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Online shopping inventor goes online

Archives recording innovations of the man who invented online shopping are being expanded and the public is being asked to help.

The first part of the University of Brighton's Michael Aldrich IT Archive can now be accessed via www.aldricharchive.com and the university is now working on plans to enlarge it.

The archive chronicles the inventions and innovations of Michael Aldrich at Sussex-based Redifon/Rediffusion/ROCC Computers from 1977-2000. Among his innovations, Michael invented online shopping in 1979. He agreed to donate his archive of personal and company papers to the university in 2008.

The archive, which took two years to organise and digitise, deals with technology advances and events.

The second part of the project, starting this year and lasting up to three years, will identify some of the people who created the IT systems and also the clients who used these systems. This will provide a comprehensive social and technical record of the achievements of a small Sussex company trading internationally at the end of the 20th century, and the people who worked with it.

Professor Bruce Brown, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research at the University of Brighton said: "The archive now needs to hear from people who worked at the company or clients who used its products and services from 1977-2000 and have memories, and or photos to share.

"The archive is particularly important in that it documents the beginnings of a period that would go on to see great social change. In this respect we want to keep building the history of this largely undocumented period and so are keen to receive stories that illuminate the impacts of the various new technologies upon people and their habits. To help this process, there is a feedback page on the archive website where potential contributors can make contact.

"The purpose of the archive is to provide a unique source for future generations of scholars interested in better understanding a period of social upheaval equal to that stimulated by the invention of the printing press. Also, the archive will encourage teaching, learning, scholarship and research into the uses of information technology. The completed archive will continue to be an open public resource through the web, accessible to all."

Professor Brown added: "By capturing some of the technology and events and the people involved jointly and severally, a comprehensive record will be developed on the beginning of the IT age which will enable students of today and tomorrow to study, appreciate and draw lessons for future enlightenment."

University of Brighton academics from the Business School, the School of Service Management and also from the School of Computing, Mathematical and Information Sciences will be involved in the progression of this new archive.

Editor's Notes

1. Redifon/Rediffusion/ROCC Computers was originally based in Crawley, West Sussex. Subsequently the company moved to Brighton in 2001. It also had an office in Shoreham and other offices throughout the UK and Eastern Europe.
2. Michael Aldrich was Chief Executive 1980-2000 of the company until his retirement.
3. A team of volunteers from ROCC's Brighton office is responsible for designing, organising and digitising the Archive.
4. The Archive is held in digitised and hard copy form at the Aldrich Library at the University's Moulsecoomb campus.