



A Recipe For Disaster

Eric Nowhere has a Vic-20 that he is extremely fond of. It has helped him to come to terms with computers and learn a little about programming in BASIC, but Eric unfortunately cannot distinguish between a serious application and having fun. He insists on using the computer to keep the telephone numbers of his (few) friends, and he uses a database to store his cooking recipes. When you go to supper at his house, you invariably get nothing to eat till about midnight because Eric insists on checking out the details of the cooking instructions on his Vic. He plugs it in with a dramatic flourish, loads the program in from tape — this usually takes several attempts — waits happily during the interminable period while the computer searches and reads, views the instructions a few lines at a time on the screen, and finally heads off to the kitchen to cook. You quickly unplug the computer and switch on the television, knowing you are in for a long hungry wait. It's no good coming to supper late as he won't start before you get there, because part of the excitement for him is to show you the computer at work. Eric clearly doesn't make efficient use of his computer.



ROY INGRAM

The Right Records

Peggy Average has always had an enormous record collection and has built up a profitable disco service. Experience has taught her that it is essential to take the right records for each type of gig. Recently, Peggy decided to buy a computer, and for speed and high storage capacity she chose a twin-disk system. She then worked out on paper the appropriate headings for the categories of music that she wanted her database program to include. There were two main groups, each with subheadings that were further subdivided. The main division was between 'Black' and 'White' music. Black music consisted of three main sub-groups: Reggae, Jazz and Soul. White music broke down into Rock and New Wave. White Rock subdivided into Heavy Metal and Progressive Rock, and so on. Peggy used the database manager to pick records according to the occasion — entering, for instance, the command to list all Rock records and then narrowing down the choice by making a lower-level selection of either Heavy Metal or Progressive Rock. Having inspected the listing of record titles displayed on the monitor she took a print-out of the titles in the required target area and then went to the shelves and took off the ones she wanted for that occasion.

time you wish to make a telephone call. In the time it takes you to switch on the computer, load up the database program, call the file and sort through it for Lizzie Dixon's number, you could have made six telephone calls to numbers obtained from a book or card index. You might want to keep the names and telephone numbers on file for some other purpose, such as printing standard letters and labels, but using a computer system when established manual systems are perfectly adequate is pointless.

A more ambitious database package will provide all of these facilities, and will give you the ability to use arithmetic to obtain such data as the total amount of revenue earned from club fees, or calculate which club facility is used most often. Several files of information can be linked so that data on related subjects can be used in conjunction with one another. For example, a particular player belonging to our imaginary club has his personal details kept in one file and details of his performance in club tournaments in another. When a history of his 'form' is required, the two files can be used together. For a 'snapshot' of the performance of everybody in the club on a particular date, the file can be accessed by calling

up every record for a certain date, rather than every record for a certain person. In order to run a program with such extensive facilities, it would almost certainly be necessary to use a desktop or business computer with a minimum of 64 Kbytes of memory and disk drives.

There has been a remarkable increase in the use of information systems in the last few years. Doctors use databases for keeping details of their patients' medical histories. Research workers use them for specialised sorting and cross-referencing of data. Businesses keep mailing lists and customer information handy and up to date. The more information there is available, the more they are used. Databases can now handle any form of information, from simple lists to highly complex systems with multiple files, facilities for creating elaborate reports and the ability to process information in a form that can be transferred to other computer software such as word processors. The ability to communicate with public-access databases such as Prestel and Micronet 800 gives the home computer user access to an enormous amount of information. This points the way to a future in which your micro could become a terminal linked to a mainframe computer.