

ITTS Hardware

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The Manager
HEWLETT PACKARD
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

Dear Sir,

I have a story to tell you about a Hewlett Packard Computer Model 9830A.

In 1960 a fellow Director and myself were Motor Dealers for International Harvester Company, selling Trucks and Tractors. Over the years we often talked about these new fangled Computers and what they could do. We felt that it would be nice if we could input our Spare Part numbers into a machine and have it record the Sales and Replacement orders instead of the time consuming Card System which we then had. We were spurred on by an invitation to inspect our State Government's Main Roads Computer, which was a massive piece of equipment.

Being young and foolish, and thinking "Big is best" (Ha Ha) we contacted IBM and asked if they would send a Salesman. We were just starting off in business with very little money for Capital - consequently we were in old premises, with ideas of succeeding in business in the future. The IBM Salesman arrived a couple of weeks later dressed in an impeccable suit, with a black brief case (which was carried only by the Elite in those days) and as he walked into the Showroom, he looked around at the unpainted building, glancing up to see no ceiling under the roof. We invited him into our Office (which had painted walls and a ceiling) and explained what we would like to do. He said that what we wanted was impossible, and even if it could be done, the Hardware would take up all of the Office space (10 feet by 10 feet) and it would cost around \$38000-00 (Australian) and would we have that sort of money to spend?

I was a bit upset at his insinuation that we were broke (which we were - however, I told him that if he could produce the goods, we would be able to arrange the finance. We never saw him again.

We knew a friend who worked for a building Construction Company, and he invited us to inspect their "Computer Calculator". We found - on a table in a very hot tin shed, a 9830A Hewlett Computer and a 9866A Hewlett Printer covered in dust.

They showed us some of the work it could do, and we were very impressed - especially considering the environment - as we had been told a number of times that all Computers had to have clean Air Conditioned surroundings.

We then contacted Hewlett Packard, and they sent a dapper little bloke (also impeccably dressed - including three (3) inch high platform sole shoes for extra height) and we reiterated the requirements. He said that the Hewlett was basically an Electronic Calculator, but to leave it with him and he'd work on it. Three (3) days later, he phoned and asked if we could come to his Office in Brisbane because he had "something to show us". When we arrived we found a Console screen with ten

(10) Part numbers displayed and he showed us how we could sell some Parts and print an Invoice - have a listing for re-ordering - how to adjust pricing and a daily Profit and Loss. We were ecstatic as this was exactly what we wanted. We placed an order and raced home to arrange finance.

In due course the gear arrived and we excitedly set it up for a trial run - then the bombshell exploded!!! We were then told that the recorded Software was on a Cassette Tape and if we wanted to access Part Numbers at each end of the tape "it would take a little while to search and find" - in actual fact half a dozen Part Numbers scattered throughout the tape took longer to print out than to handwrite as we were doing. However, our smart little Salesman - being a true Salesman - told us with a smile on his face "that all was not lost" because Hewlett Packard in the United States were developing a Disc Drive - which would be able to access Part Numbers in a Split second. This unit would be available in twelve (12) month's time.

In the meantime, we could program the tape (of which we may need 2 or 3) to hold all of the numbers. At that time we had my fellow Director's brother-in-law working for us in the Office and he had a brain like a Computer - and he took to programming instantly. We worked up a Debtor, Creditor, Payroll Programme which worked really well.

While this was going on, we bought the premises next door to us as it was twenty (20) feet higher and we were experiencing low level flooding from the nearby river. In January 1974, the area was devastated with the highest flooding in the history of the country. As we watched the water rise - which caught us napping because we expected it to peak every hour, and we had already moved twenty-eight (28) trucks to higher ground - to no avail because they went under also. At 8 p.m., knowing that our efforts to save our Parts stock were lost, and our Staff were exhausted, we decided to go home. At the last moment we decided to lift the Hewlett and Office Electronic equipment into the ceiling which was twelve (12) feet above floor level because the water "couldn't rise that high" - in actual fact it rose a further fourteen (14) feet above the highest roof point overnight.

It stayed that way for three (3) days and as it receded below the roof, we removed some roofing sheets and pulled the Hewlett out into a rowing boat. One of our helpers who was in another boat said "Don't fool around with that block of mud - throw it out into the water" - little did he know what it was. Jim - our Computer Programmer took the Hewlett to his home - placed it on the front lawn and with a Garden hose washed the mud off. He then dismantled it and hosed the mud from the inside. When it was clean he dried it with Air Pressure and then sprayed it with CRC (a dewatering agent) / On assembly, it worked okay, but the Thermal printer was affected and had to be replaced. The Insurance Company was so pleased with our efforts, they gave us free Insurance Cover for twelve (12) months. It was the only item insured because the Policy did not have a Flood Clause. I must add that all of the other Electric typewriters etc. did not survive the flood.

In 1975, my wife Joy - having reared two (2) sons and wanting to get back into the workforce, took over the running of the Office. She immediately took a liking to the machinery which now consisted of -

One (1) 9830A Computer
One (1) 9867B Mass Memory
One (1) 9866A Thermal Printer
One (1) 9871A Printer
One (1) 9870A Card Reader
One (1) 11305A Controller
One (1) 13215A Power Supply

In the ensuing years, my fellow Director had a parting of the ways with his wife and consequently brother Jim went also - destroying the majority of the programmes he had written. In 1984, we resigned as the IHA Dealers, because due to economic conditions (and poor Management) IHA was going down the chute and we knew that we had to get into some other business or we would be following the leader. Retail Hardware looked pretty good and we were able to join an up and coming Co-operative Group (now the largest Group in Australia) - Mitre 10. We moved into a new Airconditioned building (in dry country) and the Hewlett became known as "Joy's Hewlett".

In 1979 the Cassette Drive bugged up and as Brisbane could not supply a new unit, we wrote to the States, but not having received a reply, we decided that no replacement was available. We scrounged around and were fortunate to locate a 9865A second-hand Tape Assembly.

In 1986, a problem occurred in the Mass Memory, so I took the whole system to Brisbane. The Sales personnel were amazed at the Unit - some had never seen "an old relic" like it before. Fortunately for us, one of the older Serviceman was able to rectify the fault.

We have had trouble free running up until a few months ago, and we are now experiencing "start up" problems. Every week when Joy goes to run her Wages programme, the staff hear - "Now you lovely darling, be good and start up for me" - and if you poke your head into her Office you'll see her tenderly stroking the Mass Memory. I must add that Joy's method of rectifying a mechanical fault is to hit the object with something. If her car won't start she'll hit the battery with a hard object or slam the door, expecting the vibration to fix the trouble. So - when the Hewlett doesn't start, we hear the Disc Drive doo slam shut with a resounding thump, then followed by several thumps with her fist on the side or top of the Drive. When it does start up then we hear "You sweet lovely girl - I knew you would not let me down".

None of the staff are game to condemn "her Hewlett" and any young budding Computer Salesman who may have ideas of a new sale and says something like "that old Hewlett" is shown the way to the exit door.

Joy has made it quite clear to me that should we ever sell the business - the Hewlett is "definitely not for sale" and when I

"When I'm finished with it, I'll donate it to a Museum".

I appreciate the fact that you are a very busy person, but if you have given of your time to read this letter, and enjoyed hearing about the life of a wonderful machine, then Joy and I will be very pleased.

People who have seen the Hewlett and appreciate Computers tell us "They don't make Computers like that anymore".

Thanking you,

Yours faithfully,
K.&C. NOMINEES PTY. LTD. T/A ITTS HARDWARE

ARDEN V. COOMBE
DIRECTOR