

Apple and IBM get poor marks for public relations

By Andy King

Early in April I had thought of setting up a demonstration of the three major computer platforms for the readers of my "One Byte at a Time" column.

Normally in my column I try not to draw comparisons between computer systems in order that I do not offend users of any particular brand of computer.

I decided to find a place, set a time and date, and try to have each of the brand name manufacturers participate in a pseudo "blind taste test". The computers would be tested by inexperienced users and we would take photos of the event and publish the reactions of the participants in "One Byte at a Time". The results of testing would hopefully be of interest to the readers.

I tentatively chose mid-May as an appropriate target to hold the event, allowing me about five weeks to put it together.

At the outset I felt that this concept of a demonstration might not meet with the approval of the computer companies but I determined to try. I contacted IBM, Apple Canada and Commodore Business Machines Canada. With each company I was directed to people in charge of such events. IBM and Apple both have media representatives, Commodore directed me to one of their corporate executives, to whom I outlined what we were trying to accomplish. I told each that we would like the users to briefly experience word processing, simple accounting, basic drawing and page layout and that we would publish the users' impressions. Each company representative would also be given an opportunity to sell the benefits of the computer system they represented.

The IBM, Apple and Commodore people all thought our approach unique and appeared very interested in participating. During the following two weeks I made many phone calls to each company in order to keep them up to date with the progressive arrangements. IBM and Apple seemed to be switching me from person to person during the course of making arrangements but my initial Commodore contact remained the same.

While I was making arrangements I found out that the minimum IBM system currently offered was a P/S-1 486-SX that was packaged with several software titles. I informed Apple and Commodore of the IBM minimum during our many conversations in order that no one would be presenting substantially more powerful equipment than the other. The level of equipment IBM would be showing made the Apple/Mac reps noticeably uneasy when informed but did not bother Commodore, who would be presenting the AMIGA line.

By the beginning of the third week of April, everything appeared to be "coming together". Canada Trust Realty Inc. in Brampton's Kingspoint Plaza had graciously agreed to donate the space needed for about 15 people and the com-

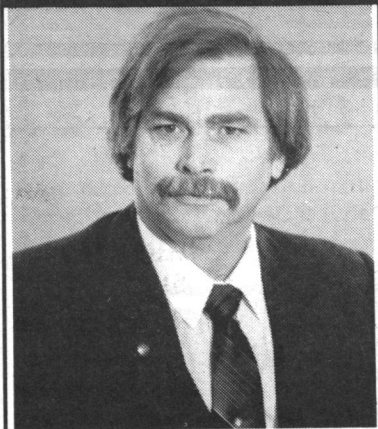
puter systems. All the computer companies seemed to be prepared. I had lined up several interested people to be the "testers" and May 12 had been set as a date.

All of the companies had been made aware they would gain some good exposure without having to spend any cash. I was very pleased at the initial positive responses.

"The curtain started falling" by April 22. I received calls from the IBM and Mac media reps suggesting that they may have a problem providing people and machinery. They said I should contact a retailer to proceed with the demo. They could have told me this two weeks earlier.

Vic Rocha of Computer Express Inc. at the corner of Bramalea Road and Derry Road was going to

One Byte at a time



be the representative showing off the Commodore AMIGA.

Computer Express also builds and sells MS-DOS compatible computers for home and business use. Both Vic and Commodore were eager to supply the machinery and people for our program. They were appropriately confident that the AMIGA would be the outstanding performer. When Vic heard of IBM's decision not to participate he was even willing to show their own MS-DOS compatible machinery. I told Vic that I preferred to have IBM represented by another dealer in order not to strain one dealer's workforce.

On April 23 and 26, I called a couple of IBM dealers and outlined what we needed. Neither had enough people available to participate. I contacted two of the large Apple/Mac dealers suggested by

their locator service (SHL Computerland and Hamilton Computers) and after being courteously shuffled from one person to another at each over a couple of days of calls they decided that they did not have ability to participate.

After putting much time, long distance phone calls and effort into arranging this program, I was disappointed with the way IBM and Apple conducted themselves. They both left me with the feeling they believed Halton Hills was too small a market to be worth the effort.

Conversely "I take my hat off" to Commodore Canada Inc. and, in particular, Vic Rocha of Computer Express Inc. for their willingness to participate without necessarily deriving any direct benefit.

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