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Transcending Troubled Times

How the Online Connection
Can Help Steer You Through
Financial Uncertainties

by Jim Johnson

Atari's Newest Vendors

▶ **Double Click, Maxwell CPU and Lexicor come into the support fold.**

While most vendor support forums create spinoffs to accommodate user base growth, sysops of the Atari Vendors Forum favor a leaner, unitary forum structure that reflects the current Atari market.

COMPUTING SERVICES

"We're committed to keeping the top companies in the Atari arena," says Ron Luks, primary forum manager. The current mainstays of the forum are several long-standing companies. Gadgets by Small, the brainchild of ST guru David Small and his wife, Sandy, holds a strong online presence and accounts for some of the liveliest discussions.

ICD, maker of hard-drive adaptors for the ST, has been part of the forum since its inception. CodeHead Software, developer of utility programs, is another important part of the forum. Two makers of desktop publishing programs, ISD Marketing and Soft Logik, each have sections. Practical Solutions, an Arizona-based manufacturer of hardware enhancements for the ST series, and several other companies also are represented.

In recent months, a few select new companies have joined the forum, and others will soon open message sections and libraries.

Newcomers include Double Click Software, a company that got its start in the shareware business in 1986. At the time, Double Click's developers were creating simple but well-respected utilities such as DC Format, a more flexible alternative to the GEM Desktop's Format command, and DC Stuffer, a program for installing desk accessories beyond the Atari ST's limit of six.
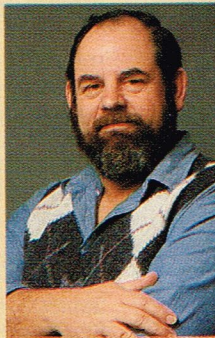
Because of the success of these programs, Double Click was able to begin creating fully commercial hardware and software in 1989.

Liked It So Much, He Joined the Company

In building a successful software company, some entrepreneurs will invest heavily in learning programming skills, while others will look for good software people and use their business savvy to guide the company in the right direction. Yet, for Lee Seiler, founder of Lexicor Software, the key to his career in software development was ... dialing a wrong number.

Seiler's first encounter with the ST series came one day when an Atari salesman showed him an Atari Mega running Cyber Studio (an early 3-D animation program). He was so impressed he bought the entire system. However, he soon became frustrated and made frequent calls to the publisher's customer support line, once accidentally reaching Charles Cherry, head of developer relations at Antic Software.

Although Seiler had no prior experience as a software developer, Cherry felt that Seiler's illustration/animation background could lend a "real-world" perspective on the Cyber series. Seiler joined the team. Not long after, however, Antic decided to leave the software business. Seiler and several of the programmers then decided to form Lexicor Software.

One of the main reasons Lexicor has been successful, according to Seiler, is because of CompuServe. "We couldn't function without it," he says. Lexicor's programmers work out of their homes, throughout the United States, at whatever hours they choose.

Not only does this make for happier, more productive programmers, but also it helps minimize the company's operating costs since there's no need to maintain a separate office. Says Seiler, "Compared to the cost of operating even a small business in a storefront, we can run our business online for a year on what we'd have paid for two months' rent."

CINDY CHARLES

Low-rent office: Seiler