

THE ENTERTAINMENT COMPUTER TRADE WEEKLY

Monday May 6th 1996

Sony and Psynosis to separate?

After three years of marriage, Sony and Psynosis could be parting company.

CTW understands that the two firms have made initial progress towards an amicable deal which will see the Liverpool-based games development powerhouse no longer owned by the Japanese giant.

Details were scant at time of press, but along with well informed sources pointing

to looming changes there would appear to be a fair amount of wisdom in each company agreeing to the split.

Having been bought in May 1993, Psynosis has proved a shrewd investment for Sony. But right now could be the perfect time to sell — whilst dovetailing with the private wishes of senior Psynosis management.

The firm became a part of Sony when PlayStation was still at the planning stage. It appeared to have been bought almost as much for the counsel of Psynosis founders Ian Hetherington and Jonathan Ellis as the firm's software development skills — and they have delivered on both counts.

They shaped some of the PlayStation's earliest strategy, particularly on the software support side, with Hetherington

in particular operating as a convincing evangelist for both the machine's original specification and concept.

On the in-house product side, whilst perhaps flatteringly to deceive on other formats in the past, debut PlayStation titles such as *Wipeout* and *Destruction Derby* gave the new system a momentum from launch that could not have been solely achieved by the coin-op titles bought in from Namco.

It could almost be argued that Psynosis has served its purpose, done its job. The PlayStation's launch proved an immediate success in all global markets.

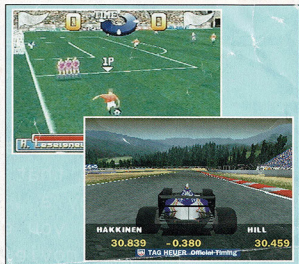
There are more titles coming from Liverpool that are exclusive to the platform, such as *Power Soccer*, *F1*, *Monster Trucks* and *Destruction Derby 2*. Continued frontline support

for the Sony format is absolutely assured.

Psynosis is not, however, owned by Sony Computer Entertainment but Sony Corporation of America. It has kept an independent streak all along, one which has come to prominence this year — with Sega Saturn being added to PC CD-ROM as a separately supported format and the company's return to its original name after a brief and strangely incongruous spell as Sony Interactive.

Given Psynosis' eccentricities as a member of the Sony empire, a move out of ownership should not necessarily be seen as a shock. And, with games company prices as they are, a sale would prove highly lucrative.

Indeed, Sony has said repeatedly that its PlayStation model is based on profit not



Power Soccer (left) and F1 are Psynosis' next blockbuster empire-building. Selling off Psynosis might just be the perfect opportunity to make back some of its huge investment in a new market, whilst retaining a 'special relationship' with one of the world's best software developers.



GT flashes its cash

GT Interactive fired a shot across the bows of its games rivals last week by proving that profits are possible in this business.

The firm has proudly unveiled a set of sterling figures for 1995 and the first quarter of this year. They follow depressing financial reports so far this year from the likes of Sega, Acclaim, Mindspace, Virgin and many others.

GTI saw global sales leap 140 per cent in 1995 to \$204 million and profits jump 65 per cent to \$18 million. CTW believes that European profits came in at around \$1.5 million.

INSIDE ISSUE 586

Company News:	
Amiso	5 Maxis
Centresoft	6 Merit
Electronic Arts	4 Ocean
ESA	3 Sega
Gen	4 S. & Schuster
Future	4 THG Games
Headland	5 Viscom
Media	
4	6
Counter Point	
9	9
Multimedia	
11	11
Features:	
10	10
17	17
18	18
19	19
20	20
20	20
22	22

It has followed this with a first quarter ending March 31st boasting sales of \$62.3 million and profits of \$5.1 million.

The figures would appear to rubberstamp GTI's swift emergence as a major player. Key titles due later this year include its eagerly awaited *Quake*, plus *War Gods*, *Mortal Kombat Trilogy* and the NBA Jam follow-up *Hang Time* from Williams.

"It's a case of crisis? what crisis?" Our figures are proof positive that a well run company can make money even in the most difficult of times," offered GTI's European financial and commercial director Hillary Cranry.

Centresoft re-focuses

Centresoft looks all set to focus squarely on games once its buy-out is complete.

First evidence of this has emerged with the expiry of the firm's direct distribution relationship with Microsoft. After some three years of buying direct from the US software giant's European logistics centre in Ireland, Centresoft is shifting back to sub-distributor status.

The move is partly a consequence of Microsoft's own intention, amidst a changing retail distribution scene, to deal with less wholesale customers. Frontline, Gem, Ingram and Merisel

remain as the leading retail distributors buying direct from Microsoft, with Centresoft likely to buy from one of them.

Whilst the firm is saying nothing, CTW understands that Centresoft is happy to change its relationship with Microsoft, as the newly independent outfit will look to focus on entertainment products. It has a pedigree in that sector plus lucrative exclusive arrangements with Sony and Sierra, amongst others.

As revealed in CTW last week, little is hindering Centresoft's progress out of the now Eidos-controlled CentreGold group. Terms are very close to being agreed.

'Sega' backs PlayStation

A Sega-owned firm has announced that it will be producing games for the PlayStation.

Sega has a 40 per cent equity in the otherwise independent US firm Segasoft which has already stated that it will be making games for the Saturn, PC, internet and 'other viable platforms'. The firm has now openly admitted that it will be producing for Sony's super console.

The firm has now openly admitted that it will be producing for Sony's super console. Executive vice president Joe Miller told CTW: "It's really not that strange, although there has been some confusion about Segasoft — which we have

been trying to clear up. We are independent from Sega and the best way that manifests itself is indeed the fact that we are publishing for multiple platforms."

"Sega has a 40 per cent equity in us, but we have other partners and we have an independent board."

Segasoft is planning to show three titles at the E3 US trade show in a fortnight's time and hopes to release about half a dozen in total this year.

The firm will have source games for the PlayStation itself and will not have access to Sega's own games such as *Virtua Fighter 2* and *Sega Rally*.

Eidos Interactive rings the changes

US Gold and Core are to become developers, and the Domark name could disappear from games altogether.

That's the stark truth of a fast-evolving strategy from new UK games super-publisher Eidos, which is planning to turn its newly formed Eidos Interactive company into the umbrella publishing arm of the whole group.

In little more than six months, the City-placed Eidos — previously only involved in video game development software — has bought some of the best known names in the history of the computer games business.

It spelled out to CTW last week, however, that it wants to start afresh. It's not intending to use the old names as labels and they must be focused and boast a real brand value if they are to survive.

Whilst much of Eidos' infrastructure and strategy is still to be officially mapped out, executive chairman Ian Livingstone said last week that US Gold, Core and the Domark brand operation will all be re-positioned as development studios.

"We're not being emotional about this. If there's no brand equity there, we won't use the name. It has to be said that Domark is not in a great position as a brand. It

might just be used for *Championship Manager* games in the future but, then again, it's arguably the game itself that is the real brand, so why bother with the Domark name at all?"

"Content is the key. We want to focus on areas of expertise. Gold and Core will produce console games, then there's a need for a brand carrying the strategy games. But everything will also carry the name of Eidos Interactive."

Livingstone revealed that the Domark name has already been dropped from the hotly tipped *Deathtrap Dungeon*, due in September. Other changes due include US Gold's exit from its long-



US Gold and Core becoming studios, Domark disappearing? time Holford Way, Birmingham. HQ. An Eidos Interactive sales and marketing office is likely to be set up somewhere in the Midlands, operating between the various studios of Core (Dorset) and Silicon Dreams (Banbury). Eidos Interactive will then have its corporate HQ in London, but is planning to move out of the current Domark site in Putney in the not too distant future.

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 SEGA SATURN

NEWS

EXTRA

Acquired TWI cuts staff

The drop firm formerly known as Time Warner Interactive has cut back on staff. Recently acquired by Williams, it was a separate operation to the TWI in Europe which has just been re-named Warner Interactive (CTW April 1996). Its last major hit was the cabinet version of *Primal Rage*. The extent of the losses are not known as yet although it is understood that many of the jobs are in administration and production facilities. "We've lost employees as a result of being purchased. It didn't make sense to have one organization duplicating tasks around the country now that we are part of WMS Industries (Williams)," said the firm.



Amstrad takes back old pro

The self-proclaimed 'reformed' electronics group Amstrad has appointed an ex-employee as managing director of its consumer electronics arm. Anthony Scitell left his senior marketing position at Amstrad three years ago to join the Gooding group. In his new role he will run ACE operations in the UK, Germany, France and Benelux.

Apple slices Performa prices

Apple's ongoing strategy to provide user friendly systems at low prices continues with the firm announcing European price reductions of up to 21 per cent on selected Macintosh Performa machines. The five Performa ranges have been dropped by between \$100 and \$300.

Product Info: Call Apple Computer 0181 730 2480.

Compaq Presario goes on-line

AOL Bertelsmann Online and Compaq have announced a deal that provides AOL services across the range of Compaq Presario PCs. Under the agreement AOL will become a Compaq Preferred Service Provider and will deliver various services with localised content and country-specific information. Compaq Presario customers will be offered a 10-hour free trial period, with the option of continuing with the AOL service thereafter.

Product Info: Call Compaq: 0181 332 3000.

MEDIA

GAMES PRESS GUIDE

Euro '96 takes the plaudits this week, as it prepares to boost the Saturn in a few weeks' time. But don't mention Pinball 3D VCR to the lads at PC Game...



TITLE	VERSION	MAGAZINE	SCORE	REVIEWER'S COMMENT
<i>Virtual Snooker</i> Interplay	PC CD-ROM	PC Gamer	85%	"Not as much fun as its pool equivalent but a cracking snooker simulation nonetheless."
<i>Assault Rigs</i>	PC CD-ROM	PC Gamer	70%	"Starts off simple but gets more and more involving as you play."
<i>Chronicles of the Sword</i> Paygonia	PC CD-ROM	PC Gamer	28%	"The background looks great, but even Merlin couldn't salvage anything from the rest of it."
<i>Psychic Detective</i> Electronic Arts	PC CD-ROM	PC Gamer	25%	"The same poor quality rubbish as all the interactive movies that have come before it."
<i>Pinball 3D VCR</i> 21st Century	PC CD-ROM	PC Gamer	7%	"Sickeningly poor."
<i>Euro '96</i> Sega	Saturn	Sega Saturn Magazine	94%	"The best football sim yet on the Saturn."
<i>Defcon 5</i> GT Interactive	Saturn	Sega Saturn Magazine	67%	"This isn't even a poor rip-off of Doom."
<i>The Heretic</i> BMG	Saturn	Sega Saturn Magazine	90%	"Buy it."
<i>Revolution X</i> Acclaim	Saturn	Sega Saturn Magazine	44%	"Switch on the auto-fire and go watch paint dry or something."
<i>Ridge Racer Revolution</i> Sony	PlayStation	Play	90%	"A must buy!"
<i>Defend</i> TWI	PlayStation	Play	87%	"If you thought Doom was violent, then check this out."
<i>NBA Live '96</i> Electronic Arts	PlayStation	Play	82%	"If you're a beginner, then you could do worse than to check out NBA Live '96."
<i>Tekken 2</i> Namco	PlayStation	Play	95%	"The best fighting game on any home system."
<i>Legends</i> Guildhall	A1200	Amiga Power	80%	"Big, together and beautifully detailed."
<i>Tracksuit Manager 2</i> Alternative	A500/A600	Amiga Power	65%	"For the same price, I'd be inclined to just plump for Premier Manager 3 Deluxe."
<i>Super Stardust</i> Gameltek	PC CD-ROM	GamesMaster	88%	"Great value for money."

Indies cheer exclusive PSX pack

Centrosoft has rolled out an exclusive new PlayStation bundle for independent retailers.

The £299 Destruction Derby pack was shipped to official PlayStation Centres last week, to an ecstatic response. It is available for a limited period, or while stocks last.

"The trade has been extremely positive about the new pack, and what is really encouraging is that the hardware is still selling on its own, too," Centrosoft's PlayStation brand manager Sam Broad told CTV.

"We wanted to give the independents a triple-A pack

and so we were extremely pleased to be able to offer the Destruction Derby pack because it's such a great game."

"It seems to have worked well for retailers, too. We had no orders coming in after the first weekend, so it obviously worked for them — despite it being a sunny weekend."

Broad said that more bundles for the independent sector are likely, although the next pack will probably feature an accessory rather than software.

"It's going to be another couple of good months for the PlayStation," she added. "Ridge Racer Revolution plus the Negicon controller



Indies strike back with Destruction Derby

are arriving this month and we've also got Tekken 2 and Adidas Power Soccer coming up, so the trade is going to be very busy over the summer months."

Maxis doubles up

Maxis has reported an impressive set of full year results, with sales up and profit doubling.

Sales for the year ending March 31st were \$55.4 million, up 45 per cent from \$38.1 million reported last year. Profit rose over 100 per cent to \$7.5 million, compared to \$3.6 million reported last year. This figure excludes a one-time charge of \$2.2 million for the acquisition of development firm Cinematrix. Including the charge, net profit for FY96 was \$6.2 million.

For the quarter ending

March 31st, sales increased 35 per cent to \$12.2 million, compared with \$9.0 million for the same quarter last year. Excluding the acquisition charge, profit rose more than six times to \$1.2 million, up from \$178,000 last year. Including the one-time charge, the net loss for the quarter was \$207,000. During the fourth quarter, international sales reached a record 25 per cent of total sales, up from 15 per cent during the same period last year. The firm is looking to continue this expansion, having recently hired Aki Kodama as managing director of its Tokyo HQ.

Range gains Merit

Ocean has boosted its budget line by signing up a range of titles from Merit Studios.

It has snapped up 25 in all, with seven, including *Command Adventure Star*, *Alex Dampier Pro Hockey '95* and *Isle of the Dead*, being published under The Hit Squad brand.

The remaining 18 titles, including *Armie II*, *Frankenstein*, *Match Day Manager* and *International Athletics*, will be released under Ocean's 'super budget' Regenerator label.

This deal provides The Hit Squad and Regenerator

with a range of quality product which will enhance an already strong portfolio," commented Ocean's business development manager for The Hit Squad Ray McIntosh.

Merit Studios' commercial director Paul Jobling added: "We are confident that these titles will perform well within The Hit Squad's two portfolios. They represent a huge variety of gameplay that will offer maximum value to both newcomers to the PC market and experienced gamers."

The first Merit titles to be published by Ocean's budget label will arrive next month, with the new deal apparently being the first of many.

ON AIR...

Week ending April 27th 1996

Most TV & radio review mentions:

Hardware: PlayStation/Saturn

1

Software: Criticom

3

Total TV & radio review mentions

(All games products):

This week: 44

Last week: 42

Comment

Fulli Booked has started its summer run on Sunday mornings on BBC2 and once again includes games reviews as a weekly slot.

Missed It?

Essential Guide to Summer (ITV)

New kids' programme looks set to feature regular computer games items and competitions.



Supplied by Media Research. All broadcast game coverage is available for purchase. Tel: 0171 731 2020 Fax: 0171 731 3160. Copyright CTV 1996

MEDIA NEWS

Industry PR firm Powerhouse has grabbed two new accounts. The London agency, which already lists Mattel Media, Virgin Sound & Vision, Maris Multimedia, News Multimedia and Philips amongst its clients, has now been signed up by Random House New Media and Yorkshire International Thomson Multimedia (YITM).

Successful US specialist games magazine *Electronic Gaming Monthly* is currently looking for a new senior editor. Publisher Sendai is offering transportation and relocation expenses. Those interested should write to Senior Editor Dept. ACE, Sendai Media Group, 1920 Highland Ave, Lombard, IL, 60148 or email to joefunk@msn.com.

Future Publishing has been appointed for membership of the World Wide Fund for Nature's Plus Group. The Group is apparently a rigorously selected body of UK companies that actively seek to use wood and wood products from 'well managed' forests, with a long term aim of improving international standards of forest management.

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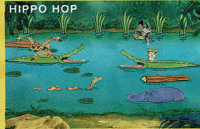
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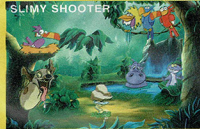
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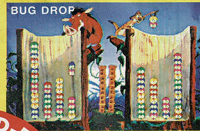
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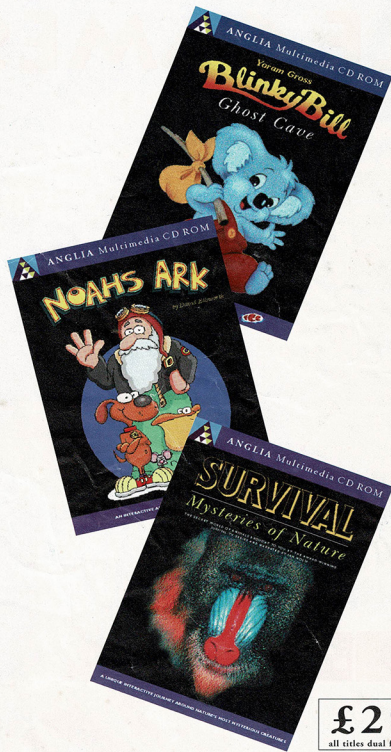


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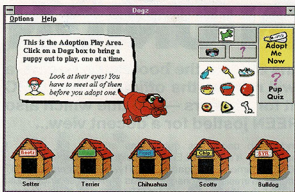
Anglia Multimedia products are available from Gem Distribution, Computer Bookshops Limited, Leisuresoft, Interactive Ideas, Entertainment UK, Active Distribution or contact 0171 839 2255 for more information

COUNTERPOINT

Price Check

	Dogz PC CD-ROM	FIFA '96 Mega Drive	Toy Story Screen Saver	X-Men Saturn
HMV				
Birmingham	£14.99	£29.99	£29.99	£49.99
Toys R Us				
Bristol	£29.99	£34.97	£24.99	£44.97
Virgin	£24.99	£34.99	£24.99	—
Nottingham				
E Boutique	—	£29.99	£24.99	£49.99
London				
Game	£14.99	£34.99	—	£49.99
Stevenage				

Price Check is a brief survey of current retail prices. All information was collected on Monday April 29th.



DOGZ: Some stores offering barking mad price of £14.99

Talking Shop

David Belgrave
GamesWorld, Melton Mowbray

44I know this has been said time and time before, but why do the big stores slash prices on brand new games, such as Toy Story? Surely when shops sell this great title at £32.99 they are not making anything on the game. I'm sure this is not good business sense. Or do the big stores hate small retailers that much they would like to see the independents out of business?

Where also, is the sturdy packaging for formats such as Saturn and PlayStation? It seems to be non-existent. Often when I open my deliveries shards of plastic come pouring out and I know the customer always looks twice before buying a knackered box.

I think congratulations are in order to Panasonic 3DO for announcing yet another delay of M2 for its current machines. I think the games are very good, but letting down customers again is bad news. I think Panasonic should get it together otherwise the customers are going to revolt and buy another machine.

Moving on to PCs, I've actually decided to get out of the CD-ROM market because of the amount of games I get back due to users not knowing how to load games properly. They blame the CD for being faulty.

Finally all the best of luck to all the small retailers — I really do believe that the small games shops out there are the best simply because we know what we are talking about, we let customers play the games in the shops before buying and we won't try and sell them an over-priced camcorder instead!?

To be considered for inclusion in Talking Shop, contact Lisa Foster on 01462 442472.

CTW RETAIL NETWORK

Every week CTW's Counterpoint section offers a selection of invaluable retail product information, trends and opinions. To be included in our panel of regularly contacted retailers, call Lisa Foster on 01462 442472 or e-mail her on editor@ctw.co.uk.

SELL-THROUGH CHART — ALL FORMATS

Title	Label	Formats
1 Star Trek DS9: Harbinger	Ocean	PC CD-ROM
2 Dogz	Mindscape	PC CD-ROM
3 Duke Nukem 3D: Demo	US Gold	PC CD-ROM
4 Worms: Reinforcements	Ocean	PC CD-ROM
5 Civilization 2	MicroProse	PC CD-ROM
6 Worms	Ocean	PC CD-ROM
7 Sens. World of Soccer 95/96	Time Warner	Amiga
8 Worms	Ocean	Amiga
9 Need For Speed	EA	PlayStation
10 Alien Trilogy	Acclaim	PlayStation

ENTERTAINMENT/REFERENCE RELEASES

Title	Label	Formats
World Press Photo Portfolio CD	Diamond Soft	PC CD-ROM
Frank and the Kilowarts	SkillsWare	PC CD-ROM
Learn To Speak...	Softkey	PC CD-ROM
Vocabulary Builder	Softkey	PC CD-ROM
Pronunciation Tutor	Softkey	PC CD-ROM
Perfect Plants	MIP	PC CD-ROM
Thinkin' Things Collection 3	Iona Software	PC CD-ROM
Trudy's Time and Place House	Iona Software	PC CD-ROM
Peter Pan	Europress	PC CD-ROM
MoneyBox	SS&M	PC CD-ROM
World Cuisine Recipe Book	GSP	PC CD-ROM

WHOLESALE CHART — PC CD-ROM LEISURES/OFT

Title	Label	Formats
1 Descent 2	Interplay	PC CD-ROM
2 PFA Football	Philips	Interplay
3 Virtual Snooker	Interplay	PC CD-ROM
4 Chronicles of the Sword	Psygnosis	PC CD-ROM
5 Ripper	Gametek	PC CD-ROM
6 ESPN Extreme Sports	Psygnosis	PC CD-ROM
7 Terrow	Virgin	PC CD-ROM
8 Perfect Flight	Instant Access	PC CD-ROM
9 Sailing	Europress	PC CD-ROM
10 Gingerbread Man	Europress	PC CD-ROM

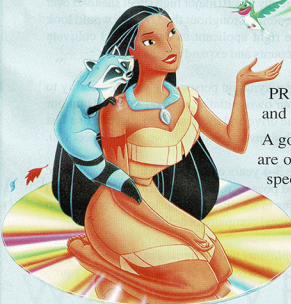
This is a selection of the new releases in the reference and entertainment market. To be included please fax your release schedules to Lisa Foster on 01462 442489 or call 01462 442472.

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EUROPEAN UNION

The Euro 96 tournament kicks off on June 8th, but the booting up begins a fortnight earlier. That's when Gremlin will release the official licenced PC game of Britain's biggest sporting event for 30 years — the title which also launches BT's Wireplay service. TIM GREEN jostled for a decent view...

The city of Sheffield may not be able to boast a single player in the home countries' Euro 96 line-ups (and if David Hirst gets a late call-up I'll eat my CTW subscription in one sitting), but it's not entirely without representation. Ask Ian Stewart. The chairman of Gremlin Interactive is going to lead the event. His company has already scored twice — its Euro 96 game is the tournament's official licence and the flagship for BT's Wireplay service.

The UK will become completely footy obsessed throughout June and July. The publisher has lined up a marketing campaign worth £80,000, its biggest ever. Ads will appear in the specialist, lifestyle and soccer press as well as every Euro match programme. There'll be a huge POS programme as well as special demerit-orientated events in Currys, Dixons and PC World. A major national newspaper competition is also in the pipeline.

Meanwhile, BT will focus its attention on securing a

series of headline grabbing events. A BT Local Partnership event in Manchester is already underway while the Wireplay City Challenge roams the country's retail outlets throughout June culminating in a cable-strewn final. Other details are sketchy but BT has confirmed its intention to host a 'virtual'

Within the space of just a few months Gremlin has lined up a prestigious licence and a strategic partnership with the UK's biggest company.

match between England and Scotland, played simultaneously at the Football Football restaurant in London and at Hampden Park.

For BT the activity is taking place much earlier than planned. It had originally scheduled the launch for later in the year with a full quotient of Wireplay-ready games. Broadly that's still the intention — the official clear from 1,500 journalists

and celeb users has only just begun. It's just that Euro 96 (tournament and game) offered an irresistible chance to publicise the service right now.

Robert Smith, BT Wireplay's marketing manager, says: "We want to be able to launch with a range of a good quality games across all genres. But in the meantime this is just too good an opportunity to miss."

So Euro 96 will, for a few months at least, be the only game to have the Wireplay option built-in. Click on it and players are dialled into the network to play virtual opponents for £1.50 an hour (evenings and weekends).

Licence and sellability

What, then, is so great about this particular game? Well, you can't ignore the power of the licence, only acquired by Gremlin in late 1995. Stewart remembers his shock at its availability. "We were talking to Sega about using Actua Soccer as the base for their own 32-bit Euro 96 game. It became clear that the PC licence

was still up for grabs. I couldn't quite believe it."

The involvement with BT was similarly serendipitous. BT's Colin Duffy visited six months ago to investigate Gremlin's work on the networked version of the soccer game. The concept of a soccer game in which individual on-field players are controlled by individual on-line participants came up right at the beginning of Wireplay's development. And here it was, staring him in the face.

As an official supplier to Euro 96, British Telecom realised the mutual benefit of a link-up. So within the space of a few months Gremlin had lined up a hugely prestigious licence and a strategic partnership with the UK's biggest company.

Although Gremlin carefully excludes explicit reference to Actua Soccer in publicity for Euro 96, the fact is that the hit footy sim has been used as the basis for this mega-licence. With amendments, of course.

Euro 96 includes double the number of motion captures and improves the "True 3D" engine which



Gremlin's big licence kicks off BT's ambitious Wireplay

FIFA rules on discipline and match results are incorporated. Meanwhile, Barry Davies has added to the Actua Soccer soundtrack with 30,000 new words of dialogue for Euro 96. Given his relish for pronunciation no doubt most of them will be Serbo-Croatian. □

Euro 96 is published for PC CD-ROM on May 24th.
For more information call Gremlin Interactive on 0114 275 3423. For more details on Wireplay, call British Telecom on 0800 800 883.

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MULTIMEDIA

This week CTW's dedicated multimedia page offers an at-a-glance guide to the performance of new titles from Philips Media, Corbis, Softkey and Notting Hill in latest editions of leading leisure computing titles. Multimedia Editor Christina Eskinie also reports on the growing Imagine range from Ocean.

IMAGINE

Having relaunched the Imagine brand as its non-fiction label six months ago, Ocean is currently replenishing its range with new keenly priced titles featuring everything from a CD-ROM New York travel guide to interactive insights into famous sculptors...

For a long time Ocean — successful in the core games sector since the days of Sinclair Spectrums and C64s — never looked entirely comfortable in the PC market.

It certainly took a while to be attracted by 'multimedia' and all that this rather nebulous sector implies, but late last year it reincarnated the almost forgotten Imagine label for a range of titles bought in from a little known firm called Arborecence.

They were discovered by the Manchester firm's French office and were far removed from typical Ocean action games or even the sophisticated flight sims emerging from part-owned developer DID.

Moreover, the titles were already produced in both French and English; all Ocean needed to do was to re-package them and then set about the retail sector would react.

The range included a series of CD-ROMs for car enthusiasts (Porsche, Ferrari)

etc.) some very highbrow cultural CDs (*Triptych: Monet-Verlaine-Debussy* and *Matisse-Aragon-Prokofiev*) plus some interesting interactive travel guides.

"We're not a specialist in the multimedia field and we never will be," says Ocean's PR manager Stephen Hey. "The whole point of this first batch of programs we put out was to provide for money. Our highest priced CD was £24.99, the lowest £14.99 and, sure, the actual quality isn't *Encarta*, but it's not bad either and we weren't really competing with the £40-£50 product, a lot of which is pretty average anyway."

From this initial market tester, Ocean found much that was encouraging. The distributors were keen to take the product. The magazines, on the whole, gave the cars and arts programs good reviews, which helped to drive sales. The travel guides were more problematic and a low price on its own didn't appear to be enough to stimulate sales, but the feedback was generally positive enough to encourage another go with a second range.

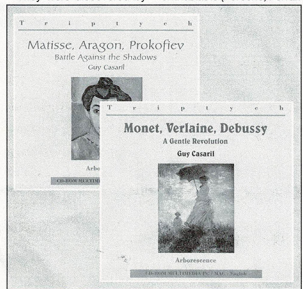
This year Ocean is releasing the rest of Arborecence's titles, bringing the total number of products

available to 22. Morocco, Mexico and New York will be given the travel guide treatment and Imagine's intellectual credentials will be strengthened with the release of CDs on the sculptor Brancusi and one in the form of a 'diary of an artist' Eugene Delacroix. Also appearing will be the first of a new range dealing with Greek mythology, called *Men of Legend: Ulysses*.

Hey is adamant that this is a market Ocean wishes to be involved in; the question is whether the firm is going about it in the best way.

"This year we're doing a lot of research both at distributor level and with consumers — qualitative research with family groups — to find out what they want when they're buying multimedia products."

The Imagine label also now has its own product manager, Karen Levy, who already has a thick file of data on the growth of the multimedia market so far and where future growth is likely to be. This year's research will, Ocean hopes, determine the nature of



Ocean gets arty with its Imagine range

BETWEEN THE COVERS...

Rock icons who get involved in CD-ROM creation do so, it would seem, at their peril. Peter Gabriel's pioneering *Aphex* was brave but largely incomprehensible, David Bowie's *Jump* was simply uninteresting and the Cranberries' *Distors and Windows* was distinctly thin. But Sting, of all people, seems to have hit the button with *All This Time*.

Even given the chance to have a good old dig at the man's reputation for pretentiousness, the reviewers have merely noted it, then settled down with his interactive CD instead and unanimously proclaimed it merely rather good.

PC Home couldn't resist pointing out that there's "a little too much of Sting rabbling on" and Rob Beattie in *ComputerLife* admits this Sting is "easy to poke fun at" before going on to declare this "a significant step in the development of the interactive music CD-ROM".

Certainly all the reviewers praised the presentation and the interface, while also pointing out that this type of program is for fans only. Anyone largely uninterested

in Sting and his works really doesn't need all this information about his views on life, the universe and everything.

Also impressing reviewers at the moment is *Critical Mass*, the history of America's race to build the atomic bomb. As with *All This Time*, it's the way the information is presented that really found favour — "beautifully presented and often fascinating... easily digestible chunks" of narrative," according to *ComputerLife*, which along with *CD-ROM Magazine*, noted that the information is presented almost entirely non-judgmentally.

CD-ROM Today, however, unearthed the *Beyond Trinity* slideshow on the disc, which it felt was "one of the most poignant sections... seeing

both the good and evil that has resulted from the nuclear age."

Everyone agreed that the subject matter was fascinating, but I can't help feeling that this is the sort of CD-ROM you need a definite reason to purchase. It's hardly a Saturday morning impulse buy if you're looking for something jolly for the weekend.

Similarly, the anatomical tour *Bodyworks 5.0* is an interesting release, but hardly what I would call 'entertainment'. The magazines found the information and depth of detail contained therein hard to face, although *PC Home* made a direct comparison to *v4.0* and questioned whether this latest series did "a great leap forward or just a 'slightly better presented product'".

PC Format muttered that it was a bit expensive, but *PC Answers* reckoned it was "a superb medical guide and gave it a nice big "Recommended" stamp.

Finally, in the last between *The Covers* magazine, Notting Hill and *The Art of Singing*. There are four reviews of this promising title in as *write* this as well as the other Notting Hill programs, no one can make their minds up. *CD-ROM Today* is sitting in the unimpressed camp ("too slow, too unhelpful and too old-fashioned to let its content shine in as well as the subject") and *PC Home* is pretty neutral. *Plaudits* come from *CD-ROM Magazine* ("delightful way to approach the subject") and *PC Home* ("neat little multi-

Title:	Sting - All This Time	Critical Mass	Bodyworks 5.0	Art Of Singing
Publisher:	Philips Media	Corbis	Softkey	Notting Hill
Tel:	0171 911 3000	0171 278 1387	0181 789 2000	0171 229 0591
CD-ROM Magazine	3/5	—	4/5	—
PC Guide	4/5	—	—	—
PC Format	82%	—	78%	—
ComputerLife	4/5	—	—	3/5
CD-ROM Today	—	4.5/5	—	2.5/5
PC Home	83%	—	76%	80%
PC Answers	—	—	86%	—

Note: All reviews taken from *Mag Issues*, apart from *PC Answers* (June)

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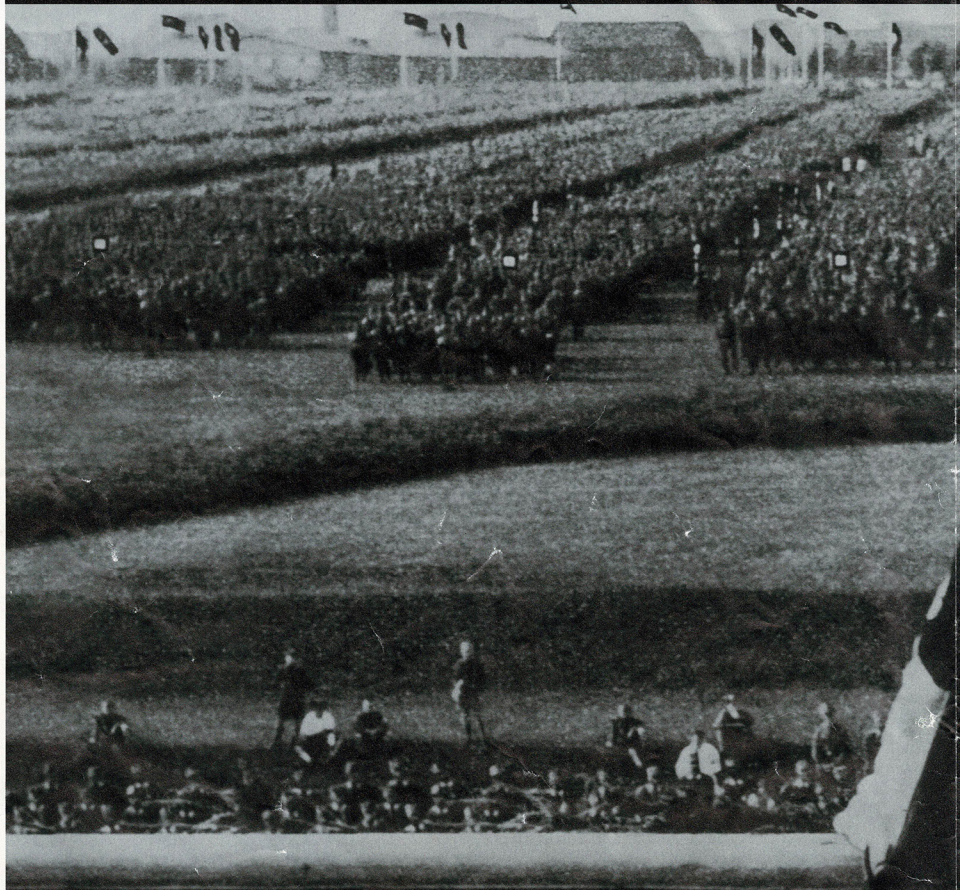
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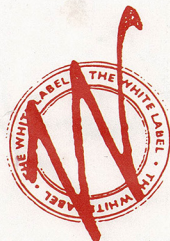
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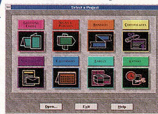
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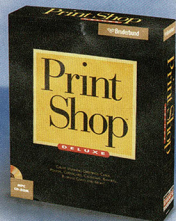
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SPOTLIGHT: FUTURE PUBLISHING

EMIPRES OF THE FUTURE

It's just over 18 months since Future was snapped up by the fledgling Pearson New Entertainment for £52.5 million. The Bath firm now boasts over 40 magazines, 450 staff, a turnover of around £50 million and made a profit last year of £4 million. It's the fifth biggest magazine publisher in the UK, dominates the PC sector and — with a three month ABC of 41,925 announced last week for *Official PlayStation Magazine* — has leapt to the forefront of the emerging super console sector. DAVE ROBERTS spoke to managing director Greg Ingham and chairman Nick Alexander about the firm's continuing evolution...

The problem that the games industry in general has had to confront over the last few years has been that the void created by the collapse of the 16-bit market has not been filled by the growth of CD-ROM or the emergence of 32-bit. What sort of problems has this presented to a magazine publisher and how have you dealt with them?

GI: With the console titles, the problems were quite significant. You can't have magazines selling a half or a third of what they were without an effect on the bottom line. In the computer division, not really. While the hits were being taken on video games, we were developing strongly on the PC and network side. We've never seen ourselves solely as a games magazine publisher.

Software publishers also shifted emphasis but still ended up losing money, was your timing better?

GI: I think perhaps we can move and adapt more swiftly than software publishers who are stuck with long lead times. We can scale down distribution, people or promotions at pretty short notice and have titles that are still profitable selling 30,000 as opposed to 100,000 — a smaller profit, but at least it's still there.

NA: The up and down swings with magazines are also a lot less dramatic than with games and the tails on them can go on longer after the software's disappeared from retail.

GI: It was only last year that we finally closed Commodore Format and Amstrad Action. In 1996 we're still profitably publishing PCW Plus and ST Format.

NA: We also have the benefit of having other places to go. The interactive entertainment industry generally has been going through a slightly tricky time with the upswing of 32-bit systems, PCs and Internet not quite matching the downswing of the SNES and Mega Drive, but for us there are all these other wonderful areas like football, rugby, comedy and science fiction.

GI: Even within the computing portfolio, there are more people employed on our Internet titles and on FutureNet than there are on Sega and Nintendo titles.

What sort of peaks did your magazines reach at the height of the console boom and what sort of percentage of Future's total business did they account for?

GI: I'm not ducking, I honestly don't know the percentage number. In terms of sales figures, GamesMaster, for example, was launched at over 200,000. The first issue sold 225,000 on a distribution of 247,000, which is just ludicrous. It settled down in the hundreds. Sega Power was also over 100,000. But if you look at Sega Power now selling around 30,000, there are very few pieces of Mega Drive software that are doing a third of what they would have done at the height of the market. With magazines you also have the opportunity of metamorphosing into the next platform so Sega Power is being re-launched and is now largely a Saturn magazine.

Despite smaller issues, less people, less promotion, there must come a point where magazines just don't sell enough copies to make any money.

GI: Yes there does and the only basis for continuing a loss-making title is if you foresee an upside at some stage.

Are there any Future titles in that position?

GI: Yeah, there have been and will be issues that slip into loss from time to time.

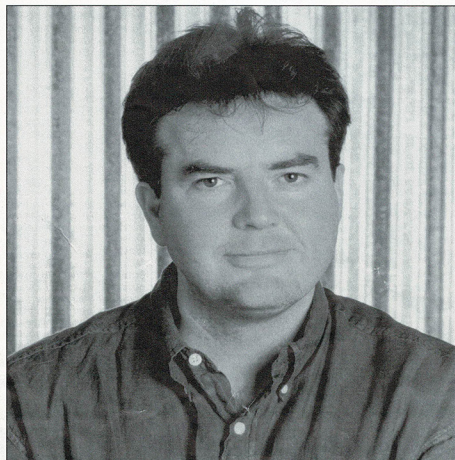
NA: With firms like Sega and Nintendo, though, whilst they might be going through fallow periods, particularly Nintendo, they're not going to go away so it makes sense to hang on in there. There are other instances, as with PC Attack last year, where we got into a market too early. So you close it and maybe look again later. Magazines are much more flexible beasts than games all round.

Has the building of a roster to suit a booming console market left you with an unwieldy, Sega/Nintendo-heavy portfolio of titles?

GI: I suppose if we started off with a blank sheet of paper we wouldn't end up exactly where we are currently, but then I don't think anyone would. I don't think the line-up's unwieldy, it's management's wishes and so it's not surprising when we didn't get it and at that stage I wasn't sure about the benefits. I think it comes down to complete editorial freedom because you have to have credibility. That's the only downside to an official title — the sense that people might think there may be some interference — but given the evidence so far, given the people involved and given our reputation I would hope people know that there's no way there could be any influence exerted.

How is the 32-bit market shaping up for magazines?

GI: On the Sega side, slow but getting there. On the PlayStation side I can only speak on the basis of what the Official Magazine has achieved. It's a fine market for us and there's a clear sense of Sony



INGHAM: Contests Emag's claim to superiority in the video games sector

getting ready to step up a gear or two this autumn.

You said on previous occasions that you were suspicious of the benefits of officialdom, so how's the relationship with Sony going?

GI: On the Nintendo side we pitched for the official magazine subsequent to launching an unofficial magazine against Nintendo's wishes and so it was no surprise when we didn't get it and at that stage I wasn't sure about the benefits. I think it comes down to complete editorial freedom because you have to have credibility. That's the only downside to an official title — the sense that people might think there may be some interference — but given the evidence so far, given the people involved and given our reputation I would hope people know that there's no way there could be any influence exerted.

Are rival PlayStation magazines also selling in the 40,000s do you think?

GI: Our tracking isn't showing that, but some of their claims are, so we'll see.

Why are you launching another, non-official PlayStation magazine?

GI: There's a real thirst for knowledge about PlayStation out there at the moment and a disproportionate amount

of purchasing activity among the user-base. We want to be competing with the guys at the £2.75-£2.95 price without cover-mount model. We don't simply want to give them that end of the market. We also believe that the market will become slightly younger and make room for a brasher magazine with more games tips and a different style.

NA: It's a buoyant market and we want to be active in every sector of it.

What do you think of the generally held view that Emag images rode the console wave better than Future, but that you did and continue to do computer magazines better than them?

GI: I can see that as an argument, but I look at the current array of titles and the current state of the markets at which they're aimed and I'm not so sure it stacks up. The ideal games portfolio would have the Official PlayStation Magazine and Edge, neither of which are published by Emag. They're two very powerful titles. So the idea that Emag have got supremacy in the console market...well I'm not so sure.

Perhaps it's more accurate to say they rode 16-bit better.

GI: They probably did, yes. They certainly did in the

Nintendo market, NMS clearly outsold Total and SuperPlay. They probably did in the Sega market as well — although it got close on two or three occasions. The multi-format market has been chequered but we've been ahead every period since the last one.

NA: I think we're well positioned across the board, we're poised particularly nicely in the 32-bit console sector and we've managed to maintain clear dominance of the PC and Internet area that's very much Future territory.

What is the PC portfolio now?

GI: It's 64 per cent, I know that. It's PC Format, PC Answers, PC Gamer, PC Review, PC Guide, CD-ROM Today, then there's .net and .net Directory.

That 64 per cent figure, does that mean that 64 per cent of all PC magazines sold in the UK are sold by Future?

GI: 64 per cent of anything other than pure business titles, yes.

And Format's the flagship?

GI: Yes, it's a very, very fine title indeed. To its great credit, it's got a bigger market leadership than Amiga Format ever achieved.

Continued on page 18

FUTURE ROLL-CALL

Computing Division:
Amiga Format
Amiga Shopper
Amiga Power
Computer Arts (June)
PC Plus
PC Format
PC Answers
PC Guide
PC Gamer
PC Sports
PC Review

Mac Format
CD ROM Today
.net

Consumer Division:
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Mountain Bike Pro
Cycling Plus
Total Football
Football Italia
First XV
Birds/Plant
Future Music
Total Guitar
Classic CD
Nuclecraft
Gross Stitcher
Cross Stitch Collection
Quick & Easy Cross Stitch
Good Woodworking
A-Z
Comedy Review

Exhibitions:
Bike '96 (cycling)
Future Music's MEMS
(hi-tech music)
Good Woodworking Show
Nuclecraft Show



SPOTLIGHT: FUTURE PUBLISHING

EMPIRES OF THE FUTURE

Continued from page 17
What's its closest rival?

GI: Now, probably, PC Home from IDG which is just through 50,000, so easy numbers, we're double.

The PC games market is a lot tighter isn't it, with you and Dennis' PC Zone battling it out?

GI: Yes, although we do have market leadership which we're massively proud of. Unfortunately it's only by two copies. Their last ABC, however, doesn't reflect Zone's price rise to £4.99, which we suspect might make a difference.

How do you think the two titles compare editorially?

GI: I think Zone serves a slightly different purpose, the same as Zero did. I'm actually not so sure it serves readers' needs in the same way that Gamer does and that's something that becomes extremely important at a high price point.

Are there any more non-computer launches due this year?

GI: Yes

Any details?

GI: No, not at the moment. I can add that we're looking at acquisitions as well as

launches. This is one of the key things since Pearson bought into Future, this sense of ambition about where we wish the company to be and whilst we can and will grow organically, for really fast expansion, acquisition is a more obvious route.

Your rivalry with Emag Images seems to have cooled slightly over the last couple of years, why is that?

GI: There was a period where it all got too deep, too bitter, too personal and, above all, too public. We subsequently set up the Computer Magazine Publishers Association and, whereas most trade bodies don't tend to achieve very much, this one did. It made us appreciate an awful lot of common ground and allowed us to keep any differences of opinion largely behind closed doors because in the end we may well have been right in some of the things we were saying and Emag may well have been right in some of the things they were saying, but the way that each of us was damaging both of us.

There's also the fact that we've grown up and grown more comfortable to a certain extent. There's still a fierce competition between us, but I don't think it's as personal as it was.

The magazine publishers generally also seem less at odds with the rest of the industry as they once were.

GI: Probably, yes. You still get incidents and there are always bound to be a few confrontations, but I think there's been a mutual mellowing on both sides. We tend to get fewer software houses going berserk, pulling all their ads and saying "never darken our doors again" or whatever.

On the other side I think the responsibility to the reader is still inherent in every review, but I think there's a greater understanding of the process involved in producing a piece of software.

NA: I certainly think we see ourselves as partners to the rest of the industry rather than adversaries and perhaps part of that comes about through tougher times and a sense of being all in it together.

Future's activity in areas outside gaming and computing seems to have increased quite dramatically in the last few years. Is that a reaction to the decline of the console market, a way of spreading your eggs across more baskets?

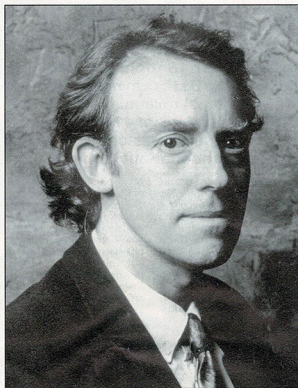
GI: Not really. The 16-bit

console market was an interesting and good market for Future but it was never the focal point in the way that it was for the majority of CTW's readership. Sega and Nintendo were and are important to us but I don't think they've ever been as germane as the question implies and I'm not even sure if the rate of change has consciously increased in that period.

NA: I have a different perspective which is that whilst there have been other areas of strength within Future for some time, when we bought them we didn't want to just buy a computer magazine publisher. Yes it's core territory and it's one that we intend to remain extremely active in as time goes on.

But we also want to be in all the other markets for boys of all ages as well. So sports is something we've very keen to build up and I don't honestly think that the pre-Pearson Future would have gone for Total Football and 1st XV, which are both substantial investments that we're going to need to deal with for a fair old time before we begin to make real money. We want Future to be our complete consumer magazine publishing arm — and that means much more than just computers.

What sort of split is there at the moment between computer/console titles and others?



ALEXANDER: Pearson has increased non-computer ambitions

GI: We're running at about two thirds computers, one third others and whilst the computer division will grow, that ratio will get closer.

Do you see a day when computer titles account for less than 50 per cent of what you do?

NA: I do.

GI: Absolutely.

Will you stick in the boys' areas?

GI: We do have a strategy and a fairly clear guideline aimed demographically at specialist interest magazines for boys from 14-40, either in terms of age or attitude.

NA: And there's still so much more to do within those brackets that it doesn't make an awful lot of sense to divert resources elsewhere.

JOHN DAVISON

NO PLACE LIKE OEM

Alright, so PC as a format is in the ascendancy and multimedia machines are increasing household penetration by the month. But, why then, are sales for most software releases so disappointing? JOHN DAVISON begins the first of a multi-part explanation by venting his spleen about those value-packed software bundles...

I was in a meeting with a certain very large multinational publisher recently which was about to take the bold step into 'interactive media' (to give it the nauseatingly Americanised term that lots of these big companies insist on using — they're garnes damn it). Having been very prominent in other software areas, obviously this particular

company was keen to impress upon us its remarkably impressive track record and sales achievements. Numbers ending in 'million' were frequently banded about, and even when these had sunk in, we had numbers ending in 'hundred thousand' thrust into our collective faces too.

As you'd expect, we were suitably impressed but the

meeting seemed to be leading towards something. Then it came. "So what sort of numbers do you think that an interactive media product would do in this territory then?"

Oh God, here we go. "Well, er, from our experience I reckon, for a pretty good one, er, about twenty thousand. There was a moment's silence before the following bomb-

shell was dropped. "Is that all?"

Is that all?

To be honest, let's face it they had a point. The console market ramped up global sales in the millions and now the PC market is supposed to be God's gift to wretched, idle, whiny do software sales seem to be incapable of doing anything truly spectacular?

Within the industry itself there are games which have been amazing — Doom, Descent, Command & Conquer, etc. — but on the whole they don't compare to videos, records or movies.

So here we go, the first of a series of unscientific speculation as to why things rarely go ballistic. I'm not going to cop out with an argument about pricing or anything. Firstly, it's straight for the throat... bundled bloody software.

Having scanned various magazines, been bombarded with press releases and worked my way through the news in CTW, it's a pity that the hardware fraternity are bundling more and more titles with their new PCs.

Hundreds, and now thousands of pounds' worth of gear is pre-installed on virtually every new machine bought by Britain's increasingly well-equipped consumer.

The PC market is growing incredibly quickly in the home sector. Many of these people are buying machines because, well, they need them to, 'cos the neighbour's got one.

They're not computer enthusiasts at all, they're just plain consumers who are

dozen other average to half-decent offerings.

After six months to a year, the punter might venture out to buy something new, but before it gets too dog-sared, they're pretty much sorted.

So where does that leave software publishers? Well, seeing as no one's buying as much new product as they should be, the only way to guarantee that the stuff gets flogged is to cut an OEM deal with a hardware manufacturer. If you can't sell through retail, then sell lots in one go to those nice people who can get the software out of the warehouse before it gets too dog-sared.

The deals get made, the software gets bundled and the whole thing turns into a self-fulfilling prophecy. The more in-pack bundled software that gets put out there, the less software is going to be sold at retail.

It's not a new problem, just talk to anyone who does OEMs and you'll hear of generous software bundling sold lots of STs but killed the software market stone dead.

Now I'm not saying that anything this drastic is likely to happen on the PC side, but bundling is surely having a detrimental effect on software sales at retail right now, and is showing little sign of improving.

And there's the Internet, cover-mounts and masses of poor quality releases to consider as well... more of the same.

John Davison is editor of PC Zone



We're assured that somewhere in amongst all that free software there is a PC

SPEAKEASY

CTW too tough on Amiga

noticed with dismay your dismissive reporting of both the World of Amiga Show and the news of ViScorp's prospective purchase of Amiga Technologies. (Big deal for dying Amiga? — CTW April 15th).

Dislike only 10,000 Amigas having been sold in the UK in the last 18 months, World of Amiga was a great success, as any of the exhibitors there will be happy to confirm I am sure.

And don't forget that with Amiga Format (July - December 1995 ABC 60,008), the market is served by a maga-

zine that outsells both PC Gamer and PC Zone and, as previously stated in CTW, Team 17 had a substantial hit with Worms on the Amiga recently.

All of this goes to show that substantial revenue is still being made by many companies (many of them no doubt subscribers to your paper) from the Amiga and you do these people a disservice by continually playing down any good news for this market.

Like you, I too need to be convinced by more than just words that the UK market

will benefit from the AT sale, but ViScorp do want to see the phoenix rise and I am still surely not alone in being convinced that there is a market for a sub-£500 home computer in the UK.

Escom put most of their stock through Germany in a few short months and totally failed to understand UK market conditions, but if ViScorp can get machines to market with the right price and the right bundle for a UK audience, we might all still be surprised by the Amiga.

CTW could do more for this sector if you too put

forward positive suggestions about how the Amiga could be successfully relaunched into the UK market and maybe you could help the Amiga community to aid ViScorp with their plans to relaunch the Amiga in this country by backing my call for a UK bundle with decent marketing and some support for John Smith and Amiga Technologies.

This is not a market without opportunities and we are a community that continues to fight with energy for a strong presence in the UK computer market.

I'm very pleased to be able to say at this juncture that Amiga Format is increasing its print run to accommodate a CD version of the magazine in the light of increased sales of CD-ROM drives and that there is still support for this format from leading software developers such as Almaterra, whose new version of Photogenics you also reported on briefly. Future Publishing continues to have faith in the Amiga (and to invest in it) and we will continue to push for the support the market needs whether from ViScorp or, indeed, from CTW.

Simon Stanfield
Publisher,
Amiga Format, Amiga
Power, Amiga Shopper
Future Publishing
Bath

— We have tried to be supportive of the Amiga ever since Commodore International went into liquidation in the US two years ago and the increasingly asset-stripped CBM UK bravely kept the machine alive, with little or no stock, whilst its management sought to complete an MBO for the business.

When Amiga Technologies was set up last summer, under the auspices of eventual new owner Escom, our hopes — like everyone else's — were raised. We soon, however, realised that the powers that be had little understanding of the UK market's needs or the Amiga's track record and still sizeable potential here.

Amiga Technologies UK was never supported adequately, the company's emphasis (driven from Germany) seemed wrong from the outset, products took too long to appear, the A1200 was too expensive when it arrived, publishers became disenchanted, consumers seem to only think PC when considering a new home computer purchase and a once fiercely loyal retail base became frustrated and, ultimately, learned to live without the Amiga.

It's now mid-1996 and the Amiga as this industry knows it is very nearly history. Only the top handful of titles in the ChartTrack Amiga Top 10 are selling more than 100 units a week. Only one major multiple, Tandy, is currently stocking the Amiga 1200 hardware as far as we're aware

— plus a sadly decreasing number of independents.

Of course, there is still a large and committed user base and the hope that will remain so for some time. A format's community, be it owners, magazines, shows or specialist software firms, can keep that format alive long after the industry as a whole has moved on.

But unless ViScorp can do something drastic, and quickly, CTW has to stick with its opinion that gradual decline will continue. That doesn't mean we're happy to witness it or belittling what remains. We just think that any hope that the Amiga can 'return' as a retail/home proposition in any major way — certainly any way that compares to past glories — has gone.

The future of the technology would seem assured thanks to ViScorp's arrival. Who knows, we might all have set-top boxes under our TVs in a few years which deliver all manner of interactive wonders thanks to a new Amiga chipset. But that's a different story.

We're not being pessimistic or crunk. Right now, we're simply being realistic.

CTW

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Can ViScorp keep the Amiga alive as a retail proposition?

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