Book Reviews

Computer Strategies, 1990-9: Technologies – Costs – Markets by Anderla, Georges and Dunning, Anthony. Published by John Wiley, 1987. ISBN 0-471-91585-8.

Barring an improbable accident of history, 1990-9 will be the years of the great divide in the computerisation of society. To future historians and analysts, the forthcoming decade may appear more as a curtain raiser, a preliminary to a second information revolution, in the course of which the level of computer penetration will have been pushed, by new vendor strategies, pertinent and more amicable to the user, to perhaps 40-50 per cent of the population in the industrial nations.

This is the first paragraph from the authors' conclusion. It sums up well the thesis which they are putting forward. Their main concern is with where the computer industry will be going in the 1990s and with the strategies that will be needed in order to get there. The average life cycle of a new information technology product is some seven or eight years, so thinking ahead to the mid-1990s entails examining what the next generation of IT products is likely to be. The authors see forecasting this as being different in kind from previous exercises because computers have now reached the stage where their basic architecture must change if the rapid advances of the past few decades are to be maintained.

The book is divided into three parts – 'Anatomy of costs'; 'The dynamics of marketing'; 'Megatrends in technology'. This division reflects the authors' view of the future, especially the dominant role that the consumer will play in new IT developments. A survey of cost trends in the first part leads to a discussion of such topics as product differentiation, the cost of R & D and the problem of hardware versus software costs. The second part concentrates on marketing – of especial importance if the customer is to be pre-eminent. The discussion covers the rationale of computerization, the widening of customer choice and the identification of the most promising market prospects. The last and longest part of the book is devoted to technological trends. Two chapters concentrate on the prospects for the basic technology of hardware and software. The final chapter looks at how these might be put together into successful systems.

The major points that come out of this study are the great potential demand for versatile electronic imaging and the possibility of opening up the present non-user market (still over 90 per cent of the population even in Western countries). These and other developments, such as the increasingly important role of Japan, lead to the conclusion that computer vendors must look closely at their future business strategy.

Their choice boils down to two alternatives: either keep muddling through as best they can in the hope of a (problematic) reversal of fortunes or position themselves for riding the new wave, thus spearheading the second information revolution in the (fair) hope of reaping early rewards.

The intended readers of this book are primarily managers of companies affected by information technology. It will be equally valuable to students for it provides a stimulating and well-argued case for the ultimate conclusions reached. Some of the individual assertions might be disputed. For example, the future of integrated work stations may well prove brighter than Anderla and Dunning suggest. But their discussion is generally convincing, and the book can be recommended to anyone interested in the future of computers and computerization.

Jack Meadows

Information Analysis: Selected Readings by Galliers, Robert (ed.). Published by Addison-Wesley, 1987. ISBN 0-201-19244-6.

What exactly is 'information analysis'? For Galliers, it means essentially the identification of information requirements or needs. In particular, it is the examination of these needs in the context of the increasing computerization of information handling.

The book has arisen from a course the author gave on the topic in Australia. He collected appropriate papers for use by his students and discovered that such papers were widely scattered throughout the literature. He comments that his students were unprepared to spend money on photocopying these papers (which is just as well, since they would probably have been breaching copyright). So this set of collected papers with his