

Trax News

Issue 30 – March 2007

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Trax UK

ON THE MOVE

We have now moved into new and slightly larger premises sited near Sittingbourne town centre in Kent. This was precipitated by the end of the lease on our offices in the Medway towns (Rochester) and the need to find a more worker friendly environment with regard to easy access.

On our initial move to Medway travelling onto and off the estate by road was relatively easy as the estate was relatively new. However, in the last three years as more and more accommodation was let, both my colleagues and myself found it almost impossible to drive off in the evening without large tailbacks of traffic, which meant anything up to an hour (or sometimes longer) to undertake a two mile journey. Added to this was the problem of staff travelling in by train, whereby the station was a twenty five minute walk from the offices.

With this in mind, we looked for new offices that have both good road links and were within easy walking distance of the mainline rail station and bus networks. Sited ten minutes walk from both the town centre and rail station, the new offices meet this criteria. They are situated in a three year old semi detached building on the Eurolink estate and we have our own access plus full disabled facilities and ample parking space for visitors.

There are excellent road links including the A249 dual carriageway from the main M2/M20 motorway/trunk roads, which are approximately 20 miles from the M25 Dartford Crossing. Train links are via the London Victoria to Dover/Ramsgate main line with a journey time of approximately one hour from Sittingbourne station to London

As well as having 20% more space compared to our previous premises, the two floor design of the offices has given us the opportunity to site the increasingly popular outsourcing/bureau services on the ground floor with the software, sales and support aspects on the first floor.



NEW RELEASES

Also on the move are our latest software releases, which includes a switch from the original Access Database version to the new SQL Server option. The former is still available for those users who prefer the MS Access whilst the latter is available as either a stand alone (using SQL Express) or fully net-workable product.

All modules including Print & Scan, MultiTest and the Question/Item Bank options now have a new and more friendly front end, which means that users are able to set up a project database, attach forms, print and scan forms in easy to follow steps. As with all IT related software products, there is a tendency for systems to grow as users feed back with ideas and requests. Unfortunately this leads to programs becoming 'clunky' (to use a customer's phrase) and not as user friendly. This facelift to our software has addressed this problem with the design of new front end screens that are intuitively easy to follow whilst retaining all of the original system features. Please note, however, that these updates only apply to the SQL version as it is intended to phase out the current MS Access version and make it available only on special order. A few of the screens are shown on our web site at www.trax-uk.co.uk or alternatively, if you would like further information, why not email us at:- sales@trax-uk.co.uk or call Colin Woolhouse on 01795 410011 to discuss your requirements further.

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Bracknell & Wokingham College

A Case Study

In 1993, Bracknell and Wokingham College purchased a DRS CD350 Optical Mark Reading Scanner to assist in automating their registration system. Attention also turned to student surveys when, in 1994, Maureen James joined the college as Quality Assurance Administrator. Using a combination of Aldus Pagemaker and Crystal Reports two forms were designed to produce and analyse an optically readable form to survey all of their students on completion of their course. Unfortunately it meant that every time a change was made, a contract programmer had to be employed to make the alterations.

In late 1995 Maureen and her colleagues approached Trax to see whether a more flexible option was available, which allowed them to produce their own forms. Maureen commented "Following a demonstration and discussions with Trax we calculated it would only take 2 years to recoup the initial outlay on the Print & Scan system and would give us the option to change the form design as many times as we wished. In reality it took less time than that to recoup the cost."

Maureen continued "It also did not take me long to get used to the software so the next thing we decided to do was to survey our full-time students on entry".

Eleven years on and Maureen now summarises 18,000 exit survey forms by course and sends the data back to the course manager. At the end of the year she also produces graphs for each college section and for each question so that she can compare the performance of the college to see where they need to improve the service to students. In addition the college also surveys prospective students when they come to open events and when they receive the college prospectuses, which gives useful and informative feedback to the marketing department.

Maureen added "We are due to start rebuilding our College this year and have surveyed staff and students, in advance, about their modes of transport to get some idea about parking requirements during the rebuilding process. In total we now have one entry survey form, six different types of exit survey forms, five different marketing forms, two service standard forms and two survey forms for employers who send their staff to us".

When the old DRS CD350 expired, Maureen turned to Trax for a replacement and in her words "they came up trumps again". At the same time the Print & Scan OMR software was updated to include the Web option so that she could combine and use both technologies.

Maureen holds a Masters Degree in Mathematics and obtained a Post Graduate Certificate in Education during her time at the college and is also qualified to teach basic skills to adults. She is happy to discuss any quality issues with other organisations and can be contacted at the college (see - www.bracknell.ac.uk for contact details)

THINKING OF OUTSOURCING YOUR SURVEYS OR EXAMS

If you need to carry out **surveys, assessments, tests or examinations** urgently but your time schedule is extremely tight or you lack the manpower requirements then, as originators of the **Print & Scan** software system, Trax UK are in an ideal position to undertake bureau service functions on your behalf. We can also offer data capture services on forms that cannot be read, in their current format, by OMR/ICR machines, whereby data is transferred by either keyboard entry or by simple transposition onto machine readable forms.

The number of organisations who have opted to use our Bureau and Outsourcing services has continued to increase especially since we can now offer comparative data to Education Institutions.

As always, the most critical part of the equation is costs and we believe that beside offering a first class service our charges are highly competitive. We can also tailor our services to suit individual users, whereby we can undertake just part of the project such as printing forms for clients who have already purchased the **Print & Scan** system or the whole thing from start to finish including form design and generation, scanning, reporting functions including graphical and report analysis generated by the system plus the option for both Access and/or Excel files preparation for users who wish to undertake their own-in-depth comparisons of the data.

Conference & Exhibition News

We shall be attending a number of events during the coming year and look forward to meeting and talking to you. Presently these include:-

West Midlands Education Technology Show - Motorcycle Museum - Solihull, West Midlands - 13th/14th June, 2007.

BETT 2008 Exhibition - Stand SW16, Olympia, London - 9th to 12th January, 2006.

Alternatively if you require further details or an on-site demonstration call *Colin Woolhouse* on 01795-410011 or email: sales@trax-uk.co.uk

OMR/Image Scanner News

A new scanner from Pearson Assessments called the iNSIGHT30 has recently been announced. This machine continues the theme of combining traditional Optical Mark Reader along with the ability to capture constrained hand-print data as well as images and clips of the form in TIF format in the same manner as a standard document scanner. It has a throughput speed of 3,500 sheets per hour and is supplied with the Nestor Recognition engine plus NCS Scantools software. It is expected to be available in September this year but the price tag has not yet been finalised.

Second-hand Scanners for Sale

We have a number of second-hand OMR scanners for sale as follows:-

DRS CD360 - (later model - fully working and refurbished)

Scantron 2260 * 2 - (virtually new)

OpSCAN3 - Single Read Head Bubble 0.166"

OpSCAN4 - Single Read Head.

All the above are line read (.200" - European/UK standard) unless otherwise stated. We are open to offers on all these machines and they are supplied with a three month warranty.