ARTICULATE VOICE

Artic Computing is a classic success story. It was founded in 1981 with £20 of pocket money by an 18-year-old schoolboy called Richard Turner. Since then it has developed into a software company with an annual turnover of around £750,000, and plans for worldwide expansion.

Richard Turner started writing software in 1980. The first games he wrote were Battleships and Star Trek for the ZX80 computer. He chose to write strategy games instead of the more popular arcade-style games owing to the limitations of the machine. As he explains: 'The ZX80 used to clear the screen every time something moved, so the only games you could do were thinking games and not arcade games, which only really came in with the Spectrum.'

His first big success was with the game ZX Chess, which he launched at the first ZX Microfair in the summer of 1981. Turner's resources were pushed to the limit: 'The night before, we were still copying cassettes using seven ZX81s and putting them in plastic bags with instructions we'd run off the school photocopier.' ZX Chess was a great success, and Turner claims to have taken £1,500 at the fair.

Artic Computing became a limited company later that summer but had to take a back seat when Turner accepted a sponsorship from the Ford Motor Company to study Electrical Engineering at Imperial College, London. His studies lasted only a year, at the end of which he decided to take a year's break to run the company. He never returned to the University.

Artic was originally run from Richard's bedroom in his parents' house in Hull, but as the company's list of software grew to 93 titles, Turner decided that it had to have premises of its own. In June 1983 the company moved to its present offices at Brandesburton, Humberside. The catalogue was streamlined and extra staff were taken on. Artic now employs 15 people, including three telesales staff and five full-time programmers, who are paid a salary plus royalties.

Artic plans to open its own chain of retail outlets throughout the UK. These will be known as Artic Software Stations, and will sell not only Artic's games but also the products of other companies. The first 'station' opened in Acton, West London, in July 1984 and doubles as the company's London headquarters. The significance of the shop is that it is not in a main shopping precinct and is well away from the commercial centre of London's West End. Asked why he chose this particular site, Jeff Raggett, Artic's London marketing manager, replied: 'A high street site would be £300-£400 a week, and this shop is a lot less, so we don't have to sell many cassettes to cover overheads. A lot of people have criticised us, saying we're mad to open shops, but at least we can see what is selling, and can talk to people about what they like about the games.'

Another marketing innovation is Artic's counter units. These units are display boxes that can hold up to 64 cassettes. They are currently being sold to newsagents, allowing people to buy their software locally rather than having to go to the large retailers. Jeff Raggett says that these units are proving extremely successful.

Artic plans to handle its own overseas marketing as much as possible, and the company is currently investigating expansion into Europe. For the North American market, Artic has made a contract with two established software houses, Softsync and the International Publishing Corporation, to distribute each other's products.

Artic's biggest sellers to date have been Bear Bovver (which alone has sold over 40,000 cassettes), Galaxians and Gobbleman. The company has recently launched a new game for the Spectrum called World Cup, which sold over 5,000 copies in three weeks.

Artic Games
A range of the games for which Artic is noted, including the best-selling Bear Bovver and World Cup, a Spectrum version of the popular football game

IAN McKINNELL

Richard Turner