



STATE OF THE INDUSTRY ■ BY RACHEL PARKER

Micro Channel Highway Ads Steer IBM in the Right Direction

Congratulations, IBM, your latest Micro Channel highway ads prove that even a huge

corporation can adapt a clever approach to selling its technical wares.

It is no secret that IBM has gotten more aggressive about advertising its PS/2 line and touting the merits of the Micro Channel Architecture. Late last year, perhaps coincidentally the same time competitors began talking about EISA, IBM started working on new ways to promote the systems. It was becoming increasingly obvious something was needed: While it was entertaining to watch the MASH characters transfer their roles to a modern business setting, those ads did little to persuade people to buy IBM over any other brand, and they failed to explain why anyone should care about Micro Channel.

The 32-bit architecture is a complicated issue that has taken up hundreds of inches of articles in journals. So how can a company describe the merits of a wider bus? Simple, use the same imagery that writers have been using since the PS/2 was introduced: the highway. If you look through articles in the general press, where writers have to explain technical products to a nontechnical readership, you will see that writers have expressed the Micro Channel's benefits by reaching for a highway comparison. The Micro Channel is to the AT bus what an eight-lane highway is to a country road: more room, fewer bottlenecks, and capable of handling a growing population.

The highway image is a good one for IBM to use. First, the ads touch on an image that is near and dear to many business people. Who hasn't been stuck in traffic and thought, "Geez, if they had only planned better, they would have made this road wider."

This familiar thought translates easily to business planning. Nearly every business person expects the company to grow. And none wants to have to say, "Geez, if I had only planned better I would have bought a system with greater capacity." Even if the company doesn't plan to add staffers when sales pick up, it will still want to increase the capacity of its PCs to keep up with growing orders, inventory, and accounting requirements.

The ads' messages also avoid the "technobabble" that computer promotions frequently use. Wang's television ads may work, but only someone who deals in computers can understand what it is that the characters in the out-of-focus frame are discussing. The drawings help, but the ads probably alienate a hefty share of TV-watchers, who run a wide gamut of technical expertise.

Thankfully, IBM's new campaign also refrains from taking any potshots at the competition. The TV screen and newspaper page are filled with images of cars moving smoothly through complicated traffic loops, and the text discusses IBM's plans for SAA and new software. While the ad theme exploits the urban angst of traffic bottlenecks, Big Blue doesn't try to vilify other companies' offerings.

While it is too early to tell whether this campaign is improving IBM's sales, it certainly reflects a more aggressive computer manufacturer. And, with EISA

machines on the horizon, it is high time for IBM to shift the discussion from the security of a blue brand label to the power and benefits of its systems.

Finding a 30-second message and image that expresses the advantages of any product — especially a complicated one — is difficult. The computer industry has changed substantially since the days when IBM could count on its logo and brand recognition to sell personal com-

puters. While IBM was tremendously successful with a Charlie Chaplin character promoting the original ATs, that kind of campaign would likely fail to explain any of the merits of Micro Channel — current or future. That is where the MASH team ads stumbled — they didn't differentiate PS/2s from other computers in a meaningful way.

With the sophisticated machines and new markets to address, IBM needed a

new approach to marketing its wares. IBM and its ad team have recognized this change and are offering an accessible image for buyers to think about in deciding whether to buy IBM or another brand. The traffic image distinguishes the PS/2 and Micro Channel from the pack in a way that potential buyers can quickly grasp.

And remember, you read it in the papers first.

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*There will be a minimal charge of \$50 for either a V.42 or X.25 upgrade on products purchased before October 1, 1988. Products purchased on or after October 1, 1988 will include either standard as they become available. For details call Hayes Customer Service: 404-441-1617.

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