

### Student invents computer program

Income tax time is headache time for most of us, including major employers who supply tax slips. Getting data like social insurance numbers, salaries and benefit payments out of the computer in the correct order for the right person can involve many hours of programming time.

Michael Gilman, a Master of Science student at McGill University in Montreal, has invented a system that can cut programming time up to 90 per cent. It is called Relational Query Language (RAQL — pronounced like the actress). Gilman anticipates that RAQL or something like it will eventually be used in more than 5 000 major computer installations across the world. The Federal Reserve Bank, major car manufacturers, the armed forces and Statistics Canada are typical examples of potential users. Gilman is currently marketing RAQL with the help of the university's Computing Centre and the School of Computer Science.

The system works as follows: Users of big computers like the IBM 370 or in McGill's case, the Amdahl, have a programming product called Statistical Analysis System (SAS). It was designed for these big computer installations by the SAS Institute of Cary, North Carolina. SAS stores computer data in the form of tables, like the kind accountants use. While these tables are a convenient way of storing data, writing computer programs to access them for certain items, like those needed for tax slips, can be time consuming.

"SAS programmers need a simple and efficient way to query their SAS tables," said Gilman. RAQL accomplishes this because, Gilman said, "it provides SAS users with a higher level programming method. Unlike other relational query languages, RAQL is the only one that interacts directly with SAS tables".

#### Shorter method

How then do SAS users currently manage without RAQL? "Normally SAS tables are accessed by SAS programs. These programs can be long, difficult to maintain and are often specific to one or two applications.

RAQL is really a shorthand method which condenses lengthy, repetitious SAS programs into just a few RAQL program statements. Since there are only eight basic kinds of statement, RAQL is easy to learn and use.

### Canadians turn trivia into profitable pursuit



Jacques Grenier

Scott Abbot displays the "Trivial Pursuit" game.

A former "team" of Canadian newspapermen, who had a bright idea a few years ago, are very happy they stuck with it. Working in an old boatworks, a bar and a farmhouse, their extremely successful firm, this year, has dominated the adult board-game market.

Horn Abbot is the corporate signature of the team behind the phenomenally successful game called "Trivial Pursuit".

Abbot (Scott Abbot) and "Horn" (Chris Haney) had their brainwave in Montreal late in 1979. Why not systematize the games of trivia that friends were playing at each other's houses? The basic concept — a board which determines the category in which each player is questioned — took only half an hour to refine. Getting the game to market took two years and an enormous amount of initiative.

The risks taken by Horn Abbot have paid off handsomely. The elegant Trivial Pursuit box can not be kept on the shelves; in the pre-Christmas rush there were line-ups as customers reserved future printings of the boards and sets of question cards.

Greg Hagglund, treasurer of Mr. Gameways Ark, a major Toronto-area retailer, said \$100 000 worth of the product was sold in the first ten days of December, duplicating sales for December 1981 for one entire store. His five locations had 1 800 sets back-ordered.

James Mayberry, corporate controller of Chieftain Products of Toronto, Canadian distributor, notes that orders are

spread out across Canada and in the New York area. "It's selling by word of mouth," he said. "Print and broadcast advertizing have been minimal to date."

Chris Haney and Scott Abbot formed Horn Abbot in 1980 along with St. Catharines lawyer Ed Werner and John Haney, who became the team's chief researcher. Additional shares were sold to raise venture capital.

The faith of investors, suppliers and a friendly bank manager has been vindicated. A full 100 000 units of the game have been sold and production capacity was subscribed until March. Horn Abbot has expanded its staff from four to six and is turning over production responsibilities to another company.

Trivial Pursuit was designed with expansion in mind. An additional set of cards containing entirely new questions appeared last November under the name "Silver Screen". This spring, a module on sports will appear and is expected to sell well in the United States; a children's edition is also planned.

Expansion outside Canada has been facilitated by a manufacturing and distribution deal with Selchow and Righter of the US. Extensive research is being made into Britain and Australia-New Zealand markets, for which whole new sets of questions will have to be created.

In Canada, meanwhile, production was backed up until March and sales of 350 000 units are expected in 1983.

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