

Click

'T-Rex' gathers speed

Computer digests data with abandon

By Mark Wilson
Staff Reporter

One of Vancouver's oldest computers is a 1958 machine on display at the Richmond offices of MacDonald Dettwiler.

This future treasure of some museum is a Control Data vacuum-tube unit originally used by MD co-founder Vern Dettwiler, who now lives in Switzerland.

Nobody still with MD knows its processing speed but it isn't measured in millions of instructions per second (MIPS).

"Vern's machine is punch-tape-in-punch-tape-out and any cheap pocket calculator has it beat on performance," said MD spokesman Eric Mogenssen.

The growth in computing power, and a corresponding decline in the cost of MIPS, is astonishing. In the three years to 1997, the cost of computing, measured in MIPS, fell by two thirds.

The trend continues and T-Rex, a computer with hulking specs and available from Vancouver's Storm Computing, could be commonplace in the home within a few years. Storm is a virtual computer sales and service company.

Co-founder Raymond Li said T-Rex, with its 333/83 MHz Pentium II processor, is a single processor machine that comes close to breaking through the billion instructions per second barrier.

"Within six to eight years, something

year 2000

What it can do is build stockpiles if it has any doubts about continuity of supply.

Willson said that only one in three mining and other resource sector companies have embarked on serious action to combat any year 2000 problems.

He warned that companies who leave it to the last minute may be in for a rude shock.

The skilled people they need to help comb through computer systems or check embedded chips for date sensitivity may not be available, at any price.



Staff photo Les Bazzo.

Barb McKay, of MacDonald Dettwiler, compares old and new computers.

similar to T-Rex will be standard in the home. It will be a computer and a communications, games and entertainment centre. It will control the home's mechanical and electrical systems and monitor appliances."

T-Rex has brainpower superior to that of four Pentium 100 MHz PCs and is already far along the road to being the generalized and indispensable household system predicted by Li.

It has been designed to run at least four mainstream business and productivity programs simultaneously.

It combines in one central station an array of communication technologies. It can be used for voice, data, fax and video transmissions and will take dictation at better than 100-words-per-minute. All this, with power to spare.

"We wanted it to exceed the minimum requirements of the latest software by at least 100 per cent, preferably by 200 per cent. It is designed to blow the doors off any other contemporary system," Li said.

He points out while T-Rex compares favorably with the best of the latest, it has an awesome lead on the legacy stock of PCs in service, as half of them operate at or below 486 performance levels.

Storm is telling customers that impressive though T-Rex is, it will, in time, join Vern Dettwiler's machine as a curiosity. Storm is planning to have a machine with four 450 MHz processors ready by Christmas.

It has delivered a twin 300 MHz server to a local Internet provider and has a dual 416 MHz computer under test.

Li is a former Yellowknife restaurateur who moved to Vancouver and became a computer reseller when the economy of the N.W.T. tanked.

"I couldn't even sell my restaurant and had to walk away," he said.

Through Storm he is offering hardware and a range of services over the Internet. Currently, customers can select equipment from Storm's website and then arrange payment by phone.

Services include encrypted audio-video communications targeted chiefly at Vancouver businessmen with interests in Asia.

"We aren't saying it removes the need for face-to-face contact with customers or suppliers in Asia, but it can reduce the number of air trips people need to make across the Pacific," Li said.

Storm's Internet address is www.storm-com.com.