Hardgoods Confidential

Cotter Triad Users Newsletter

Fall 1991

Welcome!

to the premier issue of Hardgoods Confidential, a quarterly newsletter for Triad computer system users.

We are not affiliated with Triad in any way, other than the fact that most of us are owners of Triad systems which we use in our stores. We also have no connection to Cotter, other than membership in the organization. We hope to provide an alternative source of news, ideas, and techniques, covering topics which Triad and Cotter publications have missed, skimmed over, chosen to ignore, or reported incorrectly.

We'll keep you up to date on new software changes and things that should have been changed. We'll give you concise reports on features and problems with new hardware components, including products offered by vendors other than Triad.

Nothing we report in the newsletter is actually "confidential" or illegal, but rather hard to locate or not commonly known. We want to make sure that ALL system owners are aware of alternate methods, products, techniques, and ideas, which some sources might prefer you to remain in the dark about.

This first issue is FREE... however, in order to receive future issues you must subscribe. Subscription information can be found later in the newsletter.

Hope you enjoy our first effort, and please let us know what you think!

The Eagle has Landed

By now, most of you have seen the new Eagle System product line, in promotional literature, at the Cotter market, or possibly sitting right in your office. The introduction of this system is a major step for Triad, as it uses the UNIX operating system rather than the old, outdated Texas Instruments DX-10 operating system. The hardware platform has also changed, with the systems now based around the Intel 80386/486 processor chips.

Although the operating system and processors are considered industry "standards", it isn't clear yet whether this means anything to the average Triad user. Although UNIX software packages are available, Eagle owners can not install these applications on their system. This is probably the correct policy, as users could potentially damage valuable data by improper use of other UNIX programs within the Triad applications. Triad and other vendors now have packages available to easily transfer Triad system data to personal computers, so direct installation of software on the Eagle is not really necessary.

Pricing?

By changing over to the UNIX/Intel platform, Triad has opened themselves up to possible price comparison, as there are numerous vendors hawking 386 and 486 systems. Potential customers will wonder why they can get 486 33mhz systems based on the EISA standards for half of what the 1700 series Eagle costs. And, unlike the Texas Instruments components, the new Intel based components can potentially be serviced by numerous support companies familiar with UNIX based systems. This is good for Triad users, as it forces Triad to price their monthly support fees more realistically.

DX-10... RIP?

The introduction of the Eagle means the end for the DX-10 system. Software development had already slowed considerably in the last two years, due mainly to the limitations of DX-10, and continued development for this system is doubtful. Other than maintenance releases and a few "new" enhancements (see related article about electronic invoicing), don't expect to see many more developments for the old systems. Triad can not afford to keep programmers working on software for both systems, and their current software development setup now makes it easier to develop Eagle software and port it (i.e. convert it) to the DX-10 system than to develop it for the DX-10 directly.

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However, don't expect any discounts on the support prices for the DX-10 systems... without competition from vendors offering support for these TI-based systems, Triad will keep the price high. As users convert to the Eagle, expect prices to rise as DX-10 system parts become harder to obtain, and as attrition of field engineers makes it more expensive to train new FE's to repair the old TI-based systems. Don't forget the marketing advantage to keeping prices higher on the old systems, encouraging users to convert to the new boxes (remember the CRT to VDT upgrade?) and "save" money. Finally, don't expect any great trade in deals on your existing equipment. The system CPU you paid tens of thousands for not that long ago is worth only a couple of thousand dollars now... even though you've paid top dollar to keep it in tip-top shape.

Silver Lining?

In the long run, the change to the Eagle configuration was obviously the proper course for Triad, both for their company and for our businesses. The capabilities of the UNIX operating system allow for more flexibility, as well as advanced capabilities in future program developments. Developing programs in UNIX is easier, as the pool of available utilities, programming aids, and experienced UNIX programmers is far greater than those for DX-10. If they had attempted to continue using the DX-10 systems, other vendors would have surpassed the Triad systems in capabilities. Those of us who've owned systems for a few years have seen this change coming... in fact some of us have been clamboring for it. Those of you who recently invested in the DX-10 systems should consider working the current system to its maximum potential before making the jump to the Eagle, as the current capabilities of the DX-10 will take you a few years to master anyway... jumping to the Eagle right away would be overkill (unless you need the additional I/O capability). If you are outgrowing your system, there are now many competitors who can offer similar capabilities in an inventory control system, as well as other service options available to owners in some parts of the country (see related article).

Eagle reviews

Early reports from Eagle purchasers are glowing... fast backups, quick reports, and a substantial increase in back office speed. It's still early to get detailed reviews of some of the newer functions, as most of the Eagle purchasers haven't had time to fully explore most of these enhancements.

Next issue, we'd like to hear from some of the owners of the new system. If you upgraded from the old system, how did the conversion go? What do you like about the new Eagle? What don't you like about the new Eagle? We'll present a collection of the reviews we receive in the next issue.

Popularity Poll

What's the most popular item in your store? What figure do you use to decide "popularity code" settings? For next issue, we'd like to compile a survey of Cotter/Triad stores showing what the top twenty items are nationwide. In order to accomplish this, we need you to run two RPA reports. Run the reports store wide, including only items which are Cotter warehouse stocked.

Run the first report ranked by Units Sold, and using YTD as the sales period. Run the second report by Dollars Sold, also with YTD as the sales period. Make sure you fill in COT to COT as Primary Vendor, as we need to base the results on a "standard" inventory selection. In order to conserve paper, spool both reports. Depending on the size of your inventory file and your available spooler pages, you may want to run the report on consecutive nights. After the report is spooled, you can then print it using MSP, aborting the report after the first page finishes printing.

We'd like to see one full page of items, as your 23rd ranked item might be someone else's 2nd, and we'll be using a weighted average method to compile a top twenty list from all the RPA printouts we receive. If you'd like, you can blank out the store name if you prefer anonymity. All reports must be received by October 30 to be included in the Winter issue.

By the way, make sure you look at the reports yourself, so you can see the difference between top Sales Dollars items and top Units Sold items... which list shows your real "A" items?

Running the Product Analysis Report

Ranking on Sales Dollars versus Units Sold

Bob Whelan

The Implement Group, Ltd.

The single most powerful feature of the Triad system is the ability to rank your inventory in an A, B, C, D, X fashion. From that single function, decisions can be made about the establishment of order points, the determination of an in-house variable pricing program, store merchandising and in-house promotions to name a few. There is, however, much debate as regards the best "analysis sequence", as it is known, to use for the purpose of assigning popularity.

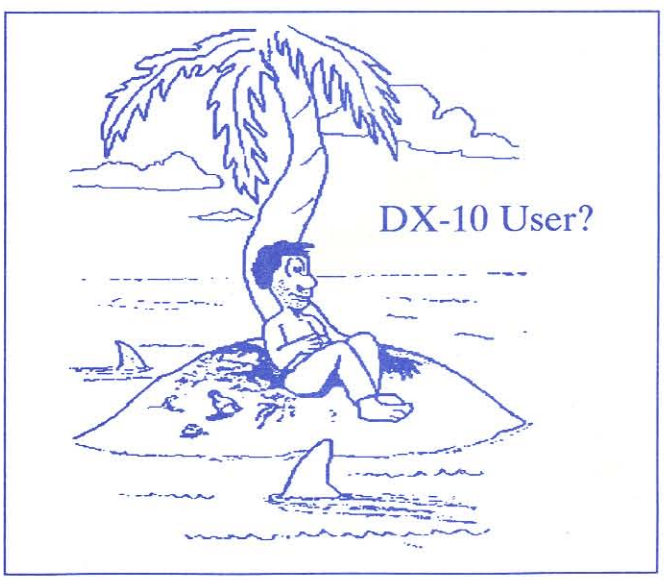
Triad recommends the use of the "units sold" sequence when doing goal tracking, and has set the breakpoints at a default for A items at 70%, B's at 85%, C's at 95% and D's at 100%. What does that mean? Ranking on units sold will simply review the total number of units sold for the set being analyzed, and the items will be ranked from the number one selling item from the perspective of units sold through to the item which provided the incremental units to comprise of the first 70% of the total units sold. What purpose does this information serve? Little, in our estimation. Wire nuts, or manilla rope by the foot, or somthing of that nature will be the number one item (or 2x4 precuts or 1/2" CDX in a lumber environment).

The point of the popularity code is to use it in conjunction with other functions. Using a popularity code in conjunction with the Order Point function, for example, when the popularity is based on units, IS A REDUNDANT USE OF THE AVAILABLE INFORMATION! Remember, the order point function reviews sales history for the months specified, then, based on the number of weeks of supply you've asked for, will take and calculated the order point. It would be useless to vary, for example, the weeks of supply strategy on the basis of the popularity set on units sold.

The first rule I learned in retailing is that 80% of your sales comes from about 20% of your items. Time and time again, I see that borne out when clients use the analysis sequence of dollars sold year to date. I grant that at certain times of the year, items will be considered x items due to their seasonality, but if the purpose of the popularity analysis is to base the order point FOR WEEKLY OUT OF WAREHOUSE ORDERS at a higher number of weeks of supply for faster moving items (A items), then is it not valid that seasonal x items should not have a high order point? Also, since many of the seasonal items are bought at market or via directs or relays, they'll be in stock, ready to start gathering sales history when their season comes, and the system could then tick up the order point to facilitate filling out of warehouse (that is, if you run order points AT LEAST weekly).

A items from a dollars sold perspective are your "basic-basic" items. In the average store, in a 15,000 item inventory, 2,000 items will be A items, meaning that 2000 of your items give you 80% of your total sales dollars. Shouldn't those be the items you watch most closely, from a standpoint of checking their inventory level frequently (RIS reports) as well as making sure you have adequate weeks of supply? For what it's worth, an X item is an X item (not having sold) from either the perspective of dollars sold or units sold, so you can cull that end of the inventory still in combination with the Zero Sales report run on X items with a date of last sale set at a point you desire, so that seasonal items are not considered.

The popularity code is one of the greatest features of an excellent software package for inventory management. I've yet to see another software package which can calculate an order point/reorder level incorporating a weeks of supply strategy based on the movement of the items. Its a powerful tool to facilitate cash management, and assure yourselve of being adequately sotck on merchandise that so obviously provides you with your livelyhood.



Gossip

Tru-Trac on Track?

The Tru-Trac system is finishing up a "tour" of the regional distribution centers, and approximately 170 systems have been installed to date. The stand alone Tru Trac "mini", similar to the LaserCat but using more up to date data, is due to be shown at the Fall market. It has gone through a lot of changes from the winter of 1989 when Cotter was hoping to incorporate full color product images in the system.

Members who purchase the new Eagle should look closely at this product, as with PC Access or EZ Workstation, they can use a Tru-Trac "mini" for a terminal as well as a WPB database. The Tru-Trac machine will be more "current" than the LaserCat, as Cotter will be updating the data weekly right off the mainframes, a week before the Triad can download it and a month (or more) before the new CD arrives for the LaserCat. Of course, we'll have to wait until the market to see if the Tru-Trac "mini" sees the light of day.

Uhhh... never mind

Speaking of changing priorities, Bill Claypool spoke at the Cotter Spring market on the topic of sales and promotional history being collected by Cotter for up to date product movement tracking and restocking. Not long ago, this was one of the top items on the "to do" list Cotter data processing gave to Triad. Triad began development of a nightly transmission procedure to collect sales history for Cotter to analyze at the main office. The product reached the testing stage, but suddenly Cotter dropped the idea, putting the effort on the back burner and leaving Triad with a basically finished product and nobody who wanted it. It's easy to see why Triad is being careful to make sure Electronic Invoicing can work for vendors other than Cotter, just in case there's another shake-up at CIS.

Tri-Care... My-Care

More and more Triad owners are taking a close look at service options for their systems. In the New England area, a company has begun offering system hardware support as well as consulting services for system setup and operation. The number of customers has been growing, causing enough of a stir that several Triad execs traveled east to discuss the situation with their ex-customers.

See a related article in this issue about one members decision to investigate other service options.

In the midwest, at least one store is looking into insuring their components rather than paying for monthly support. Sounds a little like those "extended warranty" contracts which are sold with major appliances. Problem is, finding someone who will repair or replace on a per incident fee basis. If anyone is looking into this type of service insurance option, we'd like to find out how it would work for next issue.

If you're considering other support options, make sure you investigate how this would affect your system software level. If electronic invoicing is released, you may not be able to purchase an update unless you're a current Triad support customer. This may change in the future, as some members who dropped Triad support are attempting to purchase software updates from Triad... so far to no avail.

Triad Trivia

How long have you owned your system? Some of these questions go back a little, while others can be answered even if you just unpacked the thing yesterday. Answers can be found on page nine.

1. What was the old password necessary to enter Field Service Mode?

2. What function used to be run to stop the POS Updater?

3. Before SHUTDOWN was added to the system, what service mode command copied your fragmented file to SRTP?

4. What function allows you to set each terminals Next Item key parameters?

5. Is there a security bit for POS Training Access?

6. What command will print out a diagram of the port configuration for the back panel of your CPU?

7. What item was once pictured on the Field Service screen?

8. What function displayed the pricing for an item before IMU was added to the system?

9. What virtually unreadable report prints out all information for inventory items?

10. How many reports can be simultaneously spooled on a 1400 series system (on a busy Saturday) before the bookkeeper pulls her hair out trying to enter ROA's in the back office?

Electronic Invoicing Update

Cotter members have been requesting electronic transmission of "A" copies for years, and the pressure has built as more members make use of the bisync transmission capabilities for warehouse and relay ordering. Cotter management has told Triad to put this development effort at the top of the list, and programmers in California are working on the final details of exactly what the program needs to do before beginning work on the actual coding of the software.

One of the problem details involves the Eagle vs. DX-10 development efforts... ideally, Cotter wants to phase out the old Bisync communications routines used for the DX-10 systems and take advantage of the more advanced Async capabilities of the Eagle. This would allow Cotter to provide Triad members with data without conversion headaches, as well as faster data transmission using high speed modems. However, the vast majority of members are using the DX-10 platform, so the development must first address those stores, and later phase in the new communication routines for Eagle owners only.

Triad is developing Electronic Invoicing as a package for ALL accounts, and not just Cotter dealers. The software design must take into account a variety of invoicing procedures, which vary from supplier to supplier. It would not be productive for Triad to develop a specialized piece of software which could not also be used to enhance the capabilities of all their hardgoods customers.

The present release schedule anticipates the first testing to begin late this year, with general release of electronic invoicing sometime in the spring of 1992.

PC Connection?

So you want to hook up a PC to your Triad system? After years of waiting, there are finally TWO options available to you if you want to use your personal computer as a terminal. In the next issue, we'll review both Triad's PC-Access and EZ Software's EZ Workstation.... features, price, options, support.

"New" Triad Invoice Printer

The Triad Model H3320 80 column invoice printer was introduced in January, 1991. It handles multi-part invoices better than earlier models, and has proven to be very reliable in store use. If you can feed paper from the rear of the printer, you can remove the tractor mechanism from the top, and rely solely on the rear "push" tractor feed. This makes it easier to remove invoices, and allows you to tear off the entire invoice so the signature comes through on all three or four copies.

How much for ribbons?!?

If you have this printer, you might be interested in a great source for ribbons. The printer is an Okidata printer, which Texas Instruments buys, then sells to Triad, who then sells it to you. Ultra Computer Supplies Warehouse sells the ribbons for this printer (Okidata model 192) for less than $ 4.50 each, and will ship as few as six.... they're even individually boxed rather than mass packed in one carton of six. Their toll free phone number is 800-822-2868. We haven't done extensive comparison testing, but they seem to perform as well as the ribbons other vendors are selling for $7.00 apiece (and more!).

You can also just order the ribbons from the Cotter warehouse. The IBM number is 122531, packed 6, for a cost of $ 5.18 apiece. Not as cheap as Ultra Computer Supplies, but convenient.

System for Sale

1 - 1480 CPU w/28 I/O

14 - CRT Terminals & 3 - CRT POS Workstations

7 - 100 LPM Printers, 1 - 300 LPM Printer & 2 - Slave Invoice Printers

4 - 8 Channel 9600 baud mux

1 - Software Package, including A/R, G/L, Payroll, A/P, and Contractor POS.

For sale complete, or in part. Contact Greg Adams at Adams Building Materials. 1-800-277-0611 FAX 1-813-293-0812

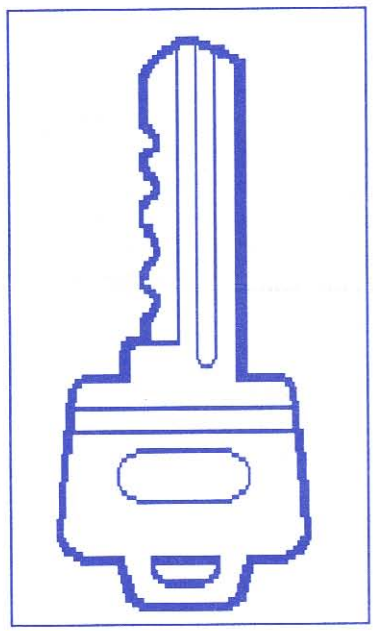
Keys and Fleas

Opportunities for Profit

William H. Round, Jr.

Round's True Value Hardware

"Track keys through the computer? We might as well count fleas on the dog, and then at least we would know how many fleas were on the dog. It's a waste of time. It's not worth it. Spend your time more profitably: go raise prices on nuts and bolts again. " So went a few of Dad's objections to tracking the key-blank inventory at the item level. Dad soon thereafter went fishing for a month. In his absence we began selling keys on a sku. One sku for each key blank, for every key blank in the inventory.



I picked up the idea to track keys at the item level from Sam Costa of Costa's True Value. Sam was at a meeting of the New England Cotter-Triad User's Group a few years ago. Cotter members took over the hotel bar the evening before the meeting and enjoyed some spirited discussions while trading shop-talk and rumors. Sam brought up the subject of keys. He outlined how he handled keys in his store and drew two responses from the other members.

One group of members nodded agreement and boasted about ordering thousands of cheap ILCO key blank skus at the market based on their sales history. The other group declared that selling keys through the system on anything but a "generic" sku (one sku each for single, double, and foreign keys) amounted to a monumental waste of time. This group seemed to prefer Cole National as a supplier. The ILCO members felt they had a great profit advantage while the Cole National members firmly believed the service they received and the data entry and maintenance they avoided more than made up for the extra cost of the blanks.

We were not at that time selling keys through the system at Round's True Value, though I counted us firmly in the ILCO key blank camp. I knew that the three skus we used to sell keys represented several thousand dollars in sales. Sam was right, that approach was too sloppy and made it impossible to get any useful information from the system. I took Sam's suggestions back to the store, talked it up with my Brother, and waited for Dad to go fishing. Here is what we did.

The Triad had to be set up to make selling keys as easy as possible. The Cotter IBM numbers which served as skus for keys would be awkward and unsatisfactory. These skus would be changed to the EZ key numbers stamped in each blank. Thus, IBM number 321406 for the True Value Yale Y-1 blank became in our system sku "Y1." The Cotter IBM number is loaded in the alternate part number file to correspond with the "descriptive sku" Y1. This makes the whole scheme work. These sku's are stamped in every key blank by the manufacturer. No more hunting for IBM numbers when ordering keys. The IBM number falls to the background and is heard from no more. The system will grab it from the alternate part number file and transmit it to Cotter when Y1's appear on a weekly Cotter order. The system will also use the alternate part number file when a price change transmission is received for Y1.

We had to clean up the inventory. We threw out any key blank without an EZ key number stamped on it. We initially sold keys on their respective sku's without tracking inventory. Once we had a few months sales history for keys in the system, we did a beginning inventory count and started routine order point purchasing, applying the usual techniques for minimizing slow sellers. We concentrated on popular sellers first, left the D and X movers to pop up on an RSO once they went negative. There were lots of them, the remains from every "best seller assortment" Dad had purchased at the market over the past twenty years.

We had to maintain the key blank inventory. We installed a procedure to deduct mis-cut keys from inventory. We altered order multiples for slow-moving keys to 10 packs for the ILCO keys and switched to bulk packs on True Value blanks whenever possible for good sellers. We locked slow sellers into a warehouse-only buying pattern using the order indicator code "W." Direct ship-only key blanks received a "D" in the order indicator field.

We found that maintaining accurate key counts was indeed difficult. It was made excessively so by the huge

numbers of key blanks we traditionally kept in the back room. As we worked them down this became less of an issue. Blanks kept disappearing.... by the box full. We enclosed the key tower with plexiglas. As with paint, order points for slow sellers are often too low to cover the possibility that someone might come in for four or five units where the QOH was one or two. We addressed this issue by assigning an employee to fill the key board at least once a week and list the low quantity key skus he observed on the key board. We would in turn post a new order quantity of one for these skus. The low quantity keys would pop up on the next RSO for a physical inventory with all the information necessary to make a decision on whether or not to place an order.

We were pleased with the results from the project. We deleted some generic skus from the system; these always made me feel uneasy when I see them on an RDI report. We identified precisely what keys we were selling and in what quantities. We adjusted our buying accordingly. We were able to clean up our employee discounts for key cutting, and put ourselves in a position where we could offer price matrix or quantity price break deals to our customers. Selling blanks to customers with their own key cutting equipment became a snap. We could see when mis-cuts were getting out of hand and attribute the problem to a specific employee or machine. Our mis-cut expenses where trivial. An unintended side benefit was that we had a window on the community's replacement lockset market. This was revealed by our sales history. If 60% of our customers were bringing in Schlage keys to be cut, why were we trying to sell them Kwikset replacement locksets all the time? This was not the path of least resistance. We began offering re-keying service for Schlage locksets.

In some respects Dad was right. We will never know how many keys we have in the store... exactly. Counting key blanks is certainly tedious and prone to error. But, we do control the situation now, and know where the profits are coming from. Even Dad agrees with that.

If you would like to set your system up to sell keys, here's an outline of the procedure we used. If you need a word or two of inspiration or help, please call Bill Round, Jr. at Round's True Value, 1-617-438-0131.

1. Entered the manufacturer vendor number and class for every key blank sku.

2. Having done this, we used function MAP and copied the sku into the alternate part number field. COT was the vendor for this alternate part number. We used an RIS report for the key class for the manufacturer vendor ILCO (WPB 534). When this step was completed, the MAP line for Y1 had an alternate part number of 321406, a sku number of 321406, COT for the vendor, and the description we have in IMU. The advantage of doing this is that we are entering the same sku twice, and one sku must be a valid sku in the system.

3. Used function RCIN to change the IBM number in the sku field to the descriptive sku in the ILCO EZ key numbering system. We started with the True Value blanks first as we knew there would be duplicates in the ILCO brand key blanks. These duplicates were deleted from the system. If we go into function MAP after this step we will find the the sku 321406 for Y1 has been changed to Y1. This sku will now display in IMU as Y1 and sell through the front desk as Y1.

4. We changed the old Cotter LOD tape descriptions into english and cleaned up the manufacturer's part numbers, the sequence number, and the order multiples. The sequence number was set as 0534// 999XXXXX where XXXXX was the EZ key number. As the EZ key number takes the first two letter of the lock manufacturer's name as the identifier, the keys will print out on reports in a recognizable pattern. AR1 will print before Y1, for instance.

5. We reviewed the printed list when the work was done and compared it with the Cotter price book pages. We loaded any missing key blanks which we thought ought to be in the store along with the corresponding IBM number in the alternate part number field of MAP.

6. We reviewed the pricing to make sure the retails conformed to the existing price structure in the store. Key blanks have different costs but are traditionally priced by single, double cut, foreign, and special categories.

One system function you might consider using is the physical inventory subsystem. It handles the mis-cuts quickly and easily. I added a shrinkage type "K" in function MPI. Every few days mis-cut keys are swept from the tray beneath the key machine and posted to the system through PIP as a difference amount. So, if three Y1 keys are mis-cut, they are added to PIP as shrinkage type K with a difference of -3. The RPI report is run to update the shrinkage history, deduct three blanks from inventory, and clear the PIP temporary file. Remember, your customers will endure a lousy $20 per plate meal and tip the waitperson, but they will curse you to the rafters about a 99-cent key which doesn't work.

The Agony and The Ecstasy of Switching to a Non-Triad Service Option!

Gary Miller

Foggs True Value Hardware

The decision to roll off of Tricare service and go with another service vendor is not normally an easy one. However, in our case, it was made much easier for two reasons, number one was the fact that we knew the alternate companies' leadership well! We had employed their advice on numerous occasions in the past and we were very pleased with the results! The other reason was that we knew Triad very well and we were very displeased with almost every aspect of that organization! First of all, let me describe our system and situation.

We are a $5 mil +/-, (mostly - this year), multistore home center. Our system is a 1200 Series CPU, with 24 I/O. We have 3 point of sale terminals, 4 back office terminals, 2 180 lpm report printers, 2 100 lpm invoice printers in our main store. We have 4 point of sale, 1 back office, 1 180 lpm printer, 1 100 lpm printer in our second store. We are connected by a lease line and mux. The CPU also has a 168 meg drive. For software, we have Contractor P.O.S., Special Orders, A/R, A/P, G/L, and P/R. Our Tricare bill was equal to having a person on the payroll!

I can't go into the frustrations we have had with Triad over the years, within the limits of this article, but they started with Triad's refusal to schedule moving our terminals out of our office onto the sales floor, because THEY felt we couldn't be ready! Our problems continued when we added a second store and two weeks after our purchase of the new Triad equipment, they came to us and said "it would have been better to lease it, (to improve our cash flow), but it's too late now!"

We employed Bob Whelan of The Implement Group to advise us on what equipment to add to the second store, unfortunately we did not fully listen to him when it came to obtaining the equipment! After the initial consultation with Bob, we kept on employing his services to fine tune our system and our way of doing things. On his second trip to Vermont, he solved a terms discount problem that had been bothering us for years! Triad was never able to solve the problem! At one time or another, we had asked everyone we talked to within the Triad organization for help on this problem, at first glance they all said "oh, that's easy. Do it such & such a way" however after a few minutes work, they all admitted defeat! Bob had it solved in 10 minutes work! Our one question about rolling off Tricare, was whether we could expect the same service from a company that is based in Connecticut, when Triad had an office in Burlington, VT. just 90 miles away! Well, we finally got our answer two weeks ago. We had a motor going bad in our invoice printer at our second store. We put a call into Derek Swift of the Implement Group on a Friday afternoon. He returned my call within 5 minutes, we tried a few things, they didn't help, and he was up here the NEXT day at 8:00am! Amazing, some computer repair people DO work Saturdays! So that answered our questions about the ability to be taken care of.

I must state that we are not meek computer users. By that I mean that I am not afraid to yank circuit boards to replace them. For several years that's how Triad repaired our system! They came around to do the P/M's, but if we had a problem, they would send out a board to replace the one's they thought defective!

Now on to the savings, we rolled off in mid April. Our computer maintenence for the three months from 4/91 to 7/91 was reduced by more than 75% from what our Tricare would have been! That is a savings we can't ignore!

Gary's story is not intended to encourage all Triad customers to drop their service contract in favor of outside vendors. It is intended to give owners of Triad systems "food for thought" with regards to possible options which are available in some parts of the country.

When considering other service options, all aspects of the system support must be considered, including your own level of computer expertise in case you must perform some maintenance functions yourself.

Future issues will continue to present articles examining various service related topics.

When is that stuff coming in?

If you've been tracking your relay purchase orders in the Triad, you've had to decide how to handle the "Due Date". By setting the Due Date far in the future (some members use 12/31/99) you prevent the relay purchase order from affecting your RSO reports for weekly warehouse orders. Since many relays are filled late, or even cancelled, this prevents you from being out of stock on an item because your RSO "thought" the merchandise was about to arrive.

However, by setting an inaccurate date, you're losing a valuable piece of information which can actually assist you in your weekly warehouse ordering. If the warehouse goes out of stock on an item, the odds are high that the restocking order is tied to the next relay order due to arrive from that manufacturer. By setting the Due Date to the approximate relay ship date, you can gauge when the item will be back in warehouse stock, especially if it shows as "current future quantity". By running your RSO with option Q, the system will ignore all QOO's when calculating your order. You can then make a decision based on your knowledge of where the items are ordered from, and whether you want to add them to the warehouse order anyway as backup.

Relays and Ship Later

If an item is on ship later, and on current future order quantity (from a relay PO), odds are that your relay order will be filled BEFORE your warehouse ship later anyway. You might actually adjust your ship later quantity downward, anticipating the arrival of the quantity you ordered on the relay. If the item is shipped from warehouse FIRST, you may want to contact the distribution center, as your original relay order may be "lost", or they may have neglected to tell Cotter's system to pull the relay orders, even though stock is available.

Sale items, S/L, and Relays

This information is especially useful when tracking promotion items which go out of stock. As many items are repeated from one promotion to the next, you'll see current and future quantities at the same time, reflecting the next few promotion relays, and you can get a better idea on the next warehouse due date for the out of stock items. And, once again, you can contact the RDC to make sure your relay is filled before the warehouse ship laters.... after all, you ordered it on relay first.

Answers to Triad Trivia

1. The password was "ascicl", typed in small characters. After it was discovered that basically all users knew this password anyway, the password check was eliminated from the FLDSRVC and SERVICE commands. Now, does anyone know the meaning of "ascicl" (I don't)?

2. Function CSO (which still exists) used to stop processing of the POS updater and allow EOD reports to begin running.

3. Copy Key to Sequential, or CKS, copied the inventory (or other) file to the SRTP during the rebuild procedure.

4. Function NEX allows you to fine tune the way the system scans the inventory file for each terminal in your store.

5. Yes, security bit 207 controls POS training access.

6. BACKPANL (from service mode) will print a diagram of the back panel of your CPU. Print one out, and tape it near the CPU for reference.

7. The service screen used to picture a hammer, along with Triad's copyright notice and software level information.

8. IPS (Item Price Status) was the function which showed all the item pricing information before IMU (and the four screen access) simplified inventory lookup.

9. RIM, or the Item Master report, which crams all the item information into one jumbled report.

10. Hmm... good question... why don't you try it and find out? (Just kidding!)

Flex Your Sales History

In order to make informed purchases for trade shows, markets, and promotional relays, you need a report showing sales history and other information for your SKU's. Triad has a built in sales history report, showing all thirteen sales periods (RIH), but it is a little jumbled and hard to read (not to mention how much paper it wastes).

A few years ago, at a meeting of the New England Triad Users Group, a flex report format was handed out which formatted all thirteen months of sales history on one line, along with a bunch of other valuable information. The trick was overlapping most of the fields, as the Triad allocated more space for each field than most stores needed.

For example, the Quantity On Hand (QOH) field is nine characters wide, but the vast majority of your inventory items range from two to three characters wide, with a few going to four characters in width. By overlapping fields which have shorter data lengths than the defaults assigned by the Triad, you can squeeze far more information on a flex report.

This definition shown below is for August 1991. You can set up one flex report for each month of the year, so the headers are correct and you don't have to count backwards to figure out when Period 5 was when using the printouts. Use function DEF to create one report, then use the "Copy to" option to create the additional reports. You then need to use the Query key to go through the fields, and properly enter the name for each month. You may want to omit the "91" year entries, so you don't have to change these flex reports each year, but that's up to you.

We use this report for the semi-annual Cotter markets, as well as for promotional purchasing. It's great for the markets, as you have all 13 months of history right in front of you, enabling you to place orders for at once and future shipments with complete confidence... or with as much confidence as you can have with the current economic climate.

	FIELD #	PRINT LOC	LENGTH	FIRST LINE	SECOND LINE
RY F/13 MONTHS	1	1	14		SKU
	10	9	32		DESCRIPTION
	82	41	6	ORD	PNT
	79	45	6	NEW	ORD
	76	49	6	FOQ	
	75	53	6	QOO	
	74	57	9	QOH	
	132	66	8	YTD	UNITS
	22	75	1	P	U
	17	76	4	P	$
	102	77	8	LAST	AUG
	101	81	8	SEP	90
	100	85	8	OCT	90
	99	89	8	NOV	90
	98	93	8	DEC	90
	97	97	8	JAN	91
	96	101	8	FEB	91
	95	105	8	MAR	91
	94	109	8	APR	91
	93	113	8	MAY	91
	92	117	8	JUN	91
	91	121	8	JLY	91
	90	125	8	NOW	91

Screen Image Captured using EZ Workstation and GEMCAP.

Nurturing Knowledge

Roger Pence

I meet a surprising number of computer experts who are self-taught. Most of these people weren't particularly drawn to computers, they just slogged through the manuals, learned from their mistakes, asked a few questions, weren't intimidated by the buzzing little machine, and then one day realized they were the companies computer expert.

It's good that businesses acquire experts this way. Real-for-sure, tape on-the-glasses and shirt pocket protector types are expensive. Now, you'll still occasionally need a to-the-bone nerd to help from time to time, but on a daily basis, your on-staff expert can be a life-saver. What can you do to encourage the inquisitive attitude, the desire to learn, in any potential experts lurking somewhere on your payroll?

-> Start a program that actively pursues these people. Make it known that you encourage them to learn more about your computer.

-> Consider buying a $2000 or so portable computer that interested employees can take home on the evenings and weekends to tinker on.

-> Offer to pay for magazine subscriptions, seminars, or computer courses or classes, or anything else that will help. Not only will your employees be learning something, but expressing your confidence in them in this fashion helps build loyal employees. NOTE: Computer vendors often offer free classes you could offer to your employees.

-> Pay attention and reward significant achievemants. It's a challenge to coax a meaningful report out of a computer and then understand it - when an employee shows you one and makes an interesting remark about it, acknowledge the fact that this report didn't just grow in the employee's hands.

-> Be aware that the existing on-staff experts might be threatened by additional experts in the ranks. As you develop experts, use care not to alienate existing ones.

Roger Pence's article is reprinted from "Jim Pence's Good Idea" Newsletter, Issue # 91.

Quick Facts

The Eagle operating system is UNIX System V, Release 3.2, manufactured by Interactive Systems Corporation (ISC). Although there is a newer release (4.0), 3.2 has been more thoroughly tested, and is more reliable than 4.0.

ReQuest, the new flexible report writer in the Eagle system, is a licensed version of a program called IQ (Intelligent Query) written by Programmed Intelligence Corporation of Georgia. The use of a UNIX based system by Triad now means they are able to purchase or license off-the-shelf products for resale to Triad System owners, cutting down on internal software development costs. The pricing of ReQuest is very reasonable, considering the markup of some previous system hardware and software components, and may signal a new pricing policy at Triad to address the complaints users have had with pricing in the past.

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Coming in Future Issues

At your Request

The ReQuest report program in the Eagle system is an extremely powerful report writer and management tool. Beginning with the next issue, we'll feature user created ReQuest formats, and ways to use them in your business.

Inside the Box

UNIX and DX-10 are mysterious words for many of us, and this column will cover hardware and software topics for the two operating systems used in Triad systems.

PC Management

More and more hardware store owners have personal computers in their business, and this column will examine ways to use these computers more effectively.

Letters

C'mon, let's see some cards and letters! Topics you'd like to see covered, procedures you use in your business, etc.

Credits

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Unless otherwise credited, all material written by John Fix 3rd.

Thanks to Bob Whelan, Gary Miller, and Bill Round Jr for contributing articles to this issue, and to all the callers to Hardgoods East BBS (914) 961-8749 who lent their ideas and comments as the issue was put together.

And finally, thanks to my wife, Judy, for the hours (days?) she spent typing over 1000 names and addresses into our PC to print mailing labels for this newsletter.

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