

Pulsar's Stock Control System, for example, which runs on larger micros like the IBM PC and the Sirius, offers users the choice between a right- and a left-justified coding system. The resulting stock coding systems are totally different and incompatible.

The product code can be up to 16 alphanumeric characters long. The right-justified system is a numerically ordered system of codes. The left-justified system is designed for users who have rather more complex coding systems, involving alphanumeric — say, PX445/44. It allows codes of different lengths for different products and is useful for systems where the user wants to use the product code to identify some feature of the stock line, such as pattern, size or colour.

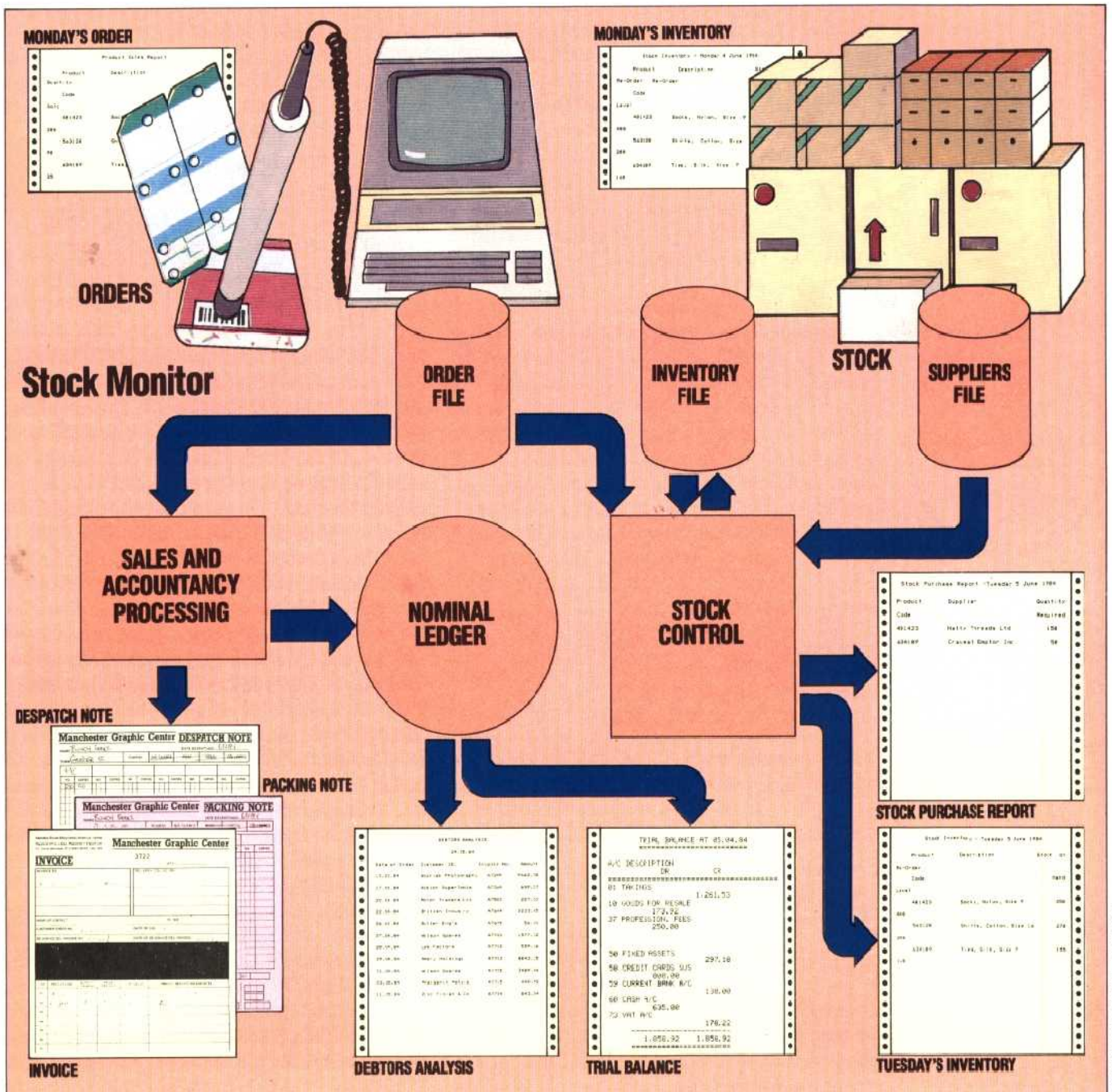
Omicron's Powerstock package, which runs on the Sirius, is a more expensive system designed for users with more complex requirements. This has an even more complex coding system, and is

defined in terms of stock groups. A stock group can be any set of stock records that are related by common processing or reporting requirements. What makes it different from Pulsar's left-justified coding system is that each stock group is processed separately and different processing rules can be assigned to each group. Remember that whatever the code number assigned to a product line in Pulsar, all code numbers are processed identically.

The coding structure of stock control systems, therefore, has to be flexible enough to allow users to identify and subdivide their stock lines. The simpler systems running on the cheaper home computers tend to offer less flexibility because of the constraints, once again, on memory and storage. The Dragon Data system, for example, is designed to handle a maximum of 350 stock items. Omicron's Powerstock system is open-ended — the maximum number of items depends on the user's computer configuration.

Stock Control

Integrated sales and stock control systems in high turnover businesses can benefit greatly from an automated point-of-sale system to keep the inventory and accounting files up to date. Sales data can be written on a marker such as a Kimball tag or a bar code attached to the product. The markers are read by an optical reader attached to the cash till. This may be a microcomputer itself, or it may pass the data to a computer for processing



TONY DUNCAN SMITH LIZ DIXON