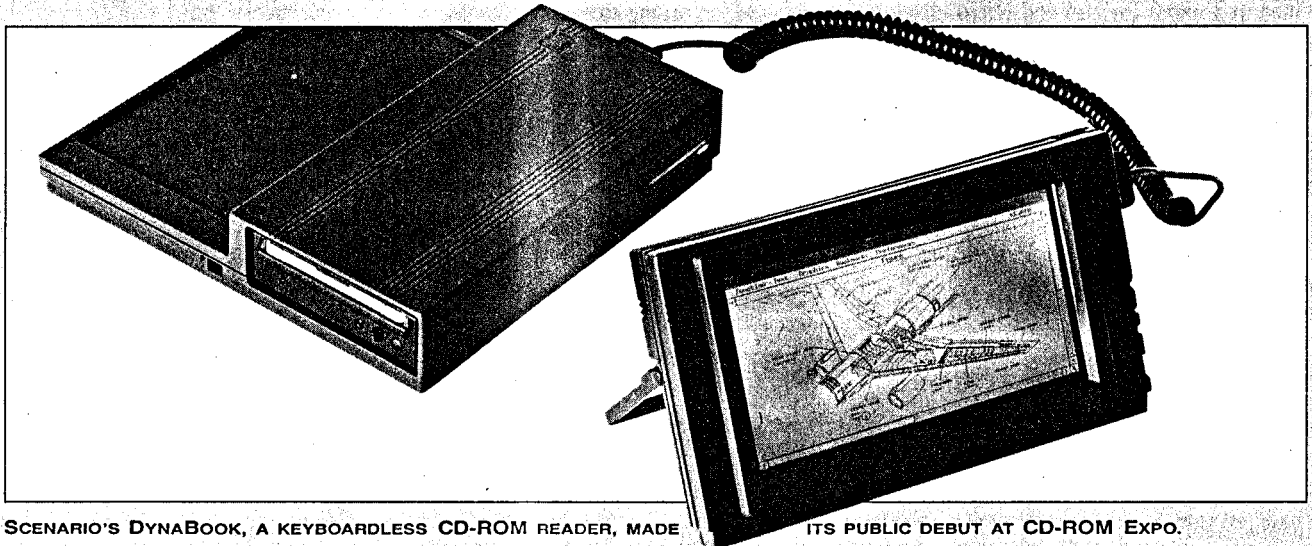


THE DYNABOOK ARRIVES



SCENARIO'S DYNABOOK, A KEYBOARDLESS CD-ROM READER, MADE ITS PUBLIC DEBUT AT CD-ROM EXPO.

The Dynabook concept of computer visionary Alan Kay described a portable, powerful computer with massive storage and a friendly user interface. Now a Somerville, Mass.-based company, Scenario, has taken the concept and developed a product called Dynabook.

It made its first public appearance at CD-ROM Expo, with two units shown at Scenario's exhibit. The Dynabook is a 16-pound transportable IBM PC/AT clone with an internal CD-ROM drive, MS-DOS 3.21 burned into ROM, and a removable high-resolution touch-sensitive screen. A keyboard is optional.

The Dynabook's touch screen and its all-in-one approach make CD-ROM applications available to people who don't like computers, but who have much to benefit from mass data storage. The acoustic touch screen allows users to run their fingers down the screen and then press on the desired icon, much as they would manipulate a cursor with a mouse.

"The guts of the machine is an AT compatible laptop running at 10MHz," said Chris Stokes, Scenario's product manager. The board, built in Taiwan, sits underneath a built-in Hitachi CD-ROM drive. "Hitachi turned out to be the most willing to license their controller and let us put it on the board," Stokes says. The drive also supports audio, opening up the possibilities of multimedia applications. Up to three external CD-ROM drives can also be connected.

The display is a double super-twist LCD, showing 720 by 400 square pixels,

each in four shades of gray. Invisible sound waves bounce across the front of the screen to find touches—sort of a sonar for fingers. One of the advantages of surface acoustic waves, Stokes says, is that the screen "learns" where dirt, dust and fingerprints are and, after 15 seconds, ignores them.

There's room left inside for a 20-megabyte hard disk, internal modem and two megabytes of expanded memory.

In late September, 14 Dynabooks were in existence: three at Scenario's offices, "eight in the air," and "six coming right before (CD-ROM Expo)," said Stokes. Fifty more were due to arrive before the end of October.

"That's where we stop while we are waiting for final FCC approval," Stokes says. "We can produce 5,000 a month."

The price? \$4500, quantity one, for value-added resellers. Add \$500 for a 20-megabyte hard disk.

Dynabook's ROM automatically runs a startup file on the CD-ROM, if one is present. This opens up the possibility of CD-ROM applications which boot off the disc. Forget about floppies, CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT. Because it is an all-in-one product, forget about plugging in a thousand cables.

Forget about training, too. Need help? Press the box on the screen that says "press here for help." An "intelligent" application might even realize that a novice user is at the screen—perhaps by detecting thumb presses on parts of the screen that don't make any sense—and

offer help without even being asked.

Scenario Systems wants to market its machine as a "platform" for other CD-ROM vendors. "We're not even considering coming out with our own applications until we have spoken with every CD-ROM developer out there," Stokes says. Getting applications vendors to convert their products for the touchscreen is a major stumbling block, conceded Stokes. The units demoed at CD-ROM Expo were running a custom version of the Comstock photography catalog on CD-ROM.

"It's definitely Alan Kay's concept," Stokes says. "But the trademark law doesn't allow you to trademark a concept. The name was available and we felt we were the first group to go after it."

Today's technology holds back the system on one key point: it should run on batteries. Such a machine would be "ideal," Stokes says, a machine which would "weigh nine pounds, run for six hours on batteries and be completely portable. . . . I do see that happening. The first step is this machine." For now, Scenario will be offering a six-pound, three-hour lead-acid battery pack.

A year ago, Custom Design Technology came to CD-ROM Expo in New York with a transportable computer that had a full-size Sony internal CD-ROM drive in it. By spring '88 at the Third Microsoft CD-ROM Conference, Pindar had developed an 18-pound lunchbox clone featuring a half-height LMSI drive.

Scenario has taken the next logical step. ●