

Show Attendees Yawn Over MCA Compatibles

No 'Hands-On' Demos Given

By Robert Snowdon Jones

ATLANTA — Spring Comdex attendees appeared oddly disinterested in the PS/2 Micro Channel clones on display.

Tandy Corp. showed a Model 50 clone at its booth, and Dell Computer Corp. displayed its versions of the Models 50 and 80. But crowds tended to clump around the companies' XT and AT clones, while the PS/2s got brief looks from a few resellers.

One of the problems of displaying a Micro Channel clone at this point is that there is no way to demonstrate any superiority, said David Frager, a Dell product marketing manager. No applications or equipment exist to show how the Micro Channel is used to implement more advanced communications than can be run on a PC AT, Frager said.

No hands-on demonstrations were given, and both Tandy and Dell ran the standard slide-

show-style video demonstrations.

Chips & Technologies Inc. showed Model 50 and 80 prototypes that use its Chips/250 and Chips/280 chip sets. The Model 80-compatible chips were set in silicon the Tuesday before the show, and the motherboard was up and running in three days, said Raj Jaswa, product manager for the PS/2 compatibles.

Faraday Electronics Inc., a subsidiary of Western Digital Corp., also had a Model 50 prototype in its booth. Both companies' PS/2 motherboards are smaller than IBM's, making it possible to reduce the size of the computers' boxes.

The lack of interest in PS/2 clones is partially due to computer dealers' uncertainty about the future of MCA computers, said William C. Keiper, group vice president for Microage Inc., a national computer reseller



Dell Computer demonstrated its Micro Channel-compatible System 400 MC at Comdex.

chain. The chain's dealers sell a lot of IBM equipment, Keiper said, but Compaq leads the list in terms of overall units sold.

Dealers like to sell a lot of peripherals and boards with their computers. But MCA computers have many advanced functions already on the motherboard, and few accessory boards are available, said Alan P. Hald, Microage's chairman.

But movement to MCA is inevitable, said Marty Alpert, chairman of Cumulus, a peripherals maker. "People like to know, but they don't like to learn," he said. It will take time for dealers to realize MCA computers and OS/2 have features important to the industry's advancement, he said.

FCC Specs Cause Trouble For 25-MHz 386 Makers

Costs May Offset Speed Gains

By Robert Snowdon Jones

The new speed-demon 80386 chips may push bits around faster, but the systems they go in will cost more because of radio emission regulations from the Federal Communications Commission.

The new 25-MHz chips, which showed up on several new systems at spring Comdex, operate at speeds that increase the chances of creating the powerful emissions that throw television sets out of kilter and interfere with radio communications.

"The word is that if you built your boards the same way for the 25-MHz chip as you do for chips below that speed, you'd have to line the box with silver," said Gordon Reid, a marketing manager for Intel Corp.'s Oregon Systems Division, in Hillsboro, Oregon. Intel makes high-performance PC AT-compatible workstations for VARs. "It wasn't an issue until the 25-MHz chip came out," Reid said. Improperly designed circuitry can create excessive emissions from a circuit board. As a result, the companies making 25-MHz PCs must go to greater lengths to prevent the emissions, said Marty Alpert, chairman of Cumulus Corp., a Cleveland-based PC board maker. "If you double the frequency, you double the amount of emissions," he said.

Intel used surface-mount technology and a board design that reduces sharp turns and increases the ground connections to prevent the long stretches of circuit that could emit signals. The bus is designed as a separate unit, operating at slower speeds than the processor. The problem of spurious emissions associated with high-frequency processors is a reason IBM Corp. designed the Micro



The radio emissions of high-frequency processors are a main reason IBM designed the MCA, said IBM engineer Chet Heath.

Channel Architecture (MCA) for its PS/2 line, said Chet Heath, IBM's senior engineer for personal systems architecture in the Entry Systems Division, in Boca Raton, Florida.

The MCA bus is designed to operate at high speeds, so manufacturing costs are cheaper than for AT bus boards that must be specially designed, Heath said.

Anand Naidu, product manager for Faraday Electronics Inc.'s MCA-compatible chip sets and motherboards, said every fourth pin on the bus is shunted to ground. "The more you ground the signal, the more you minimize the problem," Naidu said.

"You can solve part of the problem by having the bus operating at slower speeds," Heath said. "But reduced performance and higher cost is a tax you have to pay," he said. The AT bus, which runs at about 6.65 megabits per second, can become bogged down when several boards are installed. The MCA bus operates at about 18.7 megabits per second.

Prodigy Users Offered 6 Months Free

By Sharon Fisher

Selected users in San Francisco, Atlanta, and Hartford, Connecticut, are receiving packets in the mail offering six-month free introductory memberships to Trintex's Prodigy videotex service.

"Founding members" will also be eligible for one-year subscriptions for \$49.95 after the trial period, according to the packet. At a rate of \$4.16 per month, this is less than half the \$9.95 per month fee Trintex will normally charge.

Users who accept the offer could begin using the service within weeks, said spokesman Brian Ek. However, not all the pieces will be in place until the fall, when the on-line system becomes generally available, he said.

"When you sign on as a founding member now, you will get the service in its current form," Ek said. Features such as travel and on-line brokerage services will be added during the summer, he said.

Features that will be available at inception include news, weather, sports, 15-minute delay stock quotes, educational pieces, and games, Ek said. Shopping from at least 50 clients and catalog sales from Sears and J.C. Penney will also be available, he added.

At first, only IBM PCs will be supported, Ek said. Apple II support will be added in the fourth quarter; Macintoshes will be supported early next year.

In return for getting the service free, users will be asked to fill out questionnaires periodically, Ek said.

Ek wasn't sure how many users had received the information packet, but said the mailing focused on members of computer-oriented special interest groups and users who had filled out questionnaires at various shows. "We are concentrating on special interest groups from this point on through the summer."

Users can also choose to purchase a limited-function Hayes Personal Modem 1200 through the service for \$79.95. (See "Hayes Teams With Trintex to Sell Modem," February 29.)

Prodigy, the newest entry in the moribund videotex market, has been receiving a great deal of attention because Trintex is a partnership of IBM and Sears.

Trintex, 445 Hamilton Ave., White Plains, NY 10601; (914) 993-8000.

Perfectek Unveils an MS-DOS Coprocessor Board for Mac II

By Nick Arnett

LAS VEGAS — Trying for a piece of the market now held by AST, Perfectek Corp. last week unveiled an MS-DOS coprocessor board for the Mac II.

Called the Mac+PC II, the board uses a 12.5-MHz, one-wait state Intel 80286 microprocessor. The board comes with 1 megabyte of on-board memory, IBM-compatible printer and communications ports, support for the Apple Imagewriter printer, and file and disk conversion utility software, the company said.

Perfectek is hoping to ship the Mac+PC II board in August, pending FCC approval.

Perfectek demonstrated the board with MS-DOS 3.2 running Lotus 1-2-3 under Apple's Multifinder, using Perfectek's own BIOS.

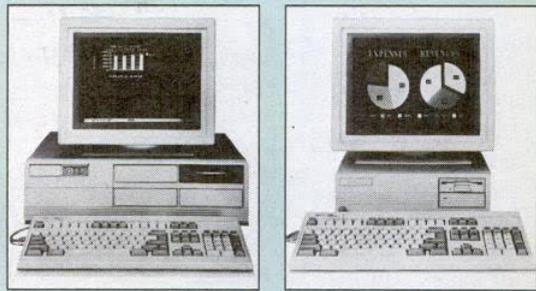
However, company officials said it may use a better-known BIOS in the final version of the board.

The Mac+PC II will cost approximately \$1,500, barring changes in DRAM prices, the company said.

Perfectek is shipping MS-DOS coprocessor boards for the Macintosh Plus and SE models.

Perfectek Corp., 1455 McCarthy Blvd., Milpitas, CA 95035; (408) 263-7757.

Zenith Shows Two PC Systems



Zenith Data Systems introduced at Comdex its Z-248-12, left, which runs at 12 MHz and holds up to 6 megabytes of RAM on the motherboard. A basic system with one 1.2-megabyte floppy costs \$2,999. The company also unveiled the lightweight, small-footprint Z-286 LP, which costs \$3,999. Available now, both run with zero wait states and include 1 megabyte of RAM and a 640-by-480-pixel color adapter.