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FOOTNOTE

Consumer Reports [8] indicates that differences in quality scores of seven or less should be considered insignificant.

PURCHASING A HOME COMPUTER: IS THE INFORMATION WHERE IT IS NEEDED?

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Four out of ten households in America plan on purchasing a home computer in the next five years[1]. These families need information about computers to make well-informed purchase choices, but where is this information? Without highly available and utilizable information, consumers can become frustrated and unsatisfied during the purchase process. This frustration can result in the consumers not completing their plans to buy or result in their making an unsatisfying purchase.

One point at which confusion begins when purchasing a computer is not knowing the terminology nor the concepts of computer usage. The buyer may actually ask, "what is a home computer?" A home computer is defined simply as any computer to be used primarily in the home costing between \$50 and \$1000. This basic com-

puter can be expanded to include peripherals such as a monitor, matrix printer and disc drives for an approximate cost of \$2500.

The relatively affordable cost of a home computer is one of the reasons they are becoming a common household item. As Bill Grubb, president of Imagic, a software manufacturing company, aptly states "consumers view a home computer as a necessary and desirable appliance"[2]. As computers continue to evolve into an average household appliance, an increasing number of people will need accurate, comprehensible information regarding home computer purchasing. This paper evaluates common periodicals as an information source for consumers purchasing a home computer.

INFORMATION SEARCH

People shopping for a computer are confronted with an overwhelming number of options in home computers. Today's market has numerous types of computers available, each with their own advantages and disadvantages. In order for consumers to maximize their satisfaction they must be able to purchase the computer that best fits their households needs and wants. To do this, the consumer will seek information concerning home computers. How mass market buyers use information to make purchasing decisions has been examined by various researchers. Having information available enables the consumers to feel more confident in their choices and more satisfied with their purchasing decisions[3].

Consumers interested in buying a home computer are likely to search for purchasing information. This is prompted by the tendency of people to engage in information search activities when they lack prior knowledge of a product's specific attributes or of the necessary purchasing procedure[4]. Computers are a relatively new product for the mass market buyer and, thus, many buyers lack the prior knowledge needed to make a good purchasing decision. People also search for purchasing information when the information is easy to obtain and utilize. Often a main stumbling block for consumers is locating useful purchasing information.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND PROCEDURES

Common Periodicals as a Resource

Consumers frequently turn to independent literature sources when trying to locate purchasing information[5]. Many types of independent literature are currently available to consumers, although some sources are more accessible than others. For the purpose of

this paper a highly accessible independent literature source is focused upon: commonly read periodicals. One can hypothesize that consumers will look for information in commonly read periodicals because such periodicals are very accessible, familiar and written in lay terminology. Although these magazines are not the only independent literature sources utilized by the consumer, they are very likely to be the first consulted.

Methodology

A list of the most widely circulated periodicals in America was obtained from *The World Almanac and Book of Facts 1984*. From this list the top fourteen periodicals were chosen to be evaluated as an information source. All issues from January 1981 to March 1984 were examined for 1) articles on computers in general, 2) articles on purchasing a home computer, and 3) the content quality of the articles regarding the purchasing of home computers.

Using the *Consumer Report* September 1983 article entitled "Special Section: Computers" a content list of information needed by a potential computer buyer was made. Using this list as a guideline a rating instrument was developed. The instrument contained 21 informative points which a potential buyer should know. Each of the computer articles was then rated using the instrument. Rating values were as follows: 0 = no mention, 1 = mentioned but not informative, 3 = point discussed in depth. When each article was evaluated the point values were summed to obtain an overall score for each periodical. Using these summations it was possible to rank the periodicals relative to one another.

Table 1. EVALUATION OF COMPUTER ARTICLE CONTENT FOUND IN COMMON PERIODICALS

Content Areas	Reader's Digest	McCall's	Time	Woman's Day	Good Housekeeping	Ladies' Home Journal	Better Homes and Gardens	Playboy
List of computer components	1	1	0	3	3	3	3	3
Describe each computer component	0	0	3	0	3	1	3	3

**Table 1.
(Continued)**

Content Areas	Reader's Digest	McCall's Time	Woman's Day	Good Housekeeping	Ladies' Home Journal	Better Homes and Gardens	Playboy
Discuss memory size and importance	0	1	1	3	3	3	3
Explain how a computer works	0	1	0	3	1	3	3
What home computers can do for a family	3	1	3	3	3	3	3
Address computer friendliness	0	1	0	1	0	3	3
Computer vocabulary list	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Explain how computers are priced	3	1	0	3	3	3	1
Cost of computer systems	1	1	0	3	3	3	3
Range of computer choices: price and ability	0	0	0	3	1	3	3
Review of computers on the market	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
Explanation of hardware versus software	1	1	3	3	3	3	3
Software availability and limitations	0	1	3	3	0	1	3
Types of keyboard	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Types of program storage	0	1	0	0	1	1	3
Types of displays	0	0	0	0	1	1	3
Types of printers	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Options in peripherals	0	0	0	0	0	3	1
Advice on where to buy computers	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Shopping caveats	0	1	1	1	3	1	3
Futurizing: market and prices	0	1	1	0	0	0	0

**Table 1.
(Continued)**

	Reader's Digest	McCall's Time	Woman's Day	Good Housekeeping	Ladies' Home Journal	Better Homes and Gardens	Playboy
TOTAL	9	12	15	22	31	36	45
63 points possible							52

(Note: 0 = no mention of content, 1 = content presented in an uninformative manner, 3 = content discussed in depth.)

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

When the articles on purchasing a home computer were evaluated, it was determined that only two of the eight periodicals contained highly informative articles about computers. *Playboy* and *Better Homes and Gardens* had the most complete computer articles. These two publications discussed 14 to 16 of the 21 information points in depth, providing their readers with a comprehensive overview of the subject.

In order for any of the computer articles to be useful to consumers they must be easy for consumers to obtain. These periodicals can usually be found on grocery store magazine racks, in libraries or by subscription; thus, they are relatively simple to locate. However, locating the articles may be more difficult. Many of the articles were not advertised on the cover of the periodical. Even if a consumer is looking for information about purchasing a home computer, scanning the cover of the periodical will not alert the buyer that a relevant article is contained inside.

Another problem in utilizing common periodicals arises because the best purchasing articles were in *Playboy* magazine. It may be that even if consumers know these computer articles exist, people will be inhibited in purchasing the magazine due to the magazine's general subject matter. Therefore, a major portion of the population may avoid this information source. Also important to consider is the potential damage an incomplete article may do to a purchasing decision. For instance, the *McCall's* article on purchasing a home computer mentions many important points, but it is done in a quick surface analysis that may leave the reader confused.

If we consider the commonly read periodicals to be one of the first literature sources that consumers read, then it would be useful for the

consumers to have information about other independent literature sources. Only two of the eight articles provided the consumer with the names of other literature materials that would aid the reader in an information search. Providing reference sources is an area that could use improvement in the articles.

Overall, commonly read periodicals do not provide the information that consumers need to make a rational, well-informed home computer purchasing decision. Many consumers will likely examine these periodicals for computer purchasing information initially in their information search. Unfortunately, they generally will not find the comprehensive, understandable information that they need.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONSUMER EDUCATORS

Consumers tend to utilize information sources with which they are familiar. Due to the general lack of quality information in common periodicals, students need to be aware of other information sources with useful product information. Consumer educators may want also to emphasize to students the importance of using more than one information source to obtain complete and unbiased information when making a major purchase.

A lesson plan focusing upon the practical problem of locating quality product information could be developed by a consumer educator for use in the classroom. In this lesson the student could compare the quality of the computer product information in common periodicals versus information in technical computer magazines. This type of comparison would illustrate the value of extending an information search beyond a single source.

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RETIREMENT PLANNING EDUCATION: WHAT DO PEOPLE WANT TO KNOW? WHEN DO THEY WANT TO KNOW IT?

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Demographic and economic trends indicate a growing need for retirement planning education. By 2000, one out of seven persons in the U.S. will be 65 or over. By 2025, nearly one out of five will be 65 or over, compared to one out of 9 in the 1980s. Economically, Social Security and other retirement income source will be strained by this growing proportion of elderly. Private savings which now accounts for 21 percent of retirement income for persons 65 and over, will become an even more important source of income in the future [6]. Adult consumer educators are becoming increasingly aware of the need for retirement planning education. Careful planning will be of great importance in helping individuals to maintain a satisfactory lifestyle in retirement and in helping society and the economy to support families and households. Yet, research studies indicate that people are not making realistic projections when it comes to income needs and consumption in retirement [1, 2].

For consumer educators, the questions which naturally arise are: What do people want to know about retirement and retirement planning? When is the best time to reach them with this information? The objective of this study was to address these questions.

THE SURVEY

Data was collected from a sample of New York State employees who were offered an early retirement incentive in spring, 1983. Twenty-six thousand workers age 55 and over who were vested in the New York State Employees Retirement System (NYSERS) were offered for