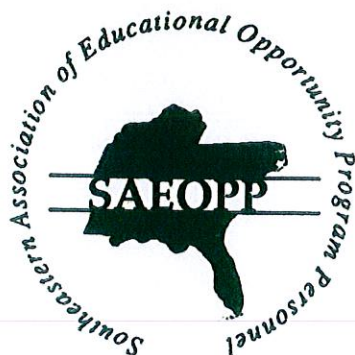# SAEOPP
JOURNAL

Journal of the
Southeastern Association
of Educational Opportunity
Program Personnel

Ernest W. Brewer, Editor

SPRING 1994

CONTENTS

Making Technology Work for Your Office

At the 22nd Annual SAEOPP Conference I talked with several colleagues about how funding agencies seem more receptive to approving equipment when we can show that it will allow our funded projects to be more effective and efficient. This conversation prompted me to address the topic of making technology work for the office; and express the need for writers to submit hardware and software reviews to be considered for publication in the *Journal*.

Invaluable as human effort is and always will be, today's office is becoming more and more dependent on automation to meet the demands of this last decade of the twentieth century. Technology is ever-changing, and today's computer may be tomorrow's museum piece. With this in mind, we all need to make sure that our offices are making full use of technologies that will allow us to keep up with demand and competition. In the following paragraphs, I will highlight some major products available for the modern office, and provide introductory information to help you choose the right technology to optimize productivity in your workplace.

Typewriters and Word Processors

The days of the good old manual typewriter are gone. Instead, electronic typewriters and word processors turn out pages of flawless copy using state-of-the-art electronic technology.

Typewriters still consist of keyboards with tabs, margin setters, and the basic alphabet, numbers, and symbols. But now, they have new features, such as bolding, centering, underlining, pitch choice, auto return, and—the all-time favorite—auto erase. Higher up the technology ladder, you'll find word processing typewriters. These have memory and LCD screens for editing before committing words to paper. Some models have spelling checkers, and others even perform basic proofreading.

Beyond typewriters, the dedicated word processor does a very good job of creating, printing, manipulating, and storing documents which are essential for grantwriting and managing project records. Not quite like a desktop computer, it comes with a larger screen that can hold as many as 80 character lines and which greatly facilitates editing. You can choose

from a variety of fonts, and you can insert information anywhere on the document without erasing what already exists.

Computers and Printers

If your needs extend beyond word processing or you write a great deal, personal computers are your best option. These machines can do anything from basic word processing to spreadsheets for manipulating numbers to database management to graphics. They can even produce three-dimensional images and a whole lot more. Major manufacturers like IBM and Apple now have many user-friendly, price-competitive machines. Compatible "clones" are available by the hundreds for IBM, but none yet for Apple personal computers.

Computers can help track as well as reduce your paper trail. Some software allows you to send messages via computer with no paper at all. It has been estimated that a ton of paper a year lands on the average manager's desk! You can see how this new method of relaying information can be most welcome and economical. "Electronic paper" can also store information, which might otherwise take up a great deal of space as hard copy. New read-write optical disks can store an incredible amount of information—one 14-inch disk can store 6.8 million bytes of information, which would require 15,000 floppy disks.

Try as we may, we can't completely get rid of paper. Even if you buy computers, chances are you'll need printers to record your work on hard copy. Laser printers, though higher in price than their ink-jet cousins, provide very clean, fast printing. Ink-jet printers may save you money, but the print can smear when wet. If the printed material is for wide distribution and display, you may prefer the laser printer.

Choosing Machines That Fit Your Needs

If your office is small and you only need a machine for short reports, memos, and letters, don't waste money on a fancy, multi-featured word processor. Go for a simple, reliable typewriter that comes with basic electronic features, such as erasing, bolding, auto underlining, and centering.

For more complicated or longer documents, opt for word-processing typewriters or dedicated word processors, depending on the nature

of your work. No matter what you choose, make sure the machine provides a clear view of your work. For instance, when typing, nothing should hide the letters as you type, so you can review your work quickly as you go along. Pick computers or word processors that have easily-read screens.

If you have to interface with other users, or already have a system, stick with the same brand if possible. If you're a new buyer, consult friends and business associates regarding their experiences with the computers they own. Then test-drive them to discover the system with which you are most comfortable. Don't forget to buy a modem if you need to communicate data over phone lines to other computers or databases. (Modems at 14.4 baud are rapidly becoming run-of-the-mill.) Surge suppressors should also be purchased to protect your equipment and your work from unpredictable and potentially calamitous power surges.

Shredders

Along with the capacity to generate changes quickly in the documents in your automated office comes *one* inevitable side effect—outdated, previous iterations of work piling up around you. These can rapidly lead to clutter, confusion and/or errors if not disposed of in a timely way. The handy shredder is the answer here. One distributor will even ship you a complete, free replacement gear-set module if you accidentally overload yours and strip a drive gear.

Besides freeing you from "iteration pollution", a shredder can also be an asset in your efforts to maintain client confidentiality and records security. When staff must dispose of previous editions of periodic reports—monthly participant databases, rosters, etc.—the shredder provides an excellent alternative to merely throwing whole-page copies of personal or sensitive information in the trash.

Although we strongly urge you to "THINK before you shred!" (to avoid accidental destruction of important documents), a shredder can prove an invaluable and relatively economical supplement to your automated office. It's no longer necessary to depend solely on the "monster" shredder at your printshop or document security office. Smaller, low-capacity shredders of sufficient quality and strength—in free-standing or "top-of-the-wastebasket" models—are available in the $80 to $100 price range from your discount office products outlet. Caution: models priced under $70-$80 often lack the quality to last in a busy office.

Copiers and Duplicators

Most programs have access to a copier or duplicator. These machines are becoming more and more useful because of new features constantly being introduced.

Duplicators. The word conjures up images of blurred, purple copies chunked out of the old school office machine. But today's duplicators have moved into businesses with abilities such as editing; image sharpening, reduction, and enlargement; color highlighting; and memory loading. They remain a good buy because they produce large volumes of exact copies for a very low price and can create their own master original document. The more copies made, the cheaper each copy.

From an environmental standpoint, duplicators can produce superb copies on recycled paper. They release virtually no ozone or radiation and use water-based inks. Because they don't use heat-fused toners, duplicators often experience shorter down time for service than copiers.

Copiers. Copiers, on the other hand, produce better quality copies and do very well with few copies of many originals (e.g. less than 20 copies each of more than 10 originals). They also have more features, options, and paper handling capabilities, such as sorting and collating. Copier manufacturers are also trying harder to accommodate consumer concerns about the environment by reducing ozone generation and improving toner chemistry.

When you lease or purchase a copier, you must determine the volume and type of copying most typically needed in a month by your organization or office. If you merely need copies on 8 1/2- by 11-inch paper, then you don't need to buy a more expensive copier that can print on various sizes of paper and/or in color. Remember to overestimate the volume of copying. If you make many more copies per month than the manufacturer's recommended number, lower-range machines will be more prone to breakdowns. Keep in mind that people tend to use new machines more, and that the organization's needs might also grow. Also, decide if you need quick printing, enlargement/reduction features, double-sided printing, and/or sorting capabilities.

Facsimile (Fax) Machines

Nowadays when I talk with my program officer and/or grants officer in Washington, D.C., they say "Fax it and mail the original as-

soon-as-possible." Although original documents are often sent via the postman, fax machines are now the ultimate way to send mail. All it takes is the price of a phone call. If you can put it on paper and spare a few seconds to dial a phone number, you can send any message via fax.

Initially expensive, fax machines are now highly affordable; machines of substantial quality can be purchased for around $500. Features to look for in even the most basic fax include an automatic paper cutter and automatic document feeder. Without these you'll have to trim pages and stand around feeding in material page by page. Automatic acknowledgment that your fax has been received will save you time and money in the long run also. In addition, some computer software programs such as Winfax, will permit you to convert your PC into a fax machine.

Dictation Systems

People can speak five times faster than they can write. It's no wonder, then, that in this age of rapid information dissemination, shorthand has gone the way of the dinosaur. Enter dictation machines—a boon to secretaries and bosses alike.

The most basic system consists of a hand-held tape recorder and a microcassette tape. The most advanced systems use digital technology to store and manipulate huge amounts of information, simultaneously communicated by multiple users.

Phone-Mail

The most recent technological upgrade in my TRIO programs [Talent Search, Upward Bound, Math and Science Regional Center, Veterans' Upward Bound, and Educational Opportunity Center at U.T. Knoxville] is phone-mail. This technology involves a computer-controlled voice processing system that works with a private branch exchange and serves as a valuable communication tool. It allows you to record, send, and listen to voice messages from any TouchTone telephone. In effect, it provides everyone connected with a highly sophisticated, integrated "answering machine" system. I feel that this is essential for TRIO staff who are frequently out of the office at sites providing services to program participants. Remote, automated message-checking capability is a routine feature of such systems.

Summary

As you can see there are many new options available to make your office more efficient and thus more effective in administering your programs. This, in turn, will allow you to focus more of your resources and time in working directly with the students you are funded to serve.

Guidelines for *SAEOPP Journal* Review Articles

Allow me to remind you that I welcome computer hardware and software reviews as well as reviews of other commercially-available technological products and/or services that our readership would be interested in exploring. These reviews should be between 500-750 words long and should contain the name (and model number if appropriate) of the item being reviewed, the company that produced the item, and cost of the item. Identify shortcomings and good points, and provide your personal evaluation of it (state your opinion; cite any similar hardware, software, or equipment) and state what you think the item contributes to the field of education.

Ernest W. Brewer
Editor