

# BATCH SCORES OVER ONLINE

**D**ATA preparation bureaux have commonly been looked upon as the poor relations of the computer industry. But you won't find anyone at the Bradford-based bureau, Spectrum Data Services supporting that theory.

About three years ago we were anticipating a lean period when our established customers were going online. However, since then "business has been booming," says divisional manageress Joan Northrop.

"There is a great demand today for the creation of vast databases, as part of the information technology boom," adds group managing director, Barry Burns. "Typical

customers are health boards, direct mail and mail order companies. Our ROCC equipment and software is specifically designed to facilitate rapid entry of data with sophisticated validation.

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**"... online data entry can often be substantially slower than batch."**

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Combining this with our high performance operators enables us to provide an extremely cost-effective service."

Northrop adds that "online data entry can often be substantially slower than batch. This is because operators typically have less practised keyboard skills and the question/response to data entry often requires time consuming thought from the operator - this is avoided in batch systems by the set up procedure".

Spectrum has a full order book and is confident that this will continue to be the case. The bureau runs two ROCC data entry systems, one supporting 16 workstations and the other 24. These are used for two shifts, a day and evening shift, and a flexi-time system is in operation.

What is the secret of Spectrum's success? Joan Northrop sights a number of factors.

"We are very selective in the staff we employ. We always look for some experience of data entry and some evidence of keying rates before we recruit. We initially employ staff on a three-month trial basis. Out of a batch of six, perhaps two will fall by the wayside. Usually both parties discover long before the three months are up if the working relationship is going to be successful. Operators have to change jobs constantly - they

may be processing some 10-15 jobs a day which develops quick reactions." "Our operators are motivated by bonus rates," says Northrop. The target varies from job to job but is typically 10,000 key depressions per hour, which means that bonuses can account for as much as half of their take home pay.

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**"ROCC Computers' Operator of the Year Keying Competition."**

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In, admittedly, the rather artificial conditions of the ROCC Computers' Operator of the Year Keying Competition, Spectrum has certainly attained a high standard of performance. Since its inception in 1980 their operators have been placed as follows:

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| 1980    | Anita Wolstencroft joint 3rd  |
| 1981/82 | Anita was 2nd and Joyce Pool 3rd  |
| 1983/84 | Anita was the winner and Joyce Connors was placed 2nd   |
| 1984/85 | Again Anita was 1st and Joyce Connors 2nd. With registered rates of 26,609 kdp/hour and 25,206 kdp/hour net of errors both improved on their previous year's performance. |
| 1985/86 | The rules stated that Anita was unable to enter the competition again but 2nd place went to Joyce Connors and 3rd place to Julie Askew of Spectrum.                       |

An impressive record which no other ROCC installation in the country has ever matched.

This not only shows and proves that practice makes perfect, but highlights another

Since the inception of the Operator of the Year Keying Competition in 1980, Spectrum operators have always been in the final.

Pictured (seated) Anita Wolstencroft winner in 1983/84 and 1984/85, Joyce Connors (left) 2nd in 1983/84, 1984/85 and 1985/86 and Julie Askew who was placed third in 1985/86.

Both Joyce and Julie are entering ROCC's 1986/87 £1000 competition.



reason for Spectrum's overall efficiency – low staff turnover in a thriving yet stable atmosphere which encourages operators to steadily improve their skills.

But the story does not end here for the bureau is part of the Spectrum Computer Services PLC group of companies, all of which are prospering. In 1981 there were two major divisions in the company – the data preparation business and the software house operation. Now the group also has divisions providing turnkey computer systems, computer bureau processing and computer supplies.

The Software House activities have continued to include a full range of services extending from initial consultancy and feasibility studies through to systems design, program production and complete installation support. Additionally, this division has developed an extensive range of software products for both micro and minicomputer equipment. Examples include a comprehensive financial accounting suite and vertical market products including Property Management, Debt Collection, Building Society and Housing Association systems, Local Authority, Educational Administration and Opticians. There is even a suite of Financial Accounting Software which works completely in Arabic and has been installed in several sites in the Middle East.

The Turnkey Computer Systems division markets a range of software products which are supplied in conjunction with appropriate computer hardware. Examples include the 'SOLARS' Cash Receipting system and 'PROWESS' the Schools Administration system. 'SOLARS' is supplied in conjunction with British Olivetti hardware and Spectrum is the sole UK distributor for them in the specialist local government market at which this product is targeted. There are currently in excess of 50 UK local authorities using Spectrum/Olivetti Cash Receipting systems.

'PROWESS' is supplied either on a software only basis or alternatively as a complete turnkey hardware and software

solution. This system is a comprehensive Schools Administration product and is currently in use by over 50 schools in the UK alone.

The division is also responsible for marketing the British Olivetti/AT&T 3B UNIX range of hardware together with the suite of MOSAIC Accounting Software and/or software for specialist markets including Property Management and Opticians. Across the product range, Spectrum is the largest British Olivetti distributor in the UK.

The Computer Supplies division was formed to satisfy the requirements of clients in other divisions for standard and customised continuous stationery. Since this time the range of products provided has grown rapidly and includes a wide range of quality computer, word processing and telecommunications supplies. Supplies director, Steve Moroney, says that the vast majority of current turnover is now achieved with clients who are not customers of the other divisions and Spectrum is one of the largest 3M and Dysan distributors in the UK.

The Bureau Processing Operations started five years ago, and shows how data preparation can create business as well as provide a steady income. A client had asked whether the company could perform some manipulation on data subsequent to its capture on tape. The appropriate software was developed and initially the company provided its processing services by using its ROCC computer as the



processor. The business has now built up to such an extent that the operation is performed by using a powerful Hewlett Packard 3000 series model 42 system complete with Image Database management systems.

Says operations manager, Richard Coulson, "We offer a complete mailshot service, from capturing the data to merging and de-duplicating files, validating addresses, and adding postal rebate codes, to producing fully personalised laser printed mailshots, even organising fulfilment and postage if required. This saves our customers from having to deal with up to four or five separate suppliers".

Spectrum is certainly going from strength to strength with a rise in turnover from £1m to over £4m in just four years and in the same period the workforce has risen from 60 to over 140 staff.

**"Our ROCC equipment and software is specifically designed to facilitate rapid entry of data with sophisticated validation," commented Barry Burns – group managing director of Spectrum Computer Services PLC, pictured at the company's Bradford headquarters.**

**Spectrum Data Services runs two ROCC data entry systems supporting 40 terminals in total.**

**"We are very selective in the staff we employ," says Joan Northrop – divisional manageress of the bureau operation, who is seen talking to one of her operators.**

