Atari Wins Big at CES

Mr. and Mrs. Steven Jones, owners of DeBug Bytes computers in Indiana, Pennsylvania, were delighted with the exhibit. "I've always thought Atari had good products but I'm impressed with what they've brought out now." The Jones' were pleased at the amount of software shown for the 800XL, and XEs. "I think Atari is wise to get an image of more than a computer games company," he said.

Don't Forget those Peripherals!

The new computers were supported by a full line of quality low-cost printers and monitors. Eventually, Atari intends to market them for other manufacturers' PC's. Russ Wetmore of Batteries Included, who wrote *HomePak*, mentioned the new 80-column monitor (at $150) as a welcome new arrival to the field. The new printers had their admirers, too. Marty Katz, a freelance photographer, snapped an interesting photo. "There were a bunch of guys from Olivetti gathered around the color printer," he said. "They were all pointing at it and wringing their hands."

A Look at the Atari Booth

The booth was set up in a square with a wide traffic lane running diagonally through it. In the left corner of the square, two walls of over 60 video monitors showed programs in action while demonstrators put various Atari models through their paces. The right corner was glassed off and divided into two separate rooms, one for the ST machines, and one completely lined with software for the XE line.

Four pavilions were placed in the middle of the traffic lane, one each for the 65XE, 130XE, 520ST and 130ST, complete with informative brochures and peripherals. Another information station stood behind the video wall. Two additional outside walls displayed Atari 2600s in action, and AtariSoft's software.

No Demo-Itis!

"Demo-itis" is symptomatic of two of Murphy's Laws: "Bugs emerge fast when someone else is watching," and, "the severity of the bugs is in direct proportion to the importance of the people watching the demonstration." The whole world was watching Atari at this CES. Trade shows are notorious for making new machines crash, but ST and XE reliability proved to be excellent. The machines were up from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. each day, and not a single bug appeared. Seven bug-free STs were brought to the show, and seven bug-free STs came back.

From Atari Software to AtariSoft

Another important introduction at the show was the *new* AtariSoft. AtariSoft now publishes software for Atari machines, a wider scope of operations than the *old* AtariSoft that started in 1983 and only released software for other brands of computers.

The new AtariSoft brought more than fun and games to the show. Four productivity programs and three educational programs were introduced at CES! *AtariWriter Plus, Silent Butler, Atari Proofreader,* and *Infinity* were among the new line of business and productivity software. The educational programs introduced included *Music Painter, The Learning Phone,* and *AtariLab Light Module.* Hundreds of existing programs were also showcased in the XE room, on the software "wall."

AtariSoft personnel had their hands full at the show, making contact with developers who wanted to write software. "I've never had such a good show for business," said Sigmund Hartmann, president of AtariSoft. "We've spoken to jillions of people."

Software developers were excited about the STs. "We feel that they are very interesting machines," said Robert Botch, Director of Marketing for Epyx software. "All our programmers have seen the hardware and they are breathlessly awaiting the chance to write new software." Ken Wasch, Executive Director of the Software Publisher's Association, dubbed the ST "a winner." He predicted a very healthy developer and software publisher response.

There were two reasons for this large response: the power and price of the ST machines and renewed faith in 8-bit Atari products. According to Bob Lindsey, a creative director for Epyx, "The ST products are for all those folks who have been waiting for and wanting a "Mac" type computer (Apple's Macintosh computer). Atari's pricing and the machine's capabilities have opened up this market."

"I have been getting tremendous response from developers outside the U.S. who are interested in writing software for the 800XL and the 65XE," said Atari's Hartmann after the show.

Reaching Out to Developers

U.S. developer interest was so high that 400 software developers and 100 press representatives attended Jack Tramiel's address to the Software Publishers Association (SPA). The SPA's executive director, Ken Wasch, described the Atari booth and its chairman's speech before his organization as "*the* event of the Winter CES." Atari is a member of the Software Publishers Association, and the other members, who are major developers of programs, responded positively to the address.

Tramiel first described his activities since he left Commodore and the evolution of his concepts of a new generation of affordable technology. He let the crowd in on the real reason for his going back into the computer business. "I was in Japan," he said, "and everyone I was talking to was smiling. They were thinking 'now Jack's out of computers, it's time to go into the U.S.'"

"Jack Tramiel's enthusiasm was contagious," Wasch said. "A broad range of software publishers and developers want the machines to succeed. If Atari fulfills Jack's promises, and pre-releases machines to these software publishers, I think they'd be crazy not to take the bait."

The Changing Image

An important turning point for Atari took place at this January's CES. Confidence in the future was restored. R. Barry Shatwell, advertising director for Timeworks, a software company that publishes *The Money Manager,* the *Electronic Checkbook,* and the *Data Manager,* summed it up. "The Atari booth had more traffic than any other booth, and