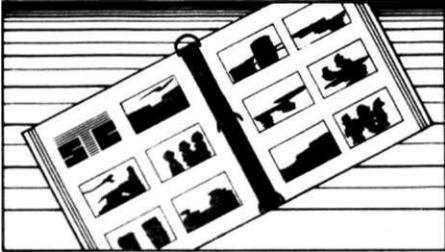*I Remember When..*

The Only Systems Engineer

Your contributions to this column are requested. Please mail humorous or interesting Storage Technology facts and anecdotes to NEWS, MD CC. Final publication is subject to approval.

by Fred Moore

I remember speaking with Steve Montague back in 1975. It never occurred to me that I would soon be joining him at Storage Technology. A marketing rep out of Dallas, Steve introduced me to Don Oliverio and Gary Holtwick. Don was then vice president of sales for the Southern Region, while Gary was the manager of systems engineering. Together they hired me in 1976 to be Storage Technology's first field SE.

Prior to that, a prototype for systems engineering existed under Gary in Louisville. Staffed by ex-system programmers, this small group provided all technical market-cox provided technical support and worked with customers in pre-sale situations. Gary himself was like all the product managers rolled into one. Storage Technology's decision to rely increasingly heavily on the technical sell, and to provide the customer with continued systems support after the sale, resulted in the creation of the field SE position, and my hiring.

My chief responsibility initially was to help Southern Region salesmen sell the Superdisk. Word soon spread to other regions, however, and requests for SE support increased dramatically.

As the only SE, I led an active life. I remember weeks in which I made an average of three customer visits per day, each day traveling to a different city. In fact, I once got a call at noon one Sunday asking me to meet Howard Derby and Rich Kiefer that midnight at a customer's data center in Jacksonville, Florida. Everyone was there on time, worked through the night, and headed home on Monday after a successful fix. There was a tremendous spirit of cooperation.

In those days I knew all 55 salesmen and their individual marketing styles. In 1978, I moved to Louisville, eventually to head a spirited corporate SE group, chartered with the tasks of developing and guiding systems engineering at Storage Technology and of supporting the SEs in the field.

Over the years, Storage Technology has continued to expand its systems engineering organization. Now there are 162 SEs worldwide, including 104 in America. Given today's count of 253 domestic salesmen, that means the ratio of salesmen per SE has improved from 55:1 down to less than 2.5:1.

The tremendous growth of systems engineering at Storage Technology represents an industry-wide migration towards highly technical marketing. The projected growth over the next few years is even more spectacular. The need for technical discussion in marketing the Superdisk in 1976 will be dwarfed by the same need in marketing Sybercache, CPU and Optical Disk in the coming years.

What began as a trial program back in 1976 has succeeded. Originally the question was "How effective would systems engineering marketing support be in increasing sales?" The subsequent growth of systems engineering at Storage Technology indicates the answer to that question. The growth trend leads toward a marketing force in which each salesman has an SE at his disposal most of the time. Apparently the two groups have worked well together, as Storage Technology has grown from $90 million to over $1 billion in revenues.