out the form.

But the computer does not stop there. The time-consuming tasks of working out wages, assessing VAT, and doing the annual accounts all fall within the realm of the computer.

Computers are not merely convenient. Men could never have landed on the moon without computers. There are problems in rocket design and navigation that can be solved only by computer. The power of the computer opens new worlds to humanity which were closed before. But to the owner of a small business who may wonder what computers can do that can't be done manually, the simple answer is — they make money. Activities that formerly required such organising and administration that they consumed as much money as they earned now, with the advent of the microcomputer, become profitable.

The newsagent's original occupation was the distribution of newspapers. But the small profit margin on each paper forced him to diversify into other goods. Now the computer can bring profitability back into newspaper delivery by keeping records of the daily requirements of each household. Customers may now change to different newspapers or magazines at weekends and from day to day, without throwing the newsagent's system into confusion.

First the correct number of each newspaper is ordered from the publisher. Early in the morning the machine prints out the delivery requirements, dividing the households into networks of streets. Every delivery boy or girl receives his or her own personal list. They each leave the shop clutching a list and a precisely arranged bundle of papers.
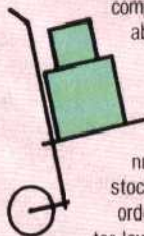
The computer lists the houses in the order to be

The Small Business System

Accounting
All of the company's accounts can be done using special accounting software. Sales ledgers, cash books and standard double-entry bookkeeping can all be automated to produce yearly, quarterly or monthly accounts in a form acceptable to accountants or auditors. The better kinds of accounting software comprise 'modules' that work together so that new data supplied for one section of the software (the sales ledger, for example) automatically update all the other parts of the accounting system. The advantage for the businessman translates into fewer man-hours spent in routine bookkeeping, more accurate accounts and higher profitability at the end of the day

A computer system suitable for a small business will need to be a high quality machine capable of withstanding hours of everyday use. A go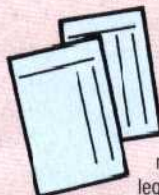od keyboard is essential and disk drives will also be needed to 'run' the business software. The NCR Decision Mate illustrated here costs around £1,500 and is a typical system. The only other item needed is a printer costing £300 to £400

Payroll
A payroll program is one that computes the salary and prints the salary slips for all the members of the company. Payroll programs can be configured to take into account hours worked, basic rates of pay, standard deductions including tax and social security, overtime and so on. Such programs usually work by asking the computer operator a series of simple questions: 'How many employees are on the payroll?', 'Are salaries paid monthly or weekly?' etc. These can be answered by typing the information in on the computer keyboard

Stock Control
A stock control program gives the computer operator access to information about how the company's stock is being depleted. If one of the big sellers is Peanut Treets and the operator types in (in response to a question on the screen) the number of packets left on the shelf, the stock control program can issue re-stocking orders as soon as stock levels fall too low. Some stock control programs can take input from a bar code reader (see page 40) when items are sold, so that both the sales price can be indicated on the cash register and the inventory can be updated simultaneously

Invoicing
An invoicing program generates printed invoices with less trouble and more accuracy than a typist. When an invoicing program is 'run', the computer operator is asked questions and enters the appropriate answers on the keyboard. The program looks up records to check that the invoice is legitimate and that the details are correct. Some invoicing programs are able to cross-reference with the stock con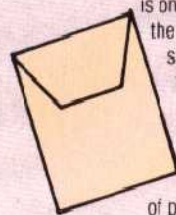trol program to keep all the books in balance