sell an idea than a mere product, a principle embodied in the venerable advertising slogan that you 'sell the sizzle, not the sausage'.

The 'industrial design' of the machine (its outward appearance, and the external layout of its switches and function keys) is often a useful starting point in developing a hardware product image. The BBC Micro, for example, is unfussy and utilitarian, as befits its claims to special educational value. The casing of other machines may be tooled with 'go-faster' mouldings and jazzy logos to entice the games player. The Atari XL range — restyled as part of a marketing effort to rescue the product from the doldrums in mid-1983 — has a rugged, squared-off styling edged with castellated air vents that emphasise its military appearance — just right for playing Tank Battle. Commodore, in their own battle for the US market, commandeered Ferdinand Porsche, designer of the famous car body, to enhance their range with an elegantly rounded design intended to be confidently, but not obtrusively, futuristic.

In contrast, the physical appearance of the Sinclair Spectrum, with its small black casing and elaborately inscribed multi-function keys, implies a machine that crams a lot into a little, with a strong suggestion of value for money.

Product image goes further than considerations about the machine's physical appearance. The image must be boosted by a coherent advertising 'platform' that reinforces the idea. The supposed 'jumbo memory' of the Commodore 64 is put across by introducing an elephant into television and magazine advertising. For the BBC, the logo of the owl evokes the idea of 'wisdom' in the public mind.

Naturally, the name is an important consideration. Early home computers had to fight hard against an image entrenched in the public mind by films of the 60s and early 70s, where the computer was invariably depicted as an inhuman 'Big Brother' beyond the control of mere individuals. Accordingly, micros were given domestic names that deliberately defused their high-tech associations. Hence PET and Apple.
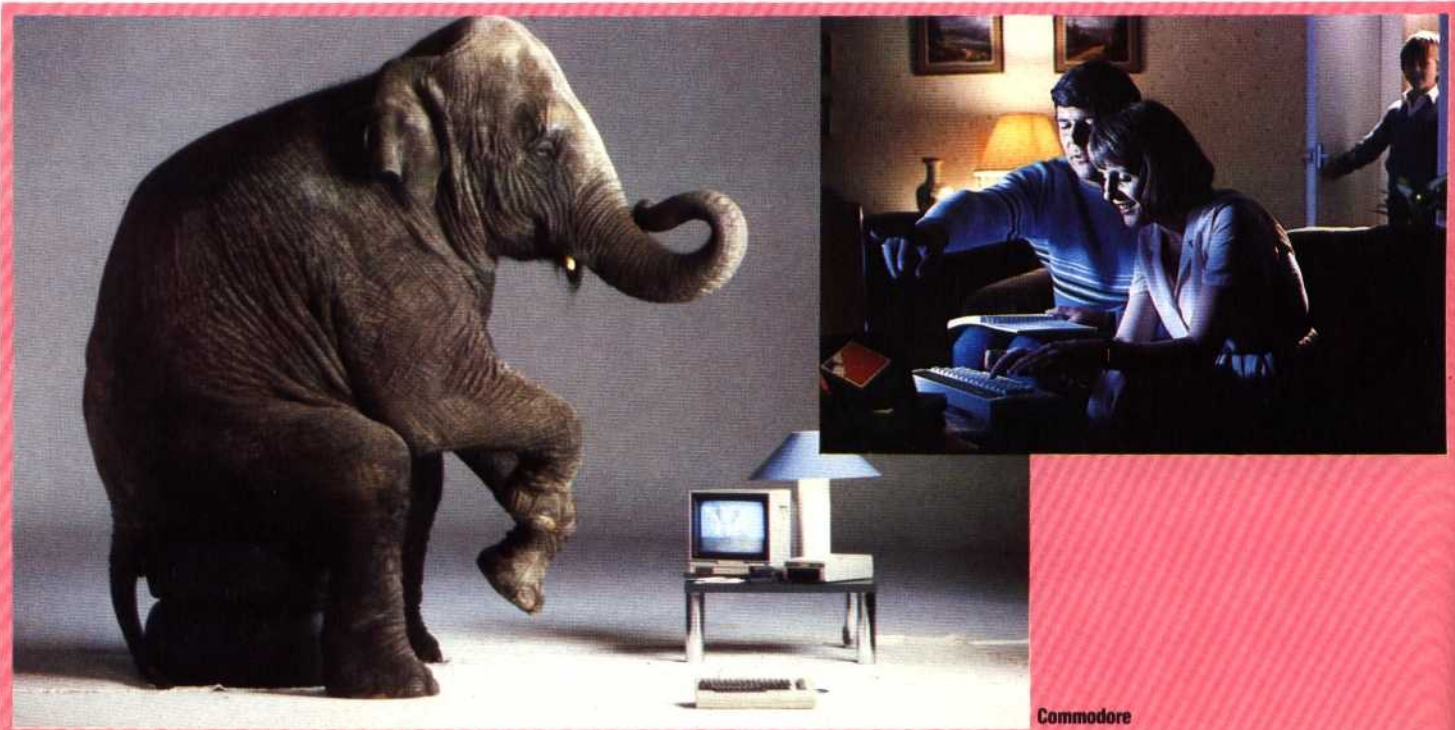
The Macintosh was heralded in the UK and the US by a 'teaser' television campaign, filmed in England by Ridley Scott, that showed a 'Big Brother' screen being smashed by a woman to represent the new-found freedom offered by the latest Apple product. The slogan was 'Thanks to the Macintosh, 1984 won't be like 1984'. To the American market 'Mackintosh' is a well-known variety of apple. The development team, for whom spelling was not a strong point, dropped the 'k' and the mistake stuck.

But people need to be assured that they are not just being sold a toy. The PET ran into a good deal of sales resistance on this point as Commodore tried to develop into the business market in the late 1970s. The first line of attack was to suggest that the name was an acronym for the much more scientific-sounding Personal Electronic Transactor, but the ploy wasn't very persuasive, and they reverted to renaming the micro the Commodore Business Computer.

The high-tech tradition enjoyed a vogue as the public became increasingly comfortable with the idea of having computers around. The effectiveness of product names in this category depends on moving them as far from everyday language as possible, so that acronyms and even collections of letters with no meaning are preferred to words you might find in the dictionary. The rarer letters that score high in Scrabble also score high here. Hence machines

Images
The importance of creating a powerful product image in marketing is clearly seen in our example: Commodore's elephant suggests the 'jumbo' memory of the Commodore 64, the BBC's home and school scenes convey the Electron's flexibility, friendliness and educational importance, while the rather more fanciful Apple scenario with its Orwellian allusions promises Apple users freedom from drudgery in a humanised computer world. Like most high-power techniques, however, they can have unforeseen effects: the elephant is proverbially terrified of mice (unlike the Macintosh and Lisa), and might suggest a product that is old fashioned; potential Electron buyers may find the family setting cloying and stereotyped, and the school connection intimidating; Apple customers might think that they were being portrayed as mindless clones

Commodore