



SHOWCASE

The myriad pages of information on Prestel are created using a viewdata editing terminal. Such editors can cost up to £20,000 for a system consisting of minicomputer, digitising tablet and colour video camera. But the home computer owner can also get in on the act simply by spending ten pounds on a piece of software.

Apart from Prestel there are two other public viewdata systems in the UK: Ceefax and Oracle — although because they are broadcast through the air and not sent down a cable they are strictly called *teletext* systems. Many large companies run their own private 'in house' viewdata systems, which keep staff informed of company news and enable them to access specialised information — the latest stock market prices, for example. In a similar fashion, Rochford District Council have

set up a free local viewdata system, containing 'What's On' information, details of council services, and so on.

In the High Street, viewdata is also becoming more common. Perhaps the travel agent booked your holiday using Prestel, or maybe the local video rental shop has a viewdata system in the shop window, working its way through a series of advertising pages — the so-called *carousel* system.

In all these areas it is possible to set up as an *Information Provider*, or *IP* for short. This means you create pages of viewdata information and then either use them on your own private viewdata system, or alternatively sell them to customers. For example, to put a single page onto the Prestel system costs between 15 and 45 pounds, but having done this you can then charge Prestel users every time they read your page — normally about one to 10 pence per access. Judging by the number of different IPs on Prestel there is obviously money

Page Creation

Let's go through the steps in creating a viewdata page. Assume that a local travel agent has commissioned you to create an eye-catching advertisement for a holiday in Greece, which with other pages could be put onto a carousel system in the shop window.

The first step, before we even touch the keyboard, is to draw a rough sketch of the page on paper. To be more precise, we could rule a 40 by 24 grid on the paper first and then translate each square on the paper into a screen character. We shall draw a typical holiday scene (beach, sea, sun etc.), and then superimpose the details of price, location, and so on.

Page 100
Here we have drawn the sea and beach. The sea is produced by pressing the blue function key followed by the background key at the beginning of each line. Similarly, several lines of yellow background make up the beach

Page 101
We now start to 'build up' our hill out of green mosaic characters superimposed on the sea. In a similar way, the beginnings of an umbrella have been made with magenta mosaics

Page 102
The picture is now beginning to take shape: the hill has been finished, red stripes have been added to the umbrella and work has started on the sun. Each large letter is made up from six mosaic characters

Page 103
The picture is almost finished. The large letters, the sun and the umbrella have been completed, and a yacht has been added. For that authentic touch, a Greek temple now overlooks the sea!

Page 104
The completed page. To finish off, the text has been typed over the picture. 'TWO WEEKS IN GREECE' is done with double height characters, and if this were not a still photo we could see that the price is actually flashing. Incidentally, the 'waves' added to the sea are cyan minus (-) signs