

EDITORIAL

by Jon Bell

In the first weeks prior to last Christmas, I had the opportunity to discuss ATARI computer sales with a local computer store owner. His business was booming. There was a mad rush for joysticks, games, educational software and computers. I watched a salesman make several pitches for both the 400 and the 800. His customers were usually young couples, shopping for their first home computer. Many of these couples wanted their children to learn how to use a computer and to help prepare them for the world of the 1990s, when it is estimated that one out of every four American households will have personal computers and computer literacy will be regarded as a job necessity. However, most of these couples did not have a lot of money to spend, and a 1982 Christmas package consisting of an ATARI 800, 810 disk drive and software cost, at that time, over a thousand dollars. Therefore, the couples were interested in a cheaper system, one that could expand as their children - and assets - grew. They looked at the 400. The salesman made his pitches for it. I heard this response:

"- but this can't be expanded to more memory, can it?"

I shook my head in dismay as the salesman explained to several people that that belief was a common fallacy. I asked the store owner if this was a typical question. He told me that he had heard over a dozen people ask that same question in the past two weeks.

Nowhere in ATARI's literature or advertising for the 400 does ATARI mention that the 16K 400 can be upgraded to 48K. Consequently, in comparison ads pitting the ATARI 400 against such other small home computers as the TI-99/4A, the VIC 20 or the Commodore 64, such a personal computer authority as Bill Cosby can get away with implying that the 400 is limited to only 16K. Whenever I see that ad, I get annoyed. Not at Bill Cosby, certainly, or even Texas Instruments, the makers of the commercial, but at ATARI for their neglect of third-party hardware and software. They are hurting themselves with their "ATARI is an island" attitude.

A company should work with its customers. By extension, people who manufacture goods used in conjunction with your company's products are your customers too, and should be treated with respect. They are helping to promote your products. It is not wrong for others to make money off of your success if you do not have the ambition or the ability to "fill in the gaps" present in your products. The only way to stop these other companies would be to discontinue your own product - and if that isn't killing the goose that laid the golden egg, I don't know what is. I consider ATARI's inexplicable "isolationism" to be quite harmful, and ultimately alienating to many people.