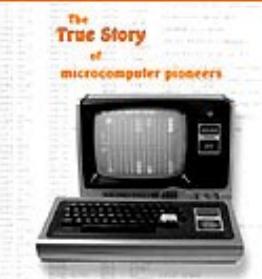


Priming the Pump: How TRS-80 Microcomputer Enthusiasts Helped Spark the PC Revolution

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Helped Spark the PC Revolution



348 pages plus Index
121 illustrations

\$22.95

The True Story of Microcomputer Pioneers

Priming the Pump: How TRS-80 Microcomputer Enthusiasts Helped Spark the PC Revolution by David and Theresa Welsh is the first book to reveal the hidden history of personal computing. In the late 1970s, the TRS-80 Model I from Radio Shack became the first mass marketed off-the-shelf computer.

Introduction of the TRS-80 meant, for the first time, anyone could experiment with software and affordably use word processing, spreadsheets, accounting, database and other kinds of software... as soon as someone wrote programs to perform those functions. And lots of individuals working in basements and garages did create those programs. By the early 1980s, microcomputer users had a big choice of software, and small businesses were integrating computers into daily operations.

David Welsh was one of those programmers. Self-taught, he created a word processor, Lazy Writer, that sold worldwide and had many enthusiastic fans eager to throw away their typewriters. His wife, Theresa, wrote manuals, product literature and dealt with dealers and customers. Programmers were proud of their work and some became stars, their talents showcased in the many prosperous magazines devoted to computing.

Tandy Corporation got into the computer business because Don French, a computer hobbyist who worked for them, suggested that they capitalize on the latest craze, home-built computers. A real computer would be a perfect product to sell to the electronics hobbyists who patronized their Radio Shack stores. Tandy took a chance and hired young Steve Leininger away from Silicon Valley and told him to build a machine they could sell cheap. Leininger, working alone in an old saddle factory, built the first TRS-80; its total development costs were less than \$150,000. The price to customers was \$599.95. After its introduction in August of 1977, the TRS-80 became an overnight success. Orders poured in, over 250,000 orders in the first year alone! It seems there were plenty of people yearning for their own personal computer.

Highlights

- Tandy contracted with Randy Cook to create a Disk Operating System (TRSDOS) for its next generation TRS-80, which would come with floppy disk drives. The company agreed Cook would retain ownership of the code. But Cook, believing Tandy violated the agreement, created a rival DOS which he sold through his own company. Clueless Tandy managers found Cooks' name embedded in the TRSDOS code.
- TRSDOS replacements appeared - five of them - and programmers made up their own homespun magazine ads touting their products great features and attacking their rivals' products in the pages of magazines like *80 Micro*, the most popular of many publications devoted to the TRS-80.
- Wayne Green, publisher of popular computer magazines, promised to "editorially break" Radio Shack because they would not carry his *80 Micro* magazine in their stores; his vitriolic column often lambasted Radio Shack CEO John Roach.
- Bill Schroeder, a successful businessman, bankrolled Logical Systems, Inc. and sold Tandy on LDOS as the company-sponsored TRSDOS replacement. A state-of-the-art headquarters and a pile of money followed the lucrative contract, but once he sensed the coming demise of the TRS-80, Schroeder simply shut down his company, a move he came to regret.
- A notorious scam artist preyed on the gullibility of microcomputer enthusiasts, destroying the Southern California Computer Society with a Ponzi scheme, then bilking TRS-80 owners out of thousands of dollars with magazine ads from a bogus company called World Power Systems showing phony products.

Reaction

"...full of memorable details and names... For those of us who got hooked on the software thing at an impressionable age, this is exciting stuff. And Theresa is a fine writer. ...there's an innocence and earnestness and honesty in the book that makes you willing to let them tell their story in their way."

— Michael Swaine, Dr. Dobbs Journal, August 2007

"I've been reading this great book about the rise of the TRS-80 and the people that made it happen. I highly recommend it..."

— Scott Adams, creator of the Adventure games

"This is the most accurate history of this *Industry Creating Machine* out there. Even knowing the history, it was enjoyable..."

— Don French,
TRS-80 co-creator