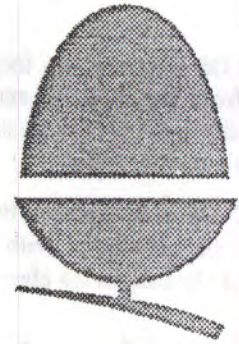# ISV Department News from Acorn

No 18 May/June 1990

Acorn's new Managing Director

In the Spring, Harvey Coleman was promoted to a new post with Olivetti Canada. Acorn's new Managing Director is Sam Wauchope. Sam, who took over the reins in April, joined Acorn in 1985 and, therefore, knows the company and its products intimately. He is also well aware of the importance of good quality third party software and peripherals. He was previously Finance Director and, more recently, Sales and Marketing Director.

Prices

A new ISV Price List is enclosed for those eligible to purchase discounted hardware and development software (i.e. registered ISVs, IHVs and VARs in the UK with the exception of those registered to receive information only).

This Price List reflects the April price reductions and supersedes that of August 1989, which should be discarded. Developers are reminded that orders should be sent to the ISV Department with payment made 'out to Kelator and including the relevant handling charge (£2.30 per consignment excluding a computer or FileStore, £5.75 per consignment including a computer or FileStore, both inc. VAT). Orders are fulfilled by Kelator and enquiries about specific orders should be made to Rosie Bevan at Kelator (Tel:081 456 0827). Orders are copied directly to Kelator and should not, therefore, bear any other queries or information.

'Acorn Computing' Spring 1990 Catalogues

The above catalogues have been distributed at a number of events and exhibitions which Acorn has attended. There are some errors in the catalogue itself and so an Errata and Addenda document has been prepared for distribution with each copy. Until this could be available, it was decided to delay distribution of the catalogue to contributors. Many ISVs will have obtained copies at shows and other events, therefore the Errata and Addenda document only is enclosed with this newsletter. Contributors will be glad to hear that almost all the catalogues have been distributed to customers. Should any contributor, however, not have obtained a copy, there is a small stock of them available and we will be happy to supply one on request. First come, first served!

Registration, registration numbers and support

All Developers (ISVs, IHVs and VARs) must be registered with the Acorn ISV Department to receive support. A Registration Questionnaire is provided by Acorn upon request. This seeks to determine whether the Developer's product plans are complementary to Acorn's marketing aims.

Support resources are finite and Acorn reserves the right to reject applications for support, at either level, where they do not meet the appropriate criteria. Acorn is under no obligation to give a reason for any rejection.

Acorn has assigned a high priority to the support of registered Developers and intends to introduce a small charge to enable the developer support programme to grow. Further to that, Acorn hopes to institute a group of developers who, by paying a higher subscription and complying with more stringent requirements will be eligible for significant additional benefits. As mentioned in previous newsletters, Acorn will also issue Registration Numbers to Developers and those who have not previously completed a Registration Questionaire will be asked to fill one in to ensure that records are up-to-date. The Registration Number should, thereafter, be included in all communications with the ISV Department.

Terminology and RISC OS

Over the past few months, it has become increasingly clear that there are three main categories of applications for use in machines fitted with RISC OS. These are:

1. RISC OS Compliant - those applications which run in the desktop and closely follow the RISC OS guidelines

2. RISC OS Compatible - those applications which can be loaded from the desktop and have a quit option which returns the user to the desktop with no change to his machine's configuration

3. RISC OS Coexistent - those applications which will run in a machine fitted with RISC OS but which fit into neither of the categories above

International News

O Canada

Acorn is now on the list of approved suppliers of computers to schools in Ontario, Canada. This is extremely good news, and means that we will be capturing every opportunity in the educational market there.

In fact, Acorn product is already well-known in the school community and benefits from the close ties which exist between the two countries. Being on the list of Grant Eligible Microcomputers will now allow us to capitalise on this properly.

We operate in Canada through Olivetti, who act as our distributor there. The Manager responsible for the development of the schools' business is Dorothy Netherwood, and she is very interested in acquiring good software for use in the schools. If you have any packages which you think might be suitable, then please contact Dorothy direct at:

Olivetti Canada Ltd Office Products Sales Division PO Box 3710 160 McNabb St Markham, Ontario Canada L3R 6G9

Tel: 0101 416 940 2245 Fax: 0101 416 475 0257

If you need any further information, then please contact Richard Sumner at Acorn (Fulbourn Road office).

O Australasia

As part of its continuing international growth, Acorn Computers is to capitalise on its strength in Australasia by establishing its own marketing and sales operation in the region. A formal bid has been made for Barsons, which is listed on the main board of the Australian Stock Exchange in Melbourne. The bid is conditional on Foreign Investment Review Board approval and acceptance by at least 90% of existing Barsons' shareholders. Acorn will have a stand at WCCE90 in Sydney in July where a number of ISVs' and IHVs' selected products will feature.

Communications with the ISV Department

O Technical queries

The most efficient way of presenting technical queries remains a written or machine-readable form (Edit files preferably). If fax is used, please note that small text and dot matrix computer print-out often do not transmit well.

O Answering machine

A dedicated telephone line has been installed to which an answering machine is connected. This allows ISVs and IHVs to leave a message with the ISV Department at any time.

The telephone number is: 0223 212011

Messages will be collected from the machine at regular intervals. The procedure to take is as follows:

Give your name, the name of your organisation, your registration number (when it has been issued to you) and your telephone number, then leave a concise message explaining the nature of your enquiry so that appropriate answers can be sought before responding.

A message simply giving the request to call back, with no details of the enquiry, will be given low priority.

O Electronic mail

If you wish to use electronic mail for technical queries and you have access to JANET, this is an acceptable route for them. The Email address is:

ISVquery@acorn.co.uk

Technical Information

O For those IHVs developing and marketing expansion boxes for A3000.

Modifications are planned for the A3000 to enable the product to meet fully the stringent International EMC requirements (EN 55022) in the lead-up to "1992". Any external unit connected to the expansion port will also need to maintain the EMC integrity of the complete system. Typically, this will require a metal box adequately grounded to the rear panel of the A3000. Suppliers should leave the area in contact with the rear panel free of paint. The mating area on the A3000 will also be clear of paint, but plated.

○ ANSI C

Release 3.1 of C, only available to registered ISVs, will shortly be provided to those ISVs who registered their use of C on the Programming Languages Questionnaire which was sent out with the August/Sept 1989 ISV Newsletter No.15 or who have indicated use of C on the ISV/IHV Registration Questionnaire. This release is a disc-only update. No additional paper documentation is provided or required. It is assumed that those who receive the update already have the full release version of ANSI C Release 3. Should any ISVs, who have not notified Acorn of their requirements, need the update, they should send four formatted discs (E format) to the ISV Department after 1 June.

○ Bugs

Should ISVs discover suspected bugs in RISC OS, the programming languages or in Acorn software or tools, they should provide machine-readable evidence corroborated by examples so that these can be passed directly into Acorn's feedback mechanism. Likewise, suspected errors in manuals should either be outlined in machine-readable form or sent in as marked-up photocopies of the appropriate page(s). The most appropriate medium for the machine-readable reports is Edit, since it is common to ALL Archimedes users.

○ Style Guide

A draft copy of a proposed RISC OS Style Guide was provided to a small sample of ISVs representing a variety of markets - education, games, graphics etc. - for their comments. Thank you to those who took the trouble to return the very constructive feedback. Once all the response has been correlated, work will go forward on the guide. It is hoped to have a final version available to ISVs in the autumn.

The Style Guide lays down the requirements for RISC OS compliance - the "look and feel"; the user interface etc.

ISVs and IHVs should already be aware that the bare minimum for software running under RISC OS is that it should be able to be started from the desktop, to run and to return to the desktop without leaving the machine with a changed configuration. This is essential for multitasking where users should be able to return to a previous task, should they so wish.

Applications MUST NOT assume that they will be run from a specific drive or that they have the machine to themselves.

○ Memalloc

This module, very useful in the days of Arthur 1.2, is inappropriate in the RISC OS environment and should be avoided. It changes memory usage in a way that does not re-instate the original configuration when an application exits to an earlier task.

○ !System

Further to the advice previously given on shared resources, considerable thought has been given to the subject at Acorn. This was engendered partly by the confusion experienced by users owing to the differing installation instructions given in third party documentation and the lack of guidance given previously by Acorn. An application note about !System and shared resources is enclosed. ISVs requiring the !Sysmerge utility mentioned in the application note should send in a formatted (E format) floppy disc with their requests for !Sysmerge.

○ Concept Keyboard Module

Many ISVs have asked about a common Concept Keyboard driver module for RISC OS. The Concept Keyboard Company is arranging to provide such a module. Please contact Trevor Nice at The Concept Keyboard Company (Tel: 0962 843322) for details.

○ Filetypes

We are concerned about the very large number of filetypes in use and the never ending demand for more types to be allocated! It is essential, if connectivity between applications is to be optimised, for there to be a relatively small range of preferred filetypes. Acorn intends to draw up a list of preferred filetypes from those already allocated. It is essential for Acorn to have a definition on file for those filetypes already allocated. If you have not already done so, please supply this as soon as possible. New filetypes will not be allocated unless a specification is provided. It is vital that ISVs look at current file standards either in the Archimedes world or perhaps in other worlds, such as IBM, Apple etc. prior to inventing new protocols. As an example of this, Acorn is planning to adopt the TIFF file format as a key format for future graphics work, including the use of compressed images (In this case, an Archimedes filetype already exists).

○ Memory Application Note

An Application Note is currently being written to summarise the key points relating to optimum use of memory in Archimedes machines. This is particularly important for owners of 1 Mbyte RAM machines. The Note will be mailed with the next Newsletter, but should be available prior to this, in July for those who request a copy earlier.

○ Monitors and screen Modes

As you should be aware, a well-written RISC OS application will not make any assumptions on the screen mode being used, but will adapt according to the screen mode chosen by the user. The choice of this screen mode will often be influenced by the cost and availability of particular monitor technologies. It is becoming

increasingly important that ISVs follow the advice and produce mode-independent applications. One example of a rapidly increasing trend is the movement to VGA monitors. Applications that cannot support modes 25 - 28 will be disadvantaged.

Acorn is aware of the variation in performance of some monitor suppliers' products with some screen modes e.g. Mode 20. Future versions of RISC OS will take the opportunity to optimise performance over a wider range of monitors.

○ Special Needs Group

Acorn has recently established a small working group consisting of members selected from a range of organisations catering for people with various differing special needs. The first meeting was held recently at Acorn's Training Centre and there was useful discussion regarding the suitability of the user interface for those users with special needs. It is planned to continue the dialogue and to build the knowledge gained into a specific Application Note and, eventually, into the RISC OS Style Guide. Please bear these users in mind when specifying your software. More will follow on due course.

News Exchange

○ A Message from the Education Business Unit

A very successful Education Roadshow has just taken place. A busload of software and hardware suppliers (twenty-two were represented) together with Acorn staff descended on Bexleyheath, Bridgewater, Dudley, Barnsley and Ayr on consecutive days of the week of 14 to 18 May. Almost 500 I.T. Advisors, advisory teachers and heads were delighted to have the opportunity to view the applications available and coming soon for RISC OS and to talk to the suppliers direct.

For future Roadshows, preference will be given to suppliers with products which are RISC OS compliant. This is in direct response to the stated requirements of our customers in education.

○ From Acorn User - Software Database

Software publishers from all aspects of the Acorn market will be interested to hear that BBC Acorn User, the top-selling magazine for users of Acorn micros, plans to set up a software database.

The aim is to provide readers with a detailed and varied rundown of all types of software products currently available. Consequently, the magazine welcomes information from software houses on their present releases.

Send your brochures, catalogues and any other relevant details as soon as possible to: The Publisher, BBC Acorn User, Redwood Publishing, 20-26 Brunswick Place, London N1 6DJ.

○ From the SID Editor, Acorn

A document from the SID Editor is enclosed, giving details of facilities SID has to offer. Do take advantage of this additional means of reaching a wider market for your products. Please note, however, that SID is not the route for your technical queries as an ISV and that provision of software packages and information for review or distribution via the Support Information Database does not remove the need to provide these to the ISV Department Library.

○ Enclosures

June 1990 ISV Price Lists (where appropriate)

'Acorn Computing' Spring 1990 catalogue Errata and Addenda (for contributors)

SID leaflet

!System Application Note

This newsletter was produced using the Acorn Desktop Publisher

System Resource Management under RISC OS

One particularly powerful aspect of RISC OS is its open architecture. This allows, and in fact encourages, the interchange and sharing of common facilities. This may take the form of system extension modules, common temporary files, shared datafiles, printer drivers, etc.

Acorn's !System application is one such system resource and provides a number of system extension modules that may be required by various applications. Initially, !System also provided a place within itself for storing temporary work (or scrap) files. However, to enable more flexibility, subsequent releases of the system resources included both a !System and !Scrap application, the later being introduced to provide a place in which to store these scrap files independently of !System.

The introduction of a separate !Scrap application was primarily to assist in network environments, where multiple copies of !System are wasteful and yet where each user needs to be given access to a place for applications to store temporary files. !Scrap is used by desktop applications requiring <Wimp$Scrap>, and for scrap files required by the printer drivers.

Due to the continual improvement of the environment, the content of the !System application is likely to be updated occasionally. Although Acorn will make every effort to distribute these updates as quickly as possible, it is inevitable that a few applications will rely on updated resources that are not necessarily generally available. To avoid any unnecessary inconvenience, Acorn may grant an appropriate binary distribution licence to allow updated !System applications to be distributed by third parties with their product.

To allow careful control of the various distribution channels, Acorn have produced the following guidelines regarding the use, distribution and updating of the !System resources.

1. !System is for Acorn's use, and its content should not be added to, or modified by, third party items, other than under the strict control of Acorn.

   Acorn may consider the inclusion of third party items within future releases of the !System application if they are truly global to applications, and issued to Acorn as a formal release.

2. !System must be updated in a controlled manner. It is essential that items within !System are only replaced by later versions. Users should be advised to take copies of existing versions of !System before they update them.

   Users should, on no account, be advised by third parties to replace their existing !System.

   To assist in the update procedure, Acorn provide a utility called !SysMerge that provides the user with a transparent mechanism by which to update the content of !System.

3. Third parties wishing to release shared resource facilities must release their own shared resource application directory, rather than a modification of !System. The name of this resource application must be registered with Acorn to avoid duplication.

4. Acorn recommends that users of 'floppy disc drive only' systems create a 'System disc'. This may contain many commonly required items, such as !System, various third party shared resources, fonts, printer drivers (for scrap files), etc.

5. Although users should be advised to keep only one copy of shared resources, this is sometimes impractical especially for the user with a 'single floppy disc drive' system. Under such conditions it is essential that the user is instructed to update ALL occurrences of the shared resources.

6. !Scrap is unlikely to change and should not be modified by third parties in any way. Although replacing a part of the original !System functionality, it is in no way tied to the !System application, and may be positioned independently, as required.

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