

plants and distribution centers worldwide in a move to boost its flagging profitability. The company said the initiative will result in special charges of \$100 million over two years and \$100 million in incremental expenses.

WEEKLY: *US* magazine, a monthly since 1991, will become a weekly Friday and go head-to-head with *People*. (Story, 2R)

AD TIME: The four major television networks increased the amount of time they devote to advertisements during prime-time shows by nearly 5% in 1999, the Myers Report newsletter says. ABC, which devotes the most time to commercials, increased advertising minutes 4%. CBS' ad time rose 2%; NBC's surged 10%; and Fox's rose 3%.



US: Monthly goes weekly on Friday.

OIL PRICES: Crude oil prices plummeted 3% Wednesday on growing rumblings from within the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries that the producing nations will substantially raise output in two weeks to feed an oil-starved world market. Crude oil for delivery in April fell 97 cents to \$30.72 a barrel.

SOFTWARE DEAL: Anglo-French company Sema said it will buy German-American software house LHS for \$4.7 billion in stock to form a leader in customer services and software for the rapidly growing mobile phone market.

BOEING STRIKE: A five-week engineers strike at Boeing has stalled product-development work, delaying commercial jet upgrades, the company said. The projects, ranging from extending the flying range on certain aircraft to upgrading manufacturing techniques and materials, are on hold temporarily. The 15,000 engineers and technicians represented by the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace have been on strike for better pay and benefits since Feb. 9.

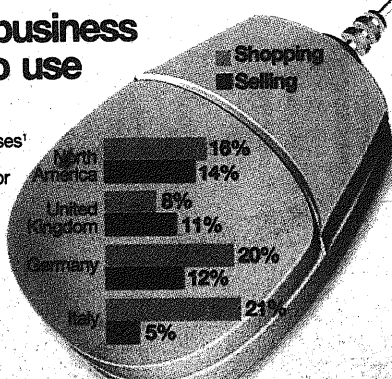
Written by Sara Nathan from staff and wire reports

USA SNAPSHOTS®

A look at statistics that shape your finances

Small business slow to use Net

Small businesses that rate their Internet high for buying and selling goods and services:



Source: Cyber Dialogue for IBM

By Anna R. Carey and Quin Tian, USA TODAY

Global sponsorship:
4 years
\$55 million

Scandal fails to tarnish Olympics as market jump back into Games

By Bruce Horowitz
USA TODAY

Scandal? What scandal?

You would never know there was scandal — at least, not by the recent actions of the ticket sponsors. No indignant defections. No budget cuts. Not even sorrowful farewells. Instead, companies are high-jumping the Olympic bandwagon:

► **Kodak.** The longest-standing Olyr will announce today that it has extend wide sponsorship eight years. Industry mate that is at least a \$110 million co

► **Sema.** The European information giant Monday announced an eight-year, \$1 billion sponsorship. Sema effectively replaced the Sydney Games in September.

► **John Hancock.** The only sponsor to criticize the International Olympic Committee (IOC) — once even threatening to turn around last month and extend the deal for four years for about \$55 million.

► **Visa.** Four months ago, Visa be-

Please see COVER STORY

'Consumer Reports' tells a

Invoice price service reveals vehicles' true cost

By Earle Eldridge
and Jayne O'Donnell
USA TODAY

Consumer Reports magazine says it will sell car and truck buyers better wholesale information about dealers' costs, a move that could save hard-bargaining shoppers hundreds of dollars.

The magazine will disclose true wholesale prices of specific models after subtracting a secret dealer profit called hold-back and other allowances typically concealed in invoice prices.

"What we do is give the lowest possible amount that the

dealer has paid for the car, and we tell consumers to negotiate up from that number," says Paige Amidon, director of auto price services for Consumer Reports.

The price information is an aggressive update of the invoice price service the magazine has sold for years via an 800 number. The new version sells for \$12 a vehicle and includes other advice on car buying. Some of that information can be found on the Web, but it is hard to find and not always for specific models. *Consumer Reports* competes with some of those Web sources.

Dealers don't like the trend. "It's offensive for consumers to know every single cost we have," says Frank McCarthy, president of the National Automobile Dealers Association. "Consumers do not know any

other retailers. "You can get the exact same product on the Internet," says a representative of L.L. Bean and Saturday Morning. "We're not the only urban Wal-Mart store in the world, and we're not the only one more than 100 miles from anything."

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