Computer magazines that computers read

A new era in home computing is being ushered in with the advent of ready-to-run programs that can be "read" from the pages of PCM magazine directly into a computer's memory. Computer-readable bar code of selected Basic listings can be read by computers, but not by people.

Using the principles employed by the sophisticated bar-code readers in supermarkets, home computer users can now "read" bar code into their machine's memory using a small bar-code "wand," which looks something like a fat fountain pen with a cord attached to it. With the wand (available from Radio Shack for $100), PCM readers can scan bar-code listings with a flick of the wrist and feed the information directly into their computer. Then, in a couple of minutes, they can scan in a program that normally would take hours to type in and debug.

"We're the first magazine in history to devise a truly workable program and make a continuing commitment to bar-code-generated software" says Lawrence C. Falk, editor and publisher of Radio Shack's PCM. "It's a new direction and is going to facilitate personal computing in the months and years ahead."

With each successful sweep—which can be either left to right or right to left—the computer responds with a beep, much like the signal the checker listens for in the grocery line. There is no prompt unless the bar code is read incorrectly. The development may influence the way computer magazines are printed.

"Right now, there are tape and disk "magazine" services, computer networks using giant "host" computers, smaller home computer bulletin boards and, of course, printed computer listings in the many computer publications now on the market," says Courtney Noe, PCM managing editor, "but none of them have combined the convenience of the printed page with articles and documentation on implementing the program, and the immediacy of being able to load the program directly and run it."

Software monitors biofeedback

Thought Technology, a Montreal biomedical electronics company, has added Calmpute to its line of biofeedback equipment. Designed by a team of psychologists and engineers, the program produces an individual stress profile automatically adjusted for individual differences by monitoring tension level through galvanic skin resistance, a function of the opening and closing of skin pores.

Calmpute demonstrates the effect of physical and mental stressors and teaches the user how to overcome them. In addition to monitoring stress, the program can help teach stress control. From a number of visual images projected on the screen, the user selects the most relaxing. Instantly interpreted feedback from skin sensors signals the success of the relaxation efforts.

Several biofeedback games also stimulate the user, but the object is to stay calm. The calmer the user, the better the games are played, and they evolve in difficulty as the player learns to control pressure.

The Calmpute system features a galvanic skin resistance monitor with inputs to monitor heart rate, temperature, and muscle activity. Its menu-driven software has a special help key and provides such selectable feedback options as baseline sensitivity, range, display method, tone feedback, and auto erase.