

# Harland Data Systems

## HULL

Hull is a town steeped in the traditions of the sea; perhaps its very geographical position, on the coastal fringe of Yorkshire, has tended to emphasize its remoteness from the land and turn its horizons increasingly towards the sea. Nevertheless diversification away from maritime dependent industries has always been desirable from the town's stability and these days modern communications are making this increasingly possible. So, for example, in the Sutton Fields area of Hull where Harland Data Systems have their brand new, purpose-built headquarters, can be seen the offices, factories and warehousing units of a good cross-section of British industrial enterprise.

Harland Data Systems is itself a good representative of this enterprise in that it is a company offering an exceptional two-fold service to its customers. First it offers all the normal data processing bureau services for standard commercial applications like payroll, sales ledger and stock control. Second, from its own production unit, the Company offers a highly specialised label printing service, based on advanced computer

type-setting techniques. Commenting on the service Barry Savery, Managing Director of Harland Data Systems, said "At the moment we feel we are unique in Europe; no-one else is offering the service we are offering, particularly in terms of turnaround". The label printing services are particularly aimed at applications like supermarket shelf labelling where fast production of new labels to keep pace with price changes is vital. The labels are also often part of in-store data collection systems utilising, for example, light pen scanning devices to read bar codes printed on the labels, so helping to provide stores with benefits such as fast, accurate inventory control.

Despite the two-fold nature of the services offered by Harland Data Systems, their two Redifon data entry systems have important roles to play in both areas. For the specialist shelf label printing services, the Redifon terminals are used to enter clients' label information, but it is the data communications capability of the Redifon system that is particularly important. Customers requiring new or updated labels need to get data concerning the content of the labels to Harland Data Systems as quickly as possible, so the Redifon system is used as the basis of a data transmission bureau service. Data is received regularly, over the public switched network, from label customers throughout the UK, as well as in Europe, particularly Belgium and Germany.

Data transmitted to the R300 system is output to magnetic tape: this in turn forms input for the company's NCR Century 75 mainframe, which processes the data and prepares it for use in the computer type-setting system. Using highly automated processes like these Harland Data Systems claim a turnaround of as little as 48 hours for the production of new shelf labels for possibly thousands of products.

The other aspect of Harland Data Systems activities, the normal bureau data processing service, is centred around its NCR mainframe and a second Redifon data entry system, located in Anlaby about seven miles due west of Hull. Anlaby is the Group Headquarters and the Headquarters of Harlands of Hull, a long-established printing company and the largest member of the Harland Group of Companies. Harlands of Hull was founded almost 150 years ago during the lifetime of Hull's most famous citizen, the anti-slavery campaigner William Wilberforce. Through its long history, Harlands of Hull have become a leading printer of labels for packaging and one of Europe's leading

improved, and this fact alone has justified acquisition. In addition, one old-established bureau client has taken advantage of the Redifon system in a more unusual way: he has installed a terminal, modem and private line and now does his own data entry on-line directly from source. The data he transmits is subsequently processed on the NCR mainframe.

Transmission is also the key method of data exchange between the Redifon system at Anlaby and the R300 at Sutton Fields where the mainframe is also located. Ray Birch explained that by having two similar systems they can ease the loading problem on the 5M disk at Anlaby where the larger volume of data preparation is sited. "As soon as information is prepared it can be transmitted to the other Redifon system in a 'Rescue' type mode. In this way we keep the integrity and security of the Anlaby system at the Sutton Fields site. As soon as Anlaby have transmitted their data they can free their disk space for further use."

As if to justify Ray Birch's earlier assertion that the Redifon system is more than just a data preparation system, the Anlaby system



An R300 data entry system is installed at the new offices of Harland Data Systems in Hull.

innovators of labelling systems. The specialist label printing activities of its much younger sister company, Harland Data Systems, clearly find their roots here.

The Anlaby based Redifon data entry system was installed nearly two years ago, replacing card punches. The prime justification for the Redifon system was for data preparation for the Harland Group of Companies and outside bureau clients. As Ray Birch, the Technical Manager explained, "Of all the data preparation systems that we evaluated, the Redifon system offered most, especially in terms of power. It was not purely a data preparation system. We saw that it could save us 2-3 hours processing a day on the main computer because we would do all our data validation off-line. So it pre-empted the upgrade to a bigger mainframe or the starting of a further shift on the existing machine". Since the Redifon system was installed data preparation throughput has

also been very successfully utilised. A processor in its own right to provide a printing and cost estimating service to Harlands of Hull. Three terminals are now installed specifically for cost estimating in the estimators' office and by simplifying what is a lengthy process they have enabled Harlands of Hull to give a quicker, more competitive service to their customers. Using the Redifon terminal, variable information (materials, colour, inks, numbers required etc) concerning printing can be entered. Using this, costing details can be picked up from master files on the Redifon disk and exact printing costs can be calculated and displayed. A further advantage of the system is that individual variables can be changed (for example numbers required) and the effect on the overall cost compared once. Harlands of Hull had planned to automate their cost estimating before the installation of the Redifon system and the fact that the Redifon was powerful enough to be used for this as well as the data preparation was a very welcome bonus.

The tremendous range of uses to which Harland Data Systems have put their Redifon systems certainly emphasises the equipment's flexibility. Perhaps too it can be seen as an indication of the dynamism of a young growing company that is using its very considerable computer expertise to provide customers with an all-embracing, efficient service.