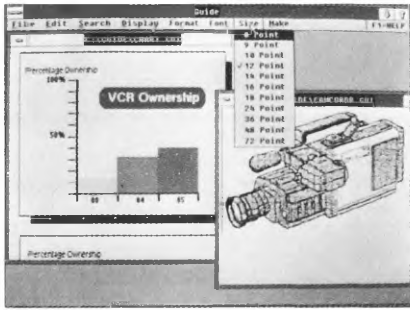


Graphical user interfaces — growing in usefulness

PRE 1983, BEFORE the PC, computer systems were not to be trifled with. They made few if any concessions to their users. If you were lucky enough to have access to a computer it would have been churlish to complain that the manner in which the application software forced you to relate to the processor was way short of perfect.

And if you had to learn a new system, very little of what you already knew would be relevant to what appeared on your screen.



Computers were built for data processing and refined for cost efficiency. Ergonomic effectiveness was a gleam in someone else's eye. Computers were for computing, not for people.

Xerox had other ideas. Since the early 70s it had been working on a different kind of person/computer interface. A graphical interface which minimised use of the keyboard substituting a mouse to select from a range of symbols or icons, all with menus and context sensitive help which could be 'pulled down' from the top of the screen. Their Star workstation could be directed from a mouse

or from a keyboard. It was a revolution in accessibility—and for users without specialist training.

Next came Apple with the Macintosh, then Microsoft with Windows, then Hewlett Packard with New Wave, then Microsoft and IBM with OS/2 Presentation Manager, then Sun Microsystems with Open Look and most recently, the Open Software Foundation with Motif.

All have more graphical user interfaces (GUIs). All use graphics mode on the new generation of PCs. All are designed with users in mind. All are visually attractive and easy to use.

According to Microsoft a good GUI:

- is a graphically oriented interface, making extensive use of icons;
- exploits bit mapped displays, offering WYSIWYG screen presentation of printed output;
- looks good and is a pleasure to use;
- supports direct manipulation of text or graphics displayed on the screen;
- uses the object-action paradigm where the user first chooses an object, then selects the action without needing further actions to complete the task;
- is predictable and standard in appearance across multiple applications and platforms; and
- comes complete with development support tools for building new applications.

Software which runs under GUIs is already tumbling onto the market. Examples include PageMaker, Ventura, Word for Windows, Excel, Lotus 1-2-3/G and Guide.

GUIs are not just for PCs. Many existing



mainframe applications can find new relevance, new approachability and new utility with a GUI front end. Multisoft's Infront software (Perspectives No. 15, Dec 89-Jan 90, pp 14-15) transforms character based 3270 screens into CUA compliant graphical interfaces — without rewriting any code.

In a development program known as Project Escort, Femtree is using Infront to improve its service to customers by adding GUIs to its AUSINET (Stairs) and ASCIS (Dobis) CICS based information services. Escort's justification is making computer systems easy to connect to, and easy to use. The way they should be.

GUIs have arrived. They're useful and popular and mesh with development directions such as IBM's Systems Application Architecture (SAA), for both software and hardware, especially in the micro world. GUIs will define the way people use computers in future. And the future is here.

Ian McCullum
Femtree Computer Corporation

'Information online & on disc 91' 2 years older, wiser and set to be better than ever!

WITH AN INNOVATIVE and highly specific program already confirmed, the 2 year break since the last formerly annual Information Online conference looks well worth the wait.

The explosion of development in telecommunications and networking, in database creation, quality assurance, user interfaces and disc technology is proving to be an ongoing challenge to everybody involved in the information industry. It is this challenge which the new look biennial conference plans to tackle head-on.

'Just keeping up with information about the information industry itself is a major challenge,' comments Lyn McCullagh, convener of next year's sophisticated 'Information Online and On Disc 91' Conference. McCullagh points out that one of the topics to be addressed at this critical forum will be about that very issue: keeping up with information about the information industry.

However, this is no simple 'navel-

gazing' exercise. Two years of planning have gone into 'Information Online & On Disc 91', the 5th Australasian conference and exhibition to be held at the Hilton International Sydney from 30 January to 1 February 1991.

Its new biennial format has enabled a strong, thoroughly conceived scientific program to be developed featuring outstanding national and international speakers.

Their presentations reflect some of the critical issues and major developments to arise out of the explosion of information technology. Issues yet to be resolved, such as the legal implications of software ownership, the problems of providing data to 3rd parties and the on-selling of information will all be addressed.

Over the 3 days of the conference, held by the Information Science Section of ALIA, local expertise will cover an extraordinary range of information debates, from the technology itself to questions of ethics and liability. All users

and disseminators of information, including the corporate, academic, legal, political and health sectors will find specialist sessions targeted to their needs.

The international experience will include focusing on the need for new information technologies and their impact upon society, the development of new information delivery systems and the increasing pressure for improved user interfaces.

An extraordinary state-of-the-art exhibition, including a remarkable 'try it yourself' CD-ROM Showcase, will also be part of 'Information Online & On Disc 91', a new name which acknowledges the growing interest in disc technology.

Early registrants are automatically in the draw for an exciting 'hi-tech' prize. For further information, contact the conference organisers Australian Convention Management Services on (02) 332 4622, fax (02) 332 4066.

