

John Lane Computer Services

PETERSFIELD, HAMPSHIRE

In March 1976 John Lane Computer Services was established and a six terminal Redifon data entry system installed. From these small beginnings, a dynamic and thriving company has grown.

Initially the Company pioneered a new application for the publishing industry in which data tapes for a database used for computer type-setting were prepared on a Redifon data entry system. John Lane explained "The application meant producing data in upper and lower case. At the time, the only system suitable was Redifon since the software enabled programs to be written catering for upper and lower case output. We carried out several jobs for two large publishers, entering information for use in databases on large mainframes".

Although the publishing-type applications initially formed the bulk of the bureau's work this is no longer so as expansion has been rapid with growth occurring in several areas simultaneously. First there was a natural movement in the traditional data preparation field since the Redifon equipment is obviously ideal for this. Second, since the publishing applications were complex and involved extensive use of all the Redifon software, the bureau built up a great deal of Redifon software expertise. This in turn enabled two new, essentially separate services to develop. By a simple upgrade of their Redifon hardware the bureau was able to offer a complete data processing service. If the application required further processing on a more powerful machine, then time was bought from appropriate mainframe computer installations. The bureau also found itself in a position to fulfil a demand for

a systems software consultancy service to other Redifon Users, basing it on its own considerable knowledge and experience.

By the Autumn of 1978, the bureau was well established in all the above areas. John Lane, together with his co-Director Peter Bence-Trower, had set out originally to create a good reputation based on punctuality, accuracy of work and fair pricing. This policy, together with their considerable expertise, had succeeded and they felt the time had come to review the future plans of their business and to analyse the market areas in which they should concentrate. Their position in the Redifon software systems support area was virtually unique, outside Redifon Computers and they decided to expand this specialised service. This in itself necessitated having the latest Redifon equipment in-house. They also felt their data processing activities would expand naturally into a complete distributed processing service, given the right equipment. In addition they had a large, upper and lower case, directory job for the publishing industry in the pipe-line. Since the powerful Redifon R850 provides, amongst its many features, upper and lower case terminals, on-line workstations, very comprehensive software and large disk capacity, this system seemed to answer the bureau's needs. An R850 was ordered, and installed in April 1979.

John Lane explained the philosophy behind their order as follows: "Our market is a fairly specialised one which stretches from publishing applications, small database systems and consultancy through to large volume data entry with, in general, considerable pre-processing requirements. We have developed an efficient service, using

the latest hardware—the R850. We ensure that the combination of in-house experience and the best equipment, our clients will always receive a first class service".

In practice this means their market falls into two main categories, consultancy and bureau services. Consultancy covers both Redifon R-range software and systems consultancy, as well as more general computer consultancy to people who, perhaps having had no previous experience of computers, are seeking to find out what benefits computers could offer them in their business. In this area John Lane Computer Services offer everything from initial feasibility studies through to actual implementation, in all probability on the in-house Redifon R-range systems. The specific R-range consultancy service is aimed both at existing Redifon Users who would like to extend their applications or introduce extra ones, and at new Redifon Users requiring anything from advice to a complete implementation carried out and tested (if necessary, prior to their own installation) on the bureau's in-house machines.

The bureau services are as wide ranging as the equipment itself. The publishing applications on which the bureau was originally based are still important, though these are forming an increasingly small proportion of the total business as the latter grows. In addition some publishing work falls into the small database systems category and can be completely processed on the R850. Databases also form the central core of other important applications, for example, on-line management systems: one client is soon to install four on-line terminals in his own office though normally users of such a system would use the bureau's in-house terminals. Alternatively the systems can be run remotely for the user and his output returned to him later.

The bureau also offers a complete service to any company with a data-capture problem. John Lane explained "In cases like these we sit down with the company concerned and help design documents and validation criteria. Then we write the necessary programs in-house so that all data for mainframe processing is clean and no further validation is necessary. One system complete recently deals with data from source throughout the world. We receive document from world wide sources, carry out all the editing and error reporting as well as doing on-line corrections if necessary and ensuring all queries are answered. The clean data is then forwarded for mainframe processing, no further validation being necessary". In addition to all the above, the bureau also offers a traditional data preparation service admittedly with an emphasis on high volume and pre-processing content.

Peter Bence-Trower summed up the situation when he said "The Redifon R850 is too powerful for small value data entry and is too expensive to use only as a data preparation system; it needs to be topped up". And it is in the field of the all important "topping-up" — everything from first-rate service to excellent consultancy — that John Lane Computer Services excel.



The R850 distributed data processing system installation at John Lane Computer Services Ltd, Petersfield.