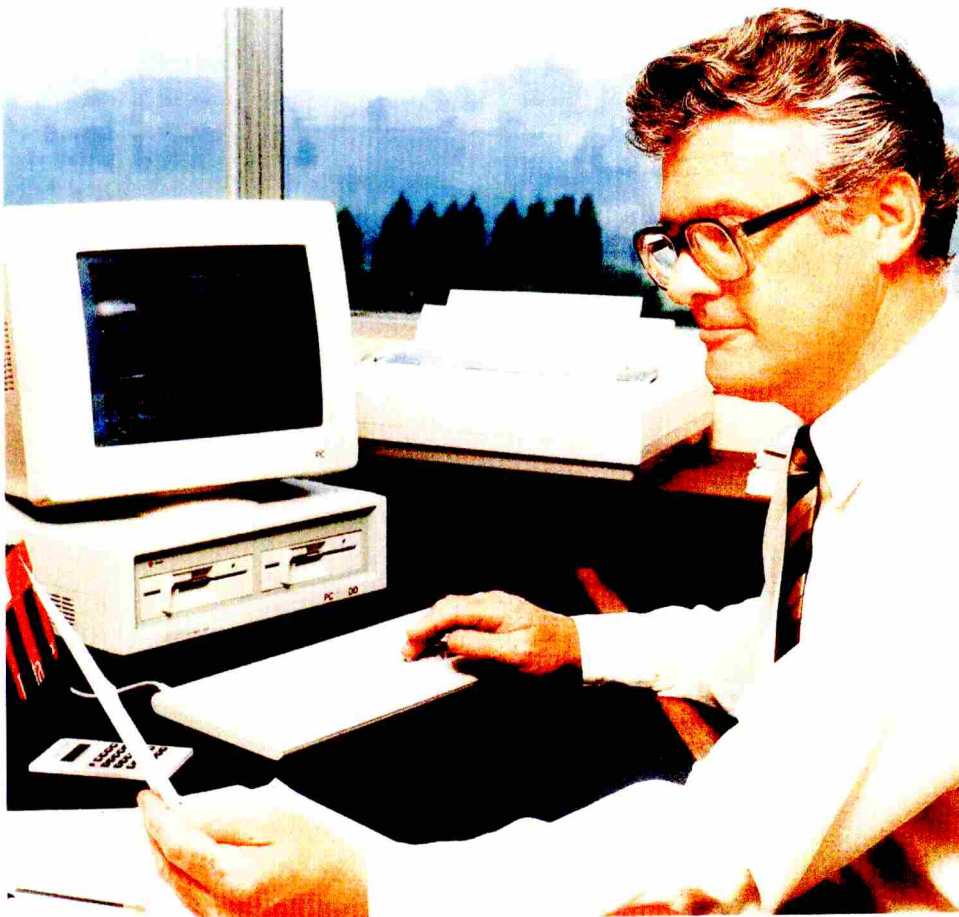


# VIDEOTEX

TAKES THE BIND OUT OF BOOK SALES REP'S ORDERING



*Bywater... "If we wish to expand these numbers in future then the cost per capita will be extremely cheap."*

**I**n the highly competitive world of retailing, it is imperative that the distributor's travelling sales reps can rapidly convey details of customers' orders to the warehouse.

Traditionally in the book trade, a book shop places an order with a distributor's rep who takes it down on a paper order form. The order is then posted to the publisher's offices where it is rekeyed for invoicing. The book shop would expect to receive the contents of that order typically about two weeks from placing it.

Clearly the rep who can confidently claim to supply copies of an ordered book in a shorter time would have the competitive edge. Located near the beautiful Mendip

Hills in the Avon village of Paulton is the Purnell Distribution Centre (formerly Purnell Book Centre), a division of Macdonald Publishing, itself a part of the Maxwell Communication Corporation. With the help of a computerised videotex sales support system running on a ROCC private videotex system, Purnell has reduced its turnaround on sales representatives' orders by up to one week.

From giant warehouse and office premises and with 25 years of book distribution experience, Purnell distributes about 20 million books each year to 15,000 accounts for Macdonald Publishing, which accounts for two-thirds of Purnell's total sales.

In 1985, Purnell's managing director Bob Bywater looked to

improve his company's revenue by pursuing third-party distribution, in conventional book publishing and in more diverse areas such as computer software, educational videos, games and music cassettes.

This strategy has proved successful; sales have doubled to £48m in the three years since 1985, and includes 10 percent export sales to other English speaking nations. In order to further strengthen its competitive position in the book distribution market, Purnell capitalised on its computerised warehouse system with the development of the Purnell Book Videotex System (PBVS). PBVS was developed initially and exclusively for Macdonald Publishing, but it is likely to be available to Purnell's third party customers in the future.

"About a year ago we considered using hand-held data entry devices to speed our warehouse book stock-taking," said Bywater. "It became obvious that they could also be used by reps to take orders from book shops.

"We had previously considered a videotex system mainly for communicating with our 36 trade sales reps operating nationwide, but rejected it as not cost effective," he explained. "But when we came to consider the hand-held computers for order entry, we could see the benefits of using them in the field, which could then link via videotex terminals at the reps' homes to a computerised order collection and sales support system running on a ROCC computer. With their small memory and limited screen displays, the hand-helds worked well in the field, but were inadequate for messaging. That's when we saw the advantage of linking them to a central system." What attracted Purnell to the concept of ROCC centralised intelligence with relatively cheap hand-held terminals linking remotely, was its flexibility and the low cost of future expansion.

The linkage between them and



ROCC utilises standard videotex technology with which any future hand-held or lap top computer seems certain to be equipped. The ROCC computer currently interfaces with an IBM mainframe but would be equally comfortable with DEC or any other major computer supplier.

"We were able to present a sound financial case for a system supporting 36 reps, but if we wish to expand those numbers in future the cost per capital will be

now find invaluable to communicate with us and other reps in an interactive way," he added. "This is a major spin-off benefit."

Each Macdonald sales rep is equipped with a hand-held computer which is used 'in the field'. At home the rep has a standard videotex adaptor linked to a domestic 14" colour TV and a screen printer.

When the rep gets home, he connects his hand-held terminal to the videotex adaptor, dials Purnell's

ment distribution system.

Although the initial justification for the system was a faster order turnaround, there is also great value to reps in the information they can glean from the system's sales support facility. This means that reps can go into a retail outlet fully briefed on the client's financial position, whether in credit or debit, or if no further order can be accepted without leaving with a cheque in hand!

Reps can also send and receive



*Williams: "Book sales reps can send their orders direct to us from their home or hotel."*

extremely cheap," said Bywater. With an interactive system such as the one ROCC Computers helped Purnell develop, not only can the reps send in orders from home, but they can also ask the ROCC videotex computer to confirm the order information it received, and give the rep the opportunity to amend it by altering, adding or deleting details.

"We concentrated on giving book sales reps a practically helpful, intelligent and speedy ordering system," said Purnell's data processing manager, Alan Williams, "one which they could use to send in their day's orders direct to us from their home - or hotel if they stayed on the road."

"The videotex messaging system came as a bonus which the reps

ROCC videotex computer in Paul-ton, sends his orders and then confirms them via the TV screen.

Once the rep transmits his order details, they are held on the ROCC 2820. Each evening at nine o'clock Purnell's IBM 4361 mainframe asks the ROCC computer for order details, then processes the orders and creates the order entry documentation including delivery notes, invoices and warehouse picking notes.

Since the time savings and the potential for interactive sales support systems is so significant, Bywater has since identified the ROCC system as capable of opening up a new marketing potential for servicing sales reps of other non-competitive companies needing a speedy order entry and fulfil-

messages, including urgent priority ones which prevent the recipient from using the system until he reads his messages.

Sales reps typically get information on sales orders on specific books or sales trends using printed reports posted to them weekly. Given the speed and ease of the new videotex messaging system, they will soon be able to do so daily. Already they are able to share their experience with other reps and with sales management.

In addition, a sales manager can 'broadcast' a message to a number of selected reps or all reps.

"One sales manager reported that whilst he used to take up to three and a half hours to com-

The Purnell Book Videotex Service running on a ROCC private videotex system has reduced its turnaround on book reps' orders by up to one week.

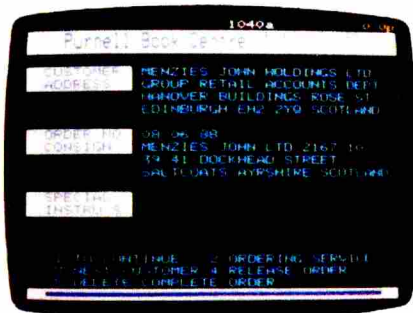
A brief look at the four videotex screens shows how they use the videotex service.



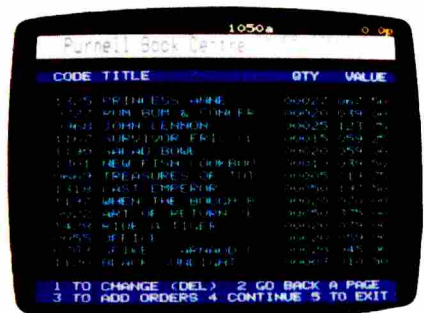
Screen 1 - Order Services Menu. After a hard day on the road, book reps, in the comfort of their own homes, can transmit their orders, review and release them for and processing at Purnell's Paulton headquarters.



Screen 2 - Is a summary by customer of the orders transmitted that day.

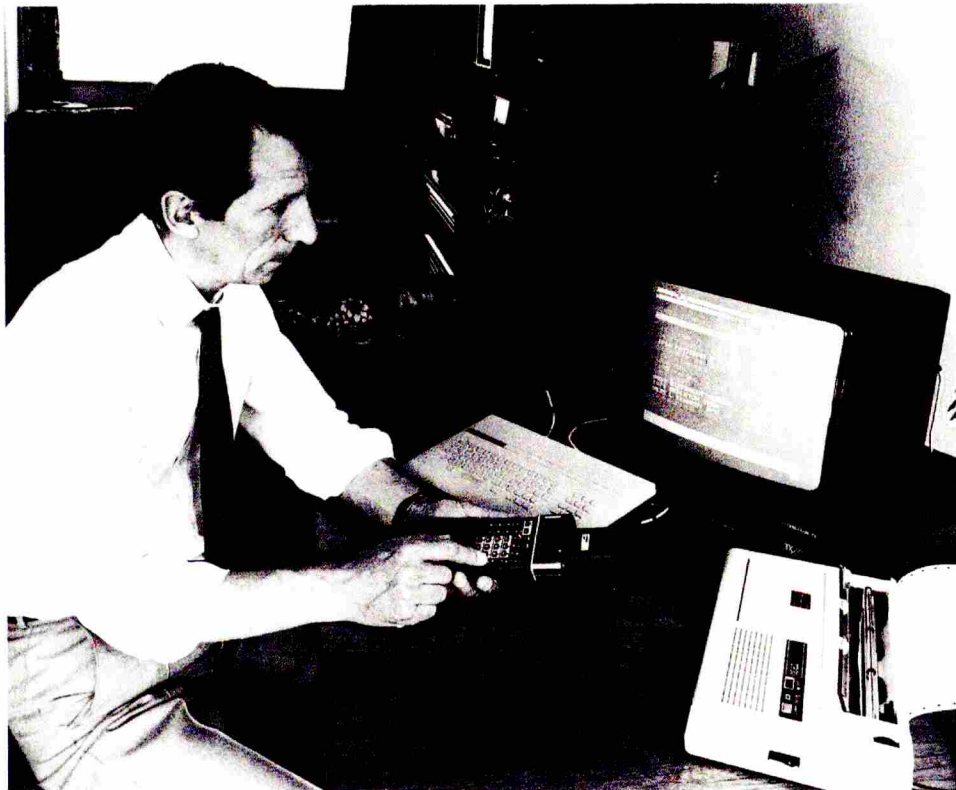


Screen 3 - The book reps can check to see that the order header details are correct i.e. the customer's name and address, order number and consignee and if any special instructions have to be noted.



Screen 4 - This is a follow on from screen 3 showing individual titles and quantities that the customer has ordered. These can be amended, if required.

Picture shows a sales book representative at home using Purnell's PBVS videotex system.



communicate with all his reps by telephone, he can now give them all

exactly the same message in minutes," Williams said.

Consequently, reps can act with speed when a product receives unexpected promotion. For example, Macdonald published the book of the film, The Last Emperor. When the film won nine Oscar awards this spring, sales managers immediately 'broadcast' messages simultaneously to all reps to help them promote further sales of the book following the film's Hollywood success. Further systems are under development to enable the reps (and/or their managers) to see their performance against that of other reps.

Williams explained that Purnell never tried to cost justify the system on a time/cost basis, but presented it to their board simply as a means to give Macdonald's (and ultimately other sales reps within MCC) a competitive edge. Bywater concluded, "Our PBVS system running on the ROCC computer gives Purnell a significant improvement in order turnaround, instant and interactive communication between reps, but most of all a real sales support system for getting account management information to reps prior to their sales visits." ■