Microfile

Jack Schofield
Computer editor

MORE THAN 700,000 PCs worth £1.6 billion were sold in the UK during 1989, reports Context, the London-based market research firm.

The top 10 PC firms by volume of sales were: 1. IBM (24.7 per cent); 2. Amstrad (16.7); 3. Compaq (13.4); 4. Apple (6.2); 5. Tandon (6.2); 6. Apricot (4.9); 7. Toshiba (4.1); 8. Olivetti (3.3); 9. Tulip (1.8); 10. Victor (1.7).

One "surprising result" to emerge from the research was the relative decline of IBM's non-standard Micro Channel Architecture expansion bus. Compared with 1988, sales of MCA machines dropped from 13 to 12 per cent of the market by volume, and from 24 to 21 per cent by value. Sales of ISA machines (Industry Standard Architecture — the PC AT bus) increased from 57 to 70 per cent by volume in the same period.

Servers

IBM'S SIX new fileservers, announced last week, include PS/2 Model 80 micros and Model 65s. The Model 80 is available with a 25MHz or a 20MHz Intel 80286 and either 120M or 320M hard discs, which makes four. The Model 65 has a 16MHz Intel 80386SX chip and either a 60M or 120M hard disc. All use the SCSI interface. Prices range from £3,545 to £7,831 plus VAT.

The new machines run standard server software including Novell and Banyan's Vines.

IBM also announced a new model of its Japanese-made P70 portable using the 16MHz 386SX processor, internal and external CD ROM drives, and a low cost (£1,368) laser printer.

Baby/36

TODAY'S micros can also be used as small minis — a fact which IBM has deigned to notice only a decade later than everyone else. However, since the firms that buy them tend to be small, and since that's a market where "IBM has traditionally been weak," it has finally decided to take the risk.

IBM has thus licensed California Software's Baby/36 program, which effectively converts a PC into the equivalent of an IBM System/36 mini. In fact, IBM has exclusive rights for one year to the OS/2 version, which supports up to 16 users running RPGII programs. California Software will continue to sell the DOS version.

Alan Thompson, IBM's Personal Systems manager of Small Business Systems, said it twice: "In case you haven't got the message, IBM is keen on promoting multi-user — up to 16 users — on IBM PS/2s!" So owners of small S/36 minis needn't feel obliged to upgrade to the expensive AS/400 mini.

Big tape

THE FIRST tape drive to use ICI's Digital Paper has been shipped by Creo Products Inc of Vancouver, Canada. A 12-inch reel of 35mm tape can store a million megabytes — the equivalent of 5,000 tape cartridges or a billion sheets of typed paper. The customer? The Canadian Centre for Remote Sensing.

ICI is also offering licences to encourage the use of Digital Paper in Bernouilli-type optical disc drives.

Plan 9

THE FUTURE of Unix will be unveiled in London this summer with the first public announcement of Plan 9 from Bell Labs at the UK Unix User Group's annual conference. And most of the major developers of Unix and the C language will be there, including Ken Thompson, Dennis Ritchie, Brian Kernighan and Minix-author Andrew Tanenbaum.

The conference will be held at the Royal Lancaster Hotel from July 11-13, preceded by two days of tutorials. Details are available from UKUUG at Owles Hall, Buntingford, Herts or ukuug-exec@ukc.ac.uk.

Open systems

ITALY has followed West Germany, which last month officially adopted X/Open standards for the purchase of government computer systems.

The European Commission is already committed to X/Open's Unix-based standards and has issued a binding decision which obliges member states to consider open systems when calling for tenders for systems.

In the UK the emphasis has tended to be on Open Systems Interconnection (OSI) communications standards, as embodied in the Government OSI Profile. The latest version (3.1) of GOSIP has just been published by HMSO at £95. It can be ordered on 01-873 9090.

Wiz

WIZ is a £199 mouse-type input device which runs over a small graphics pad holding a software template. Thus it combines the ease of use of a mouse with the accuracy and programmability of a digitiser pad. (The resolution is 1,000 dots per inch, compared with the 72dpi of Apple's mouse.)

Colour-coded templates provide instant access to the most common commands. So far there are templates for nine DOS, three Windows and 16 Apple Macintosh programs. These include Lotus 1-2-3, dBase IV, Microsoft Word and WordPerfect for DOS; PageMaker and Excel for Windows; and Word, WordPerfect, Excel, PageMaker, Quark Xpress and Adobe Illustrator for the Mac.

Wiz is being sold through dealers, but the manufacturer, CalComp, is on 0734 320032.

Far out

THE FIRST issue of Cyber Times, a new bi-monthly billed as "the only serious guide to the unbelievable," has finally appeared. It's half-way between a hacker fanzine and a trendy glossy such as Electric Word, being monochrome and produced on a Mac SE/30 and LaserWriter.

Between the futuristic news snippets and the lists of bulletin boards, the main features cover cyberspace (VPL, AutoDesk), TV, video and home automation at the sort of speed which makes you wonder if there will be anything left for issue three.

Cyber Times also offers cyberscratch videos, sequencer data hits, hyperwear (a T-shirt) and "Total systems crash live: an evening with twin 32-bit decks with Sony erasable and custom video samplers for sound-to-light wipe-out. Human engineer thrown in free."

Subscriptions cost £15 from 90A Devonshire Road, London SE23 3SX. Readers must be able to cope with different sizes of type printed on the same line.

Biomuse

RESEARCHERS at Stanford University, California, have designed an electronic musical instrument called Biomuse, according to the Computergram daily newsletter.

Put electrodes on your skin and your body can make music — via a microcomputer and a synthesiser. Flexing a forearm creates a crescendo, and blinking produces a series of staccato beats. The unanswered question is: does masturbating make you go deaf?