

The 'Teleputer' is only for the bigger buyers

INVENTING a new type of data processing machine, the "teleputer," Rediffusion has launched the System Alpha, the micro that only sells at a discount.

The company has packaged a viewdata terminal in with a CP/M based microsystem, and can use it to drive video tape and video disk players.

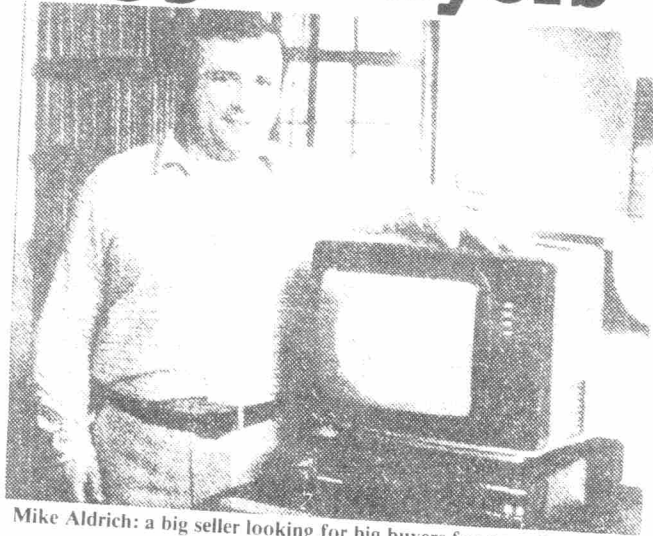
But, determined that nobody shall ever buy just one, Rediffusion has fixed the price at a whacking £4,000 for a twin diskette system.

"We don't wish to go into the personal computer market," said managing director Mike Aldrich last week.

"We want to go to corporations who want hundreds or thousands of units, and they will get a substantial discount," he said.

At a price of closer to £2,000 (DataLink's informed estimate of the cost if you buy 1,000 Alphas) the micro will attract people like the big clearing banks, thinks Aldrich.

"It will be used in its simplest form (price £750 without discount) as a very advanced business videotex terminal, able to store ten pages for subsequent free access," predicted sales chief Mike Burdett.



Mike Aldrich: a big seller looking for big buyers for a small machine.

Unlike earlier viewdata terminals the Alpha can transmit as fast as it receives, that is at 1,200 bits per second.

The full system would be used as a training aid by big clearing banks, the company thought.

Aldrich said: "It will lead to the creation of a completely new market in interactive video."

This would allow video presentations to stop automatically, ask a question

based on instructional material, and respond with the next teaching step (or the previous one if the student hadn't got the point).

The company also expects that when the product finally appears on the market next summer, it will do a lot to help its private "business viewdata" system which it is selling to large corporations already.

Guy Kewney

REDIFFUSION LAUNCHES MICRO WITH VIEWDATA

Rediffusion claims to have identified a new market and is aiming to capture a large slice of it with its new integrated multi-function personal computer with Viewdata facilities call, wait for it, the Teleputer.

Announcing the new machine at the company's headquarters at Crawley in Sussex, Mike Aldrich, Rediffusion's managing director, claimed that it was multi-applicational in that it could handle any computing job; by using interactive videotex it could have a profound impact on education in computer assisted learning; it will have a wide application in publishing — particularly in trade catalogue type publishing; in entertainment circles Mike Aldrich sees it replacing space invader machines in Arcades.

The Teleputer is basically a 64K byte micro computer with Prestel compatible Viewdata and an optional video disc or video cassette.

Rediffusion were emphatic that they will not be selling the new machines in ones and twos and that they will be interested only in large Corporations or multiple users for the foreseeable future.

Teleputers will be manufactured at the company's production unit in Crawley and Peacehaven and some test units will be produced this year. Volume production will begin in the middle of 1982.

the information system concept

By Mick Elliott

Alpha 4 goes one step further by offering computer-controlled video cassette recording for interworking sound, vision and computing as a single system, a feature Mike Aldrich sees as a big attraction to the educational market.

VIDEODISC

Alpha 5 is identical to model four except that videodisc will be substituted for VCR.

This as Aldrich admits is a facility which will not be available until at least the middle of next year. He is planning to use the Philips Laservision system which is still hitting production problems at the company's Blackburn facility.

The advantages in backing videodisc in this system are simple economics. The cost of a player will be at least half or even a quarter of the price of VCRs.

Aldrich also makes the point that access is easier on a videodisc, and as some of his potential customers may be businessmen in a hurry, they will be happier with the videodisc.

Aldrich feels the telecomputer's impact will create new kinds of communications media and new businesses.

For example interactive video is a market which, in his words, "does not even exist today".

PRIME TARGET

"But in two years' time it will be in worldwide usage in a training role," he predicts. A software contract for the interactive video system will be signed shortly.

In the publishing business Aldrich picks on the catalogue market as a prime target. While sound and vision remain constant, data changes. And as the teleputer can communicate with any number of computer networks

information can be transferred. Colour graphics are also offered on the Alpha system.

Aldrich's initial business targets will be European companies who will be looking to buy in volume.

"We don't want to get into selling these systems one-off at the moment", he comments.

And some major contracts will be announced in the next few months he revealed. While Aldrich would not elaborate, these contracts may concern east European countries.

Certainly the system was shown at an exhibition in Moscow last month, and reaction was very favourable.

The eastern bloc has always been a lucrative market for the company, and makes up some 30 to 35 per cent of its export sales.

The US market will have to wait for the time being. There are some standardisation problems which Rediffusion can overcome, so the assault on this rich market may not be too far away.

HEAD START

The first Alpha systems should start rolling off the production lines early next year. For the moment this can be fitted into Rediffusion's present facilities at Peacehaven and Crawley, but if Aldrich's expectations are met, then extra space will be required.

The company has a head start over its competition in an expanding market. Nobody at Rediffusion expects to see a rival system on the market place until mid-1982 at the earliest.

The market projections are enough to make any salesman's mouth water.

According to Frost & Sullivan the number of terminals in use for viewdata will approach 20 million by 1989. At that rate viewdata will be a \$2bn business.

Aldrich's bouncy optimism in his teleputer looks well placed. Prices range from £750 for Alpha 1 to £3,395 for Alpha 3. Rental terms are available.