

*The Independent
Newsletter for
Computerized Hardware
Retailers.*

February 1992 - Issue # 2

Hardgoods Confidential

Thanks!

Thank you for subscribing to Hardgoods Confidential. To date, we've received over 120 subscriptions, from an original mailing of about 1100 pieces. We've made some improvements since the first issue, including upgrading our printer to allow us to incorporate some better graphics and charts. We've also zip+4 coded our mailing list to save on postage, and assure quicker delivery to your store. If your label doesn't have a zip+4 code, we'd appreciate it if you could send us the correct code so we can standardize our mailing list.

We apologize for the delay in getting this issue out. The holiday season was busy enough to keep us away from our desks and out on the sales floor. In addition, we installed a new Eagle system AND a Tru Trac EL, purchased a building across the street, and began replacing our store light fixtures to save on our electrical bill.

Subscriptions are for four newsletters, but we can't guarantee the exact time publishing time frame. If a bunch of articles come flowing in over the next few weeks, the Spring issue may come out sooner than scheduled. If we all get a little busy on the sales floor during the summer, that issue may be delayed a few weeks. In the meantime, we've set up a fax network to notify all subscribers with fax machines of timely developments between newsletter issues. Now that we're up and running, we don't anticipate future delays in issues, but one never knows.

No Man's Land

Did anyone else feel the tension in the air in that twenty foot space between the Triad display and the Tru Trac magician at the Fall 1991 Cotter Market? Triad folks were hustling for information on Tru Trac pricing and spec sheets, trying to find out where their product stood. They hyped their Laser Point product, trying to show they too had a low priced POS system.

Meanwhile, Cotter looked like they had given everyone standing around in the data processing area a Tru Trac sweater. It looked impressive, but some of the guys with sweaters knew only minor details about the system, and passed you off to another guy in a sweater if you asked any detailed questions.

So, how will it all shake out? At the Triad Users Group meeting on Sunday, John Semkus reassured members that Cotter would not be dropping support for Triad owners. It's hard to imagine Cotter doing anything to cause too much havoc with Triad owners, considering that a good percentage of the board members (including the Chairman) use Triad's in their stores. Of course, Triad is concerned with the "new look" of Tru Trac, and how it might affect sales of both new systems and upgrades of older DX-10 customers to Eagle systems.

One Triad rep mentioned that it wasn't a "level playing surface" any more, noting the square footage devoted to the Tru Trac equipment. It's pretty obvious that Cotter now devotes more internal company literature (Guide to Competitive Retailing is one example) to Tru Trac, and rarely (if ever) mentions Triad anymore when listing inventory control systems available to Cotter members. However, for years Triad has enjoyed prime display space at the market, and favorable mentions in literature and market meetings. Even when Tru Trac was first showing their system, Triad had the prime space and the CIS staff showed their product in the side rooms off the meeting room. Cotter has always devoted more effort to promoting their own "product" over those offered by an outside firm (i.e. Lawn Chief mowers over Homelite or McLaine), and now that they have a more developed product, they're going to promote it heavily.

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Is it Soup Yet?

Remember the banner at the Triad booth? "New items at this market", such as PC Access II, Finline Variable Pricing, and Electronic Invoicing were all announced, along with other products. So far, none have been officially released, although PC Access II and Bisync are being tested at a several sites. It's a reminder of the common computer industry practice of announcing products long before availability, which is referred to as "vaporware." Of course, Cotter used the same techniques for years while putting together the Tru Trac system, keeping members waiting for a system that was pushed back time and time again.

As for the new products, Electronic Invoicing (EI) is still in testing. Finline Variable Pricing is directly tied to the EI project, so it too will be delayed until after the market. PC Access II is moving a little faster, perhaps due to the fact that there is a competitor to Triad offering a similar product (see related article) with more features. Bisync transmission for the Eagle system has just been sent into the field for testing, and will begin shipping by the end of February. Once this project is out of the way, it should allow more development effort on the EI project.

Users Group Meetings

The Triad users group meeting held during the first week of the Cotter fall market was one of the best I've attended. Bill Wilson of Triad made an informative presentation of the preliminary version of Electronic Invoicing, and then fielded questions on a variety of software and hardware questions relating to future enhancements. The format was more interesting than some prior meetings, and most members in attendance seemed to enjoy the meeting. The format worked because the Triad people (Bill Wilson and Larry Boubel in particular) knew their stuff better than the average Triad salesman who usually runs these meetings. This doesn't mean that roundtable meetings don't work, but it's usually difficult to address a topic like "How do I do variable pricing?" in a one hour meeting. Roundtables are still preferable to some of the "sales pitch" meetings, where most of the time is spent by Triad reps trying to sell the new Eagle system or some other new product.

System for Sale?

After the first issue went out, I received several notices from Triad owners trying to unload systems. For

whatever reason, they had decided to give up on their Triad and were going to another vendor. This seems to be part of an ongoing problem Triad has with "after the sale" support. A growing number of Triad owners seem to be stuck in a rut with their systems. They've loaded items, put in locations, maybe printed bin tickets, and now are trying to figure out what to do next. Companies like The Implement Group have sprung up, offering consulting services to Triad owners to help get inventory and accounting procedures set up properly. Now, Triad is offering similar consulting packages in some areas of the country to try and keep customers who are having trouble making everything come together. These services are usually sold as a package (i.e. "How To Integrate Variable Pricing in Your Store"), which includes approximately five hours of on site time from a Triad CER (Customer Education Rep).

This support problem is probably not just a Triad problem. I'm sure that as more systems are installed, Tru Trac customers will also begin calling CIS and asking "Now what do I do?" Part of the blame rests on the store management, who possibly expect all the pieces to fall into place without opening a manual or attending a training seminar. Just as we wouldn't expect a customer to ask us to cut his trees down once he bought a chain saw, we can't expect our computer vendor to run our systems for us. However, some of the blame also rests with the sales force, who sometimes push a computer sale on a customer who may be able to afford a computer financially, but may not have the time to properly configure and manage the system.

If someone comes to you asking for advice on a computer system, make sure you inform them of the time and manpower needed to make a system work properly. This is more important than which vendor to buy from, what system to get, etc.

Label Makers

Triad and others have shown sign and label making programs at the markets, and a number of members are working on complete bin label strategies for their store. By next issue, we hope to have a complete picture of what's available, but for now we'd recommend looking at the Bear Rock Labeler from Southern Imperial (1-800-747-4665). The cost is about \$400, it requires a PC with Windows to run, and a free demo disk is available. Avery's line of Label Maker products (for both PC's and Mac's) are less flexible, but they cost only about \$50. Both suppliers' programs can import files created either with PC Access or EZ Workstation

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Fooling Your Triad

The order point calculation system used in the Triad system is one of its greatest features. It calculates the proper stock levels for every item in your inventory based on actual sales history, and sets the order point field accordingly. When an RSO report is run, the suggested order is based on this calculated (or manually entered) order point.

However, the ROP calculation does not take into account other variables in your store which affect your purchasing decisions. It has no way to suggest the proper multiples you should be ordering when your vendor allows you to order less than standard package quantities. An order point of three for an item like a 5/32" drill bit will suggest an order of one, two, or at most, three, if you have the order multiple set to one based on the fact that your primary vendor will break pack.

This causes a number of problems, with different solutions depending on which problem needs to be addressed. First, ordering less than the full pack of twelve means you pay a service charge which increases your item cost. This is acceptable if the sales of the item do not justify ordering a full pack for stock, especially if a full pack constitutes a year of more of supply.

The second problem is in your receiving room, where the clerk checking the shipment must verify and price a single drill bit, buried somewhere in a box of assorted loose merchandise. In two or three weeks, another one of those bits will come in, once again floating around somewhere in those assorted boxes of goodies. Once it's priced, it of course must be stocked on the shelf or peg hook, by a clerk sorting through another assorted box on the sales floor.

And finally, the order point calculation can never fully take into account the occasional buying spree on a particular item, which can suddenly cause a rush on one particular size of bit.

One solution would be to always order in full carton pack, and set the order multiple to equal the standard pack. This saves the broken carton charge, and makes it easier for the receiving clerk to find the item (unless your wholesaler still dumps the item loose into a tote and shakes it well). However, it means you bought more than you really wanted or needed, and leads to yet another problem.... overstock!

All our stores need overstock, but when a peg hook or shelf can hold ten of an item and we have twelve, it's a problem. The clerk tries to jam all the product on the shelf, makes a "spare" row of the item, or sends it to your stock area where it gets shelved (or lost depending on your system). Then, you sell ten bits, leaving two in the stock room, and two for an order point, and the shelf or hook stays empty for a while.

To solve (or minimize) these problems, there is another solution. Set your order multiple to a number greater than one but less than the standard pack. So, for the drill bits in our example, a multiple of three might be a good start. Now, when the stock falls below two, the system will suggest an order of three. When the shipment arrives, the receiving clerk can find them more easily, and the stock clerk won't be sorting through as many different SKU's when stocking the shelves from the tote.

Setting the order multiple higher is especially important on items which are packed in higher quantities, like twenty four. These items might not sell enough to justify ordering full packs, but are a prime candidate for setting an order multiple of six or twelve. It's important to make sure that whatever multiple you set is evenly divisible into the standard pack, or you risk causing problems when trying to order a full pack... the system won't like trying to figure out how to get an order multiple of five up to a pack of twenty four.

Raising the order multiple above the standard pack can also be an effective procedure. For example, an item like a hole saw mandrel is only packed one in Cotter warehouse. We set our order multiple to four, even though the standard pack is only one, to prevent the problem of receiving one piece every week from warehouse, as well as to compensate for the possibility of the order point going down to two during the slow months and missing sales due to out of stock. You could also protect the order point (using the ROP protect flag in IMU codes screen) but I prefer to avoid this step whenever possible as it may come back to haunt you if sales of an item start going up more than expected.

Although I've heard of other stores using the order multiple to help fine tune their stock levels, I must give some credit to Sam Costa who presented the idea a few years ago at a users group meeting. The order multiple (and other fields) are not always "untouchable", and any creative use of the many fields available via IMU (all four screens) will help you use your system to its fullest capability.

Weekly Order Point Queue Establishment

Bob Whelan

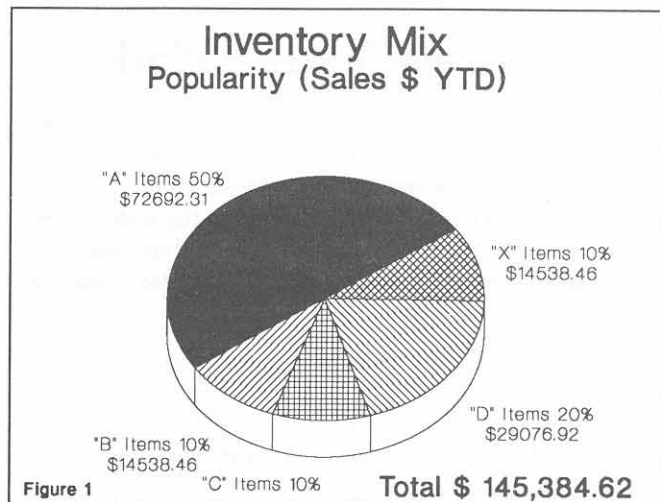
The Implement Group Ltd.

(This article expands on some of the strategies outlined in Bob's article which appeared in the Fall 1991 Hardgoods Confidential covering RPA Analysis)

Since popularity is now defined by dollar sales year to date (proving out the 80-20 adage), we can now set Reorder Points by virtue of the importance of item in contribution to sales dollars. Please note that popularity based upon sales dollars changes dramatically after the end of your fiscal year, and you might find the change in the product rankings unsettling. This will be directly as a result of the seasonal nature of some items, and the point in the calendar year your fiscal year ends. If you find the popularity ranking of items changes too dramatically on your first end of month after the close of the fiscal year, you can reset the popularity codes based on the previous years' sales dollars, or, simply change the RPA(s) in your goal tracking queues to not update the popularity code, for perhaps the first 3 months.

Remember, setting popularity by units sold, then setting order points around that popularity codes IS A REDUNDANT USE OF THE POPULARITY CODE!!! The Order Point function will set a reorder point based upon the units sold, the weeks of supply you wish to maintain, and the sales period you wish evaluated for the calculation. The emphasis in this strategy is on maintaining a greater number of weeks supply on the items which provide you with the first 80% of your sales revenue. Typically, this is about 20% of the items, and 50% of your inventory investment.

There is only one user defined variable. The number of weeks of supply for "A" items, "B" items, "C" items, "D" items and "X" items must be determined. We suggest that you use 6 weeks of supply for "A" items, 4 weeks of supply for "B" items, 3 weeks of supply for "C" items, 2 weeks of supply for "D" items, and 1 week of supply for "X" items. Making some assumptions, for a hardware store doing \$1,250,000 per year at a 37% gross margin (exclusive of purchases discounts taken) and assuming inventory mix shown in Figure 1 above.



This would translate to a GMROI of \$3.18, with inventory turns of 5.42. This is still a 67 day supply of inventory, which translates into 9.6 weeks of supply. With industry averages for turns at 2.61 (for hardware), weeks of supply at 19.9 and margins at 36%, this would be a very ambitious goal. The industry average would have a GMROI of \$1.47.

The order point queues are simple, consisting of a minimum of 5 ROP's, one for each popularity code. Optionally, you may reset the order points for any vendor or class after the first five reports in each queue (place any additional reports into the same queue). The main consideration is that the queue for week 1 is run on or about the 7th of the month (6th, 7th or 8th), week 2 is run on or about the 14th of the month (13th, 14th, 15th), the queue for week 3 is run on or about the 21st of the month (20th, 21st, 22nd), and the queue for week 4 is run on or about the 28th of the month (27th, 28th, 29th).

The reports are set in the queues as shown in Figure 2 on page 5 and outlined below.

ROPQW1-4 - Printer (N) 70-75 (Non-printing request spooled to channel) Options: CFM Minimum Order Point: 2 for "A" & "B" items, 1 for "C", "D", "X" Print Options: T Subtotals: N

Leave the from and to ranges blank, and go to Popularity. First, put in "A". Press <ADD>. The subsequent reports will be "B", then "C", then "D", then "X".

At the screen change, use method 1 (optional) and 3 (if method 1 is also used, do so with something like "If cost is greater than \$200, set order point to 1." For the

Order Point Report (ROP) **Store:1**
CORNELL'S TRUE VALUE HARDWARE

Printer (N): 78
 Printing Seq : 1
 Options : CFM____
 Minimum New OP : 2
 Print Options : T__

Subtotals (Y/N): N
 Max Stk Level : A
 Copies : 1
 Exclude records added after : __/__/__

Sequence #	From: _____	To: _____	User _____	Codes : _____	Exclusion
Department	_____	_____	Popularity : A	_____	NNNN
Prime Vendor	_____	_____	Ord Indicator: -	_____	N
Class	_____	_____	Promotional : -	_____	N
Manufacturer	_____	_____	Seasonal : -	_____	N
Location	_____	_____			

Figure 2

ROP Notes

If you're new to the ROP procedure, you should run the report a few times without the "F" option just to get an idea how the program is going to affect the inventory figures. Once you're ready to try finalizing figures, run the report first for a small range of items, possibly including just one department or manufacturer for the first few weeks.

The procedures outlined by Bob are designed for use when calculating a WEEKLY warehouse order from your primary supplier. The order points set by these weekly queues are not designed to help create direct ship orders and/or market orders. By setting up these weekly queues, you avoid the hassle of constantly creating "custom" queues based on whatever day or month you happen to get around to running the report, and instead begin using a weekly routine which automatically keeps your order points current based on recent sales history. It doesn't prevent you from running a special ROP for promotion items only, or doing other fine tuning. In fact, I highly recommend you run specific ROP reports on your "P" coded promotion items before and during a sale, as the weekly ROP queues can't always properly set your order points for these items.

Finally, there are as many ROP strategies as there are Triad owners, so don't take this particular method as the only correct method. In fact, if you have a radically different method, we'd like to hear from you. Send a prepage of how you run your report, and we'll try to include it in the next issue.

weeks supply, use 6 weeks for "A" items, 4 weeks for "B" items, 3 weeks for "C" items, 2 weeks for "D" items, and 1 week for "X" items.

If you are currently set order points with a general 4 or 5 weeks of supply, you may want to reduce the "A" items to that level, so as not to get a shock at the first suggested order.

The weeks and weight for each queue are broken down in Figure 3 below:

With this method, you are spreading the weight of the sales history evenly over a minimum of 9.66 weeks, and a maximum of 12.66 weeks. This serves to catch the most current trends in merchandise movement (to pick up a seasonal up or downswing), and smooth out any sales "blip" caused by either one time demand, or, to a degree, a promotion.

	Wk	Wt%		Wk	Wt%
Current Pd:	1.00	10.35	Current Pd:	3.00	25.73
Period 2 :	4.33	44.83	Period 2 :	4.33	37.14
Period 3 :	4.33	44.82	Period 3 :	4.33	37.13
Period 4 :	4.42		Period 4 :	4.42	.00
ROPQW1			ROPQW3		
	Wk	Wt%		Wk	Wt%
Current Pd:	2.00	18.76	Current Pd:	4.00	31.60
Period 2 :	4.33	40.62	Period 2 :	4.33	34.20
Period 3 :	4.33	40.62	Period 3 :	4.33	34.20
Period 4 :	4.42	.00	Period 4 :	4.42	.00
ROPQW2			ROPQW4		

Figure 3

PC Hookup

Although the Triad includes many programs to analyze data and assist you in managing your business, it lacks the flexibility of PC based spreadsheet and database programs when it comes to designing custom data analysis. Many Triad owners have been requesting a way to hook up a personal computer to their Triad, but until recently it was practically impossible. Triad sold their own PC, but it was overpriced and underpowered for most uses. The emulation software included with the Triad PC was very limited, with no data transfer conversion or remote access capability. If you owned a PC already, Triad would not sell the software alone, electing to offer it only bundled with their PC.

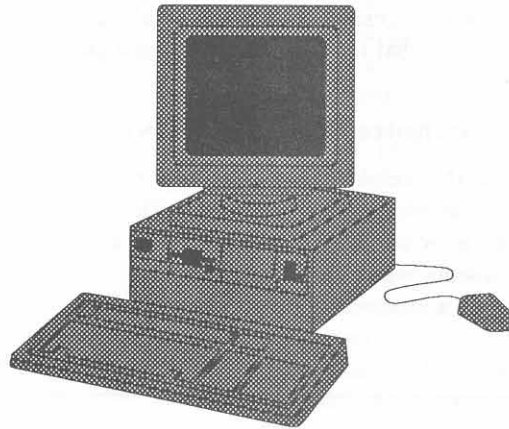
In late summer 1990, Fred Nichandros began marketing a program called EZ Workstation, which allowed a Triad owner to connect a PC to their Triad for use as a terminal. Nichandros originally designed the program for use in his True Value store, and later attempted to interest both Triad and Cotter in his program. Cotter didn't want to market the program due to possible conflicts with Triad, and Triad was close to completing their own work on PC Access, so Nichandros began marketing the program directly to Triad owners.

In the spring of 1991, Triad released PC Access. Although designed primarily for use with the Eagle system as part of ReQuest, it was also compatible with the DX-10 systems when used for terminal emulation. The release of PC Access was primarily intended to allow users of ReQuest to access the data files created on the Eagle for importation into PC based programs. The terminal emulation of the program was based on an early design, using a device driver loaded into memory when the PC was booted to facilitate the VDT emulation. Although the program worked, it was lacking in many areas, notably in the user configuration options. Triad has addressed many of the programs weak points with PC Access II, (DX-Access for DX-10 owners) scheduled to be available in the Spring of 1992. We obtained a beta copy of PC Access II, and the review presented here is based on that version of the program.

PC Access II and EZ Workstation both simulate a Triad VDT, and connect to the Triad via a cable attached to

the serial port of the PC. EZ Workstation will run on any PC compatible, while PC Access requires an AT or better (with a 101 key or "extended" keyboard). Both can be run with monochrome monitors, although we'd recommend a color monitor for easiest viewing. PC Access includes a built-in menu to allow customization of screen colors.

Both programs can be run directly from the floppy disks they're shipped on, but we'd recommend installation on the hard drive of the PC. EZ Workstation is copy protected, and must be copied to the hard drive using the install procedure provided with the program. As such, care must be taken when running backups or disk utilities, as they don't always handle copy protected files properly. PC Access is not copy protected, but we'd recommend using the install program provided with the disks. It made installation and configuration painless and quick, even for users unfamiliar with PC usage.



As the keyboard on the VDT is specially designed, both Nichandros and Triad had to set up a way to access the special function keys for use on a PC. Nichandros includes a template, which is placed above the function keys for quick reference. His program also includes a built in help screen, which can be activated with a simple key press and displays a keyboard cross-reference.

PC Access includes a sheet of peel and stick labels to be attached to the PC keyboard, as well as an 8-1/2 x 11 laminated cross reference sheet. We found the stick-on labels to be confusing when attempting to use PC software other than PC Access, and they left annoying smudges when removed. The reference chart from Triad was complete, but too big to keep on the desk for quick reference. A keyboard template would be a welcome addition to the program package.

The programs use different strategies for the keyboard assignment. Triad attempted to duplicate the VDT keyboard locations where possible, so it would be easy for a VDT user to switch to a PC. So, the PC's BACKSPACE key is reassigned as the CLEAR FIELD key, the ESCAPE key on the PC is the END key, etc. EZ Workstation was designed to take advantage of keys

already familiar to PC users. So, the PC's HOME and END keys function as HOME and END respectively, PAGE UP is PREV ITEM, PAGE DOWN is NEXT ITEM, etc. Neither keyboard layout is necessarily "better" than the other, as they both take some getting used to. However, Triad's key layout causes conflicts with keyboard macro programs and memory resident utilities. They also cancel out some of the PC's standard keyboard functions, like Insert, Delete, Backspace, and Print Screen. With EZ Workstation, all these keys function properly, even on the Eagle system, allowing easy editing of descriptions or numbers on any system screen.

PC Access was originally released for use with the ReQuest function on the Eagle, and it performed data downloads perfectly. The Zmodem procedure used for the transfer is built-in to PC Access, so no additional keystrokes were necessary to perform transfers. EZ Workstation required the addition of DSZ.COM (or any Zmodem protocol program) in order to download files created with ReQuest, and the transfer involved a few extra keystrokes. In addition, in order to access the download capability of ReQuest via EZ Workstation, you must purchase PC Access anyway. This is because the Zmodem program on the Eagle is part of PC Access, and not ReQuest.

EZ Workstation can be upgraded with a data download function which transfers data from both Eagle and DX-10 systems. The program works by extracting data from spooled flex reports, and saving them to PC files. Some users may find this method more to their liking, as it uses the familiar "flex" report system to create data files, rather than ReQuest. For DX-10 users, EZ Workstation is the only way to download data from the Triad to a PC.

Both EZ Workstation and PC Access allow printing reports on a printer connected to the PC. The programs work by capturing reports which have been spooled first, although PC Access can only print reports from an Eagle system while EZ Workstation works with both the Eagle and DX-10.

Both programs can also be used from a remote location by dialing into the store Triad system via a modem. PC Access II (DX-Access for the DX-10) has an on-screen dialing directory which shows fifteen phone number entries per screen to select from (with an additional fifteen on a second screen). EZ Workstation has a single phone number entry, which should be adequate for the needs of most stores, but multi-store users might appreciate the additional phone number entries in PC

Access.

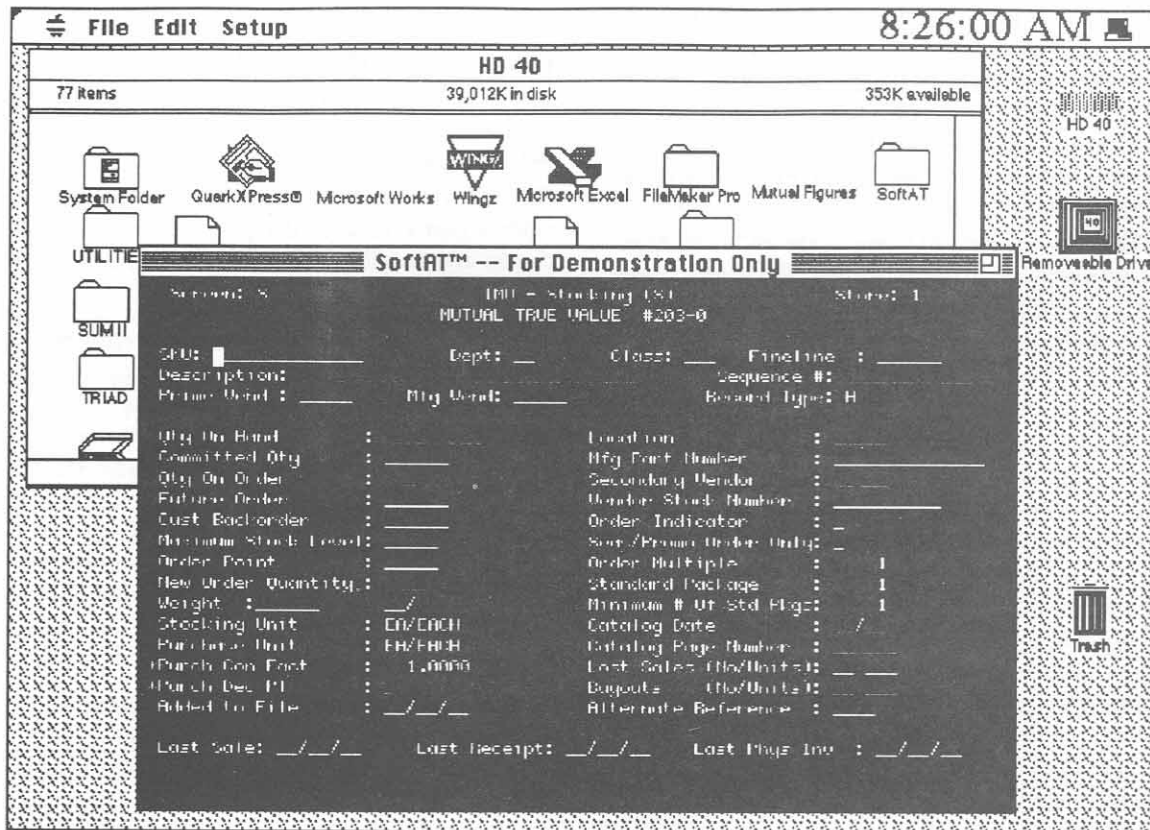
EZ Workstation has additional purchase options which add a variety of data update options to the program. Data extracted from the Triad can be modified on the PC and then used to automatically update the Triad data. Physical inventory counts and location codes can be entered into a Telxon or Psion unit, and used to update counts and locations on the Triad (either via QPIP or FIL).

In testing, both programs worked well when running emulation. When using a multitasker like DesqView, both programs had a tendency to "lose" characters, but this was correctable by slowing down the baud rate from Triad to PC. If you're already a regular PC user, you may prefer the EZ Workstation key assignment strategy as well as the capability to continue using any memory resident programs you might already have installed. If you're new to PC's, the VDT-like keyboard layout of PC Access, as well as Triad's support (800 number and field support) might be the best choice.

Getting beyond the basic terminal emulation, only EZ Workstation offers the spooler print capability for DX-10 owners. In addition, the download option package for EZ Workstation allows Eagle owners to transfer data to the PC without purchasing ReQuest. For DX-10 owners, EZ Workstation is the only way to accomplish this at present, and Triad has no plans to support any DX-10 data transfer programs in the future. Finally, EZ Workstation offers options to allow updating of data on the Triad, using the Telxon and/or Upload packages. Triad has no announced plans to make data updating via PC available at present.

PC Access II will sell for about \$595.00 for one PC, with a \$12.00 monthly SSA charge, and will be available in late spring. DX-Access will cost about \$495.00 and should be available by March. Owners of current Triad PC terminal emulation products will be able to upgrade to either product for about \$129.00. Both Triad programs include a PC to CPU cable. EZ Workstation sells for \$200.00 for one PC, with no monthly support fees. A CPU to PC cable is available for \$25.00. The download, telxon, and upload options are \$200.00 each. For more information about PC Access II or DX-Access, contact Triad Direct at (800)538-8597. For more information about EZ Workstation, contact Fred Nichandros at (510)538-5455.

Thanks to Steve Bieszczat of Triad and Fred Nichandros of EZ Software for their assistance in completing this article!



Apples and Eagles

Dane E. Sheahan

Mutual True Value

What is faster than a Triad DX-10 running ICU at 5 different terminals at the same time? An Apple Macintosh computer emulating a Triad Work Station on an Eagle. With the new Eagle, you all know that you can use a PC to act as a Triad terminal or use the PC as a host for files downloaded from the Triad. But what if you have a Macintosh and don't want to give it up? Well, there is an answer. All you need is an Eagle, a Mac using System 6.05 or higher, minimum of 4 meg of ram, Triad emulation software & cables, Soft AT from Insignia Solutions, and a Mac to Hayes modem cable (mini 8 pin din to a 25 pin).

Using Soft AT, you are emulating a 286 PC, which can then run the emulation software in your Mac. You can now easily open one window to look at an IMU screen, and then click on to the next window that has a database of bin labels that you have just downloaded from the Triad. At present, the keystrokes are slow, but the screen refresh is fairly fast. So you say, why bother? Well, here's why. We already own a number of Macs and a Mac laser printer, and I don't like two terminals

sitting on my desk. We are already using the Mac to make attractive bin labels, and have found there are much cheaper ways of making attractive bin labels than the Southern Imperial \$4,000 Label Master software and printer.

On a side note, I attended a demonstration at Deerfield True Value where they had their Tru Trac printing bin labels with a relatively inexpensive PC label program. So, if you don't own a Mac and are stuck with a PC, there is software available for about \$479 that will run your bin labels. Southern Imperial is still my supplier for the actual labels themselves. If you are going to buy bin labels from any vendor, I do advise that you spend the extra money and get the vinyl ones (I did not and wish I did). Maybe member services will find us some other sources for labels?

At the present time, I am working with Triad, Insignia Solutions, and a System Hardware Consultant to try to speed up this Mac work station. I am also planning on testing the less expensive SoftPC, which emulates the 8088 PC.

For further details or assistance, please contact me at Mutual True Value, 708-432-0026.

PC Management

A lot of stores are beginning to look at ways to use a PC in their business, either in inventory control or for other functions. If you don't have a PC already, here's what I consider the recommended minimum configuration for a business desktop computer.

Get a computer with at least a 386sx processor. Although 286 processors are fast, and the price is low, they can't take fullest advantage of the memory in your PC. Windows, Desqview, desktop publishing programs, and others are now making more use of extended memory in a PC (the memory above 1024K) and the 286 processor can't handle this memory as well as the 386 and above. Now that AMD is making a 386 chip to compete with Intel, the prices of 386 based PC's has begun to drop.

Get a machine with at least 2 megabytes of RAM, and an 80 megabyte hard drive. Most new commercial software packages take advantage of the RAM above 640K, and there are a number of memory resident utilities which will quickly use up your RAM when installed. The 80 meg of space on your hard drive is also recommended, as new software packages routinely take six or more megabytes of space just for the program files (PC Tools came on twelve floppy diskettes!). As for other options, get a VGA monitor (.28 pitch for easy reading of text), two serial ports and one or two printer ports.

If you are planning on using Windows or a desktop publishing program, get a mouse also. A "bus" style mouse is preferable so you don't tie up serial ports you might need down the line (to connect to the Triad and/or modem). Two printer ports is a luxury, but if you plan on using a laser printer, it's also nice to keep a dot matrix printer attached for quick printouts or print screens. Two floppy drives are recommended... 3-1/2" and 5-1/4", so you never have to worry about what size disk someone will include with a program. Finally, an internal modem is acceptable, but these are usually 2400 baud, and many online data services (including Cotter's CIS) have already begun using 9600 baud (and higher!). I'd recommend a 9600 baud modem which matches the V.32 standard, and in particular a US Robotics Courier HST dual standard modem (about \$800.00). If you don't think you'll need the high speed modem, get a 2400 baud with MNP level 5 data correction built in for error free connections.

(Continued from page 2)

directly into their labels and signs.

In the Works

Lots of stuff in the pipeline, some of which will be shown at the April Cotter market. From Triad, look for BiSync and a simple text editor to be available for the Eagle within the next few weeks, and possibly a release date for Electronic Invoicing by the market. However, don't expect wide distribution of the software until Summer. Triad is also testing prototype PC-based POS stations in the field, using PC Access II for the emulation. These workstations will possibly allow direct support for credit card verification, and real off-line POS transaction storage if necessary. If you're thinking of upgrading your POS stations, you might wait and see if the PC workstation is approaching reality before buying a VDT based workstation.

Cotter is also working on credit card authorization for the Tru Trac POS stations, and may have it on display for the market. The actual verification can be accomplished either at each POS station, or passed to the back office CPU which will handle multiple POS authorizations via one phone line. Cotter also is looking into a CSN based system for Tru Trac which would update store computers nightly with a stock status of ALL items in their regional warehouse.

New and Noteworthy

A new PC program caught our eye recently. It's called "Timeclock Plus", from Data Management, Inc. This PC based program will let you use a PC as a time clock, tracking employee hours with a desktop PC. The program includes scheduling capabilities, wage tracking, and departmental breakdowns. If you buy an external keypad, the program can run in the background on a PC up to eighty feet from the time clock location. The program is \$149.95 (\$399.95 with the remote keypad), and a fully functional demo disk is available for \$5.00. Call Data Management for details... 800-749-8463. On a side note, the program is also available in a Unix version, which means it may be adaptable to the Eagle and Tru Trac systems for direct interface with the respective payroll packages.... hey guys, are you listening?

Popularity Poll

Last issue, I asked for RPA printouts from stores, ranked by sales dollars and by units sold. I received twenty two reports, which represented a fair cross section of the subscribers. I used a telxon unit to key in the top fifty sku numbers on each report, and used one of the EZ Workstation utilities to transfer the data to a PC. I used our new Tru Trac EL to quickly reference the SKU's in the report, as not all the items were in our Triad inventory file. Some of the report outputs contained special sku's (i.e. RM250 for romex, or 40COW for manure) which had to be left out due to the work involved in trying to track down a Cotter SKU.

A few members made the point that ranking by YTD Transactions also gave a good indication of popularity, and I'd have to agree that it is a better indication of popularity than units sold. A combination of Units Sold and YTD Transactions would make a good RPA ranking system. We use all three methods, and update different user codes based on the three different criteria. Then, we can exclude or include particular popularity items when running ROP (and other) reports.

The cross section of items was pretty amazing. Stores in rural areas had manure and deer alerts near the top of their RPA's, while urban stores ranked batteries and extension cords near the top. Riding mowers and water heaters showed up high on the sales dollar rankings for rural stores, while barbeque grills and light bulbs were tops in the urban areas. The chart shows the top ten items based on each ranking... what it means, I don't know, but it makes for an interesting chart!

Popularity Rankings

YTD Sales \$


Rank	SKU Description
1	358556 EZS-1 Paint White
2	351908 HPX-T Gallon
3	351643 HPX-9 Gallon
4	401562 SHP-9 Gallon
5	233536 12-2 NM Cable
6	253062 F96T12 Bulb
7	319913 GBW Gallon
8	407411 45 Mower
9	357335 XT-20 Trimmer
10	156299 60' Garden Hose

Popularity Rankings

YTD Units Sold

Ranking	SKU Description
1	495465 Telephone Wire
2	233536 12-2 NM Cable
3	243543 L51 Connector
4	250563 F40 Bulb
5	167056 1/4" Rope
6	171843 1/8" Aircraft Cable
7	233494 14-2 NM Cable
8	397158 #2 Poly Paint Brush
9	167940 1/8" Rope
10	392647 Paper Towels

Users Group Meetings

Triad has announced a series of Users Meetings for the month of February. The meetings are designed to introduce some advanced inventory topics for users familiar with most system procedures. If you need details on any of the listed meetings, call Triad (800-678-7423) and leave a message for one of the folks running the meeting in your area. 

Got a friend who'd like a copy of Hardgoods Confidential? Encourage them to subscribe... please don't pass along Xerox copies. Thanks!

LOCATION	DATE	REGIONAL MANAGER	RETAIL TRAINER	CONTRACTOR TRAINER
Greensboro, NC	2/11 - 12	Roy Oakford	Moore	Gamage
Framingham, MA	2/11 - 12	Randy Kwist	O'Connor	Billingham
Kansas City, MO	2/13 - 14	Cliff Koch	Leslie	O'Connor
Chicago, IL	2/18 - 19	Siu Kapner	Billingham	Cousineau
Atlanta, GA	2/18 - 19	Neil Kelly	Statler	Wolfgang
Anahelm, CA	2/18 - 19	Scott Hanson	Leslie	Walliser
Eugene, OR	2/19 - 20	Jim Koch	O'Connor	Dantels
Pasadena, CA	2/19 - 20	Scott Hanson	Leslie	Walliser

Upcoming Users Group Meetings

At Your Request

After receiving our Eagle system, I sat down and dove right into the ReQuest procedure. I followed the tutorial, and then tried to create some really great reports. After about thirty minutes of attempting to create some sort of useable Credit Card balance report, I gave up. It appears I'm not alone, as many Eagle owners have had little success with their initial attempts at RQ reports.

This is due to a number of factors, one of which is the sketchy manual. Other than the tutorial, the documentation covers topics only briefly, and doesn't contain any master list or cross reference of all the data available and which data dictionary it can be found in. This is especially frustrating when searching for a seemingly simple field (YTD Sales Units) and eventually discovering that the field doesn't exist in RQ (remember, it's actually a calculated field on IMU, based on the MDT table, and not a true data field in the inventory record).

The other problem is the user interface itself. It's obvious that the RQ program was developed outside of Triad, as most of the keyboard conventions you're accustomed to on the system work differently within RQ. It's necessary to pay attention to the prompts at the screen bottom in order to navigate around quickly, and even then RQ is slow compared to the Triad-written programs. Selects and sorts take a little longer in RQ reports, so if you know a quick flex report which will give the necessary data, you're better off heading for RIS.

But, once you start to experiment, and see a few sample reports from other users, it becomes a little easier to refine your own procedures within RQ. Although there are a few reports of possible errors in data selection, RQ seems to work well once you get the hang of it. I've included one sample report format (see Figure 1) which generates a projected sales report based on sales for the month thus far. It bases the figures on the number of days in MMR and number of days in the month total. You can vary the entries based on whether you're open six or seven days a week, closed for some holidays, etc. After about a week and a half of data, it gives a pretty good estimate of what sales

for the month (by department) will be. The only shortcoming is a missing percentage difference figure for the totals portion of the report, but the "Rube Goldberg" calculations necessary to generate such a figure using RQ's available tools is beyond my capabilities (and would take too much typing!). Use a calculator instead.

Notice in the report format that there are two PROMPT entries. This is one of the more useful functions available in RQ, especially when dealing with calculated fields. By using the PROMPT command for controlling which records to select, you bypass the more time consuming option of "Select desired data records?" when trying to run a predefined report via RQR. Of course, the program still asks the question (dumb computer, huh?), but you can just enter "N" and move along to your defined PROMT queries.

RQ does have the capability to import and export report formats from a floppy disk, but Triad has not implemented this feature in the Eagle. If you'd like to be able to swap custom generated RQ formats with other users, let your Triad CER (or Bill Wilson at Triad) know that you'd like this feature. It would save some typing time (and avoid typos) if you were able to just pop a floppy with a bunch of RQ formats into your Eagle and try them out.

```
PROMPT 'What is the last day in MMR?' to DAY NUMERIC 2.
PROMPT 'How many days in this month?' to DAY-MNTH NUMERIC 2.
DIVIDE SALES-RETAIL-C-P BY DAY GIVING SALES-PER-DAY.
MULTIPLY SALES-PER-DAY TIMES DAY-MNTH GIVING PROJ-SALES-MON.
SUBTRACT PROJ-SALES-MON MINUS SALES-RETAIL-P-13 GIVING NET-CHANGE-MON.
DIVIDE NET-CHANGE-MON BY SALES-RETAIL-P-13 GIVING DEC-CHANGE.
MULTIPLY DEC-CHANGE TIMES 100 GIVING PCNT-CHANGE.
REPORT WIDTH 132 LENGTH 66 FOOTER 3 HEADING 50
'CORNELL'S MONTHLY SALES COMPARISON' NEXT LINE 63 TODAYS-DATE NEXT LINE NEXT
LINE 4 'Page:' 10 PAGE-NUMBER NEXT LINE NEXT LINE 4 'Dept' 47
'Lst Yr Sales $' 64 'Cur Per Sales $' 83 'Proj Sales $' 101 'Net Change $'
119 'Net Change %' NEXT LINE 1 131 '=' DETAIL 130 '%' 9 DEPT-NAME 4
DEPARTMENT 49 SALES-RETAIL-P-13 66 SALES-RETAIL-C-P 83 PROJ-SALES-MON 101
NET-CHANGE-MON 113 PCNT-CHANGE NEXT LINE TOTAL 48 11 '-' 66 10 '-' 83 12 '-'
101 12 '-' 117 12 '-' NEXT LINE 7 'GRAND TOTALS' 49 TOTAL SALES-RETAIL-P-13
66 TOTAL SALES-RETAIL-C-P 83 TOTAL PROJ-SALES-MON 101 TOTAL NET-CHANGE-MON
NEXT LINE NEXT LINE NEXT LINE NEXT LINE NEXT LINE.
```

Figure 1

Managing Policy A Claims with the TRIAD

Bill Round, Jr.

Rounds True Value Hardware

"Great customer service begins with a liberal return and exchange policy," I told my Father as I posted defective Christmas light sets to the Policy A Credit Purchase Order in function MPO.

"Anything with the word 'liberal' in it costs us money," Dad replied. "It reminds me of our distinguished Massachusetts Senator who wanders around in his boxer shorts while prattling on about this group or that program, and WE pay, pay, and pay!"

And, as Dad says, pay we do. But it doesn't cost us as much as Dad feared, especially in light of the new Policy A credit purchase order transmission capability on TRIAD level 8.1 software. This feature runs on both DX10 and EAGLE systems.

This new function allows the user to create a "credit" purchase order consisting of policy A skus. Cotter accepts the type D credit purchase order transmitted from your TRIAD system as a Policy A claim just as it does the same information sent from your Telxon. Using the Triad to handle these claims removes another clipboard from the office wall and creates control documents to keep tabs on activity. Policy A items can be entered quickly and accurately. Procedures to control and tabulate defective goods claims can be created.

The major limitation of this new function is that there is no cross reference to a Cotter data-base to ensure that the skus you add to the purchase order are actually on policy A. It is possible to occasionally place a sku on the policy A purchase order for which Cotter will not grant credit. Such a sku should have been filed under "policy B." Unlike the clip board or the telxon method, it is possible to identify these skus and file a claim with the manufacturer.

Another problem arises in stores which use their own price stickers instead of the Cotter price tags. Triad price tags can't give you information about the defective goods policy covering the item. The "fabulous" dash (319-917) in the middle of the IBM number on the Cotter price tags indicates defective goods Policy A. The "sorrowful" space in the same position (319 913) indicates Policy B, which means send a request form to

the manufacturer and see what happens. Of course, Cotter and manufacturers go back and forth on how defective merchandise is handled, so a dash could mean a space and a space could mean a dash. It has been our experience at Round's True Value that this situation does not occur often enough to warrant personnel time to check each sku. In fact, even when we find items for which no credit was issued, it is not worth the time to go back and to hunt these down.

Accepting the limitations, we modified our procedures for handling policy A. We eliminated the old policy A clipboard from the office where it had hung for the past ten years. We would add items to the credit purchase order in MPO as we encountered them. When the purchase order got big enough or the 20th of the month rolled around, we would transmit the purchase order. Cotter would send the Policy A credit list along with the listment a few weeks later. This document would then be posted to the system through RP just as the regular weekly Cotter order would be posted. An RRP would be run option F. The remaining purchase order would then be comprised of non-policy A skus.

The RRP report can then be used as a source document to post to an accounts payable or general ledger account, as could an RRP for the remaining skus on the credit purchase order for which Cotter could not grant credit. We control the paper work just as we do the paper work for regular purchase orders.

Defective goods may not be the most inspiring topic for consideration, but we do have the first step towards the full automation of this function now running in our store. We should encourage the software industry to supply us with more functions to take the drudgery out of this back office work.

Here's how you might start processing policy A items through your Triad DX10 or Eagle system.

1. Set a terminal up to permit fast entry of defective items.

The success of any automated system is the daily entry of small batches of information. This is even more so for policy A merchandise. We have a function key programmed to take us to the active policy A purchase order and set the cursor on the sku line of the detail screen of MPO. We use the QUERY key. The keyboard program is (END) MPO (ENTER) (HOME) D (ENTER) POLA (DISPLAY) (CLEAR). VDT keyboard programming is accessed by holding the shift key and hitting the space bar. Move the highlight at the top of the screen to

FUNCTION KEYS, hit the space bar again, and use the up and down arrows to take you to the QUERY key programming bar. Enter the program as indicated with functions keys noted within enclosures. The first line on the purchase order must be added before the keyboard program will work properly.

2. Set up the credit purchase order.

We use POLA as our "active" purchase order. The vendor is COT, the due date is the 22nd of the month, and the purchase order type is "D." This is very important as a blank or other letter may result in the purchase order being processed by Cotter as a weekly warehouse order. The back order question may be answered "N" to blast the purchase order out of the system when the credits are posted.

3. Add detail lines.

After the first detail line has been added in MPO screen D, the first policy A defective item for the PO, you're all set to go. We maintain terminal security at our store to prevent unauthorized fiddling with system information. Once I have signed onto terminal, I have only to hold the CONTROL key and hit the QUERY key to bring up the credit PO on the MPO detail screen ready to receive the next detail line. I enter the offending sku, TAB once to quantity, then hit the ADD KEY. Signing on and off the terminal is done equally as fast by programmed signon and signoff routines... minus the pass-words, of course. Detail lines are added with each incident with no regard to whether or not the sku is already on the purchase order. Cotter's system appears to accept multiple occurrences of the same sku on the policy A purchase order without any trouble.

4. Prepare to transmit the credit purchase order.

When it's time to transmit the purchase order to Cotter, we use function BPO to add POLA to purchase order POLA1, which is then transmitted. A new POLA purchase order is added to the system.

5. Control the purchase order file.

Purchase orders are controlled by the p.o. number. In a strick purchase order control environment where the P.O. number will flow through to become a voucher number somewhere, you may wish to use the system-generated number. As we are not yet at that stage at Round's True Value, we use purchase orders POLA1 through POLA9 to keep track of outstanding credit purchase orders. Once the purchase order has been transmitted, we write a note on the first line of the

"Special/Ship to" line on screen H of MPO: TRANSMITTED BY SYSTEM 1/22/92 BRJR. This line prints on the RPP report and is a handy way of keeping track of purchase order status in the MPO file.

6. Receive the purchase order.

When the policy A credit comes back from Cotter, it will be in SKU sequence. Use function POR to resequence your purchase order by SKU so the RRP report will match it. As always, when two or more Cotter members meet to discuss posting Cotter receipts to the TRIAD, there will be points to argue. I will side step this argument and say that we use RP "how received" A, and check the resulting RRP report against the Credit sheet. Any discrepancies are posted back in RP.

7. The receiving report actions.

The RRP report does what it normally does... only in reverse. It will not affect quantity on hand, but it will affect average cost and the YTD prime vendor purchase quantity.

8. The financial effects to consider.

Well, this is more complicated. Cotter applies the policy A credit amount against the merchandise billing, so this may have to be broken out of the listment for proper account posting. A voucher for the amount of the credit purchase order might have to be created and posted to the accounts payable to help reflect the decreased inventory value in general ledger. If your store is using the physical inventory subsystem, remember that... if your system is properly set up... POS automatically generates a shrinkage type X in the MPH file for each defective sku and updates this as incidents occur. This value might hide the validity of the shrinkage value. So, if you are taking the RPH shrinkage amount each month and posting this to general ledger, there could be some problems.

We have yet to address the financial implications for this function at Round's True Value hardware. We have been occupied with maintaining business while the Massachusetts miracle melts down as miraculously as it grew. It begs the monumental question of the disparity between the RIV inventory value and the General Ledger inventory value. Defective merchandise credits are more bits in the soup of financial information which keep those two figures apart.

This is an issue which I hope the Editor and contributing writers of Hardgoods confidential will address in the future.

Flying with the Eagle

We purchased our Triad system in the summer of 1982, and used the same basic CPU for almost ten years. When Triad was pushing /12 upgrades, we said "no thanks" and stuck with the old /10 processor. A few years ago, we purchased a "turbo" processor board for the CPU, which sped up some functions for a modest price (\$1900 at the time from Northwestern Digital). However, as we added more terminals, and as Triad added more procedures, the system began to crawl.

So, when the Eagle was released, we began investigating our options. We were very disappointed with the pricing structure, especially when we compared the hardware to CPU's available from other reputable vendors. However, we've always been a little disappointed with Triad's pricing, and happy with the product. After much discussion, and a close look at the Tru-Trac system (and the work involved in a conversion) we decided to upgrade to an Eagle. We did not trade in our old CPU, electing to sell it for parts to another vendor for a higher price.

The conversion went smoothly, although it took longer than estimated by the documentation. Triad provides an off-line (or conversion) POS to allow access to the complete IN and customer file while finishing the file conversion, so our cashiers never realized the system was down. When we went online, we just swapped modular plugs, and waited for comments from the cashiers. They were all happy to see a nice speed increase, especially in in-house charge transactions.

The biggest speed improvement appears in the report processing of the system. Reports which took two or three hours to complete on a DX-10 now finish in fifteen minutes (or less). You can run reports over the entire inventory range and expect results within a half hour (at most), instead of relegating those long reports to end of day queues. This report speed increase also allows the POS screens to "clear" for the next sale much quicker after charge sales, as the POS terminal no longer waits for the invoice to complete printing.

It's a good thing that the reports print faster, as the number of spooling channels has been reduced. Spooling on more than two channels can bring the system to a crawl at times, and even two active spooling reports sometimes cause POS to hesitate for a few seconds at a time. There is less of a need for the spooler anyway, as the reports complete so quickly that printers are rarely

tied up for long, but it's a habit you need to break if you're accustomed to using many spooler channels.

Unfortunately, the new Unix operating system doesn't support a PRINT SCREEN function like the DX-10 system. You'll miss it when using IQR to find a few items, or when trying to transfer sales history from one SKU to another. However, with PC Access or EZ Workstation you can still print screens, and many stores with Eagle systems will want to add a PC anyway. This missing feature is compensated by the much improved file viewing system accessed via MSP (spooler). This new viewing program allows you to search for specific text, and print a range of lines from a longer report. So, you can spool a two hundred page report, find the section you need and print those lines only.

The new POS "QuickView" is a welcome enhancement. It allows you to access an IQR style display within POS in order to look up items in the inventory file. Items can be searched by Class, Fineline, SKU, and a new Short Description field. The short description field must be manually added though, and the utility provided by Triad to fill in the field with data is not flexible enough for easy updating. If you want to use this feature, plan to spend time first cleaning up your class and fineline nomenclature so cashiers can quickly reference them. If you've been using the finelines, you'll find your data is probably more accurate than the data the short description utility (SDUTL) will create in the short description field.

Unfortunately, the addition of the short description means there is yet another "add-on" screen tacked on to the inventory record. This is a growing problem with the system, and hopefully Triad will work on tying some of these add-on screens (MUPC, MAP, MSD, and even MSH) into a fifth (and sixth) IMU accessible screen.

The Eagle CPU itself is a well designed component. It is a basic "tower" style PC cabinet, which means it looks like a PC case standing on end. The unit usually contains one floppy drive, one tape drive, and one hard disk drive. The I/O between CPU and terminals is handled through an add-on board which is mounted on the rear of the CPU cabinet. The internal hard drive and tape drive are controlled via an SCSI interface (pronounced "scuzzy"), and the brand of interface Triad selected (Bustek) is one of the most reliable in the industry. The processor is genuine Intel, and the internal construction is pretty solid.

The Eagle is shipped with an internal async modem, but

at present it is not active. Triad plans to make this modem available for use with PC Access II and teleterminals, but no date has been announced. This modem will also allow Triad advice line personnel (and CER's) to someday access customer systems to aid in solving system operating problems, or assist in solving applications problems (like RQ formats, running particular reports, etc.).

The floppy disk drive included with the Eagle is intended for use only when updating software releases, or in case of hard drive trouble. The system can also be booted from this drive with a DOS system diskette, although you can only do this after hours when the system is down. This brings us to an important point about Unix, which is true for both the Eagle and Tru Trac systems... Unix must be shut down "gracefully" to prevent data corruption (trashing, destruction, etc.). Unix systems have built-in commands to accomplish this procedure, with names like POWERDOWN, SHUT-DOWN, etc. These CPU's should never be rebooted via the power or reset switch, unless instructed by field service or advice line personnel.

This is because Unix works with a number of files and processes "open" and active, even when the system appears to be quiet. Watching the Eagle or Tru Trac boot up gives you an indication of the amount of activity going on at any given moment in the system. The boot up procedure takes about five minutes before you can log on to a terminal, because of the number of processes which must be started. While booting up, you can see the Unix operating system "mounting" the various files and directories. Unix pathnames look similar to DOS pathnames, but the \ is reversed to a / when identifying directory structure. When shutting down the system, the process reverses itself as Unix unmounts the directories and terminates the various processes.

One nice new feature of the Eagle system is the menu driven system utility menu, called Osprey. This menu functions like the old Field Service mode on the DX-10, but items are easily selected via a menu interface. You can view system logs, print portions of the logs, check disk usage, and more. By next issue, we hope to have put together a "Guide to Osprey" manual, which will give tips and procedures for some of the more useful functions in Osprey. For now, remember that you don't want to do anything that asks you to QUIET the system, unless you're prepared to run POS offline. Counting shutdown and reboot time, it will take at least fifteen minutes just to bring the system up and down. Then,

you need to add in the time it will take you to do whatever process you needed to do (for example MDC to change your port configuration).

There are numerous changes to the system software with the Eagle system, notably the accounting packages and report control systems. All in all, we're pleased with the Eagle system, and our only complaint is with the upgrade price structure. However, the system is well thought out, reliable and fast, and an encouraging step towards the future for Triad.

And They Sell Computers?

Triad has different divisions handling the billings for SSA, leases, and equipment purchases. It's a good idea to make sure you check the sales tax rate on the bills against your local tax rate. A recent check of our own billings from Triad showed a 16% sales tax on one invoice, and 8.25% on our SSA billings for the past year. Our actual tax rate is 5.75%! You might want to double check the tax percentage charged on your own Triad invoices.

Eagle Back Door Ajar

Those of you using a teleterminal with your Eagle should be aware that it's possible for anyone who knows the OSPREY password to access your system via the teleterminal. When dialing in to the Eagle, a caller is shown the Unix LOGIN prompt. By typing OSPREY and the password (which is hardly secret) a caller can bypass any terminal security you've set up in MTR and go directly into your system Osprey service menu. From there, the possibilities are pretty wide open in terms of possible data damage.

This doesn't appear to be a real danger to most teleterminal users, as the odds are against an employee or stranger dialing in to your line, but the possibility does exist. Triad has been informed of the potential security problem, and hopefully will address the issue shortly.

Although we received a few requests to 3-hole punch the newsletter, the costs seemd to outweigh the overall benefits. As it seems more "democratic" to leave it up to each store, we've left the issue whole(less?).

Coming in Future Issues

Labels and Signs

There are a number of sign and label making programs available on the market, ranging in price from \$50 up to \$2000. We'll take a look at what's available, test a few products, and report back on what will and won't work with your Triad data... and how much you need to spend.

Inventory Nightmare

Not necessarily.. using a Telxon or Psion unit, it's now possible to feed inventory counts, UPC codes, locations, and more into a PC and from there into your Triad. We'll look at the way two different stores handled the tasks, and how well it worked out.

Osprey Anatomy

We'll go inside the system, telling what you can and can't do in the new service mode, and how to avoid trashing your data by mistake.

Credits

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