

Publisher's Comments

Hello there. I'm Ralph McElroy, the publisher of this magazine. I'd also like to introduce our editor, Dick Fuller. You'll find him hiding on the first side of the cassette.

As this is the first issue of a totally unique magazine, I'd like to share with you a little insight on our operation, what we're doing and where we're headed.

CLOAD" magazine is the result of the frustrating experience of thousands of programmers since "computin engines" have been around - the experience of writing a program that will run exceptionally well - on one machine. When any attempt to move it to another machine is tried, the program must be changed. Fine for programmers - it's called "light editing". Not fine for non-programmers. The traditional solution to this problem has been simple - no non-programmers allowed. To join the somewhat elite club of computer users, one had to learn the mysterious art of speaking in a relatively obscure tongue.

Enter the Radio Shack TRS-80! Now there are thousands upon thousands of computers which are compatible. That means software compatible, hardware compatible and data format compatible. This allows for the possibility of vast quantities of software to be shared. The distribution can be in machine readable form (cassette), and the result is sure to run. CLOAD" magazine adds two innovations to this. One is the low cost of distribution. There are no individual sales of each cassette, with the associated overhead. The other is feedback. If the users don't like the direction that we're headed, it can be changed (keep those cards and letters coming in, folks); definitely not so with individual sales.

So what's coming? Thought you'd never ask. We have two major areas we're heading toward. One is educational programs - usually in the format of games. The personal computer is a beautiful "teaching machine". The other area is practical programs - finance oriented software, computation intensive programs such as how much heat can be expected out of that new solar collector. (You games freaks can exit at this point and start enjoying the first bunch.)

I hear some groans in the back. How about the program to run my small grocery store, you ask. Glad you brought that up. We were at the West Coast Computer Faire last weekend and that question came up a lot. The bald and blunt truth on the matter is this: if you are new to computing and you have a small business, say a small grocery market, and wish to put all your inventory and ledger accounts on a computer, go directly to IBM or Digital Equipment Corporation. Be prepared to pay thousands of dollars, and put in hundreds of hours of work over the installation period.

You're shocked, or you don't believe me. You were told by the media - newspapers, magazines, TV, friends - that computers are now incredibly cheap and it is possible for a small computer (the TRS-80, for instance) to handle such a job. Technically, they're correct. It is also correct that the TRS-80 is a powerful computer, but the problem is incredibly difficult. Handling vast amounts of data is an ability that is not common to small computers, and even if it was, a ledger program that would work for Sam's Laundry would not suit Bill's Laundry at all. The reason is the difference in the way the two businesses are run, and even if a standard laundry business technique evolved, it would not suit Joe's Garage or Don's Laundry in the next state. Most bookkeeping systems need restructuring in preparation for "computerizing". If a system is not logically precise and totally unambiguous, there is no hope of using a computer to execute it. Computers are capable of rendering a situation totally ridiculous at the speed of light. (Remember those "You owe us \$0.00" bills?) All this is why IBM still sells multi-million dollar computers, and has a multi-year waiting list for them at that.

However, before you cancel your subscription and throw your new TRS-80 at your Radio Shack dealer, let's talk awhile on the relationship between small computers and small businesses.

The first point to recognize is that computers are here to stay. Their abilities and power are going to be utilized to a far greater extent in the very near future. Knowledge of their abilities (and limitations) will shortly be a very valuable skill for all people - as opposed to the "priesthood" in the computer centers. Don't get caught behind the competition. How does one learn? The ultimate learning tool is the TRS-80 itself. The best reference is the black user's manual. The ONLY way is with one's fingers and eyes. It's not hard at all, after the strangeness wears off. (Remember - it's totally impossible to damage a computer - any computer - by mis-programming)

Second point is that small computers, like little girls, are growing bigger every day. The TRS-80 is no exception. It is already capable of many tasks that are not presently done by computer. Example: computing some rather complex payroll checks, deducting the proper amounts and adding the proper commissions and overtime. And more power is coming. ("It's expandible")

Here at CLOAD" magazine, we have been looking into what we feel is our share of the task. We are encouraging people who are designing large software packages to consider the TRS-80 based systems. We are going to try to referee the various offerings by using them and providing free commentary on their strong (and weak) points. We plan to offer advertising (not free, but reasonable or cheap) to get the buyer and seller together for a specific software product. If a product is of wide enough appeal, and we can afford it, and it will fit, we'll put it in the magazine. Otherwise we will act as the link that gets the programmer of software systems and the TRS-80 business user together on common ground.

Before signing off, I'd like to talk a bit on our experience at the West Coast Computer Faire (March 3-5), and our relationship with Tandy Corporation.

The Second West Coast Computer Faire (in sunny San Jose, just south of San Francisco, California) had an attendance of 14,000 computer enthusiasts/learners/freaks. Our editor, Dick Fuller, and myself must have talked to 13,000. Many of the people already owned, or were planning on getting, a small personal computer. We spoke with most of the representatives at the Radio Shack booth and tried out the upcoming systems. We came out of the whole experience feeling very happy and confident about what the future holds for us all. We answered hundreds of questions, and hopefully killed one rumor. Seems that around the general vicinity of New Jersey, there is a story circulating about how Radio Shack is constructing the TRS-80 with "seconds" (computer chips that don't quite pass the quality standards of the manufacturer). This simply cannot be true, about this or any other computer system except homebuilts. (And precious few of them) The Zilog- designed microprocessor chip, fabricated by Mostek, is only available as a factory prime chip. There is no separate category of "almosts". The factory simply doesn't "dump" them, and even if they did, it would be a more expensive, not cheaper, way to build a computer. All the chips in the TRS-80 are clearly labeled, recent vintage, prime chips from the likes of TI, Motorola, Mostek, and National Semiconductor. This information does not come from Radio Shack. It comes from a VERY thorough disassembly of our TRS-80s here at CLOAD" magazine. We are fairly knowledgeable about small systems, and if we didn't like what we saw, we'd never have started the magazine.

Which brings me to our closing statement. We really aren't selling TRS-80 systems. We are totally independent of Radio Shack and Tandy Corporation. We do not (and will not) own any of their stock. We do not (and will not) profit from any sales of Radio Shack or Tandy Corporation. Our only tie is that we are obviously using the broad base of look- alike computers that they have provided. We feel, as they at Tandy feel, that this really is the new "de facto" standard computer of the coming personal computer revolution.

See you next month.

12/17/71 EC
R D McElroy-Publisher