

# Data Express Group

## WEMBLEY

1979



Part of the 32-terminal R400 data entry installation at the Headquarters of the Data Express Group, Wembley.

"On reflection, I think that then we were sold the Redifon data entry equipment less stress could have been laid on the simplicity of its use and much more on its good points and on how very powerful it is. We've only discovered these things after installation; you could actually operate the kit almost as a small computer bureau if you wanted to. But it is easy to see why the emphasis was laid on simplicity; my co-director and I are non-technical and no one here had had any previous experience of this type of equipment". These reflections were made by Colin Lewis, a Director of the Data Express Group and the man responsible for the day-to-day running of the Group's two bureau locations. He went on to say: "In fact at the time of the change to key-to-disk, we all really wanted to stay with cards. We had everything set up, the operators were good and all was working like a dream when our main contract customer, decided they needed their input done on key-to-disk".

Data Express Group's duplexed 32-terminal, R400 configuration was installed in September 1978. In fact, the installation represented an expansion for the Group as they were fortunate in being able to take over an adjacent office suite to house the new equipment, while keeping most of their card and paper tape punches at work in their existing offices. This meant that established customers using the card and paper tape services were not let down since, without the extra room, serious space problems would have resulted.

The presence of the punch card equipment also meant that, initially, cards could be used as back-up until the use of the Redifon equipment was firmly established. This lead-in situation was very important during the initial teething problem period and it helped to establish the bureau's confidence in their new equipment. The two Redifon systems are

duplexed, providing instant back-up for each other, so once they had proved themselves to their new users the card back-up was dropped. The surplus card capacity has now been filled with new work.

All this expansion has lead Data Express Group to believe they are now the largest independent bureau group in the country, certainly in terms of the numbers of machines and operators working in-house. Nevertheless, size has not diminished the belief in the importance of personal service, and it is in this area that Colin Lewis believes the independent bureaux score. As Colin commented "It is a 'contact' business, the bureau business. It is knowing people, and giving a good service. It is also being approachable, so that if we make a mistake the customer can 'phone and know we will do something about it. He knows we cannot afford to lose his business: we are independent and our commitment to the bureau is all the greater since our whole life-style depends on the bureau's success. Its the commitment that gives added meaning to personal service".

Certainly Data Express have a lot of long established customers, including a number of very well known names. In fact Pat Lockey, the Bureau Manager, estimated that a good 70% of their capacity is pre-sold. This is certainly a stabilising factor in a labour-intensive operation like a bureau, and helps to ensure no operator is under-employed.

The Redifon contract is mainly concerned with food distribution. Information from individual stores is keyed and then output to tape for processing on the customer's mainframe at their London Computer Centre. The data keyed forms the basis of orders to the central distribution network, and time-scales are tight since the data is used to ensure the right food supplies are in the right shops at the right time. It is the time-critical nature of the work that makes the

duplexing of the two Redifon systems imperative. For example, on Monday nights the bureau runs a 11.00 pm to 7.00 am night shift preparing data on which stocks in the stores for the Thursday to Saturday shopping peak are dependent. Clearly any delay could have serious business consequences as well as affecting the week-end eating habits of quite a proportion of the country's population!

Since the installation of the R400, the data dispatched has been a lot cleaner and more accurate. Data Express are also now able to produce statistical reports from information stored on the Redifon disk. These reports enable unacceptable error levels in the source documents to be identified. Colin Lewis commented that their customer had been impressed by the reports, particularly as nothing equivalent could be produced on a non-Redifon key-to-disk system.

Certainly Data Express have an impressive, large installation and Colin Lewis was very happy with results so far when he commented "Our customers think the work we do is very good and if they think it is good, I think it really must be! Anyway we are very pleased now that we have gone key-to-disk, and that to do this we chose Redifon".

