



like the ZX81, the MTX500 and the MZ-700.

Packaging, merely protective in the case of hardware, has a very special importance for software's image. Broadly, two strategies are available to software vendors: to spend only the minimum on packaging (the cassette box with a coloured leaflet enclosed) and a corresponding 'bargain' price, or to build up the product's 'perceived value' by wrapping it in an enlarged case, often made to look like a book, and adding extra goodies that may or may not be part of the game. The Hobbit, for example, comes with the paperback edition of Tolkien's famous book.

The image is projected through advertising. Broadly, the relationship between marketing and advertising is the relationship between strategy and tactics. The questions of when to advertise, and how big the advertising budget should be, are marketing decisions. Typically, a home computer manufacturer will launch a new product shortly before the Christmas season and put a large proportion of the year's advertising budget into supporting the launch.

But promotion of the product image isn't always helpful to sales when the image is wrong. One marketing campaign, for cigarettes, is now legendary in the advertising business. The brand name 'Strand' was widely promoted in cinema and television advertisements associated with a solitary man in a white raincoat, and the copy platform was 'You're never alone with a Strand'. But the message that came across was 'Loners smoke Strands', and the brand was shunned.

Some current computer images may be backfiring in the same way. The Commodore elephant may serve as a reminder that the 64 is unwieldy for writing programs. Many distributors work hard to play down the BBC's strong

educational associations, fearing a dry-as-dust flavour may drive away trade.

You might call the establishing and projection of images the 'creative' side of marketing (advertising people do). But the logistics of marketing is every bit as important — more so, perhaps, as this is so frequently the weak link in the chain. It is one thing to stir up the public imagination about a new product; to get it into their homes or offices is a more difficult proposition.

Is it to be distributed by mail order, in the manner of Sinclair? This is a cheap way of getting goods to customers, but how do you assure them of your support? You will probably have to sell at bargain prices to counteract the reassurance of buying in a shop, but if you cut your margins too thin you may have difficulty in financing volume production, with corresponding delays in delivery.

Selling through the established chains such as WH Smith, Dixon's or Curry's will give customers a strong sense of security about their purchase, but these chains will exact a penalty in big mark-ups, again cutting back profits. A software package that retails at £4.99 may bring you less than £2.25 once the chain has taken its cut. Alternatively, you might think of setting up a network of hand-picked dealers, each one able to give your customers special help and advice with your product.

In the struggle for survival in the micro world, the demise of some manufacturers of excellent hardware and software products has brought home the fact that making goods is often less than half the battle. Making and maintaining markets is where the story really starts. And where the buck really stops.

Acorn/BBC



Apple

