Pulling The Punches

Slow Movers
Dragon Data's Stock Control System includes a database module that generates a variety of reports on the state of the inventory. Keeping large stocks of slow moving items costs money, so the firm is searching product group 101 for items not issued for 16 days or more; the search shows that stocks of printer's ink are very high, and sales are very slow, so stocks of ink must be reduced quickly

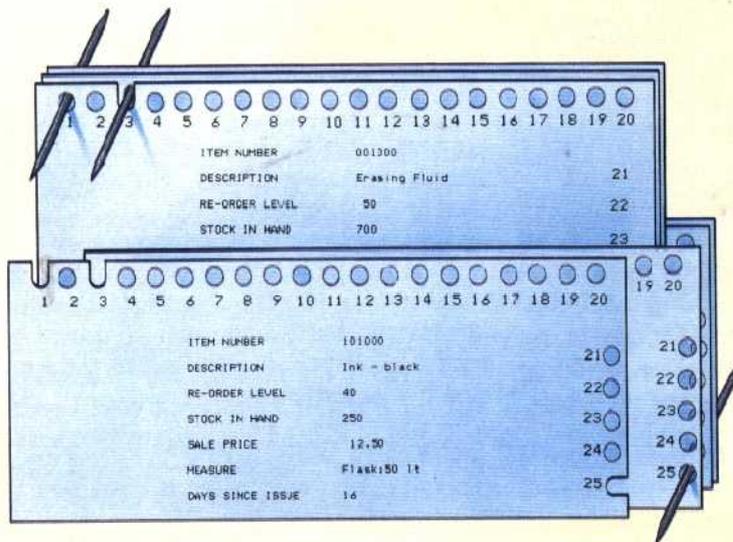**Over The Edge**
The edge-punched card system is a simple form of database. The holes around the card are treated as binary digits — a hole means zero, a slot means one. Here, the cards represent a firm's stock file: holes 1 to 3 represent product group, 4 to 6 are catalogue number, so holes 1 to 6 together form the item number; holes 21 to 25 indicate the number of days since the item was last issued from stock, and hole 25 means 16 days

deal of additional information that is important to the user. It shows the value of the stock, which tells the user how much capital is tied up in a warehouse or storeroom. It shows the average usage per month, the quantity in stock and the date of the last issue. From this information, the user will be able to work out a policy for shifting the stock, perhaps offering it at a large discount.

The principle of reporting according to selection criteria (the date, for example) is vital when it comes to analysing and reporting on the transaction data. Obviously, the system needs to be able to list out all transactions on all items. But it should also indicate what has happened to sections of the stock between specified dates.

The Dragon program accomplishes this by prompting the user to enter the upper and lower values of a range of stock items and the delimiting dates (e.g. between the dates 010184 and 010484).

Besides viewing all of the business's transactions on a specific range of items, the user may also want a breakdown, with items grouped together according to transaction type, or sales figures, or stock adjustments, and so on. The Dragon program has a menu with three options setting the date for the selection (these are: current period transactions only; all transactions; and transactions within a specified date range), and then a further sub-menu to allow the selection to be broken down into transaction types. This sub-menu is similar to the transaction type menu described on page 192, but it also includes a new option, '99 ALL TYPES', which allows a blanket print-out of all transactions within the data parameters specified.

The program allows users to allocate stock items to particular product groups. So users will want to review the product groups and their descriptions. They will also want to know what stocks are held for particular product groups. Screen-based reports are useful, but they are not permanent records. In order to provide a 'hard-copy' record, the reporting facility duplicates in many respects the enquiry facilities offered by this program.

There are a number of reasons why the Dragon program is a rather restricted stock control system, despite its detailed analytical features. The system is designed as a 'stand-alone' stock system. It is not able to link up with other, related business applications programs that could use the information on this program's files. There is no facility for allocating stock against orders. One of the most important questions users want answered is: 'Have I sufficient stock in hand to meet these orders?' Once you have several orders from customers with a number of different stock items requested on each order, keeping track of the demands made on stock is very difficult manually.

Throughout this series, we have concentrated on the use of home computers for small business data processing. It should by now be clear that, although these packages may offer supposedly integrated systems, this often means that they concentrate on one aspect of the business — such as cash flow — at the expense of the others — order processing, inventory, reconciliation, for example. Such packages are perhaps best used to provide supplementary information to business managers.

Despite these shortcomings, home computer business packages can greatly improve the efficiency of small business accounting and organisation. If chosen and used with care, such packages can prove very useful indeed.