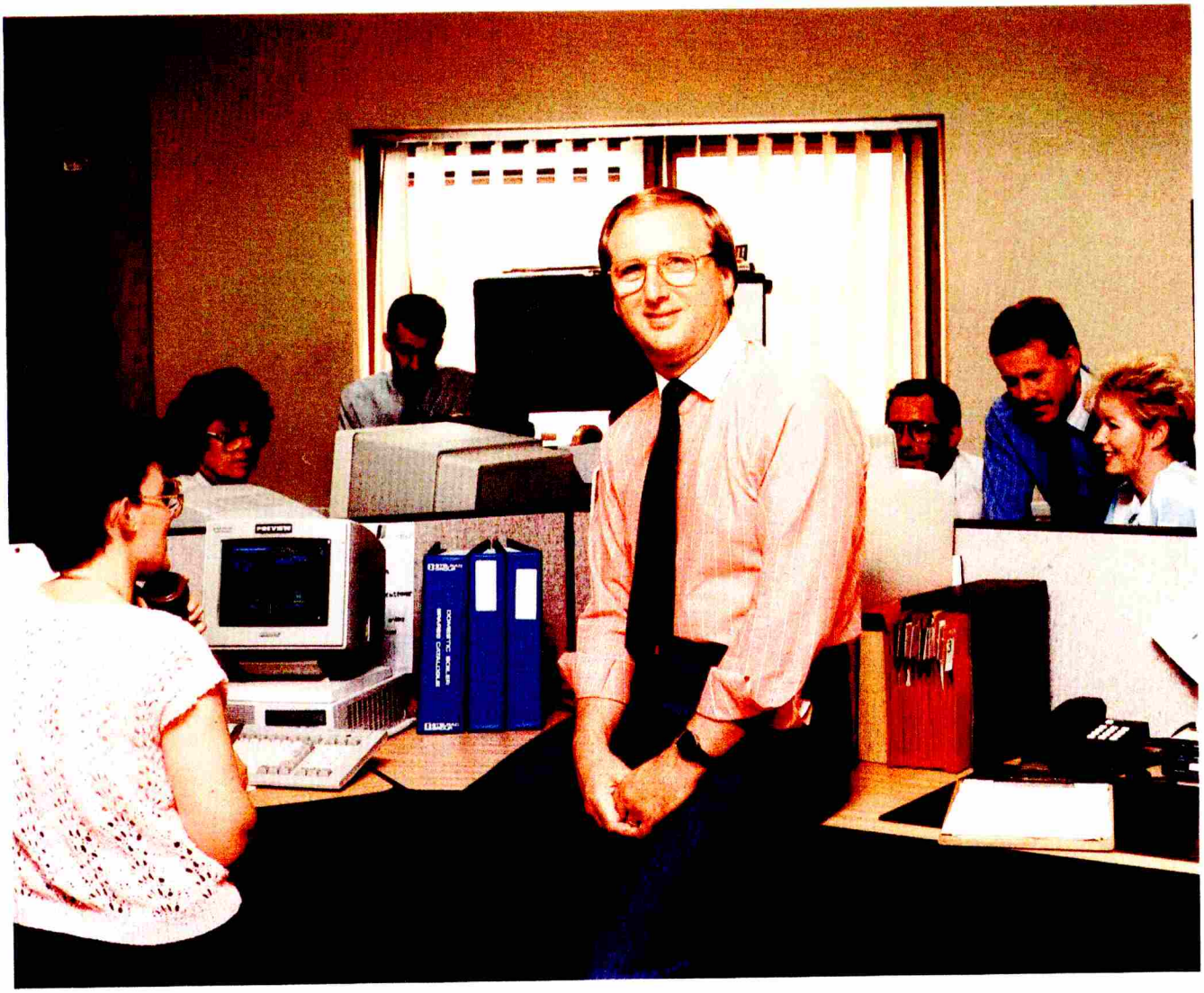
Stelrad 1988

STELRAD IDEAL



Strawbridge ... "The net benefit to us is the same net benefit to our customers."

In the service industry, the customer *is* king — and that's no platitude. When a customer telephones, it's often the first impression which can establish a good or poor working relationship. The voice and manner of the customer service department is, effectively, the voice of the organisation.

Customer service staff in any organisation must have the facts at their fingertips in order to successfully satisfy customers on the telephone. A happy customer is a loyal customer.

Many manufacturers of larger domestic appliances have a common problem and this is that their appliances are becoming increasingly sophisticated.

Despite all the quality checks and stringent schemes of supervision and control in line with all the relevant British Standards, things still do occasionally go wrong.

As one of the UK's leading suppliers of domestic, commercial and industrial heating boilers and the UK leader in domestic radiators, Stelrad prides itself on responding quickly and efficiently to resolve such difficulties.

Based in Hull's attractively redeveloped dockland area, Stelrad Ideal, the heating division of the Stelrad Group Ltd, has an annual turnover of £110 million with about 2000 employees. As a manufacturer, Stelrad supplies its products to builders merchants who sell on the products to the end user's installers.

Stelrad has 20 field repair engineers to service products mainly during the 12-month warranty, but as a benefit to the end user, it also services many more requests for help from the users even though the problem is due to the installation and not its product.

Stelrad is constantly looking to

improve its customer service and is now a user of a ROCC Corporate Videotex System (CVS) nicknamed SESAME dedicated to improving customer service by improved communications through a user-friendly means for its product services staff and service engineers. The ROCC CVS system has already helped speed Stelrad's product service response time.

Twelve Stelrad product tele-services staff take customers' phone calls for the field service engineers. The tele-service staff receive requests ranging from literature for obsolete products to requests for a service visit (sometimes to a home with a boiler which is not even Stelrad's own!).

The best support 'tool' product services has at its disposal is information. Information of a wide variety from detailed specification on the product, to which morning or afternoon the service engineer is free to call to fix the problem.

Brian Strawbridge, Stelrad's product services manager, said, "We are not in a high growth market, so we need to improve our business by improving customer service for a competitive edge; videotex communications to provide information to our tele-services staff and communications between them and our field service engineers plays a valuable part in that. Every enquiring caller is an individual to whom we must respond as quickly and efficiently as possible."

SESAME (Service Engineers' Scheduling And Management Environment) allows product services to keep the diaries of all nationwide service engineers at its fingertips. This means Stelrad is always in control and can answer the caller's query without 'passing the buck'. A customer knows when to expect the service engineer's visit and can plan accordingly.

When Stelrad originally looked for a means to improve its customer service, it looked at the gamut of options including a bureau service, personal computers (PCs), minicomputers and mainframe solutions. But it wanted to start gently with a pilot scheme and be able to opt out of the 'project' if it did not show results in 12 months.

When Stelrad began looking for a solution about two years ago, in-house PCs was an expensive option. A VAN (Value Added Network) bureau service with a videotex facility was rejected as not offering sufficient in-house control, and if/when the system was developed enough to come totally in-house, the software would have needed total rewriting, and that would have meant more software development manpower – an unattractive additional overhead.

The option of using a package on the company's mainframe could do all the work of a bureau service, but meant more development work in-house (an added overhead).

The minicomputer solution offered the best option of the maximum of in-house control coupled with the least amount of development time, and it offered protection for Stelrad's development investment. Stelrad had been using a ROCC minicomputer for data capture for about 10 years and approached ROCC for a videotex solution for its communication needs.

"We estimated that with a 32-port mini we could support up to 250 people on the system, so the future was well catered for," said Stelrad's dp manager Terry Childs. "We already had in the back of our minds the potential of expanding the system to aid in communication with our sales staff of 50 plus."

Stelrad believed that the videotex solution offered low-cost field terminal connection and a user-friendly electronic mail messaging system to include the ability to 'broadcast' the same identical message to all people within a pre-defined group of specific individuals.

"Another factor for choosing ROCC is that they offered to help with software development," Childs said. "Software development began in June 1987 and the pilot went live the next month. We initially planned to run the pilot for three months, but the system worked so well that after

Childs "The videotex system worked so well that after only three weeks we pushed it out nationally."

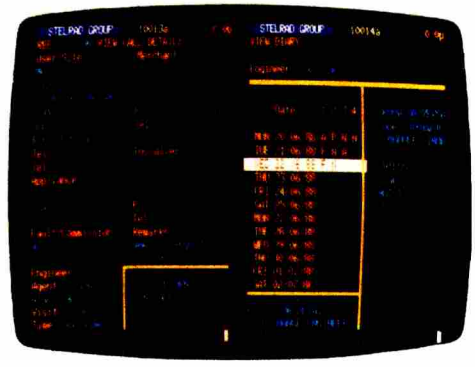
Customer service staff in any organisation must have the facts at their fingertips in order to successfully satisfy customers over the telephone. A happy customer is a loyal customer.

At Stelrad Ideal there are 20 field repair engineers to service products. Each one has a 14" colour TV and keyboard with inboard modem at home so that they can use the company's videotex service aptly named, SESAME.

Screen 1 Shows the Service Administration Menu. Stelrad's product services department is responsible for arranging the engineers' service calls. If a service visit is necessary then the product services officer will check the engineer's diary to see what appointments are already scheduled and then arrange with the customer a convenient date and time for a service call.

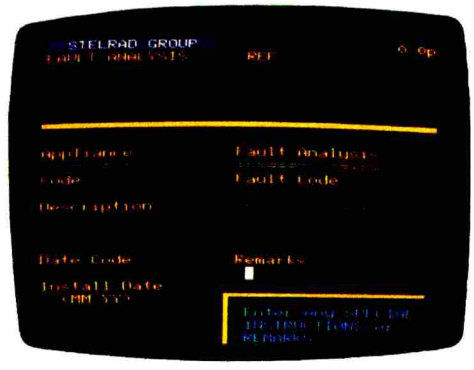
Screen 2 Product services can amend or reschedule an existing service call. However the engineers are unable to access SESAME to reschedule any of their appointments.

Screen 3 SESAME allows the product services officers to view an engineer's diary over a two-week period.



Screen 4 When entering a service call product services officers can alter the screen from 40 to 80 column characters to allow them to retain the service call details while at the same time giving them the opportunity to view an engineer's diary to select a convenient appointment date.

Screen 5 On arriving home the engineers access their diaries to check on the next day's appointments and report back to Stelrad Ideal on the current day's service calls.



Screen 6 This shows an engineer's fault analysis report.

only three weeks we pushed it out nationally – the benefits became so obvious.

"Though we were to move into new premises in August, by the end of September every service engineer was on the system. It contributed greatly to company morale and immediately helped customer relations.

"To demonstrate how SESAME has helped us improve our customer service, the backlog of outstanding service calls has been reduced considerably to 25 per cent of the level experienced some 18 months ago," said Strawbridge proudly. "SESAME running on the ROCC computer has also helped service engineer productivity."

SESAME starts working for Stelrad the moment a telephone query arrives in the product services department. If a service visit is necessary, customer service turns to SESAME to choose from one of the on-screen options of Enter New Calls, Amend Existing Calls, View Call Info, View Engineers Diary, Update Engineers Diary, On-line Fault Analysis, Send a Message, View a Message or Exit from SESAME.

Once product services enter and allocate the service call details to a particular engineer by area, his diary automatically pops up onto the screen to show what work is already scheduled for him and what time is still free. Product services can then allocate calls in the same geographical area to maximise an engineer's time.

Each field service engineer is supplied with a home terminal comprising a 14" colour monitor TV and keyboard with inboard modem. Each evening he dials up the ROCC computer to ask SESAME for his next day's service calls and enters in any comments or details about his current day's calls. His screen's first menu offers the options of looking at Tomorrow's Calls, Diary, Enter Fault Analysis, Send a Message, View a Message, or Log out of SESAME.

"The system is so easy to use," Strawbridge said, "that all any user has to do is simply fill-in a form appearing on the screen. And of course free format text entry is the backbone of the messaging system."

SESAME's fault analysis feature is invaluable in detecting early any pattern of recurring faults, and whether it is due to the product's manufacture or to a faulty supplied part. Management reports for fault analysis is one of the next projects Strawbridge has in mind. "I believe that the ROCC computer could provide us in hours the fault analysis charts that currently take us four man-days per month to produce.

"The net benefit to us is the same net benefit to our customers, and that is improved customer relations and better customer service," Strawbridge said.

Meanwhile Stelrad Ideal is running its pilot messaging system on the ROCC CVS for its 50 field sales staff. Managers can broadcast promotional material and sales directives, plus assess each rep's call patterns and performance.

Stelrad's commitment to improved customer service is emphasised with its continued investment in improved communications through the medium of advanced videotex. ■

1988 OCTOBER

13 Thursday

14 Friday

DiaryNote

October 13–14

ROCC Conference/Exhibition ROCC Computer Users' Association A.G.M., Chesford Grange Hotel, Kenilworth, Warwicks.

OCTOBER

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

NOTES

Rocc Conference and Workshop.