The Other Side Of The Pond

Computing in England as seen from this year's Personal Computer World Show

Several years ago, the British government made computing a top priority for its citizens, implementing computer literacy and programming courses through the BBC.

"Every school child in England has had computer experience," says Jeff Fenton, president of GST software in Cambridge, "and because of the BBC program, Acorn, the company that manufactures the machine that bears the BBC name, dominates the market here."

Other computer brands are available in the U.K., but their names—Electron, Sinclair Spectrum, Tatung Einstein, andAmstrad—are unfamiliar to most Americans. Commodore machines— 64s, Vic-20s, Plus 4s, and 16s—are also popular. The price of the Apple II has placed it beyond the reach of most British families.

The Macintosh is promoted as strictly a business machine,but it faces serious competition from the major business computer brands, which include IBM and clones (about 60% of the market) Amstrad, Apricot, Olivetti, Psion, Sanyo, and Victor.

Atari, too, is a strong force in the British computer market. Exact figures are hard to get, but Atari is a significant presence in the U.K. market and continues to grow. Most of the new software introduced at the Personal Computer World Show in London this fall featured Atari versions.

"Exact sales figures are confidential," said Atari President Sam Tramiel, "but I can tell you that we have sold hundreds and hundreds of thousands of computers in England. Our inventories are down to almost nothing."

We spoke to some English Atari enthusiasts at the show and asked them what initially attracted them to the Atari; most cited value and superior color graphics. As in the U.S., Atari users in the U.K. are a loyal bunch.

Computer Shows

The primary sources of information for Atarians in England are Atari-specific magazines and two large annual computer shows, both of which are sponsored by general computer magazines. The Which Computer? Show, held each January by *Which Computer?* magazine, is a business-oriented show. The Personal Computer World Show, held each September in London by *Personal Computer World* magazine, was patterned after Jim Warren's early West Coast Computer Faires and so has a much more eclectic look and feel to it.

The PCW show runs for four days, two days of which (Thursday and Friday) are crowded with trade visitors. The remaining two days can best be described as a zoo, as visitors from all over the world mob the booths and demonstrations in search of the latest products and news.

PCW is held in two connected buildings: the National Hall, a lovely glass-roofed space with two levels, and the Olympia 2, a smaller building with three levels. The business exhibitors were located in the Olympia 2, and the personal computer exhibits in the National Hall.

Walking through the two buildings, a change from last year became apparent: the business side of the show had shrunk somewhat, but the personal side was flourishing. The signs were brighter, the booths more expensive this year than last. And loud. The loudest noise came from the game companies, like Firebird

The 9th Personal Computer World Show

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