## V/T VISITS NEW ORLEANS

# Veteran Operator Alan Kronenberg Reviews Computer System Evolution

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Kronenberg formed FMC in 1970 as a successor to Advance Vending, which he had founded in 1960 and sold to ARA Services in 1964. His father, Sidney Kronenberg, had established a wholesale candy and tobacco business, Bama Distributors, in Birmingham in 1933. He was also a vending pioneer, having organized a cigarette vending business, Alamat, in 1936. At that time, the electronic computer was in its earliest experimental stages, and seemed to have no business applications at all.

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The family was also active in restaurant management, and Alan Kronenberg thus grew up in a full-line vending and manual foodservice environment. His educational background is in accounting, which he applied to his early experience when it became apparent to him that the increasing complexity of the business required new control methods.

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This was a very different business from the traditional vending company, and the possibilities for shrinkage were much greater. "I could see that we had to inventory the commissary separately, at least once every two weeks," he explained. "We inventoried each driver weekly; the large installations were completely inventoried twice a month. It was hard to do it as often as I wanted, because of manpower limitations in a growing company."

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**MAKING IT GOOD:** Food Management Corp. commissary team (from left) Sarah Johnson, Liz Dufrene, Mary Ann Layne, manager Cora Bordalee, and Beulah Addison put the finishing touches on vended food production at FMS's headquarters on the grounds of Avondale Shipyards. The company's comprehensive experience in foodservice, and its flexibility in meeting unusual client needs, were key determinants in winning the contract to serve one of the world's largest shipyards.

chain of sandwich shops in the business district of that city. He had opened a "pilot" unit and was preparing to implement his plan when he got the opportunity to bid on the foodservice operations for one of the country's largest ship-building companies, Avondale Shipyards, in Metairie.

"We bid on it, against some pretty capable competition," the veteran operator recalls. "Four national companies wanted it — but we got it." The reason for this success, he believes, is that Food Management was fully prepared to do things the way the client wanted them done, whenever necessary, and to come up with entirely new foodservice techniques to meet Avondale's unique needs. The firm has been able to do this repeatedly, and has remained Avondale's vending and food service contractor.

"We've done some unusual things," Kronenberg told V/T. "We've catered giant company celebrations, including the world's largest birthday party — with 100,000 guests, which presented some real control challenges! We've organized the logistics for feeding large numbers of employees who went to Baton Rouge for a legislative function, which called for locating a large number of suitable trucks and echeloning them along the route from New Orleans to the capital." These and many similar feats were accomplished by applying experience, without preconceived notions, to the immediate problem.

Food Management has also perfected outdoor vending kiosks that can be lifted, intact, by the giant shipyard cranes and placed on pre-prepared concrete slabs, to meet the needs of employees working on large vessels be-

ing laid down in particular areas of the extensive grounds.

The company sold its downtown sandwich shop when it secured the Avondale contract, but it built several street routes and went after selected industrial feeding business with good success. At that point, Kronenberg had no idea that he would soon be in the computer business as well.

"In the summer of 1979, our chef's vacation was coming up and we had no one to cover for him," the industry veteran recalled. "So I filled in. I asked the senior cook what time she wanted me to come in, and she said 2:30 A.M. She needed the tickets showing which items needed to go in each of the pans for each of the cafeterias, and there were 460 pans; it took a long time to write up those tickets."

As he was writing them in the small hours of the morning, it occurred to him that it was the kind of job a computer could do, and probably do a lot faster. As it happened, his son Mark was studying computer science in high school.

"As soon as the sun rose, I called and asked Mark whether he could come up with a program that would prepare those tickets," Kronenberg told V/T. "He said he could, if we had a computer. So, after school that day, we went to Radio Shack and bought a Model III, a printer, and a box of labels; we worked all night on the program. Then I brought the labels in to the cook and said 'Tomorrow, we're going to start at four A.M., and the day after, at 4:30!' "

The next step was taken by Mark, who had also grown up in the foodservice and vending business. His success at solving the pan-identification problem got him interested in other ways computers could be applied to routine tasks.

"We saw a real opportunity in recipe calculations," Kronenberg explained. "Our recipes listed ingredients in quantities to prepare batches of 100. It seemed that no one could do the math to figure out the precise amount of ingredients for intermediate amounts of something — if we needed 508 items, they'd make 600."
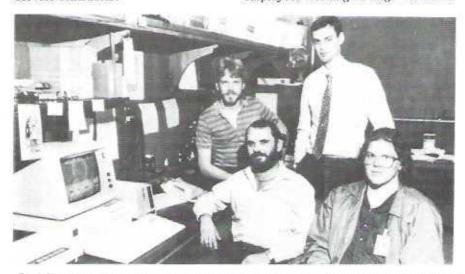
Mark wrote the necessary program, and by the end of the summer, Food Management was enjoying a four per cent saving in food cost.

These simple stand-alone programs were joined by others — to label shelves by item and required quantity, for inventory control and reordering; to schedule food production; to track the sales history of menu items; to prepare production schedules; and, finally, to compile over/short reports. All produced real savings of time, labor, ingredients, and cost.

The results were so encouraging that the Kronenbergs turned to cafeteria control.

Accountability in this area involved writing programs to track not only prepackaged items (such as chip snacks), but bulk products. The latter task entailed developing a density-grade system and dip-stick measuring



PROGRAMMING TEAM: As Compu Vend Systems USA has continued to develop and refine its software, the firm has built an experienced programming staff. Above (clockwise, from right), Dana Tardy, Marshall Youngblood, Raymond Ward and Mark Kronenberg (standing) take a break in the Compu Vend machine room.



NEW PRODUCTS: Compu Vend program development manager C.J. Hebert (left) and Mark Kronenberg check out new interface program for Cummins-Allison "JetSort" Model 1770 coin processor, using inexpensive stand-alone Tandy computer seen at left. The Model 1770 can also be directly connected to an operating company's main computer, but Compu Vend believes there are logistical advantages to using a separate machine to record collection data for subsequent transfer to the main system by simply moving a disk. Called "The Compu Vend Connection", the new interface system can also be used with the C-A Model 1701.

# AWAKENING TO BENEFITS OF COMPUTERS

device for steamtable foods; its successful completion gave the company an excellent weapon against overportioning, Kronenberg told V/T.

This program also gave Food Management a handle on portioned condiment usage, which can be difficult to control because customers take extra condiments for their own use at home. And it kept tabs on paper-goods usage as well. The completed, refined and debugged system was Compu Vend's earliest "Commissary Package".

The commissary and manual foodservice programs had proven so valuable that Kronenberg began to consider whether he might not benefit by applying a similar approach to his vending operation. "I'd spent all my life in vending, and I knew our manual control system worked well," he said. "But I realized that a computer would speed it up, and let me do some things I'd always wanted to do if time and labor had permitted. And a good manual control system is an excellent starting-point if you want to computerize."

As Mark was enrolling in Louisiana State University, Food Management retained professional programmers to develop the system. "Mark worked with them on weekends, since he understood both vending and computer terminology," the industry veteran explained. "And they converted our manual system into a computer system: that was Compu Vend's 'System I'. Other operators expressed an interest in it, and we sold three in 1982."

Realizing that Compu Vend was evidently filling a real need, Kronenberg sold off his street business and other in-plant food services in order to devote all his time to running the Avondale operations, and to developing and marketing computer control systems for operators. "System I" had been relatively limited, in that its underlying logic was based on Food Management's particular way of doing things. An enhanced version, "System II" was universal in application, and could be used easily by any company with a well-thought-out reconciliation approach.

The computer industry also helped by moving the microcomputer revolution into high gear. "System I" had been designed to store company records on "floppy" diskettes; by the time "System II" was ready, the cost of high-capacity "hard" disk drives and the devices to control them had fallen to the point at which they were readily available to individuals and small businesses. "System II" made full use of this new hardware dimension, and more than 20 were sold.

"System III" was the result of input from Compu Vend's first 25 customers, whose experiences had been very like Food Management's. Once they observed the benefits of their new computer system in dealing with major task areas, they wondered whether it could also be applied to other routine or tedious manual functions. The system that resulted from answering these

questions was much more versatile than its predecessor.

As the random-access memory capacity of "personal" and small-business computers continued to increase, it became possible to make use of more sophisticated programming languages that would make the system easier to use and provide additional features. A well-established "mainframe" computer language, COBOL ("Common Business-Oriented Language"), could now be implemented on inexpensive computers, and Compu Vend's "System IV" was a COBOL version of System III. Compu Vend also added office coffee service capabilities to its software, to accommodate customers active in both vending/foodservice and OCS.

With an increasing customer and prospect base, Compu Vend encountered many operators who either had IBM "PC" equipment, or planned to buy it when they could locate compatible vending software. Previous Compu Vend software had been designed for the 8-bit Zilog Z80-microprocessor-based Tandy/Radio Shack line, but Tandy Corp. (like most other microcomputer manufacturers) was adopting the 16-bit Intel 8088 processor and Microsoft "MS/DOS" operating system used in the IBM machine. As a result, Compu Vend produced "System V", a rewrite of "System IV" for IBM "PC" and compatible equipment, and became a Value-Added Retailer for both IBM and Tandy. The company now maintains offices in Denver, Colo. and Ann Arbor, Mich., and is planning to open another in the Mid-Atlantic region.

As of December 19, 1986, Compu Vend Systems had completed up-

UPDATE: At weekly staff meeting, Compu Vend Systems USA management team discusses the implementation of program upgrades prior to sending the enhancements out to computer system customers. From left are program development manager C.J. Hebert, Mark Kronenberg, support services manager Delores Rogers, and Alan Kronenberg. Latest version of Compu Vend's management software is written in fast-executing "SPEEDBOL-85", a modern form of "COBOL" language.

DOCUMENTATION: Compu Vend publications manager Darnel Sabio (right) demonstrates new high-speed Xerox "9900" self-contained publishing system to Alan and Mark Kronenberg and support services manager Delores Rogers. The Xerox system is capable of imprinting and collating up to 22 copies of a 350-page volume in one operation. Compu Vend takes comprehensive documentation seriously, and is presently putting the finishing touches on Volume III of its user manual.

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