

## *Gerald's Column* *by Gerald Fitton*

I shall keep my column short this month because what I have to say is more controversial than usual and I want you to read the punch line before you turn the page in disgust!

### **The Emperor**

There was once a very wealthy and powerful Emperor who had a wonderful computer on which he could 'desk top publish' all his proclamations and send them out by email to all his subjects. He could calculate his wealth using a superb spreadsheet and, when he was tired of writing proclamations, he could amuse himself and his three children playing the most interesting of games on his wonderful computer.

It was many years since he had bought a new computer, but he had bought his previous computer, and the one before that from the family firm Appointed as 'Suppliers of Computers to the Emperor' by his late Father. Anyway, his current computer did everything he needed of a computer and he was a very satisfied Emperor.

### **The Family Firm**

Over the years the 'by Appointment' family firm had had its ups and downs and, at one particular 'down' period, they called in a Management Consultant who told them that their computers were "too durable" and that they were not exploiting the potential for sales to the 'Replacement Market'. The head of the family firm (who had always approved of tailors who made suits of clothes that lasted) asked what a 'Replacement Market' was.

"Ah!", replied the Marketing Consultant, "Let me tell you why there is no such thing as an everlasting razor blade, even though the technology to make one exists". And he did.

"What you have to do is to offer to the market a new computer which will have everyone drooling over the specification so that they'll become dissatisfied with their current machine and buy the new one".

The head of the family firm protested that it would be difficult, indeed it would be well nigh impossible, to come up with a design that would make their current design appear obsolete. Indeed it was reported that the Emperor was so pleased with the current design that nobody would be able to convince him that he needed a computer to a new, better design. The Management Consultant replied that he knew a "good Marketing man" who would be only too pleased to help – and, what is more, he already was on good terms with the Emperor having sold him a New Suit of Clothes (not yet made but soon to be 'released' just in time for the next Computer Show). Everybody would be wearing clothes like the Emperor after the Show.

### **The Marketing Man**

True to his word, the Marketing Man used all his long practised skills at generating hyperbole ('hype' to you and me) to make the new computer design look so much better

than the design of the current one. His contributions to the specification ranged from trigger words like 'Industry Standard PCI slots' through colour schemes such as 'yellow facia' to giving the new computer a memorable, female name.

## **The Sales Pitch**

"The key to new sales for your new computer", the Marketing Man assured the head of the family firm, is to Create a Market for the new computer. We shall sell one to the Emperor and then everyone else will want to follow his lead.

"By the way, to what Clan does the Emperor belong?", asked the Marketing Man.

"We shall release to the Media a few glowing details of the new computer (but not too many otherwise some whiz kid will find something wrong with it) and then we shall invite the Emperor (and his Clan) along to a special exclusive showing. We'll lay on a feast and a troupe of dancing girls, etc; whatever seems to be appropriate. Take it from me, we'll convince the Emperor, and his Clan, that they should get rid of their old out-of-date computer in favour of your new one with the yellow facia and memorable female name."

## **Collapse**

All seemed to be going well, it seemed that the Emperor (and all his Clan) were about to buy the new computer (because of rather than in spite of) the rather clever hyperbole puffed up by the Marketing Man.

Then disaster struck.

There was not enough money in the till to pay for the first production run of the new computer – what's more, the hyperbole wasn't sufficient to entice the Emperor (who had just had a bad experience with his New Suit of Clothes) to pension off his wonderful computer. Indeed, only a relatively few members of the Clan were convinced that the new computer with its yellow facia (and memorable female name) was such a big step forward from the current one – even when the price was dropped by first £100 and then £500.

The estimate of potential sales was cut from thousands to a few hundred. The computer with the yellow facia, the memorable female name and the over hyped specification was never built.

## **The 'Old' Computer**

It is my personal opinion that the benefits of Phoebe over the Risc PC or A7000+ have been hyped beyond credibility. It is my opinion that the Risc PC and A7000+ are better value for money than would have been the Phoebe even with the £500 reduction.

## **Third Party Machines**

I believe that the collapse of the Acorn Workstation Division creates an opportunity for

third party manufactures to build and sell RISC OS machines which will be much better than the over hyped Phoebe and which will be a significant advance on the current Risc PC and the A7000+. It might take time, but, in the meantime we have some very good designs in (for example) the Risc PC and the A7000+.

## **Rescue**

My advice to those of you who are being solicited for cash to bale out the sinking Acorn Workstation machine with the memorable female name is "Don't!" What I suggest is that you look carefully at the specifications of third party machines. If you like what you see, then spend the money which you would have invested in (or donated to) the rescue package on buying that third party machine. The profit which the third party company makes will enable them to thrive, and, you never know, at some time in the future they might come up with a design which will revolutionise the computer industry!

## **Finally**

Please write to me at the Abacus Training address which you'll find in Paul's Fact File at the back of Archive. That Fact File includes email and fax addresses. I would prefer that you don't telephone. If you have anything of more substance than a few lines I would like a disc copy particularly if you are having a problem. A disc with an example file is so much easier for me than a description in words which I might misunderstand. Please include return postage if you want a reply. A self addressed sticky label is helpful.