

# COMPUTERWORLD

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## Airlines, Agents Caught In Systems Dogfight

By Paul Gillin  
CW Staff

A dogfight is going on in the airline industry, with computers and computer-based reservation systems as the weapons.

Automated airline reservation systems, which are now used by nearly 80% of U.S. travel agencies, have become a profitable and competitive tool for the airlines that market them. But a storm is gathering around the new automation. Increasingly, travel agents are claiming that bias built into the systems is costing them and their customers both time and money.

In an informal survey of its membership recently conducted by the American Society of Travel Agents, 81% of the agents reported misinformation problems with their automated systems.

"The reservation systems have been promoted as time-saving devices. But single vendors are short-changing the industry in trying to gain a competitive advantage from

them," said Larry Clark, president of Travel Center, Inc. in Tacoma, Wash., and chairman of the Aata automation committee.

American Airlines and United Airlines, which together split about 80% of the computerized reservation market, reportedly have spent \$300 million developing their Sabre and Apollo systems, respectively. Eastern Airlines, TWA and Delta Air Lines, Inc. all offer their own reservation systems, and Tymshare, Inc. has made a stronger commitment to market a system it bought from ITT last year.

Officials at American and United admit that bias exists in their systems, but say that is one of the reasons the automation was developed in the first place. "One of the ways we recover our investment is through the revenue that accrues to us because the agency has our system," said Thomas Plaskett, senior vice-president of marketing for American.

But some agents claim the major airlines that market reservation systems bury competitors' flight information so thoroughly that the travel agent is faced with the uncomfortable choice of calling competing airlines, wading through a half dozen or more screens of information or booking the flights that appear first on the screen. In almost every case, the first flights to appear are the ones

(Continued on Page 8)

## Do Spreadsheets Mean Micros?

By Lois Paul  
CW Staff

CHERRY HILL, N.J. — Does it make sense to buy a personal computer for everyone who wants to use spreadsheet software?

Eric J. Iaelen, director of business systems development for RCA Corp., does not think so. Instead, he has installed Parallax Systems, Inc.'s Execucalc, a spreadsheet package that can be used on IBM 3270-type terminals connected to mainframes running under VM/CMS.

"We needed a mechanism to enable people to test-drive," he said of his decision to install Execucalc. "We are not trying to keep people from using personal computers, but we want them to use them in the places and applications that are most appropriate," he said.

His feeling is that the personal computer is most effective for quick analysis or to answer "what if"-type questions. If the user wants to build

(Continued on Page 8)



Walt Street Photo

Hurricane Iwa slammed into Hawaii recently, downing power lines and destroying property. Most DP sites were spared. However, the storm did underscore the islands' need for emergency computer backup facilities.

## An Ill Wind

By Bruce Hoard  
CW Staff

HONOLULU — Hurricane Iwa was an ill wind that blew no good for DPs in Hawaii.

However, things could have been a lot worse. Kauai, the island hardest hit by the storm, is relatively small and undeveloped and has few computers, let alone computer centers.

Fortunately for DPs here on Oahu, where there are computer centers aplenty, the island's more southerly location spared it the brunt of Iwa's bluster. Nonetheless, it underscored the fact that there is no statewide emergency backup facility in Hawaii.

Doug Carlson, director of corporate communications with Hawaiian Electric Co., explained what happened to his operation when the hurricane hit. "At the height of the storm on Tuesday, when it first hit Oahu, our generation went from a normal 930 megawatts to 64, and that meant we lost 94% of the power we

normally send out," he said.

Reporters and editors at *The Honolulu Advertiser* who were working on stories at their CRT terminals were rudely reminded that Iwa was in (Continued on Page 6)

## Bevy of Products Unveiled At Distributors' Comdex

By Bill Laberis  
CW Staff

LAS VEGAS — Comdex/Fall '82, the showcase of the burgeoning computer distributor market, was held here last week.

marked by a flood of product introductions and announcements.

Few if any of the products will be available to end users directly, but rather via the vendors' third-party distribution net-

work. Prices quoted reflect the vendors' suggested single-quantity price. Quantity discounts are available for large end-user orders.

From Digilog Business Systems, Inc. of Montgomeryville, Pa., came a family of desktop business micros, utilizing either the Intel Corp. 8088 or Zilog, Inc. Z80 chip technology and based on the Digital Research, Inc. CP/M operating system.

The systems feature a dual 8-bit and 16-bit architecture that allows users to take advantage of an existing library of 8-bit programs.

Available for shipment in January, the desktops are priced from \$4,000 to \$7,000.

Mad Computer, Inc. of Santa Clara, Calif., announced a 16-bit desktop, the Mad-I, said to work with concurrent CP/M and Microsoft, Inc.'s MS/DOS operating systems. The IBM Personal Computer-compatible micro features a modular design for add-on growth, a removable hard disk drive, 128K bytes of random-access memory and an 8086-based processor.

With shipments scheduled to begin in the spring, the Mad-I line is priced from \$3,000 to \$6,000, depending on options.

(Continued on Page 10)

## CW Survey DP Managers Deny Ageism

By Marguerite Zientara  
CW Staff

Is age discrimination rampant in the DP industry? In stated attitudes, no; but in practice, maybe — at least in management positions.

While an overwhelming 205 out of 207 DP executives recently surveyed said they would be willing to hire people over 40 years of age, only about half indicated they had ever done so.

The survey went out to 300 directors, managers and supervisors of DP/management information sys-

tems services from all sizes of installations in every area of the U.S., with 41% responding. All survey recipients were chosen through a strict probability sample from *Computerworld's* subscriber list.

Of the 207 respondents, 101 (48.7%) said they had hired people over 40, while 106 (51.2%) said they had not, with a few emphasizing they had "never had the occasion."

Of the 101 who indicated they had hired over-40 personnel, 49 (48.5%) survey respondents said they hired (Continued on Page 4)

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*(Continued on Page 8)*

# DP Manager Puts Spreadsheet on Mainframe

(Continued from Page 1)

his own data base, this raises a red flag for Baelen. "Three people will tell you they have the definitive data base on sales. All three are snapshots at different times. That is where a personal computer becomes inappropriate.

"We are welcoming personal computers, but like everything else they have been oversold," Baelen said. Use of Execucalc at RCA is intended to help Baelen apportion personal computers more adequately. Some of

the people who think they want a personal computer running the Visicorp Visicalc spreadsheet package later find they do not like working with the software or recognize that it is too simple a tool to meet their needs. Baelen's staff can then steer these people toward some of the user-oriented software packages available in RCA's information center.

"If we can save one personal computer and keep one person from making a mistake, we will have paid

for the product," he said. In addition, it can provide an upward migration path for users who have outgrown the capacity of Visicalc on their personal computer.

To date, there are only about a half dozen IBM Personal Computers being used at Baelen's operation, Corporate Information Systems & Services (Ciss), he said, noting, "I know of six. It is not clear I know of all of them."

## Time-Sharing Services

Ciss is a centralized IBM facility to provide time-sharing services for RCA divisions worldwide. Ciss is running two IBM 3081 mainframes, which each have 16M bytes of memory. One is running under VM/CMS; the other is running under MVS for batch processing. There are generally 300 simultaneous users on Ciss's time-sharing system.

The division has an information center that includes products such as

Information Builders, Inc.'s Focus; Mathematica Product Group, Inc.'s Ramis II; SAS Institute, Inc.'s SAS; and Issco Graphics, Inc.'s Disspla. The firm is using Visicalc on IBM Personal Computers with 3270 emulation.

Although Baelen said his Visicalc users have not expressed any problems with the software, he said the weakest link in the chain for this product is its floppy disk storage. "We have experienced a number of outages." With Execucalc, the software can continue to be run on the mainframe if the personal computer fails. It can then be downloaded for backup.

Another area that Baelen feels Execucalc will provide an advantage over Visicalc is with regard to hard-copy output. "If you have ever waited for Visicalc to print," he said, "it doesn't spool. With Execucalc, it is virtual. You are queued, and you go on to your next task."

## Compatibility Seen Key Factor

A key selling point for Parallax Systems, Inc.'s Execucalc software at RCA Corp. was its upward compatibility with Visicorp's Visicalc, according to Eric J. Baelen, RCA's director of business systems development.

Basically, RCA wanted to eliminate retraining the company's present Visicalc users, Baelen said. He is confident that little additional instruction will be necessary to move these people to Execucalc. They will need to become familiar with features such as Execucalc's Help prompts and diagnostic messages, which are not available with Visicalc.

A second key factor was the ability of the firm to run the software on existing hardware. "Even users who don't have [IBM] 3270s can use a simulator we have put up and will still have access to Execucalc," Baelen said, noting that this includes his secretary, who can run the product on her word processing system.

In testing Execucalc at RCA, Baelen's staff put up line items that the various departments are required to provide. These requested this year's budget figure, next year's estimated figure and the difference between them. With Execucalc, RCA is able to expand the column after that so that its departments can explain why they felt that the change should be

justified, he explained.

The RCA employees who have been testing Execucalc were financial and marketing professionals and programmers. Several managers who were "novices," except for their familiarity with 3270s, also used the product. Baelen said he himself will be using Execucalc.