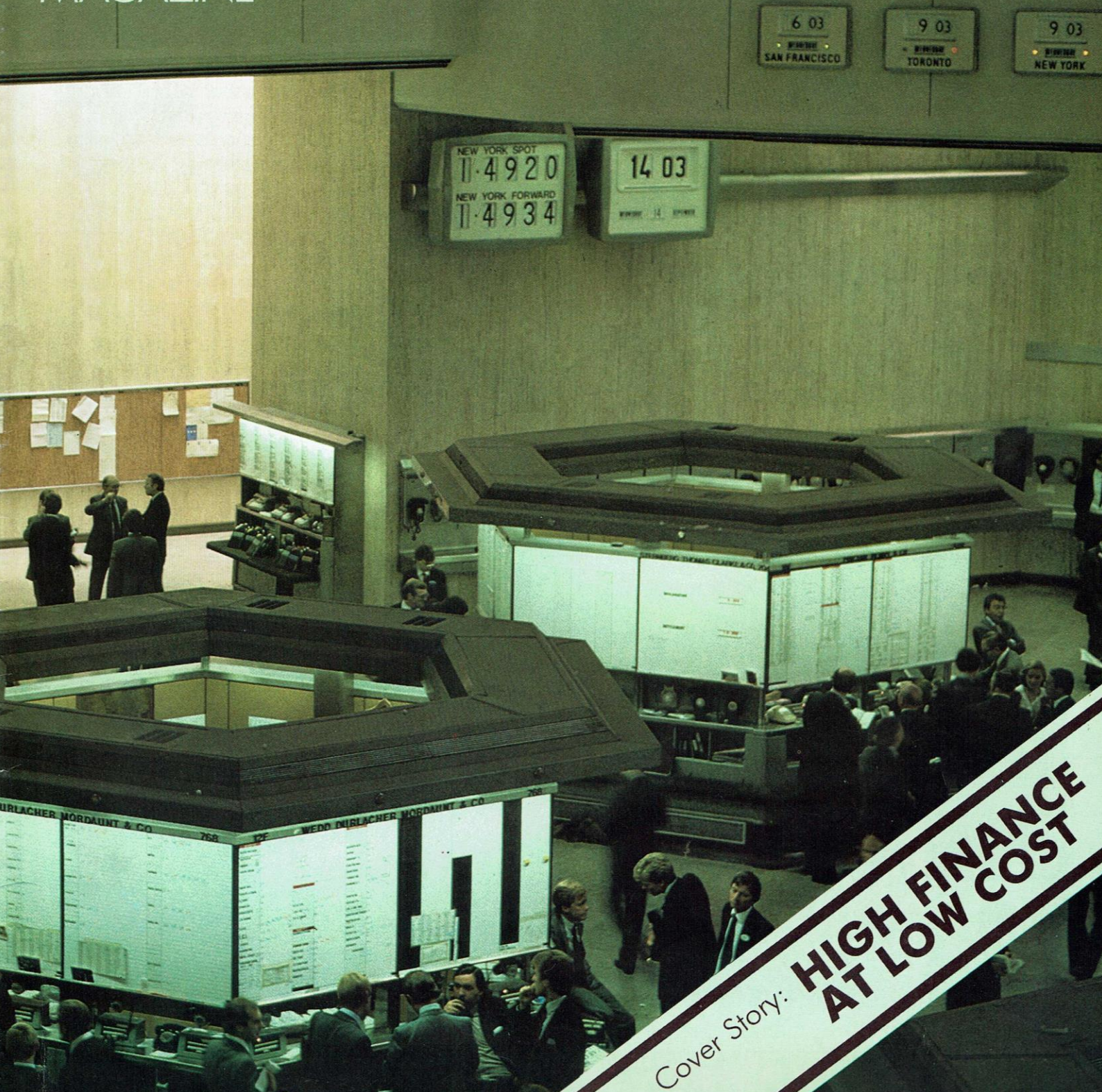
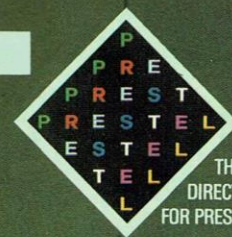


THE PRESTEL DIRECTORY

INCORPORATING
PRESTEL
MAGAZINE

EDITION 4
1985



Cover Story: **HIGH FINANCE
AT LOW COST**

THE PRESTEL MAGAZINE



In this issue

Now that summer's over—though I don't think it actually ever came!—the long dark nights ahead provide great temptation for curling up in our favourite armchair in front of the television, but if the entertainment on television doesn't appeal there is always plenty to do on Prestel—a wide range of games and quizzes with super prizes will keep you occupied for hours and in this issue Micronet tell us about a new project they are unveiling which offers more sophisticated games like the 'Round Britain Race' or you could spend the evening 'chatting to other Prestel users with Micronets new

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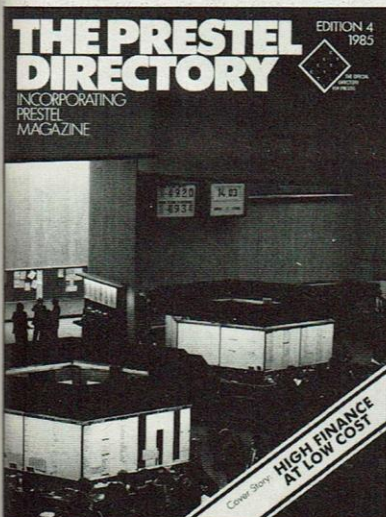
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Our cover story this time looks at the financial services available on Prestel and in particular the world

of high finance where Prestel is becoming increasingly involved, and in another feature we look at the 'over the counter' market for stocks and shares—another growing industry where Prestel plays an important role.

Among the new developments we highlight in this issue is the Prestel Carpet Service which is bringing a whole new look to the carpet industry and we also tell you about the new two way telex service that is now available on Prestel.

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The London Stock
Exchange.

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PRESTEL FOR THE BLIND

by David Calderwood of VDU (Visually Disabled User Group)

High technology has always been available for the blind—but at a price. Very many well-meaning people have designed machines that perform most useful and amazing feats; however because of the relatively small market the price of such machinery has been out of the question for all but the wealthy blind.

Fortunately the advent of inexpensive home micro computers has brought about a 'high tech for all' revolution—in this short article I map my experiences from a shaky start to the thrill of being able to access Prestel.

Back in 1981 when I was about to embark on a course of study as an undergraduate with the Open University, one problem that faced me was the need for a calculator—the only suggestion made to me was to get a set of mathematical tables in braille. The size and weight of these books when they arrived made me think again! The books made a telephone directory look like a paperback! Surely there was a better method for a blind person to solve a few sums.

Home Computer

The answer, of course, lay in the home computer. After some months I managed to make my Commodore VIC 20 micro talk—or more accurately, I made it spell the contents of the screen. This first step got me through the first year at the Open University and enabled me to make contact with Dr Tom Vincent; a senior lecturer in Information Technology. He was working on the 'Computing for the Blind' project.

The underlying philosophy of his work was to use no modified hardware e.g. computers, speech synthesizers etc. This meant that a blind user would pay no more for his or her equipment than anyone else. Dr Vincent wanted to make the hardware suitable for use by the blind using only software i.e. computer programs.

Programs are comparatively cheap things to write, costing tens of pounds as against the modification of machinery which can cost hundreds of pounds. The basic Vincent work-station is comprised

of a BBC B micro computer (£400), a Votrax type speech synthesizer (£170-£350) and a suitable disk drive (£120plus). The speech synthesizer is relatively expensive because it has an infinite vocabulary. However it is still only about the same price as a colour monitor which, of course, is not necessary!

Open University

The software produced by the Open University enables blind people to write their own programs (Talking Basic) and write their own documents (Talking Word-processor) while a more recent program enables record keeping (Talking Data Base). With more and more visually disabled people using this system it seemed sensible to form ourselves into a group: and so the VDU group emerged. The name VDU (visually disabled users) is more than a vaguely comic acronym: VDU in the language of the BBC model B is a very powerful command and we wanted our group to be equally powerful as a pressure group, for one aim is to make the convenience of a home computer increasingly available to the blind.

We have some 60 members at present and that number is growing in leaps and bounds. I produce a quarterly magazine on tape called 'Computer Talk' in which we swap experiences and hints and tips. Because the magazine is on tape it is possible to share programs we have written and our software library is a thriving concern.

Information retrieval

Naturally every member has his or her own interest—some write programs for fun whilst others have more serious uses for their computers. Some examples of 'fun' software are Pinball, Fruit Machine and Backgammon: in each of these games the relevant information is spoken rather than printed on a screen, (backgammon has to be played in conjunction with a tactile board). One of my interests is to use the computer for information retrieval: with more and more publishers sending just a floppy disk to the printers

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The next obvious choice of source for information retrieval was Prestel: the system is vast and surprisingly cheap (the hardware cost me less than £100 and the subscription is about the cost of a couple of newspapers a week). Pages of information can be down loaded to disk and perused at leisure later using a talking screen reader.

'Computer Talk'

My present system is rather clumsy and unfriendly but I have no doubt that in the course of time these problems will be overcome thereby allowing any blind person to use Prestel. The first cheap braille printers for computers are now coming onto the market and these will enable a Prestel screen to be converted into sheets of braille paper—truly a daily newspaper for the blind! Incidentally using this system and Prestel mailbox would allow a blind person and a deaf person to communicate without having to rely on a third party—and that can't be bad!

Membership of the VDU group is free. Anyone interested in receiving the latest issue of 'Computer Talk' or a demonstration of the Vincent system should send David Calderwood a good quality C90 in a postal wallet with their own address on the reverse of the label. For sighted people interested please send the cassette in a jiffy bag with postage paid return label. Send to David Calderwood, Hafan, Minfford, Penrhyndeudraeth, Gwynedd, LL48 6HP.

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Feature: Prestel for the Blind p84.

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by David Calderwood of VDU (Visually Disabled User Group) - from The Prestel Directory edition 4 1985

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