

# Greenfield & Dixon Computer Services Ltd MANCHESTER

The very heart of Manchester is an ideal location for the small independent data preparation bureau of Greenfield & Dixon. Since personal service is a cornerstone of the business the central location means that the bureau's two Directors, Arthur Greenfield and Peter Dixon, can themselves do the bulk of the collections and deliveries to customers, in the 50 mile radius of the city centre which is the area that the bureau mainly serves. As a result they regularly see all their customers, can discuss any problems and generally ensure that the quality of work is maintained. So successful has this policy been that virtually all new business is generated by personal recommendation from one user to another, and the steady growth of the bureau over the last five years can be directly attributed to it.

Nevertheless growth has been cautious. Both "Arthur and Peter" (as they are called by their customers) had many years experience of data preparation, and bureaux in particular, before they started in business together. "We knew the problems and we knew what we were aiming for"

Arthur commented. "We simply do what we say we are going to do, and do it right. On occasion we've had to refuse work because overload might have caused a lowering of standards. Basically we've built up the business on regular customers, but we still like intermittent 'peak job work'; it is just as important to us". The bureau concentrates almost entirely on normal data preparation and despite the cut-throat competition in this traditional field, has always intended to continue specialising in this area.

However, such a policy has not meant that the card punches, on which the work of the bureau was originally based, would necessarily remain the best kind of equipment to ensure the future prosperity of the business. The drive to find suitable new equipment started well over two years before the Redifon R300 data entry system was installed and was originally prompted by the fact that customers increasingly wanted their data on magnetic tape rather than on cards. As the bureau was only able to produce cards, a conversion at another installation was required. This increased costs, but more importantly it involved a loss of control since the other installation might not share Greenfield & Dixon's high standards, particularly regarding time-scales.

"Initially we felt we wanted to replace about half our card punches, but the cost per operator of such a system would have been too high and would have priced us out of the market. So we went for a larger system, but had to look for more flexibility. The Redifon system seemed to us to have none of the restrictions of the other equipment we looked at, and in our, rather erratic, game this was

important" explained Arthur. "In addition Redifon were the only firm who gave us really comprehensive quotations; they prepared a very good write-up with prices for all the various permutations enabling us to do the careful costing necessary before we could make a decision".

No one in the bureau had any programming experience prior to the installation of the R300 system. The Supervisor, Lynda Smethurst, attended a Redifon programming course and is now confident in the programming techniques necessary. She is also able to train other staff. Nevertheless, Lynda said that at first there was an element of the "blind leading the blind" and even though things now function very efficiently they are all still learning a great deal. She explained "In principle, we started by doing all work in card image form, but we soon realised the futility of that and we are now using the equipment as it is intended to be used". Lynda has found the reformatting techniques offered by the Redifon software a particular bonus, though the full range of validation checks on

of a job, that was awkward to assess, was over-estimated by the customer and we were able to give him a refund".

Another point that Arthur Greenfield and Peter Dixon made very strongly was that, regardless of the equipment used, a bureau is only as good as the operators it employs. They explained that they had kept growth down not only to ensure that their high standards of personal service were not eroded, but because they were limited by the number of good staff available. In this respect standards are high; one operator currently employed has won a major national keying competition three years in a row, another has been a runner up, and has won this year's competition. Nevertheless, Arthur pointed out that it was always accuracy rather than speed that really counted and that the ability to switch jobs often and learn new ones quickly was vital in a bureau environment. Individual talent is well rewarded as the operators' pay is based on a bonus system, the information being obtained from the Redifon operator statistics.

In addition, both directors are certain that



A 15-terminal R300 data entry system is installed at Greenfield & Dixon, Manchester.

characters, fields and records have also proved their worth. From the customers point of view, features like Batch Total have provided an extra benefit as these can now be checked and faulty batches identified before mainframe processing. However, Arthur Greenfield explained that as the R300 was still relatively new they have not yet really exploited the extra facilities they could now offer their customers. But this has not detracted from the basic benefits already enjoyed, which include greater productivity per operator and the ability to monitor the accurate pricing of work via specially written job statistics programs. "In a bureau like ours, we are essentially charging for the operator's time. We have a 'standard rate' on which we estimate prices for a job: with the job statistics produced by Redifon we easily can double check that prices are correct, whereas before checking had to be done manually and there was only time to check occasional jobs, chosen at random. Our price estimates are usually based on information provided by the customer and accepted by us in good faith. If the job statistics show more work than expected was involved we may, on a long running job, be forced to increase the price. Or, as happened recently, the content

the size of an individual office is all important. In a very large office a happy working atmosphere resulting in good operator productivity and low staff turnover is difficult to obtain. As a result they have decided on limited expansion of the Manchester office, but are about to open two new office centres, one in Halifax, Yorkshire, and the other in London. Initially, these offices will use card punch equipment only, but if the expected

growth occurs, R-range systems could be installed in these offices also. Before this, though, what they consider to be the one flaw in the R-range must be overcome: they feel that they urgently need a card punch peripheral to remain competitive, for when customers have no magnetic tape input on their mainframes, an outside installation has to be used for the conversion from magnetic tape to punched cards. This results not only in increased costs but more frequently in loss of control over time-scales.

