

EDITORIAL COMMENTS

If you missed the 1990 Altos Road Show, you need to find someone who attended and ask them what you missed. I attended yesterday, and I continue to be impressed by the progress that the Altos management team is making. They don't do everything right, but, judged on a scale of one to ten, they must be pushing eight or nine.

Before you accuse me of becoming a fan of San Jose, let me pass on what I liked about the most recent changes in their programs. First off, they have positioned their Series 1000 line at the most aggressive price points that a UNIX box has ever visited. The 1000 was not my favorite platform, but it sure beats putting a "PC Kit" together and trying to make it into a UNIX platform. The package, as provided by Altos, includes integrated serial communications, SCSI storage devices, easily expandable memory, and an operating system that has an absolute minimum of surprises. These are pretty good selling points for a system that starts out at a dealer cost under \$4,500. When you add in the Byte benchmarks, where the 1000 had a disk subsystem rated at ten times the performance of the low-priced goods, I am very impressed.

If "State of the Art" is where your heart leads you, you have to love the new products announced. The System 5000 is as good a new product as I have seen from anyone, including the vaporware specialists. If there is a neat computer trick that has been missed, I sure don't know what it is. Disk mirroring, background system diagnostics, integrated power supply, multiple SCSI channels, performance monitoring with visual display, Ethernet, TCP/IP, X Windows, and I could go on for more than my allotted space on this box alone. Top it off with the "Integrator" for people like us who have an opinion of our own about what we need, and the package looks pretty extraordinary.

The repricing of expansion items to levels that are competitive with Computer Support serves the dealer community extremely well, if you don't give it all away to the end user. Heaven knows, maybe we can strike a deal with Altos for Computer Support to sell Altos upgrades. No reason why it couldn't happen.

That's enough nice for Altos. Now it's time for what I would do differently. First off, I would drop the highly structured "dog and pony" show approach. Most of the computer people I know are just about impervious to glitzy sales pitches; we have just seen too many. I would opt for a handout package with all of the presentation materials in printed form, and about 60 minutes of pep talk. Then, with the time that is left, the dealers in attendance get a small group session (less than ten people) with the prominent folks from Altos. Maybe fifteen minutes of reasonably frank discussion about what they **really** need to get more business.

I was really surprised by the dirth of questions for Mr. Conway when the opportunity was there. Then I realized that

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an open room with your competitors and your suppliers all together could be a bit inhibiting. If the Altos people gave each group 15 minutes, they could go through eight groups in the two hours we saved them from the show. At ten in a group, they could give eighty people an audience. I could be way off base, but I think there is a good chance that the resulting communications might be good for both sides. Needless to say, I am not in favor of sheltering executives from the truth.

When it was all over, I decided that Altos hadn't hit the home run they proclaimed on the literature, but they have hit a stand-up triple, the most exciting play in the game. To reach home base they are going to need resellers who can deliver a game winning single when they have a scoring opportunity. The Series 1000 pricing really eliminates price as a sales objection. With an 80486 version at under \$10,000, I guess even a stick-in-the-mud like me will finally be forced to forget the Series 2000. I would have to say the Altos has provided us with just about all that we could ask for. Now it's time for independent resellers to deliver the goods through the channel. If any vendor has ever staked more on small independents, I missed it. Now we'll see if the guy at the plate can hit fast balls. ■

Preliminary URN Questionnaire Responses Many Are Yearning to URN

The level of interest in the URN (UNIX Resellers Network) is varied with most responders thinking it's a pretty good idea. Here are some of the preliminary tallies using **220 points** as the highest possible score.

- I. Developing buying capabilities that offer price advantages from consolidated purchasing. **157 pts.**
- II. The exchange of UNIX related knowledge that is free of bias. **197 pts.**
- III. The exchange of business related information that is unique to VARs. **206 pts.**
- IV. The development of a national support organization with standardized charges and accrediting. **166 pts.**
- V. Private label hardware platform not distributed through any other channel. **94 pts.**
- VI. Annual dues. This was the widest ranging response; everything from nothing to anything. Most thought from \$100 to \$250, but several said a higher fee would be appropriate.

There were interesting comments attached to several of your responses. One response included another question: reporting of products tested for a purpose, resulting recommendations, and units that did not pass and why. He rated it a 9.

With the interest shown so far, we can begin to see some direction for our new network. Keep those cards and letters coming . . .

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 686 25, 50
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 Kimtron KT7, KT7PC
 Qume QVT 101, 102, 103, 108
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 950, 955, 970, PT1200
 Visual 50, 102
 WYSE 30, 50, 60, 75, 85, 99, GT

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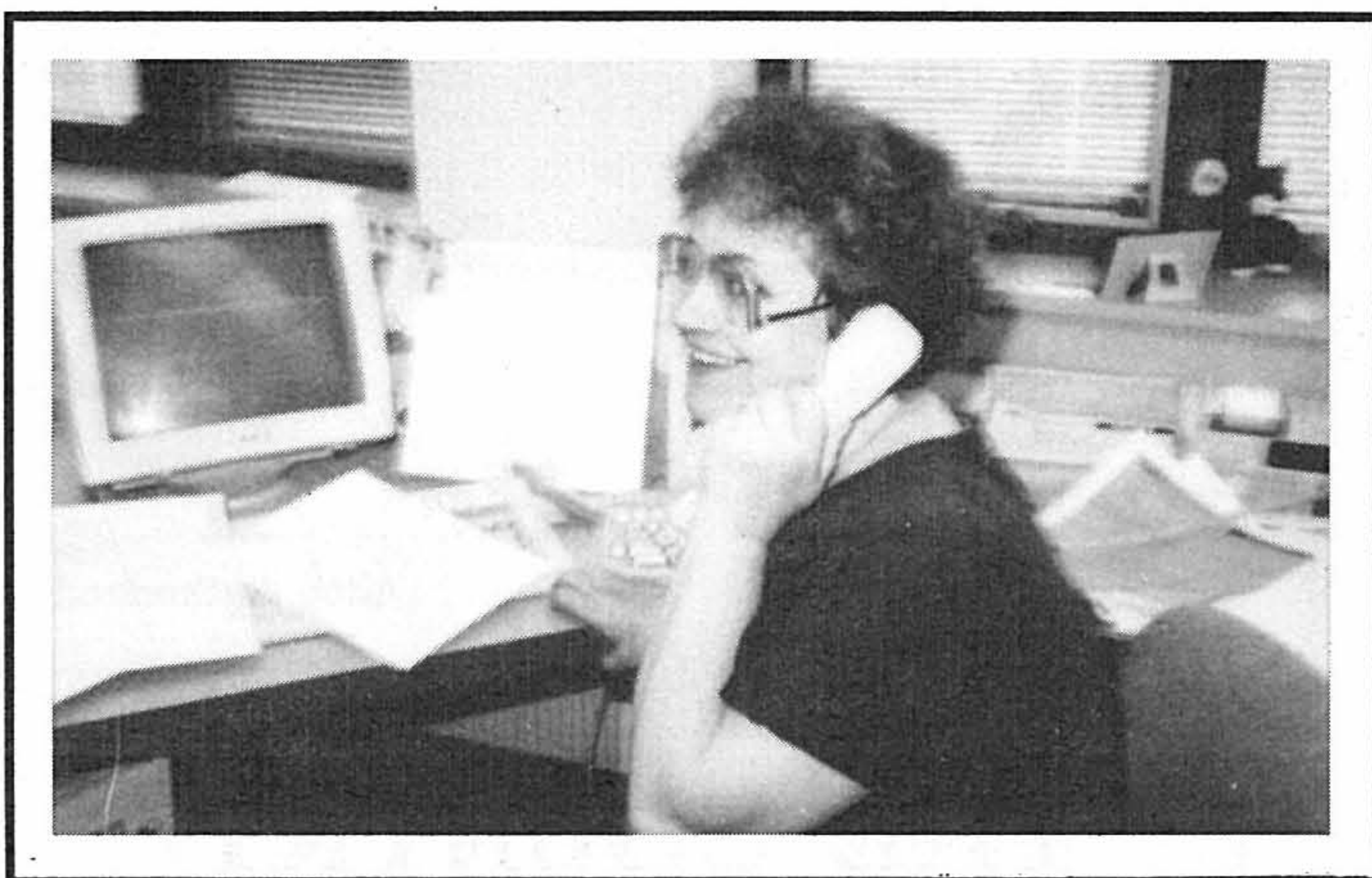
Anadex 96258, 6500
 Data Products 8070, M200
 Epson LQ1000, MX100, RX80
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Dorothy Dill

CSSC SPOTLIGHT



When, for some reason, you have to return merchandise to Computer Support, (Heaven forbid!), the smooth voice you hear on the other end of the line belongs to Dorothy, our RMA coordinator. She's the one who answers your questions, tells you how to return your merchandise, or if you are even allowed to return it. She is also one of the CSSC Billing Clerks.

Our employee in the Spotlight this month is Dorothy Dill, number eight in the Keairns family of 15; the ultimate middle child. Dorothy has been with Computer Support for two years and comes with a secretarial background. She worked for 10 years at St. Luke's Hospital in Sioux City, administering Birth Certificates for the State of Iowa. She really understands the hassles involved for your baby if you don't name it before leaving the hospital . . . so, name that child!!

Dorothy's other "hat" is as Guardian ad Litem, a trained lay person who acts as an advocate for children who are abused, neglected, or otherwise in need of legal help - truly, one of the "1000 points of light". She has horror stories, but says that, on the whole, people who work in the Juvenile Court system are caring and capable people with the best interests of children at heart. Dorothy has learned Spanish to help communicate in some of her cases, and has become knowledgeable about the child-rearing practices of many cultures. She has also taken many hours of seminars on Child Abuse, Children's Legal Rights, and differences in state laws affecting children.

Dorothy's family consists of 3 grown children, one grandchild, and a husband who is partial to "Southern" cooking. To this end, Dorothy's garden includes lima beans, squash and okra. Okra??

Dorothy's Words of Wisdom are, "With age, all things pass." With Dorothy and her can-do attitude, I'd say things just get better. Call her here at Computer Support if you don't understand your invoice. She'll help you figure it out, and she'll probably suggest that you pay it!! ■

So You Want to Be a Salesman . . .

Enclosed with this issue is a specification sheet on a different kind of product than you may have encountered in your computer experiences. I admit to being fond of something that stands out from the crowd a little, and this piece really does stand out. The LANTRONIX terminal server offers some of the more intriguing possibilities for developing a Believable Story (BS as we call it in the sales business) that I have personally encountered.

The basic concept of the terminal server is much the same as the Altos TCU-8, only it adds much more to the mix. Unlike the TCU-8, which runs on proprietary Multidrop hardware, the ETS-8 runs on industry standard Ethernet. This allows a terminal server to access any number of hosts on the network.

The first instance where the ETS-8 came to our rescue involved a small business that had several SCO XENIX based systems and the most incredibly complex cabling scheme ever designed.

The three hosts were all in the same building as a result of a recent expansion that moved all departments to one city for the first time. The first requirement was to get the systems connected in some useful way so that management could access whichever system had the information they were looking for. Their consultant solved the problem by using two serial ports for each system and used "cu" to call the desired system. Obviously, this approach had some limitations so they called us in for a longer term solution.

We removed the intelligent serial cards from the systems and installed a single Ethernet card in each one. This resulted in four slots becoming available for other uses. All of the systems were loaded with TCP/IP and NFS to provide us a functioning network. The ETS-8 terminal servers were added to the networks in the areas where the terminals were physically located, a change that simplified cabling a great deal. Most of the users are automatically connected to their regular server, but a number of management people were trained in using the capabilities of the ETS-8 to select their system and to allow multiple sessions.

When implemented, the terminal servers had cleaned up the cabling mess, allowed users to select the system they desired, provided up to eight simultaneous sessions for each user, and released valuable card slots for other uses. With the network in place, they then decided to purchase a high-capacity tape drive to do system backups to a single unit. When the project was completed, the company had spent a sizeable chunk of change, but they have exactly what they want in computer capabilities. The fact that they spent more on the new network, servers and tape backup than the original system cost didn't seem to be a problem at all, for them or me. Take a look at the LANTRONIX ETS-8 with the thought in mind that networks are going to be totally common in a UNIX environment; and, as systems grow, it becomes harder to find physical space to connect serial terminals. I think you may find some good homes for Ethernet Terminal servers. (NOTE: Dealer cost is \$1,270, and they are available now.) ■

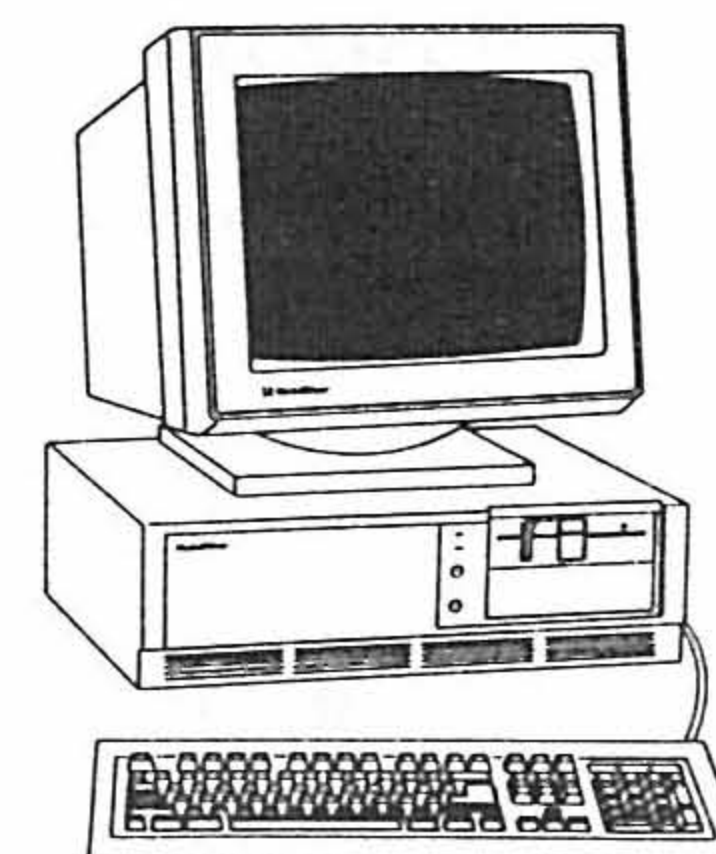
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TECHNOTES: SCO's Open Desktop

by - Brian Keairns

SCO's Open Desktop package has a lot to offer as an operating environment, even if it has a few bugs. Altos claims they are providing the necessary enhancements and bug fixes, and I have to say, at this point, that there is much need. However, once the operating system is finally sorted out, it will provide a substantial increase in available resources for user interfaces, networking and diagnostics.

At the Altos "Roadshow", they were demonstrating the Series 5000 running Framemaker on an X Windows terminal. I was impressed. I have, in the past, done desktop publishing on a PC; and I have always been annoyed that, although we do all of our computing on an Altos 2000, if we want to do a flyer or a draft of an Altogether page, we have to use a PC. A lot of the easy desktop publishing stuff can now be done on the Altos with Word 5.0. (I still occasionally have something that I have to do with Pagemaker or Corel Draw.)

In our particular setup at Computer Support, the server version of the 5000 would be an excellent choice because it can handle the large number of Informix users that we have, as well as a couple of X Windows terminals running Framemaker. Having the availability of a desktop publishing powerhouse like Framemaker right at my desk would eliminate the need for a PC. With Open Desktop, the Altos 5000 would eliminate the need for PCs in some environments, but with a large number of PCs out there, it is helpful that Open Desktop provides all the networking software necessary to make those PCs a real extension of the 5000. With X Windows software for PCs, the PCs could also run powerful applications like Framemaker.

The success of the 5000 with Open Desktop is going to be dependent on Altos adding value over the other 486 boxes on the market. This unit is the most industry standard Altos unit

ever, so they need to add software enhancements and special performance that are specific to Altos. The traditional strength of Altos is their superior disk I/O, and that is an area Altos should emphasize as the strength of this new machine.

With Altos' long experience with multi-user systems, they should be able to provide a better multi-user product than clone-makers who have just discovered UNIX. Altos also has to be aware that many aspects of the 5000 are universally available. All the X Windows and networking products are great, but not unique to Altos. Altos has to talk a lot about the enhancements they add to Open Desktop, and I think they need to beat people over the head with disk I/O capabilities. They need to talk about disk I/O until they are blue in the face because that is what is unique about the 5000. Their enhanced file processor is a definite Altos plus, and it will help Altos stand out over other 486-based clones.

Another area in which Altos' multi-user experience should pay off is supporting terminals. Altos multi-drop board and their 8 port board should offer better performance than a generic board that other 486 machines might use for terminal support. Ethernet support is going to be the same basic hardware, but Altos states that they are including high speed Ethernet drivers with their SCO UNIX. That software enhancement should be a benefit of going with the 5000.

The simple fact that all the items available on the 5000 are optimized to work together and are tested in a multi-user configuration is the real Altos plus. Even if many of the items are available from other manufacturers, integrating a variety of add-on boards and peripherals is always more difficult. The 5000 is a way to avoid the "Sow's Ear Syndrome"; it is a Silk Purse from the start. ■

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