



# So You Want to be a Salesman . . .

One of the neat things about editorial license is that you can write about anything you want. (It's possible that no one will read it - but you still get to write it.) This time I think pricing or value added is the topic. A question that pops up every now and then is, "What is the list on that?" or "What should that sell for?". Recently, while working on product documentation and the best way of doing the work, I arrived at some conclusions that may be useful in answering these questions.

If we take one of our products, a storage module, for example, we can attempt to define the value that is added by the dealer. Some treat it as a "quick and dirty" sale and wind up at a pretty low margin. Done right, it isn't very quick, but it can be much more profitable.

The proper steps to install the module start with knowing the condition of the system when you begin the process. It takes about twenty minutes to run the system confidence tests, but if there is a problem uncovered, they can't blame your technician.

Next you should know the condition of the file system on the drive(s). Both dump and tar will sometimes gloss over problems that can be very serious. Running fsck only takes a couple of minutes per drive, but it is excellent insurance against being blamed for a pre-existing "gliche".

Not too many technicians take the time to do this, but the next logical step is a system backup. This should be a tar format backup of the entire file system. There are occasions when a new module either creates a problem or uncovers an existing one when installed. Better safe than sorry.

The actual physical installation is quick and dirty and most technicians can waltz through it with little trouble. When completed, one then has to contend with putting the additional file space to use. This is definitely not automatic and may require a software technician to properly complete. As a rule, any backup scripts must also be updated to include the new information in the backup process. If they don't have a consistent backup process, this is definitely a good time to teach them.

What we have outlined here may take a couple of hours to accomplish, but it has raised the product to a much more professional level. The system and its data have been certified as being correct. The "state of the system" has been saved, and the new product has been integrated. Best of all, the key operator has been re-indoctrinated in the backup procedure, and you probably won't be back the next day working out problems.

Putting a price tag on professionalism isn't easy, but if you let the user know up front that this is the value you add (and then add it), price may turn out to be less important than you thought.

Editorial Comments, continued from page 1 . . .

2. To produce a report, the program requires that the user be able to unload the calendar data files and edit the script file, making changes to the script every time he wants a report. This assumes some knowledge of an editor, file locations, and other skills that this user doesn't have.
3. The script as written does not work correctly. The more at the beginning causes the system to hang - waiting for keyboard input.
4. When corrected to work, the end-user is expected to know how to get the output file to the printer, again something this user does not grasp. When printed, the information is useless because it does not include the date - a very important item to forget.
5. We were very surprised that Altos screwed around with our client without any contact with us at all. We attempt to create reasonable expectations, and, if the program won't do something, we have found that the best answer is the honest one.

Now we have an end-user that has been told that what he wants is easy, requiring only a "quick and dirty" shell program to produce anything he can think up. Obviously, this isn't true, but he can't believe us any more - the gods in San Jose have spoken. I surely do not want to invest a lot of time teaching this end-user the required skills to handle vi, grep, egrep, sort, awk, redirection of input, redirection of output; and, according to the letter sent by Altos, still be faced with probably having to teach him "C" programming to get what he wants. Just put the damn calendar on the PC.

Since I want to be fair (some would say for a change), I am sending a copy of the draft of this article to our regional support manager and to the tech at the factory that performed this support function. I will be happy to include any and all written responses that I receive and have reserved the space for the same. They will have a copy on February 21st and will have two weeks to respond.

## ALTOS Response to March Editorial . . .

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\* Special note for those with shorter memories:

The 580 was a desktop unit from Altos that used an 8 bit Z-80 processor and ran MPM II or Oasis. It looks just like the 586 and 886 type of system and supported three or four users.



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