

Data Capture in the 1990s: Yes - Data Capture!

Market growth brings big business for February Automation

Despite many people proclaiming that data capture would 'die a death' with the advent of new technologies such as scanning and image manipulation, companies specialising in data capture are seeing considerable growth in the market. Manual data entry - ie via keyboard - is still a very necessary requirement for some companies to extract and then analyse data from their customer base. However, the old ways have also been adapted to incorporate new technology: February Automation uses light pens to scan bar-coded data and processes some 250,000 entries a week for one customer alone.

February Automation is a privately owned British company, established for 33 years and employing some 55 full and part-time people. When necessary, the company operates from its two London-based facilities 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in order to meet customer requirements and maintain its reputation for flexibility. It does not contract out work to third parties, preferring to ensure confidentiality by maintaining on-site responsibility for clients' data.

...easy to set up, easy to use

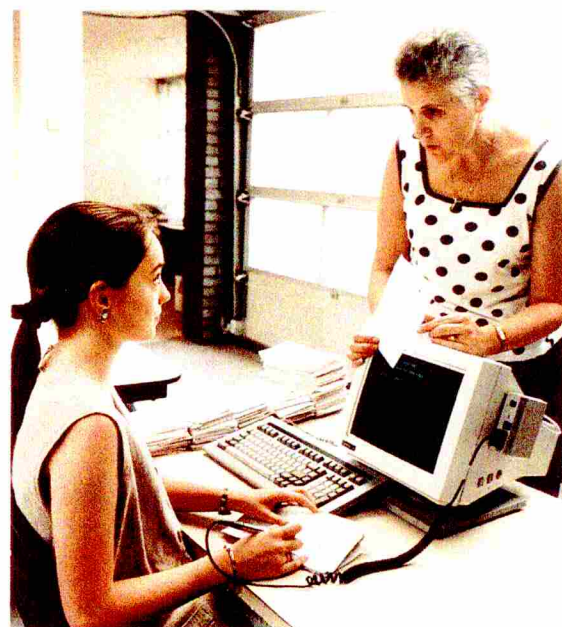
According to Thomas Fuller, senior partner, February Automation is growing 20 per cent year-on-year. Ninety-nine per cent of its business is as a data capture and handling bureau, a 'front end' receiving house for a wide variety of organisations throughout the private and public sectors. Work

varies from long-term, ongoing assistance to meet the daily needs of clients, to short-notice ad hoc projects in support of specific campaigns. Clients range from central government departments and local authorities to record companies and major name 'blue chip' organisations. Projects vary from processing just 50, to over 1 million individual responses. February Automation acts as a mailing room, sorting, sifting and preparing letters, forms, coupons etc so that data can be keyed - or scanned - into the company's ROCC computer system.

Says Fuller: "We have ten light pens connected to the ten ROCC terminals, so the operator can use either entry method. In an ongoing project for a well-known 'coffee table'-type publication, we are processing just under 1 million items of mail per month - reader responses and competition entries from members of the title's loyalty club.



Fuller:
"...Considering 10 or 15 years ago data capture was dead, the 1990s focus on improved customer service, client information and market research has brought us big opportunities"



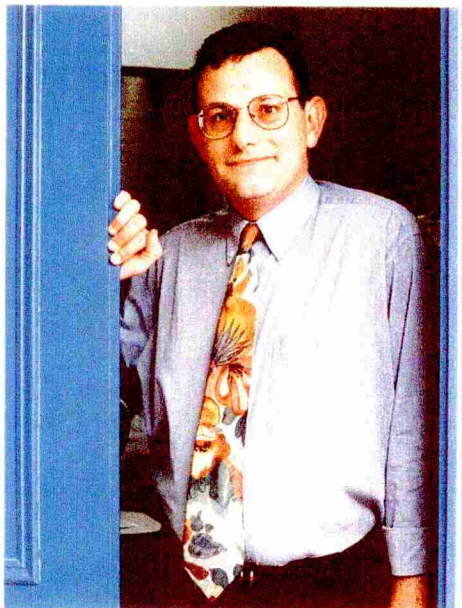
An operator scanning incoming mail using a light pen. This particular job is for a well-known publication and involves the processing of just under one million items of mail per month.

Autumn 1997

3

continued on page 6

ROCC Newsletter



Fuller:
"...our work capacity has considerably increased, without any change in personnel overheads"

Growth...

"As each member has a personal URN (unique reference number), it is an extremely quick and simple process to pass the light pen over each barcode and ensure absolutely error-free reader data is entered into the system. Previously, such a

project would have had to deal with hand-written details and be individually checked and filtered before we could begin data entry. Each week we download some 250,000 entries into the client's database. The client then uses the data for its own marketing purposes and to enable, for example, readers who fill in more than a certain number of coupons over a certain period, to be entered automatically into special prize draws."

...speedier processing

Fuller calculates that February Automation operators make 25 million key depressions a week, some 15-20000 depressions an hour; it's high performance, demanding work and the light pen application is clearly an excellent advancement in technology for suitable projects:

"The biggest advantages of the light pen technology are that it is very easy to use - no special training is required - and it is fast and accurate. Just one touch across the barcode gives fully verified information and so operator time is

dramatically reduced. For our clients, that means speedier processing and quicker reporting; data is up-to-date and can be acted upon promptly - to the benefit of both our customers and theirs."

...quicker reporting

Fuller continues: "The ROCC system is easy to set up, easy to use and very flexible so that we can develop data capture procedures and report formats to suit our clients. We can do far more work than previously, using less man-hours. Personnel are freed up to take on different roles or additional projects, so our work capacity has considerably increased, without any change in personnel overheads."

Concludes Fuller: "We look forward to continuing to enhance our services to customers by adding document scanning and imaging systems from ROCC, as well as expanding our existing barcode and keyboard entry systems. Considering ten or fifteen years ago that data capture was dead, the 1990s focus on improved customer service, client information and market research has brought us big opportunities." 


National Trust Chooses ROCC

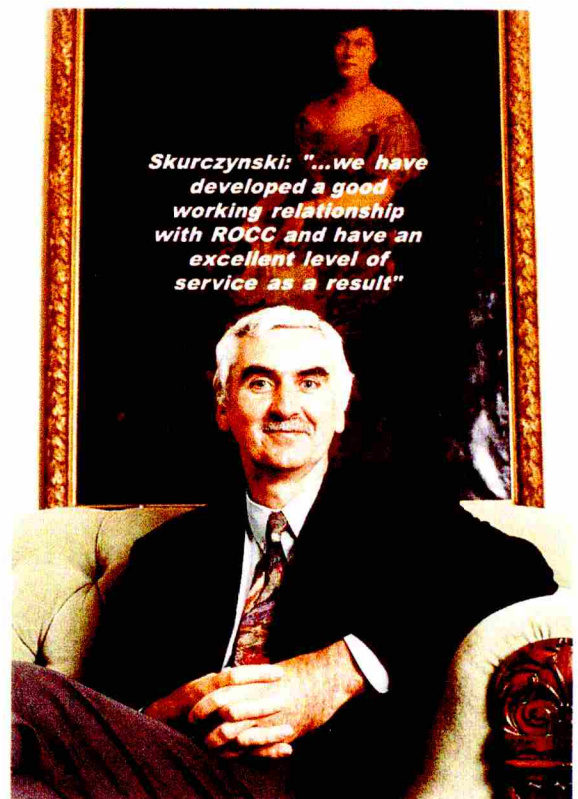
For PC systems maintenance from Hadrian's Wall to the Lizard Peninsula



The National Trust has signed a two-year contract - as opposed to the usual one-year - for the maintenance of its PCs and peripherals located throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The agreement with ROCC Computers, covers over 3000 pieces of equipment, used by more than 1500 people, located at 20 main offices and up to 900 property locations.

In the first year (1996/97) of providing maintenance services to The National Trust, ROCC achieved an 85 per cent successful rate, meeting The Trust's requirement for a four-hour response time on an average 80-90 calls per month. This included some locations in remote parts of the country. 



Autumn 1997

6