

# 40 years of changes and it's tougher than it's ever been



says Alan Isaacs!

My recent retirement from the day to day strife of running a business gave me cause to reflect on the changes I have witnessed during my 40 year career. When I went through college in the early 1960s electronic calculators were unheard of and PCs or laptops, the stuff of Science Fiction.

But everything worked and, what is more, if it broke you could fix it! Electrics in cars were limited to lights, windscreen wipers, ignition, (and that was only the coil), and the starter motor. Everything on a car was visible and adjustable, (and believe me I adjusted to my hearts content - I lost count of the times I had my Mini in bits).

My slide rule was my pride and joy (to the uninitiated that's logarithms on a stick) and I could probably beat a calculator any day, especially on complex thermodynamic calculations.

What is more you had to mentally determine the sum so you could put the decimal point in the right place. At least you could deduce whether the result sounded right or not, something sadly lacking in the calculator generation.

**“ In my first job mechanical typewriters ruled and if you wanted a copy you used carbon paper - a bestseller along with Tippex. To contact someone you picked up the telephone not your mobile, or wrote a letter. If you wanted to find a supplier you asked one of the older guys in the office or went through Kelly's Guide. ”**

Accounts were generated manually, so management accounts were only heard of once a year for audit. Most businesses ran on cash and balance sheet guesses. But believe me it worked!

The rise of the computer has been the biggest technology change and has been a real asset in the accounting field.

I found the biggest advantage to be regular management accounts and fantastic budget models.

It means, as a business manager, you are more in control. In virtually all other applications, (CAD, databases, word processing, etc.), computers have allowed us to be profligate with technology, plan less well, and do a mediocre job because it's easy to change and leave everything to the last minute.

Of course computers brought improvement, but we

really do abuse them. I have the biggest problem with email. I love the technology and use it extensively but it was so much better, so much more efficient, so much better targeted and so much less likely to be misunderstood if you simply picked up the telephone, or maybe walked around the office and talked to people!

Nor did you have to contend with people copying you on everything just to cover their backsides.

I suppose the greatest changes are in customer relationships with the emergence of the internet. Such changes have been driven by the price visibility that the internet can provide on all purchases. It has also brought about the concept of impersonal purchasing systems. Even I go to the shops to look at a product then surf the net for the best price; a sad state of affairs and one, in my opinion, which is not sustainable and an abuse of the role of the shop.

When I was selling I could rely on reputation, good performance and a personal rapport with the customer to get me business. Also, I could be sure my customer did not know all my competitors. This is no longer the case. The advent of the impersonal purchasing system means each order now feels like a fight for a new account.

**I offer this advice. Ask yourself three simple questions:**

1. Do I need to produce all these elegant documents and archive all these files?
2. Do I really need to copy all these people on emails, or would it be better to lift the 'phone and have a chat?
3. I know my customer can find a cheaper supplier through the internet so how can I persuade him or her of the essential good sense of buying from me when they won't even talk to me?

If you can find innovative answers I am sure your business will be stronger.

**Good luck, I'm off for a round of golf!**



Why not pick up the 'dog and bone'