Omnibus acquires Digital and Robert Abel

Tom Culviner, Assistant Editor

Digital Productions and Robert Abel and Associates have been acquired by Omnibus Computer Graphics, Inc., a Toronto-based company. The organizational structure of the combined companies is still to be determined. An integration plan is in the works, but right now there are four divisions in three cities: Los Angeles, Toronto, and New York.

Asks about the organizational structure, a Digital/Omnibus executive in Los Angeles said that he would have to pull the last organizational chart out of the wastebasket and that no one expects new business cards to be printed very soon.

The staff of Robert Abel and Associates has remained the same, but the full company title now reads "Robert Abel and Associates, an Omnibus Company." Abel has joined Omnibus as vice chairman of the board of directors and is executive creative director of Robert Abel. Omnibus also acquired the entertainment production division of Abel Image Research, a software company.

Meanwhile, Gary Demos, formerly in charge of software at Digital Productions, and John Whitney, Jr., formerly in charge of creative processing, have started their own company, Whitney/Demos Productions, which employs "a few" former Digital employees.

Whitney/Demos is warding off what the company describes as "nuisance suits" brought by Omnibus to prevent Whitney/Demos from soliciting or hiring Omnibus or Digital employees. Whitney and Demos themselves have filed a post-taking suit asking for damages and equitable relief from Digital, Omnibus, Control Data Corporation, Ramtek, and other defendants.

Standard may be extended to include image processing

Making it easier and less costly to integrate small computers and intelligent peripheral devices into mini- and microcomputer systems is the goal of a recently published American National Standard for Small Computer System Interface.

ANSI X3.131-1986 establishes mechanical, electrical, and functional requirements for an 8-bit parallel bus interface and command sets for peripheral device types. The command sets specified are device independent to facilitate development of software that can control all devices of a particular type, regardless of manufacturer. Different disk drives, printers, and even communications peripherals can be added to the system without modifying generic software or hardware.

A command set for raster-scan image input and output devices, now coming onto the market for personal computers, is being considered for a future revision of the standard, according to William Burr, chairman of the task group that developed it. The interface could then integrate scanning devices, laser printers, and optical disks into image processing systems.

GM awards $1-million grant to computer design lab

The Art Center College of Design has received a $1-million grant from the General Motors Foundation for the establishment of the General Motors Computer Graphics Laboratory. "We have benefited significantly from the talent of the Art Center graduates on our staff," said Charles M. Jordan, vice president of General Motors Design Staff. "We are very pleased to be able to assist the college in its continued growth and development."

The grant is one of the largest single gifts to be awarded by the foundation to an educational institution. It is a challenge grant, with funds payable over five years, beginning in 1987. New or increased gifts from corporations and foundations will be matched on a dollar-for-dollar basis. Alumni gifts will be matched two-for-one.

A relationship with nearby California Institute of Technology has been instrumental in the development of Art Center's CAD program. James F. Blinn, computer graphics scientist at Caltech's JPL/NASA computer graphics laboratory, has assisted in formulating courses and establishing technical resources at the college.

PHIGS standard gets second review period

The Programmer's Hierarchical Interactive Graphics System standard is now available for a second public review. Changes in the draft have resulted from comments received during the first public review and activity within the International Standards Organization.

The public review period on draft proposed American National Standard X3.144-198x extends through January 21, 1987.
Grant to spur development of network for scientists and engineers

The National Science Foundation has awarded the University of Michigan $3 million over three years to help develop a nationwide electronic information exchange network for scientists and engineers. The project, called EXPRES, will facilitate closer working relationships with less travel.

Researchers will use new software designed for EXPRES to prepare and submit proposals to the National Science Foundation. Later they will produce mixed-media documents, including text, mathematical notation, graphics, and images, and exchange the documents among different computer brands. Eventually the system will support audio and video interaction.

EXPRES also has the potential to enhance information exchange between universities and industry. The project will receive another $2.5 million in equipment grants and technical support from Apollo Computer, Digital Equipment Corporation, IBM, and Sun Microsystems.

Test sites for the system will include all of the Big 10 universities, the University of Chicago, Stanford University, the University of California at Berkeley, Brown University, and MIT.

Computer scientists at Carnegie Mellon University received a similar grant for software development and will work cooperatively with the University of Michigan.

Computer Graphics New York exhibits steady growth

Starting with 42 exhibitors and 3200 attendees in 1984, Computer Graphics New York has grown to more than 125 companies and an anticipated attendance of 15,000 for its third show, scheduled for January 28-30, 1987, at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center.

Organizers attribute their success to New York’s being the largest single market for desktop publishing and business and presentation graphics applications. “Instead of bringing the market to the show, we bring the show to the market,” said David Wolstenholme, president of Exhibition Marketing and Management, producer of the event.

A “Graphics Card Shootout” sponsored by CADSource is intended to enable attendees to determine the card most suited for their particular application and system. Monochrome, 16-color, and 256-color cards will be rated on performance, compatibility, resolution, and ease of use. Computer Graphics New York 87 also offers more than 30 different sessions covering business and presentation graphics, desktop publishing, PC graphics, film and video applications, CAD/CAM, CADD, and scientific applications.

Holy bitmap! It’s a computer graphic comic book!

Bob Carlson, Assistant Editor

Pity poor Henry Vector, a mild-mannered mystery writer whose acquisition of a word processor suddenly propels him into the computer graphics world of Dimension V. Unknown to Henry, his computer has an evil history, and when it downloads its memory into his own brain cells, the terrifying and evil Modem pursues him relentlessly with just one goal: total repossession.

“Vector” is the creation of two comic artists, Jim McGreal and Rich Mrozek. Now Comics, a division of Caputo Publishing, has incorporated full-color computer graphics into the series as both a graphics production tool and a plot device.

“Real world” scenes use traditional line drawing methods, explained publisher Tony Caputo, but Dimension V is computer generated, as are the special effects of the rampaging Modem, who is out to pick Henry’s brain. In this case, aliasing is desirable because it helps delineate the different dimensions.

Computer effects for the first two issues were produced on an old AT&T Frame Creation System. For the third issue, which incorporates even more computer graphics, Jim McGreal used Picture Painter software by Cablesyare on an IBM PC, to which he added a Quik-Pel board. Images are printed with a Diablo ink jet printer.

The 32-page full-color comic is published bimonthly and sold in comic and specialty stores throughout the US and Canada. While the typical reader, according to Caputo, is a 14-year-old male with a word processor, fan letters have also been received from 40-year-old professionals.