Preface

Every professional discipline has its own jargon, words or acronyms with special meaning to the well-informed, and computer-related professions are no exception. However, that same jargon is often foreboding to the novice user entering the world of computers. Terms such as IC, downsizing, server, EUC, graphical user interface, MIS, and a myriad of others often serve to confuse, rather than enlighten. When we communicate in commonly understood terms, the relationship between information system professionals and other computer users becomes less strained and more productive.

Most small businesses seeking to choose and implement a computer system often find terminology to be one of several potential stumbling blocks. In this issue, John Schleich, William Corney, and Warren Boe explore the factors affecting the implementation of a microcomputer system in small businesses. Through analysis of survey results, they successfully isolate a number of factors which had a demonstrated impact on user satisfaction with the installed system.

Small businesses are not the only ones feeling the intense impact of microcomputers. Even larger companies with one or more minicomputers or mainframe systems on-site are looking at PCs as not only stand-alone or networked solutions to individual or departmental computing needs, but also as potential replacements for current company-wide systems. In our second article, Mark Doll and William Doll provide an instructive case study, providing insight into one company's approach to this "downsizing" issue. Various facets of this topic are explored, including the operating environment prior to the downsizing decision, the successful trial project which motivated the larger effort, the ultimate implementation strategy, and the positive results associated with the change.

The final article addresses end user training, an area which receives much verbal attention, but which is often the first to be reduced when business slows down. Various training approaches are used by training departments and vendors in their attempts to provide meaningful instruction in the use of software packages. But, because much training is generic, it is difficult to provide each user with examples pertinent to the user's work. Jane Mackay and Charles Lamb provide a framework for end user training which uses functional job analysis to devise an instructional approach which moves from the simple to the complex as the training progresses. The article concludes by suggesting related research questions which need to be addressed.

For a number of years, SideKick has been a faithful companion to many IBM-compatible PC users. Unknown to many of us, this same software has also been available to Macintosh users. John Butler reviews the latest release of SideKick and discusses each of its accessories.

What do you believe to be the ultimate microcomputer system? R. Scott Huebner outlines what he would look for in this investment and why today's ultimate is tomorrow's obsolete system.

The expert system field is still widely misunderstood. In our Book Review section, Michael Erickson reviews the book, Expert System Development: Building PC-Based Applications. This book, by Larry Bielawski and Robert Lewant, was written for the expert as well as the novice in the field.

It is my privilege to have been interviewed for this issue's Expert Opinion feature. As a computer consultant and trainer, I am frequently in contact with both information systems professionals and end users. I hope the comments I hear are as helpful to you as they have been to me.

Glenn Byerly
Associate Editor