

No longer the exclusive domain of large retail outfits, the computer is available to the pro shop at a cost the pro can afford

By WILLIAM DAY

# COMPUTERS COME TO THE PRO SHOP

**I**N the modern space age, where computers are used for everything from sending men to the moon to feeding chickens, many people are asking: When can the computer help me in my business? For the pro shop manager the time is now.

For many years large retail outlets such as Sears Roebuck and Company have used the computer to sophisticate their marketing techniques and record keeping. Because they could afford to hire a computer technologist and buy computers costing in the millions, they had a large advantage over the small competing operator. As computers became more widespread and the demand for the speed and economy they provide increased, computer service companies were formed to cater to the needs of the specialized small business as well. And at a cost they could afford!

There are three firms now providing computer services tailored to the pro shop. One is D.C.S. Computer Services, Inc. Its new system, called Sportmate, is a fully computerized accounts receivable program for the pro shop.

The Sportmate system gives the pro shop manager a self-addressed statement ready for mailing for each month, plus a customer ledger card showing sales and credits for each customer. It also provides a 12-month sales and credit analysis.

The system utilizes two IBM 360 computers which are worth over three-quarters of a million dollars each and are housed at the company's headquarters in New York City. Jim Mongno, vice president, notes that the sophistication of the 360s will be able to give the pro shop manager a listing of outstanding accounts receivable for 30, 60 and 90 days, plus credit limitations and comparative sales analyses. "With this type of record keeping," Mongno comments, "the pro shop will be able to tell who's giving you the business and who's giving you the 'business!'"

Also available from Sportmate is a list of sales commissions, management analyses and perpetual inventory reports. According to Mongno, the system improves the shop's cash flow as it enables statements to be processed and paid at a much faster rate. It also





gives the shop accurate accounts billing without taking up valuable time. Information that is needed can be filled out on a special sales card by the salesman and mailed to the Sportmate office each day.

The Sportmate system now covers the New York metropolitan area. Mongno told GOLFDOM that he expects the system to expand to other parts of the country by next year.

Service charge is based on exact needs and volume. According to Mongno, the usual fee for the service works out to be a few pennies per statement processed. D.C.S. Computer Service is located at 19 Rector St., New York, N. Y. 10006.

SMART, Inc., New Canaan, Conn., will soon begin to cater to the pro shop business needs as well.

The SMART system is based on a computerized tabulation of sales slips, designed to be read by an optical character reader, a machine which collects and stores sales information. The slips are filled out by sales clerks at the point of purchase. Sales data includes the number of sales for the clerk, the purchased item, the quantity and price plus other pertinent information such as whether the transaction was by cash, charge, return, balance due or trade in.

The system assigns a special number to each piece of merchandise carried by the shop. When the merchandise is sold the number is recorded on the SMART sales slip. Then the information is tabulated and returned to the pro shop together with the additional information regarding sales, inventory and salesmen production.

Every two weeks SMART sends the pro shop a summary of the past 14 days' sales activities and a breakdown of merchandise according to brand and category. With this infor-

mation the manager can tell at a glance what has sold in the last two weeks and who has sold it. The summary also indicates the number of merchandise units and dollar volume sold for each category in that two-week period as well as the total number of units sold and dollar volume to date.

The system is currently working in 24 ski shops. Jim Spring, president of SMART, told GOLFDOM that he hopes to have a system going for the pro shop this fall.

One retailer, who is sold on the SMART system, is Jimmy Brown of Stevens-Brown Sporting Goods Company, Salt Lake City. He states, "We put the system in our ski section this winter and found, to our amazement, that we had previously been stocking items that did not sell and not stocking items that would sell. We were letting our own prejudices get in the way of good business sense and we were suffering. We have saved money because of the SMART system."

Another fast-growing firm, National Computer Services Corp., offers two different accounts receivable packages to clubs. Comput-A-Club service is a central system whereby all billing for various club concessions, including the pro shop, flows through the main club office and then is turned over to N.C.S. The other package permits the golf professional to get into computerized billing on an individual basis. N.C.S. will handle the pro's complete accounts receivable operation. Under the plan, he uses special triplicate sales slips—one copy for his customer, one for his records and one for the computer service firm. Each month statements for his accounts are sent to him, along with the sales slips. If he chooses, however, N.C.S. will mail the statements to his customers.

Beside the basic service, the company can provide the pro with mailing lists and labels, account indexes and pro shop charge plates, tax and sales analyses and several types of reports on the status of his accounts and his over-all business. Although not part of the program, N.C.S. also can handle his inventory operations. Charge for the service depends on the number of accounts handled, number of reports requested and the general scope of the individual plan. Along with its headquarters at 440 Park Ave. South, New York, N.Y. 10016, N.C.S. now is branching out nationally through franchised operations.

With these three companies and more to come the golf pro shops can now use computers for more efficient customer service and increased sales. Now the small shop can begin to compete with larger retailers in marketing volume and sophistication. □

